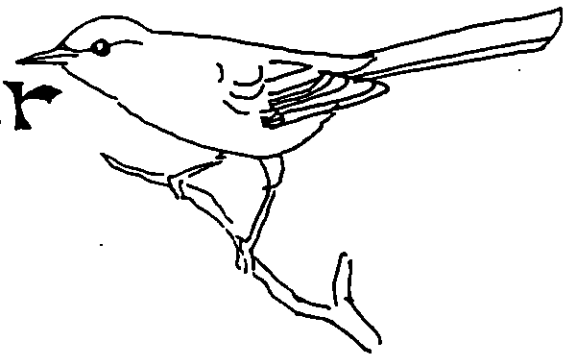
The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the

Juniata Valley Audubon Society

R.R. 3, Box 866, Altoona, Pennsylvania 16601 November 1996

Autumn Mysteries

By John George, of The ClearWater Conservancy

Autumn is a time we associate with the harvest — a gathering of stores we produced all through the spring and summer, and which we hope will carry us through the winter. Since we do it, we tend to assume that this is the natural order things. And there are plenty of examples to support our assumption: squirrels bury nuts, tubers, and bulbs. Chipmunks work diligently, storing almost everything, even though they sleep through the winter. In the Rocky Mountains, a small-rabbit-like animal called the pika or coney, cuts grasses and forbs, places them out on sunny rocks to dry, and stores them in underground caverns. These caches permit the pika to remain active all winter long, high up in snow-covered mountains. Beavers build dams to create ponds where they store saplings and twigs so they can feed through the winter under the ice.

But the natural world is seldom operating on one scheme. Harvesting and storing is only one means for survival through the winter. Migration and hibernation are other means. The mechanisms for both are complex and profound, but even humans have discovered the advantages of a Florida or Arizona winter. Migrating is easy for us. We get into a car, open a map of interstate highways, and drive south — generally less than 1000 miles.

Many birds fly four or five times that distance without maps to a land many of them have never seen before. But they can do something we cannot. They can navigate without tools. Their maps are the stars. Their service stations are their own energy stored as body fat. Their rest stops are sometimes thousands of miles apart. They may fly 2 or 3 days nonstop. If by chance they fly into a fog or clouds, they become disoriented. If disoriented at night, they fly toward any light that they can see. Millions perish by hitting obstacles, often a tower or a skyscraper. This has happened so frequently that buildings such as the Empire State Building now turn off their beacons on foggy nights during the migration season.

Mammals such as caribou, whales, and bats also migrate. Even insects, such as our familiar monarch butterfly, and many fishes migrate. Stay-at-homes, the so-called "resident species," often move to more suitable nearby winter quarters. Other animals try another activity: inactivity or hibernation. But that is another story.

One final thought. What clock sets the delicate timing of these phenomena? Changing day length is nature's clock — not frost, as is commonly believed. ❖

November Program

"COSTA RICAN ADVENTURES" — JVAS members Mike and Laura Jackson will recount their recent visit to Costa Rica.

7:30 p.m., Monday, Nov. 18 at the Visitor Center, Canoe Creek State Park, off Rt. 22, east of Hollidaysburg.

Field Trips

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT. Bill King, coordinator.

Saturday, Dec. 21

Next Board Meeting

7 p.m., Monday, Feb. 3 at President Stan Kotala's residence. All members are welcome. Phone Stan at 946-8840 for directions.

From the Gnatcatcher's Nest . . .

Early last spring the National Audubon Society launched the Important Bird Areas (IBA) project, using Pennsylvania as a pilot state due to its large concentration of bird-watchers. More than 150 site nominations have been received from around the state.

The JVAS nominated several sites in northern Blair County: State Game Lands 278, on the western side of Bald Eagle Mountain and eastern side of Bald Eagle Valley, which contain upland forest, swamp, and palustrine emergent wetlands; SGL 158 and SGL 108, which are contiguous along the Allegheny Front and consist of 35,000 acres of unbroken forest; Plummer Hollow Private Nature Preserve, on the northern tip of Brush Mountain; SGL 166, containing upland forest, swamp forest, marsh, and riverine wetlands; and, of course, Canoe Creek State Park, which has a bird-sighting list in excess of 180 species.

In Huntingdon County, the entire Rothrock State Forest was nominated by us as an IBA.

No nominations, however, have been received for any sites in Bedford, Fulton, or Mifflin Counties — all of which are in JVAS territory.

If any JVAS members know of any sites in these counties that might qualify as IBA's, please take the time to nominate them!

If you have any questions, please call me at 946-8840 or Gary Crossley, Pennsylvania IBA Coordinator, at (717) 763-4986.

Stan

Send your BiLo Foods and Riverside Markets cash register tapes to Anne Borland at 138A Larch St., Hollidaysburg, PA 16648. Anne redeems tapes for CA$H for the JVAS. Thank you!

Globally Rare Plant Discovered In Bedford County

This summer Western Pennsylvania Conservancy biologists Charles Bier and Steve Grund documented a new occurrence of box huckleberry (*Gaylussacia brachycera*) in Bedford County. The find represents the first occurrence for this globally rare species in western Pennsylvania and only the third site for it in the state (the other two are in Perry County).

The plant was discovered a few years ago by a resident of the area, Blain E. Miller, a land surveyor. Bier learned of the discovery while perusing old magazine articles and contacted Miller, who was very helpful in leading Conservancy staff members to the population. Bier and Grund visited the site this year to assess the size and condition of the colony along with the habitat in which it resides.

The information collected was entered in the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI) database. PNDI is a joint program of The Nature Conservancy, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, and the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry. The database is a comprehensive source of information regarding Pennsylvania's biological resources and is used by a variety of scientists and planners. Next, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy will work with the property owners to afford protection to the plants.

Box huckleberry is famous not only because of its rarity but also for its longevity. It has been estimated that one of the Perry County plants is 13,000 years old, which would make it older than the famous bristlecone pines — often cited as the oldest living organisms on the planet.

That a large, new occurrence of one of the rarest plants in the state was recently discovered elucidates the need for more field work in the Pennsylvania. Bedford County has been studied more intensely than most counties in western Pennsylvania, but there is still a long way to go in efforts to understand the flora and fauna of the state. ❖

— From the October 1996 issue of *What's Happening*, Newsletter of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

CONSERVATION CORNER

By Paula Ford

Dirty Water Alert —

Call Governor Ridge today and tell him you don't support efforts to weaken the Clean Water Act!

➔ *This month's guest writer is Joseph W. Turner.*

The National Governors' Association staff and the staff of governors around the country are meeting in Washington, D.C. to consider a draft bill the day after the election that would drastically weaken existing water quality protections. In fact, the NGA proposal is similar in many respects to H.R. 961, the "Dirty Water Bill," which passed the House in 1995 with the NGA's support. The bill does not appear to have changed in any significant way from the version distributed by the NGA last March and in some ways is worse. The intent of the NGA is to have the Governors endorse the staff version in January and have the bill introduced in the next Congress.

The following list compares key portions of the NGA staff proposal with the Dirty Water Bill, showing how both would substantially weaken major aspects of the Clean Water Act.

- Both allow pollution trading that allows companies to increase the discharge of toxic pollutants if they decrease the discharge of conventional pollutants, so long as there is an aggregate reduction.

- Both undermine sound science and research by elevating economic cost-benefit analyses that favor pollutants.

- Both allow the waiver of enforceable measures to reduce polluted runoff into coastal waters.

- Both delay compliance with the EPA's combined sewer overflow policy, developed in 1993 to reduce the 165 million gallons of raw sewage discharged each year from CSOs.

- Both gut current stormwater requirements by allowing States to apply either NPDES permits or the polluted runoff approach to stormwater sources. Given the lack of any effective deadline in the bill for every having polluted runoff sources meet water quality standards, there will be no incentive for a permitting approach.

- Both allow abandonment of uses like fishing and swimming in streams in arid areas.

- Both weaken water quality protection in waters impaired by pollution by postponing or eliminating the requirement to establish a total maximum daily load of pollutants.

Action: Please call Gov. Ridge *today* and tell him to oppose efforts by the NGA to resurrect a bill similar to H.R. 961.

Gov. Ridge's phone number is (717) 787-2500.

Like "Dirty Water?" . . . . . Meet "Smelly Water"

By Joe Turner, Co-Chair
Water Resources Committee
Pennsylvania Chapter, Sierra Club

Upon taking office, DEP Secretary Jim Seif announced that he was going to take a look at all regulations and get rid of those that did not have a federal basis (among others). This project is known as the "Regulatory Basics Initiative."

In the water arena, one of the regulations slated for deletion is a water quality standard known as the "Threshold Odor Number." Just as you might think, it sets a limit on how much odor causing materials can be put into our waters. Without it, there would be no limit on how smelly polluters could make our water.

The DEP has determined that they don't use it much, and it doesn't have a federal counterpart, so they can get rid of it. Never mind that it's based on a standard method, or that they might need it one day, or that perhaps they should be using it more. It clutters up the regulations, which apparently makes business unhappy, and therefore, Mr. Seif unhappy. Enough reason to get rid of it.

In 1994, like Gov. Ridge and Mr. Seif in Harrisburg, Republicans took control in Washington. Rep. Bud Shuster, one of Pennsylvania's own, became chair of the committee in charge of the Clean Water Act. The reauthorization, bill that Shuster sponsored (written by lobbyists for polluting industries), was quickly christened the "Dirty Water Act." Across the U.S., Rep. Shuster became known as Rep. Bud "Dirty Water" Shuster.

It has taken Seif a little longer to get through the DEP's regs, but if you take a look at the Regulatory Basics Initiative, you'll see what he wants to do. Just as Bud runs TV commercials telling voters in his district that he "protects our environment," Jim Seif is telling us that this regulatory roll back is good for us and the environment. So our waters can legally stink; so what? It's bad for business if they can't discharge what they want.

Luckily, Shuster's Dirty Water Act died in the Senate. But there is no one stopping Seif from getting regulations he doesn't like. So you can be assured if polluting businesses are fond of Bud "Dirty Water" Shuster, they must love Jim "Smelly Water" Seif.

A Turkish Bird Watching Adventure

By Shirley Wagoner

At the end of March, 1996 I was fortunate to participate in an historic trip — the first known bird watching trip to Turkey, where birders are few and far between. The trip was led by Dr. Robert Norton, of the University of Florida, who also is writing a bird identification book for the Lesser Antilles.

We met in Istanbul — eight of us, including Dr. Norton. We transferred to the Hotel Nippon and then visited Topkapi Palace. The next day we departed for a city park, Camlica Hill, for a half day of birding before moving on to Bursa on the other side of the Bosphorus in Asia Minor. The rest of the trip took us through the west side of Asia Minor, birding every day in places such as Uludag National Park; Manyas Bird Sanctuary — a wetland; Izmir Bird Paradise — on the shore of the Aegean Sea near Bodrum; and visiting Ephesus, where we saw a wonder of the ancient world — the Artemiseion, or Temple of Artemis — as well as a tawny owl roosting in the ruins of the city!

What birds did we see? The total trip count was 140, although my personal list is not quite that long. In the various wetlands there were three kinds of grebes, three species of cormorants, thousands and thousands of greater flamingos at Izmir, eight kinds of waterfowl (Anatidae), five kinds of Ciconiformes — herons and egrets, sandpipers, stilts, storks, plovers, lapwings, and gulls. In addition, we saw a great spotted cuckoo, turtle doves, a very green kingfisher, a hoopoo, larks, martins, pipits, wagtails, thrushes, warblers, tits, finches, and five species of Corvidae. Very few of the species are seen in the New World, and the European warblers are rather drab compared with our wood warblers. However, the various finches and tits (chickadees) made up for that — in color, markings, and in song.

One interesting aspect of birding in Turkey, especially during migration, is that both European and Eurasian species may be seen, as well as native Mediterranean ones. And it's still relatively inexpensive to travel in Turkey, as many more Europeans than Americans have discovered. ❖

Natural Diversity Is Crucial

By Richard Whiteford

Biodiversity is a might controversial issue. It is politically charged due to the clash it causes between capitalists and scientists. It has stalled many bills in Congress and was a major factor in President Clinton's delay in signing the Appropriations Bill.

Biological diversity is the variety of species, the genetic variation within them, and their ecological communities. Life on earth evolved into this symbiotic web, and live is still critically dependent upon it. Not only is it crucial for water quality and quantity, pure air, productive farm soil, climate regulation, decomposition, and pest control, it also is vital to preserve and nurture our genetic inventory to explore for potential food and medicines.

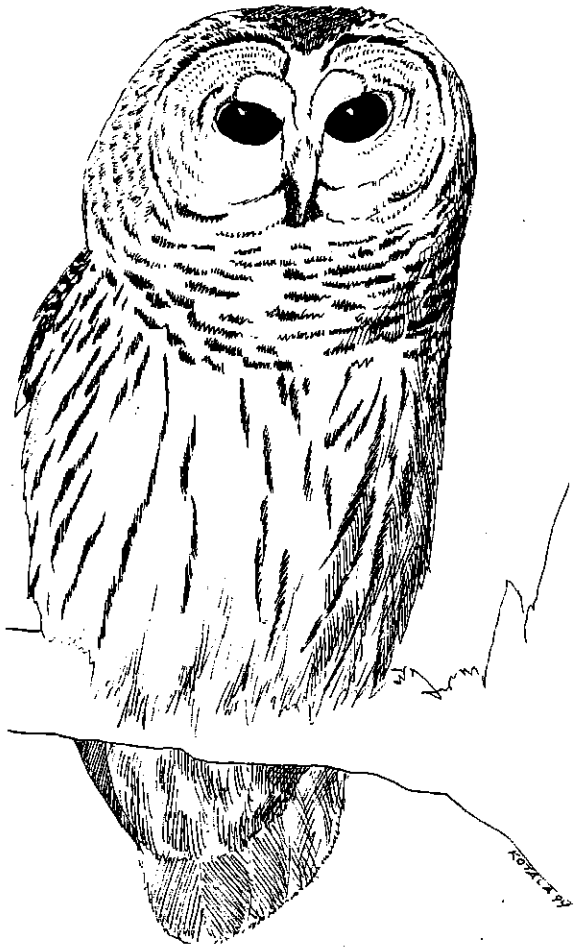
Never has the biological composition of our nation been under such an aggressive, brutal assault than in 1996 with the 104th Congress; central to the battle was the Endangered Species Act. In spite of the claims of being environmentally friendly, the Dole/Kemp platform proposed legislation to do great harm to clean air, water, and wetlands protection, and to not only weaken the Endangered Species Act but to dump its responsibility on the states.

Pennsylvania has a bounty of biodiversity to protect with no bureau or statutory base to manage it effectively. The Nature Conservancy has identified more than 94 biological communities that make up six major ecological communities. Pennsylvania is estimated to have more than 20,000 native species, and the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (managed jointly by the Nature Conservancy, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry) tracks a list of more than 1000 species that may go extinct if not protected.

Loss of habitat for residential and industrial development and habitat fragmentation due to highways, power lines, and railroads are the main cause of biodiversity loss. Fragmentation interrupts gene flow, isolates populations, increases species endangerment, and impedes an ecosystem's ability to recover to its equilibrium. Pollution and exotic spe-

cies also play a big role.

Wetlands are the habitat for more than half of all endangered species. Pennsylvania has lost more than 56 percent of its wetlands since colonial settlement, and our wetland protection laws are weak at best. Pennsylvania has more than 5000 miles of degraded streams due to pollution from industrial, municipal, agriculture, and other sources. And, even though 59 percent of Penn's Woods remain, we are losing forests at a rapid rate to farming and development. Not only are we losing certain types of forest, we are also losing certain growth stages. Exacerbating the problem, more than 70 percent of our forests are privately owned, and most owners know nothing about forest management. Even our 2.1 million acres of state forests are under assault from the Commonwealth's plan to increase harvesting by 137 percent.



William Penn mandated the conservation of our biodiversity in Section 27, Article 1, of the Pennsylvania State Constitution. It reads: "The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's 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 the people."

It can't get more explicit than that! Our constitution mandates the Commonwealth to preserve and maintain biodiversity — not allow people to plunder it for personal gain. Yet, real-estate developers, industry, and the state government ignore the constitution and develop natural areas rather than redeveloping blighted areas.

Should Pennsylvania's biodiversity be whittled away by people who think they have the right to destroy the fabric of life by polluting streams, filling wetlands, or cutting forest for a quick buck? To me, they are like a child wanting to jump out a third-story window while playing Superman — none can see what harm it will do. I find it curious that out of an estimated 30 million species on earth, only humans predicate their survival on a monetary system rather than on nature. Unbridled capitalism is the greatest threat to Earth's natural order.

To stop this disastrous loss of biodiversity, Pennsylvania must establish a bureau with statutory authority to monitor, direct, and protect statewide biodiversity, which is currently severely shackled by the fragmented and uncoordinated responsibilities of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the Pennsylvania Game Commission, and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry.

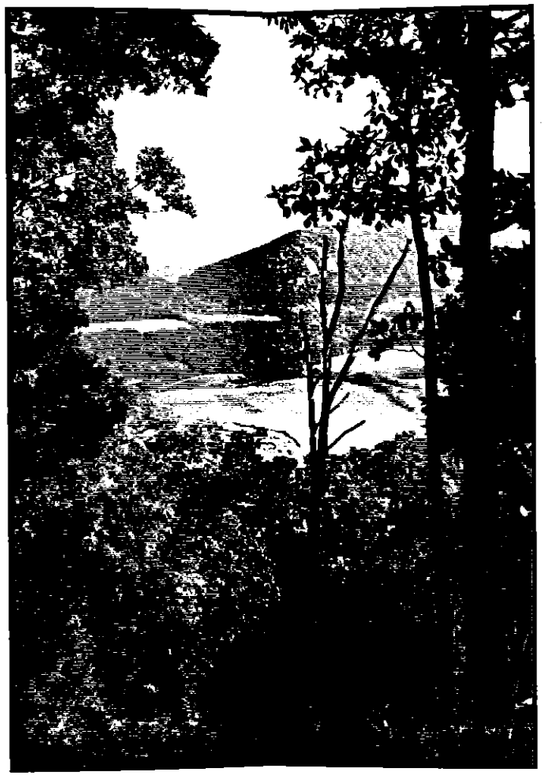
A 1995 report published by the Fish and Boat Commission entitled, *A Heritage for the 21st Century: Conserving Pennsylvania's Native Biological Diversity*, makes 14 recommendations for establishing this bureau. Our state officials better get this report off the shelf and initiate it whether the federal government dumps these responsibilities on us or not. Biodiversity sustains life and it is the "wealth" in commonwealth. ❖

Richard Whiteford is a writer and environmentalist living in Glenmoore, Chester Co.

JVAS October Field Trips

Photos by Stan Kotala

Bill Riley (*center*) and Marie Riley (*far right*) discuss their conservation plans for the Eden Hill Tree Farm with JVAS Members.



View from Dubbs Hill, looking east toward Water Street.

JVAS members, guided by Ruth Dubbs (*center*), begin the descent from the heights of Canoe Mountain.

(From left) Barb Baird, Debbie Haine, Alice Kotala, a representative from the Eden Hill Conservancy, Bob Dunn, and Helena Kotala enjoy a short break during the JVAS trip to the Eden Hill Tree Farm, near Spruce Creek, on October 13.

Tom Dubbs (*right*) discusses his forest restoration project with Marge and Charlie Hoyer during the Canoe Mountain Forest Stewardship trip on October 6.

JVAS Water Quality Workshop Held

Dr. John Lennox, of Penn State, instructed JVAS members at a water quality workshop on Saturday, October 26 at Canoe Creek State Park, in Blair County.

First, Dr. Lennox presented a background lecture on the unique properties of water that make it essential to life. JVAS members were then taught the importance of the chemical and physical parameters that were to be analyzed as well as the proper use of the various instruments necessary to assess water quality.

Rapid bioassessment protocols were explained, and a brief overview of aquatic macroinvertebrate identification was presented using charts and guidebooks.

Having taught us these techniques, Dr. Lennox then led the participants to Mary Ann's Creek for some hands-on demonstrations. Each JVAS member performed nine tests of water quality on samples obtained from the creek. Values were calculated for dissolved O_2, fecal coliforms, pH, biochemical oxygen demand, temperature gradient, total phosphate, nitrates, turbidity, and total solids. The numbers generated gave an overall water quality index of 85, which indicates very good quality water.

The overall water quality index gives a snapshot of Mary Ann's Creek at a particular moment, but to assess long-term stream quality we had to perform a rapid bioassessment, wading into the stream to find bottom-dwelling stream organisms.

These benthic macroinvertebrates are grouped into three classes. Class one organisms such as mayflies, stoneflies, and caddis flies are pollution-sensitive. Class three organisms like leeches and midges are pollution-tolerant. Class two organisms are intermediate.

Fortunately, many class one and a few class two species were found in Mary Ann's Creek, yielding a biotic index of 18. Values greater than 10 indicate good water quality.

The participants left the workshop pleased with the knowledge and skill they obtained. These techniques will enable JVAS members to protect their own streams and watersheds and the many wonderful life forms that depend on our waterways! ❖ (K)

Photo by Alice Kotala

Dr. John Lennox (*left*) of Penn State, JVAS Conservation Chair Paula Ford, and JVAS President Stan Kotala examine a sample of water from Mary Ann's Creek.

Report on October JVAS Program

Mark Hersh, an employee of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, talked to an interested audience of about 25 on federal regulations affecting stream water quality. This may sound boring, but it wasn't.

Using slides of Pennsylvania streams to emphasize his points, Mark discussed the classification of streams: Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3. Tier 1 meets minimum standards for "fishability" and "swimmable," Tier 2 exceed these standards, and Tier 3 applies to high-quality waters (or "Outstanding National Resource Waters.")

Also discussed were criteria (numerical limits on pollutants) and the federal antidegradation policy, which is aimed at preventing a reduction in the water quality of a stream. Mark had some very interesting comments on conflicts between state and federal water quality policy, and he fielded questions from the audience at the end of the presentation. ❖

— *EZ*

Plummer Hollow Field Trip

By Alice Kotala

JVAS members, ages 6 to 73, representing five counties, joined the Bonta family on Sunday, October 27 for an excursion through their home ground, "Plummer Hollow," on Brush Mountain.

The mild, slightly overcast weather enhanced the trek through forest and field, along road and narrow rocky mountain path, all heavily laden with freshly fallen leaves.

The inevitable rustling precluded observations requiring stealth, but many winter wrens were seen among the fallen trees along the stream. Copper-colored beech leaves among towering hemlocks highlighted the waning display of fall foliage. Notable botanical sightings included cutleaf grape fern and a lone surviving butternut tree.

Our walk was punctuated midway by rest and fine refreshments on the Bontas' veranda, overlooking First Field. The quiet provided by this respite allowed detection of the subtle voices of cedar waxwings and golden-crowned kinglets in the background.

All who accomplished this 6-mile, 6-hour, mid-autumnal hike were delighted by a well-spent afternoon amidst the beauty of the Appalachians. ❖

Photo by Stan Kotala

Dave Bonta (*center*) guides JVAS members on a tour of his home ground, Plummer Hollow.

JVAS Christmas Bird Count Set

Calling all counters! The JVAS-sponsored 1996 Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 21. Everyone is invited to participate.

For those not familiar with the count, it goes like this. Starting at 12:01 a.m. and ending at midnight, a group of people, us "birders," try to count every bird of every species in a 15-mile circle. "Our" circle has its center in Culp, Sinking Valley, and is bordered by Tyrone, Yellow Springs, Canoe Creek State Park, East Altoona, Riggles Gap, and Bellwood. That's a large area, and it takes a lot of eyes to survey it all.

Many areas within the circle were not covered last year, and I would like to change that. If you're not sure of your identification skills, please don't let that stop you; we'll match you with a more experienced birder. Winter is the perfect time to launch your birding career. There are fewer species this time of year (our count averages about 55 species), and the views of birds are better and longer.

Feeder watchers also are important to our count. If you live within the circle and have an active feeding station, you can monitor, count, and record the birds at your feeder for the day.

After counting all day, we'll warm our hands, tally the count, and enjoy the warmth, hospitality, and pot-luck dinner at Charlie and Marge's home starting around 6 o'clock.

I'll have maps and tally sheets at the November program meeting for all. If you need more information or encouragement, please call Bill King at 942-7673. ❖ *— BK*

World-renowned author David Quammen (see book review) will make an expedition to the wilds of central Pa. on Thursday, November 14. Quammen, a Montana resident (look out!), will speak at 7 p.m. in the Edith Davis Eve Chapel at Penn State's Altoona campus. His talk, entitled "The Writing of *Song of the Dodo*," is sure to be as anecdotal and thought-provoking as the book itself. See you there! *— DB*

BOOK REVIEW

The Song of the Dodo:
Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinction
By David Quammen
1996, Scribner

From Darwin and Wallace in the mid-19th century, to E.O. Wilson, Robert MacArthur, and Jared Diamond in the second half of the 20th, many of the most influential students of the natural world have made their ground-breaking discoveries on islands. In part, this is because island ecosystems have fewer components than mainland ecosystems, making them easier to work with; but it's also due to the very isolation of some islands, which propels relict or endemic populations toward more rapid speciation — or extinction.

Novelist and science journalist David Quammen, aided by a Guggenheim fellowship, set out several years ago on a series of journeys to some of the most remote corners of the world, traveling to both literal and figurative (habitat) islands in pursuit of rare and exotic critters — and the often equally eccentric humans who've dedicated their lives to their study and preservation. In the spirit of a 19th-century explorer, he dodges hungry dragons on Komodo; scrambles up cliffs in Mauritius to check on the breeding success of an endangered falcon; and tracks rare primates, such as the indri and the muriqui, in pitifully small reserves in the coastal rain forests of Madagascar and Brazil, where he's rewarded by eardrum-blasting calls and a rain of feces.

And while stories like these abound in the more than 600 pages of *The Song of the Dodo*, they rarely distract from the central themes — the worldwide fragmentation of natural habitat and its impact on evolutionary processes; the perilous status of most specialists in degraded environments where only generalists can thrive. Quammen not only stays doggedly on track, but even manages to inject some humor into the more arcane academic discussions, which he never considers in isolation from the personalities of the folks who engage in them.

As a result, this is a hard book to put down. Chances are you'll get excited by — and even choose sides in — the furious SLOSS (single large or several small) debate about ideal habitat size that raged in the pages of academic journals in the 1970s and 80s. And you'll probably find Quammen's accounts of his hero, Alfred Russell Wallace, so compelling that by the book's end you'll be saying, "Darwin? Who's Darwin?"

There's only one catch: at $32.50 for the hardback, most will want to wait for the paper edition. But in the meantime, encourage your local public and high school librarians to order a copy — it's *that* important a book. And be sure to attend Quammen's lecture at the Altoona campus on Thursday, November 14 (see box, left).

— Dave Bonta

Raptor Days

By Marcia Bonta

By 11 a.m. on October 28 the sky had cleared and raptors caught the northwest winds roaring over Sapsucker Ridge. I hurried up to my favorite vantage point at the top of First Field and lay down in the grass. It was like being in the calm eye of a storm. In the woods surrounding the field, the trees swayed in the wind. Hundreds of leaves were whipped off the tree branches and blown high in the air. They twinkled in the sunlight, resembling storm-tossed songbirds as they swept past. Sometimes it was difficult to distinguish them from the flocks of cedar waxwings and other songbirds that flew across the sky.

But the raptors held center stage. At first it was a sharp-shinned hawk parade as three, short-winged, long-tailed birds flap-flapped and glided over, both their distinctive flight and shape distinguishing them from other raptors. Several turkey vultures circled in the wind, not yet ready to head south for the winter. A pair of red-tailed hawks played high in the sky before sailing onward.

Then I spotted a large, dark bird coming fast — too fast for me to focus my binoculars on before it was out of sight. But I caught the glint of its golden crown and nape, lit by the sunlight. It was a golden eagle and was followed, in less than a minute, by a mature bald eagle. And that was the end of the raptor parade for the day, one of several last month that lifted my spirits and sent me sailing, in imagination, high in the sky with those magnificent wind birds.

Watching raptors on windy days is one of fall's rituals. So is putting up my bird feeders. Unlike Iowan ornithologist, Althea Sherman, who observed birds in the early part of this century, I do not divide birds (or any other wildlife) into bad birds (predators) and good birds (prey). To me sharp-shinned hawks and red-tailed hawks are at least as interesting as white-breasted nuthatches and black-capped chickadees. Both hawks and songbirds have a place in Nature's scheme, a scheme that humans often have meddled with to the detriment of both predators and prey.

Another woman naturalist from the early 20th century, Anna Botsford Comstock, had this to say to those people who routinely shoot predators because of sympathy for their prey. "In studying the histories of animals we had best start out with the cheerful theory that 'a square meal' is due to any creature that is strong enough or cunning enough to get it; and that it is a futile waste of sensibilities to sympathize with the meal."

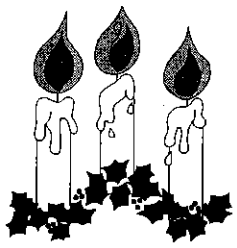
To Comstock, and to me, Nature has its own rhythms that are to be humbly observed and not arrogantly interfered with. ❖

"If you think you're too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito."

Quaint Corner Committee Established

The Quaint Corner Children's Museum in Altoona has an "Audubon Room." JVAS members plan to help the museum by donating expertise and materials. Paula Ford has agreed to coordinate this effort. If you have children's books, posters, games, or other materials with an environmental or natural theme, please contact Paula at 695-4799 to donate them to this effort.

A committee consisting of Dr. John Lennox, Barb Baird, and Paula) will meet soon to discuss ways to bring environmental education to the Quaint Corner. If you're interested in serving on this committee or have suggestions for it, please contact Paula. ❖ *— PF*



Happy Holidays!

EDITOR'S NOTE: The deadline for the next issue (February 1997) of *The Gnatcatcher* is February 1. Please submit articles to editor Charlie Hoyer, P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, PA 16686.

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