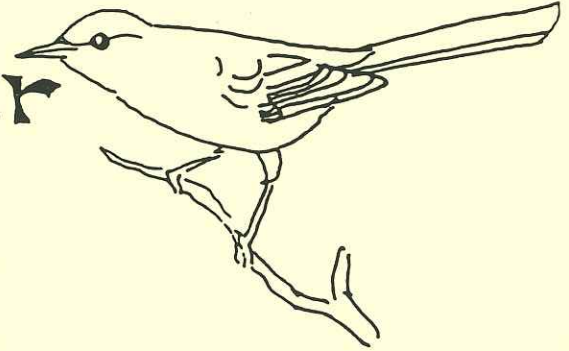


The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the
Juniata Valley Audubon Society

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

January 1996

Ridge Launches Community Conservation Partnership

Governor Tom Ridge announced on Dec. 7 a Community Conservation Partnership initiative that will provide technical assistance, training, and \$75 million in grants over 4 years to help communities conserve natural and cultural resources, provide outdoor recreation, enhance tourism, and foster community development.

"Neighborhood parks, open spaces, trails, river corridors, natural areas, and heritage parks are vital to cities and towns across Pennsylvania," Ridge said. "Not only do these areas provide great outdoor recreation and protect special plant and wildlife habitats, they contribute to the economic and social well-being of the community by creating areas where people and businesses want to locate and visit."

Secretary John C. Oliver of the new Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, speaking in Altoona, said the Community Conservation Partnership initiative includes six grant programs:

- Community Grants for the rehabilitation and development of parks and recreation facilities, park acquisition, technical assistance, and special funding for smaller communities.
- Land Trusts Grants to plan and acquire critical natural areas and open spaces that face imminent loss.
- Heritage Parks Grants to conserve natural, cultural, historic, and recreation resources relating to the state's industrial heritage to stimulate regional tourism.
- Rivers Conservation Grants to conserve and enhance river resources.
- Rails-to-Trails Grants to plan, acquire, or develop rail trail corridors.
- Urban Forestry Grants to encourage the planting of trees in Pennsylvania communities.

"Because most grants require a 50 percent match in funds by the applicant, we can realize more than \$150 million in local conservation and recreation investments in the next few years," Oliver said.

With the exception of the Heritage Parks grants, all other grant programs are funded through the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund. Established in 1993, the fund uses proceeds from a \$50 million bond issue and 15 percent of the state's annual realty transfer tax receipts to provide a dedicated source for Pennsylvania's parks and forests, local parks and recreation facilities, natural areas, historic sites, and zoos.

[Source: *Environmental Protection & Natural Resources Update*, Vol. 1, No. 45]

January Program

"WATER QUALITY STANDARDS" — Mark Hersh, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will discuss the importance of maintaining high water quality standards. This topic is especially important in light of recent attempts to weaken the Clean Water Act.

7:15 p.m., Monday, Jan. 8 at Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church, 5th Ave. & 4th St., Altoona

Field Trips

BEAVER DAM TRAIL HIKE at Canoe Creek State Park with trip leader Stan Kotala. Meet at Visitor Center.

1 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 28

Next Board Meeting

7 p.m., Monday, Mar. 4 at President Stan Kotala's residence. All members are welcome. Phone Stan at 946-8840 for directions.

From the Gnatcatcher's Nest . . .

The Clean Water Act is one of America's great environmental success stories. Its enforcement has resulted in a remarkable cleanup of our waters. The Little Juniata River, which runs through the heart of JVAS country, was once an open sewer. Now, as a result of measures taken to comply with the Clean Water Act, it's an outstanding year-round trout stream. This same story has been repeated many times over across the land.

Sadly, a bill was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives that weakens the Clean Water Act. Similarly, the U.S. Senate is conducting hearings and is continuing to review the Clean Water Act. Evidently, many of our elected representatives feel that we should return to the days when streams ran foul with pollution.

In order to better inform JVAS members of this important issue, Mark Hersh, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will discuss water quality as it relates to humans and wildlife at our program meeting at 7:15 p.m., Monday, Jan. 8 at the Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church, 5th Ave. & 4th St. in Altoona. I hope to see all of you there!

Stan

All the Fort Roberdeau folks -- board, staff, volunteers, and visitors -- appreciate the beautiful, new display cabinet donated by the Juniata Valley Audubon Chapter. It's located in White Oak Hall next to the observation window and nature area that the JVAS Chapter also has provided. Now, as people enjoy watching the wild critters outside at the feeders, they also will be able to learn about them from the display case exhibits.

We're grateful for the abiding interest and support from Audubon members since the park began in 1978. Please continue with us because there are great things to come in environmental education as our programming builds. We need you.

*Peggy Goodman
Director*

Mark Your Calendar!

An important date to keep in mind is Monday, Apr. 8, on which JVAS' annual spring banquet will be held at White Oak Hall at Fort Roberdeau County Park. Social hour starts at six, and dinner will be served at six thirty.

Our own Marcia Bonta will present an outstanding program entitled "Outbound Journeys in Pennsylvania." For a very enjoyable evening, plan now to attend.

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

CONSERVATION

O
R
N
E
R**Senate to Continue Review
of Clean Water Act**

Nearly 40% of lakes, rivers, and streams in the U.S. are too dirty for fishing and swimming despite major federal efforts to combat water pollution, according to a 2-year study just released by the Environmental Protection Agency (*The Washington Post* (12/15/95)).

Last May the House approved legislation, H.R. 961, to revise the Clean Water Act. Labeled by environmentalists as the "dirty water bill," H.R. 961 guts current clean water standards. The bill dramatically eases requirements on industrial waste, urban runoff, and sewage treatment, and allows more waivers for pouring pollution into lakes and rivers.

As *USA Today* (5/15/95) pointed out, under this bill citizens can expect to "swim in the water that flushed their city's dirty streets" or "eat fish from waters rich with fertilizer, pesticides, mud, and manure."

For 25 years the Clean Water Act has worked to make our water resources safer and cleaner. Thanks to the Clean Water Act, Lake Erie no longer is dying, fish have returned to the lower Potomac and Hudson rivers, and the Cuyahoga river no longer catches on fire from esteem pollution.

In 1996 the Senate will continue reviewing the Clean Water Act. The Senate had its first Clean Water Act hearing on December 13. The hearing was called by Sen. Chafee, R-R.I., chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Hearings are anticipated over the next several months.

We need to tell the Senate to maintain current clean water protections and not abandon the goals of the Clean Water Act. As EPA Administrator Carol Browner said, "To protect public health, we must be vigilant in protecting our waterways." (press conference, 12/14/95).

Laura Jackson, longtime JVAS member, will travel to Washington, D.C. for 6 days of whirlwind excitement. Laura will receive the Presidential Award for Science Teachers, an award given annually to one secondary science teacher in every state. She'll visit the White House, State Department, and hopes to meet with President Clinton and Vice President Gore. Congratulations, Laura, we're certainly proud of you!

"Voters last fall sent a message that they wanted smaller government, but one that continued to protect rivers, streams, and the air from pollution," remarked Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y. (*The Washington Post*, 6/29/95).

ACTION: Write or call Senator Specter and Senator Santorum. Say that last May the House passed a disastrous bill, H.R. 961, known as the "dirty water bill." Convey your concern that the Senate does not follow suit, but rather upholds laws that preserve our water resources. Ask your Senators not to abandon the goals of the Clean Water Act. Demand that any "clean water" bill protect wetlands, reduce toxins, and prevent runoff pollution. Citizens should not have to worry about the waterways they fish or swim in.

The addresses are:

Senator Arlen Specter	Senator Rick Santorum
303 Hart Senate Bldg.	120 Russell Senate Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510	Washington, DC 20510

Note: This information was provided by PeaceNet.

— PF

Site Finally Selected for Ned Smith Center

Following a lengthy process, a 4-acre plot of ground along Rt. 209, just east of Millersburg, has been selected as the future home of the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art. With the purchase is the possible lease of 300 acres and a donation of 50 acres extending up the north side of Berry Mountain.

The Ned Smith Center is a nonprofit group dedicated to bridging the world of art and natural science. It's named for the late Ned Smith, nationally recognized wildlife artist, writer, and naturalist who lived and worked in central Pennsylvania.

Geist Named Rails-to-Trails Legislator of the Year

The national Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has presented Rep. Rick Geist, R-Blair, with its State Legislator of the Year Award. Geist, an avid cyclist, is chairman of the state House Transportation Committee and a consulting engineer by profession.

Geist helped found the Lower Trail, helped establish the Southwest Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Committee, led unanimous passage of a state House resolution supporting the federal railbanking program, introduced legislation that would create a \$50 million revolving loan fund to preserve railroad rights-of-way, and supported Pennsylvania's original Rails-to-Trails Act in 1989.

"Rep. Geist is well-deserving of this award for the tremendous amount of attention he has given to bicycling and trail issues for this state," said Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary John C. Oliver.

Pennsylvania has 58 open rail-trails on nearly 600 miles and has 127 projects underway, ranking it the nation's leader.

March Conference to Study Biodiversity

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Kings Gap Environmental Center and Shippensburg University will cosponsor the seventh annual environmental issues conference, "Maintaining Biodiversity: The essence of Intelligent Thinking," Wednesday, Mar. 13 at Shippensburg University.

The conference will feature speakers Reed Noss, co-author of *Saving Nature's Legacy: Protecting and Restoring Biodiversity*, and John Flicker, president of the National Audubon Society.

An early registration fee of \$35 will include lunch and all materials for the day-long session. For more information contact the King Gap Environmental Education Center at (717) 486-3799.

Mark your calendar now and be a participant in the very important 1996 Convention program that will feature political action, birds, and skills training!



**National Convention '96
June 8-12**

The American University
Washington, D.C.

**Learning Labs
June 12-14, 15**

Chesapeake Bay &
Important Bird Areas in PA

Registration materials available January 1996

Audubon Convention Office

4150 Darley Ave., Suite 5
Boulder, CO 80303

(303) 499-3622 • Fax (303) 499-0286

November's Canoe Lake Hike

Twelve robust JVAS members braved the pre-Thanksgiving snows to hike Canoe Creek State Park's Marsh Trail and a portion of Moore's Hill Trail on November 19. As much as a foot of snow make the walking a little difficult, but we were rewarded with plentiful bird sightings.

Canoe Lake held about 350 American coots, some of which were within 50 feet of the viewers. Their feeding calls could be heard clearly as they milled about over submerged vegetation.

Eighty ruddy ducks formed a group in the middle of the lake while 50 horned grebes were scattered in various areas. Mary Ann's Creek cove held 12 gadwalls among the coots. But the best of all was the red-throated loon that we saw on the lake and then take off to fly in a southerly direction!

Our hardy bunch also visited the old beaver lodge and the ever-expanding dam. Mallards, wood ducks, kingfishers, swamp sparrows, and song sparrows were found in the wetlands that the beavers had created.

Park manager Terry Wentz pointed out the largest bur oak in our state park system. We examined fallen leaves and the unique fringed acorns of this tree, also known as mossy-cup oak.

We hope that even more JVAS members will join us on our next hike at Canoe Creek State Park on Sunday, January 28! (K)



Mary Ann's Creek, which enters the northwestern cove of Canoe Lake in a marshy area. The mouth of the creek is dominated by many interesting wetland plants: sedges, rushes, cattails, and beautiful marsh marigolds in spring. During JVAS' first Special Areas Project (SAP) in January 1992 a Virginia rail was sighted here by Bill King and Dave Kyler.

1995 JVAS Christmas Bird Count Results

JVAS members and friends completed their 25th annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, Dec. 17.

As this was my first year as CBC compiler, I'd like to thank Angeline Stout for excellent work over

the past 9 years (1986 through 1994). Her efforts are appreciated by all involved.

With an impressive 19 observers in the field and nine counting at feeders, there's still plenty of room for more help in 1996. So, mark your calendar now

for Saturday, Dec. 21 when we'll do it all over again!

- Great blue heron 2; Canada goose 20; wood duck 2; mallard 56; hooded merganser 2; northern harrier 1; sharp-shinned hawk 1; Cooper's hawk 1; red-tailed hawk 19; rough-legged hawk 1; American kestrel 12; ring-necked pheasant 3; ruffed grouse 13; wild turkey 36; American woodcock 1; rock dove 401; mourning dove 95; eastern screech-owl 5; great horned owl 4; barred owl 1; belted kingfisher 9; red-bellied woodpecker 23; downy woodpecker 72; hairy woodpecker 12; northern flicker 7; pileated woodpecker 11; horned lark 165; blue jay 136; American crow 214; common raven 2; black-capped chickadee 276; tufted titmouse 153.

Red-breasted nuthatch 2; white-breasted nuthatch 112; brown creeper 9; Carolina wren 20; winter wren 3; golden-crowned kinglet 41; eastern bluebird 33; hermit thrush 3; American robin 1; northern mockingbird 5; cedar waxwing 5; European starling 617; northern cardinal 88; rufous-sided towhee 1; American tree sparrow 127; field sparrow 3; song sparrow 18; Lincoln's sparrow 1; swamp sparrow 4; white-throated sparrow 25; dark-eyed junco 165; purple finch 2; house finch 322; red crossbill 1; common redpoll 1; pine siskin 75; American goldfinch 142; evening grosbeak 2; house sparrow 268.

Total: 61 species; 3960 individuals.

Field participants: Compiler — Bill King (942-7673); Marcia Bonta, Barb Corle, Debbie Haine, Randy Harrison, Collette Heller, Charlie Hoyer, Janet Huber, Bill and Amy King, Stan Kotala, Teddie Kreitz, Dave Kyler, Melvin Lane, Jesse Perry, Diann Prosser, Angeline Stout, Steve Stroman, Shirley Wagoner, Terry Wentz.

Feeder counters: Janet DeMuth, Katherine Everts, Mrs. R. Greene, Mrs. Lois Gutshall, Stoddard Martin, Mrs. J. Moore, Mr. & Mrs. Smith, Al & Beryl Sternagle, Mr. & Mrs. Swayne.

Thank you to all involved. And a very special thanks to Marge Hoyer for hosting the after-count buffet supper. — BK

BOOK REVIEW



Eastern Coyote: The Story of Its Success

by Gerry Parker

1995, Nimbus Publishing (Halifax, N.S.), \$18.95

Predatory, omnivorous generalists whose populations have expanded exponentially in historic times, developing different physical and cultural traits in response to changes in habitat . . . *Homo sapiens* and *Canis latrans* have much in common. As I worked my way through this book, I kept imagining I was reading a translation of the first comprehensive survey of research on human biology by extraterrestrials. One can only hope such alien scientists would be more sympathetic toward their subjects than the majority of humans have been toward wild relatives of "Man's best friend!"

Gerry Parker works as a research biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service and has conducted studies of coyotes in New Brunswick. Although he's no great writer, he's done a good job of assembling and analyzing available data on both the northern and southern races of the eastern coyote. As a wildlife professional, much of his focus derives from anthropocentric concerns about coyote predation on deer and livestock — a situation he naturally decries, even as he betrays a pro-management bias.

I should point out that *Eastern Coyote* is no easy read. It's both exhaustive and exhausting, but it is accessible to the layman, and should remain a valuable reference book for years to come. I found the author's technique of using lengthy, direct quotes from — rather than summaries of — the literature to be a bit unusual, but he's superb at explaining the reasoning behind each study, the techniques employed, and the various limitations (often quite serious) to each approach. Thus this book incidentally provides plenty of insights into the thinking and methodology of wildlife biologists. And in this way, too, Parker exposes the huge gaps that remain in our knowledge. (Extensive, non-intrusive field observations, of course, are conspicuously absent; scientists tend to prefer quantifiable data.)

This book will, however, answer most of the reader's questions about such matters as taxonomy (especially the presence of wolf genetics in eastern coyote populations), eating habits, colonization patterns, etc. The applicability of studies conducted in the northern spruce-fir forests to Pennsylvania coyotes — especially on the burning issue of deer predation — remains unclear. And I'm still not sure the author didn't anticipate the reaction of tree-huggers like myself: How would we humans like to be studied solely in relation to the needs and preconceptions of some other species?

— Dave Bonta

Feeder Birds

They come at dawn, the flock of small birds that has endured the wind and cold of another winter's night. The light is still so dim I can't distinguish one species of bird from another, but I know that in the flock of 40 will be mostly dark-eyed juncos and American tree sparrows, along with a single song sparrow and white-throated sparrow.

Gradually, as it lightens, I pick out the male and female cardinals — two pairs on some days — and as many as five mourning doves. Then the first contingent of house finches arrives, bringing with them a couple American goldfinches and one or two common redpolls.

By the time the sun has risen, the ground beneath the feeders and the feeders themselves are jammed with house finches — more than 80 — while the tufted titmice, white-breasted nuthatches, and black-capped chickadees squeeze themselves in among the house finch gormandizers to feed. But when two blue jays and two red-bellied woodpeckers land decisively on the ground to eat, the house finches take off in a flurry.

Those 14 species have remained constant since November 29 when the first common redpoll arrived. But before then, during the blizzard of mid-November, I recorded 22 species of birds including a male and female purple finch, several pine siskins, and evening grosbeaks.

That storm also caught several bird species in migration. A couple European starlings landed on the porch rail above the feeders, their strange looks seeming to intimidate the other birds that flew off in a panic. But the starlings merely waddled about the porch floor poking their long, sharp bills at every piece of corn for a minute or two while the other

birds slowly filtered back, keeping their distance from the odd couple. Then the starlings took off and didn't return.

Three fox sparrows spent several days here, firmly stationed at the holes they dug through the snow in search of seed. Larger than the other sparrows, fox sparrows are beautiful with their bright chestnut tails, brown-splotted white breasts, gray and reddish-brown faces, and white bottoms.

On November 15, at the height of the storm, 30 male and female red-winged blackbirds landed on the ground beneath the feeder to eat. In mid-afternoon, I spotted one blackbird that looked different from the others. It had a light eye and a reddish-brown head and breast, tapering off to black toward the middle of its body. The others poked at it as if it were a stranger. Later in the afternoon, it brought a friend. They were rusty blackbirds enroute from their breeding grounds in northern New England and Canada to the southern states. The pair came in again the next morning, after the snow had stopped, and that was the last I saw of them.

I have a theory about bird feeders. They help us more than they help the birds. Just when the death of the warm season and the desertion of most of our birds hit us, in early November, the birds flock to our feeders — residents and northern visitors as well. During the most dismal, stormy days the birds arrive and even if we can't go outside for a walk, we have a ringside seat at Nature's pageant. Some years are better than others and this year at the feeder, so far, has been the best we have ever experienced in our 25 years on the mountain.

By Marcia Bonta



Lower Trail SAP — 1995

As 1995 comes to a close so does the Lower Trail Special Areas Project. And what a special area it is! Twelve monthly walks yielded an unexpected high number of avian species — 115 to be exact. Each month produced at least one special sighting. Unexpected highlights include:

Jan. — ruby-crowned kinglet
Feb. — yellow-bellied sapsucker
Mar. — winter wren
Apr. — wood duck
May — yellow-throated warbler
Jun. — rose-breasted grosbeak

Jul. — Acadian flycatcher
Aug. — spotted sandpiper
Sep. — Lincoln's sparrow
Oct. — eastern phoebe
Nov. — red-breasted nuthatch
Dec. — red crossbill

Many thanks to those of you who ventured out early on those sometimes cold, sometimes snowy, sometimes beautiful mornings to help count during the SAP. If you'd like a copy of the entire SAP species list, please call Dave Kyler at 643-6030 and he'll be glad to mail you one. — DK

EDITOR'S NOTE: The deadline for February's issue of *The Gnatcatcher* is January 31. Please submit articles to editor Charlie Hoyer, P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, PA 16686.

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