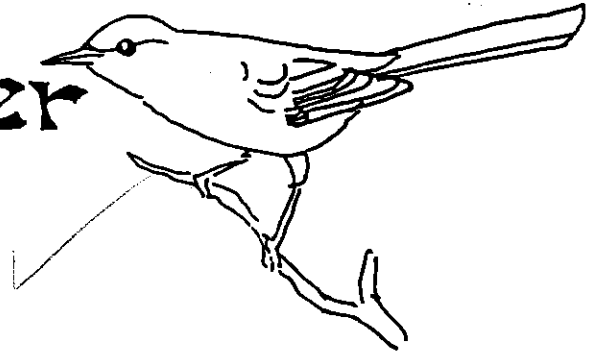


The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the
Juniata Valley Audubon Society

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

February 1996

Important Bird Areas Project Launched In Pennsylvania

By Stan Kotala

THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY has selected Pennsylvania to be the pilot state for the Important Bird Areas (IBA) project. The purpose of the initiative is to designate sites important to the birds of Pennsylvania. The IBA is a key component of the comprehensive North American Bird Conservation Plan now being developed under the Partners in Flight umbrella.

An IBA provides essential habitat for one or more species of birds and that can be distinguished from the surrounding landscape. Examples include woodlands that are habitats for endangered or threatened species, rare or unusual habitat types and their characteristic birds, and ridges acting as bottlenecks for migratory hawks.

IBAs may range in size from a few acres to several thousand acres, be privately or publicly owned, and be protected or unprotected. However, the goal of IBA designation is to effect protection or enhanced management of designated habitat for the benefit of birds that depend on it. The IBA designation is a proven tool for promoting awareness of bird life in general and for protection of sensitive habitats in particular. In Europe 626 IBAs totalling 16 million acres have been given protected status by the European Union.

The Juniata Valley Audubon Society is responsible for nominating IBAs in Blair, Bedford, Centre, Huntingdon, Fulton, and Mifflin Counties. Thus far three protected sites in Blair Co. already have been nominated as IBAs. They are Canoe Creek State Park, State Game Lands 166 (the beaver dams), and Plummer Hollow Private Nature Preserve.

IBA nominations are needed for the other counties in our area as well as additional ones for Blair Co. Nominated sites will be formally approved by the Ornithological Technical Committee of the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Stan and Alice Kotala will host an "IBA party" at their home on Sunday, Feb. 11 from 2 to 4 p.m. If you'd like to nominate a site to be an IBA, please phone Stan or Alice at 946-8840 for directions.

February Program

"WILDLIFE REHABILITATION" — *Robyn Graboski will explain her approach to healing injured wildlife and give tips for what you should do if you find an injured or orphaned wild animal.*

7:15 p.m., Monday, Feb. 12 at Penn State Altoona Campus, 109 Holtzinger Bldg., Ivyside Park, Altoona. (Park in Arts Center lot.)

**NOTE CHANGE IN
MEETING LOCATION!**

Field Trip

MOORE'S HILL TRAIL HIKE at Canoe Creek State Park with trip leader Stan Kotala (946-8840). Meet at Visitor Center.

1 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 18

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 . . .

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the first signs of spring are appearing around us. On Brush Mountain a pair of great horned owls has already laid eggs in a nest high atop a white pine. Fully formed skunk cabbage spathes can be seen in spring seeps that remain free of ice and snow. Quietly, I sit in my den and attentively listen to warbler tapes, preparing for this year's North American Migration Count.

Saturday, May 11 is the date of this year's count. The North American Migration Count is held on the same day all across the United States. Its purpose is to map the routes and patterns of bird migration. Unlike the Christmas Bird Count, birds are tallied in each county rather than in a prescribed circle. And unlike the Christmas Bird Count, the weather is usually pleasant. Last year 111 species were seen by 12 observers in Blair Co.

If the idea of seeing large numbers of birds in beautiful weather appeals to you, please mark your calendar to keep this date free. I'll host a planning session for the Blair Co. count at my house on Sunday, March 3 from 7 p.m. till 8:30 p.m. Call me at 946-8840 if you would like to attend.

Stan

Issues Day Conference Slated

The Audubon Council of Pennsylvania will conduct its Eighth Annual Issues Day Conference on Saturday, Mar. 23 from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Centre County Vo-Tech School, 540 N. Harrison Rd., Pleasant Gap. (The school is located across the road from the Supelco plant.) Registration for the conference is \$10.

Dick Sprenkle, Deputy Secretary of the DCNR, will speak about his perspective on the directions the reorganized DCNR will be taking.

Frank Gill, recently appointed NAS VP for Science, has been invited to share his views on the future of Audubon science in the new strategic plan.

Cindy Dunn will facilitate an open forum to discuss views and opinions of Pennsylvania Audubon chapters regarding initiatives to establish a Pennsylvania Audubon Field Office. She also will discuss

recent news, events, activities, and changes in the National Audubon Society and their significance to Audubon chapters.

Break-out sessions include:

(A) Todd Frederickson will inform participants about Audubon's work with Proctor and Gamble for sustainable forestry for big business and private landowners; (B) Marci Mowery will provide information on creating backyard wildlife areas using Pennsylvania native plants; (C) Barb Warren will offer information on ways organizations and agencies can work to protect land; and (D) the ACP will provide an attorney to discuss the rights and limitations of 501(c)3 not-for-profit organizations.

You can obtain a registration form at this month's meeting at the Penn State Altoona Campus or by phoning ACP rep Paula Ford at 695-4799.

CONSERVATION

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American Bird Conservancy's New Year's Resolutions for Bird Conservation

Do more for the birds in 1996. If everybody did at least one more thing in 1996 (or 10% more) than they did in 1995, think how much more might be accomplished.

- Write a letter to Congress.
- Offer to take your congressman birding.
- Volunteer at least one day at a national wild-life refuge/park; state refuge/park.
- Take a young person birding.
- Present a slide show to the local Kiwanis/chamber of commerce/Lions group.
- Join your local Partners in Flight chapter.
- Come out of the "closet"; let your colleagues/co-workers know you are proud to be a bird-watcher.
- Perform/assist on a BBS route.
- Support the Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative.
- Buy a duck stamp.
- Support a bird conservation organization (either financially or by volunteering).
- Get to know your state legislators, county commissioners, and city council members. Work to educate them about bird conservation/habitat issues; lobby them on specific conservation issues.
- Volunteer to give presentations in schools of your city or county.
- Take a class of students birdwatching around their school or on a field trip; try to find some binoculars and field guides for the students to use on the trip.
- Become active in your state or local bird conservation group.
- Contribute to the Wildlife Check-off when you pay your Pennsylvania state income tax.
- Purchase a Wild Resource Conservation Fund license plate.
- Give bird related gifts (birdhouses, bird feeders, field guides, etc.).
- Do not let pet cats roam at large; support a law banning the feeding of feral cats; support leash laws for cats.
- Drink organic, shade-grown coffee. Encourage coffee shops, health food stores, grocery stores, etc. to offer it for sale. Try to get your company to offer it.
- Write letters to the editor and call talk shows to emphasize the importance of wildlife/bird conservation; make sure that you provide specific messages of what people can do to help.
- Work with state and local officials to identify, establish, and protect critical bird habitat.
- When you spend money on a birding vacation be sure to let local businesses know why you are spending your money there. Businesses need to learn that birders = dollars.
- Global climate change is having significant impacts on birds. Support energy conservation.
- Vote for pro-environmental candidates; support their campaigns.
- Join the local native plant society and learn more about plant communities and their relationship to the birds.
- Volunteer or contribute to your local wildlife rehabilitation shelter.
- Reduce bird mortality from window strikes by installing screens or other devices.
- Support reducing the amount of lights on towers and buildings during peak migratory periods.
- Let your local newspaper know about birding activities, meetings, or interesting birding facts.
- Assist with a beach, river, or other equivalent clean-up.

— Jeff Price

Director, U.S. Important Bird Areas Program
American Bird Conservancy

Courtin' Time

It is said that in the spring a young man's fancy turns to love. While this refers primarily to human beings, it also applies to the realm of feathered folk.

Last spring was the first time I had ever seen courting in the bird world. Looking out the kitchen window, I saw on the ground below the bird feeder a male house finch feeding a female house finch. "Was this male courting the female?" I wondered. A friend, who is well acquainted with the ways of birds, assured me that it was. Now I had learned something.

This spring, a year later, I witnessed the courtship of a male and female house finch, but under different circumstances. It was a beautiful, bright sunny day. Not a cloud was to be seen when I went outside to fill the bird feeder and put out fresh drinking water for my little feathered friends.

As I stood in the yard, my attention was attracted by loud, sweet musical notes nearby. Looking up into the branches of an old catalpa tree next door, I saw the little feathered songster who sang so sweetly. It was the male house finch. With puffed-out body feathers, drooping wings, and spread-out tail, he hopped round and round the little, brown-striped, female house finch. He sang as he went, and his cheery warble radiated the joy that was in his heart. Once he stopped. He touched her bill with his — the equivalent of a lover's kiss. I watched him as he circled her three times and then left.

Despite all the attention her lover gave her, the female finch ignored him. She sat motionless on the tree branch. The results of the treatment she gave him? A lost love, a spurned lover, a spring romance ended.

— Rachel Chipperfield

Computer Glitch in Harrisburg

In a bureaucratic "boo-boo," officials in Harrisburg blamed a computer program for up to 600,000 taxpayers receiving cards thanking them for their donations to the Wild Resource Conservation Fund. They didn't contribute.

BOOK REVIEW



**The Dying of the Trees:
The Pandemic in America's Forests**
by Charles E. Little
1995, Viking Penguin, \$22.95

You've probably already heard about this book. Critics have compared it with *Silent Spring*; government-funded scientists have made it the subject of scathing attacks. What may not be so clear from many of the reviews is the despairing tone of Little's conclusion: he feels we may have already passed the point of no return, at least insofar as our own survival as a species is concerned. The trees — some of them — are simply a bit more susceptible to the same blights and poisons that will ultimately be our own undoing. I'm no biblical scholar, but I do believe the prophet Jeremiah had something like this in mind when he warned of a time when "the spoilers are come upon all high places in the wilderness."

This book is very thorough and it spares no one. If you are of a liberal persuasion, it may cause you to adopt a somewhat less sanguine view of the government's role in protecting the environment. As Little explains it, the government's interest in funding acid rain research, for example, is to forestall any kind of consensus on the issue by demanding impossible levels of "proof," thereby giving industries carte blanche to continue their despoiling — precisely the strategy employed by O.J.'s defense team, with the same results.

Acid rain is far from the only culprit fingered here. Some of the others include: an excess of ground-level ozone and other pollutants; a dangerous thinning of stratospheric ozone; global warming; clear-cutting and other profit-driven forestry practices; radioactive emissions; and a century of wildfire suppression in the West. And the complex ramifications of these practices and conditions, and their even more complex interactions, are only beginning to be understood.

One could perhaps derive solace from our lack of understanding. The very complexity of global ecosystems — what some scientists refer to collectively as Gaia — may prevent us from perceiving some factor or mechanism that will ultimately save us from ourselves. But if the planet is to save herself, the most direct route would be to purge herself of the cancer called *Homo sapiens*. Or at least force it into remission. (Little does end on a slightly more hopeful note than this, but you have to read the book to fully appreciate it.)

For my part, I find it more than a little disconcerting that the warnings of a prophet from the 5th century B.C. should now sound more urgent than ever: "How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? The beasts are consumed, and the birds . . ."

— Dave Bonta

Ladybug Invasion

Remember the nursery rhyme: "Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home?" Her home and the home of numerous friends and family in the fall and winter has been our home since October 1993.

At first, when the rotund, dark-spotted, orange beetles swarmed on our veranda and the white clapboard of our home, I was delighted. All the more ladybug beetles to eat aphids because a single ladybug larva eats as many as 300 aphids in the 2 weeks before it pupates. And aphids attack many trees including apples, peaches, plums, pines, maples, oaks, and tulip poplars — all of which we have growing in our yard and the surrounding woods.

Then, as more and more appeared each October and overwintered in our home, I tried to identify the species — not an easy task since there are more than 4000 ladybug species worldwide, including 475 in North America. Until last October I was clueless. But the same beetles that had swarmed here for 3 years were now swarming in far greater numbers in selected homes and businesses all over the north-eastern United States — and those affected begged entomologists to do something.

Articles appeared in newspapers and identified the species as *Harmonia axyridis*, an Asian immigrant that arrived on its own, probably by boat, because entomologists discovered the first breeding population in 1988 in St. Tammany Parish near New Orleans. Nicknamed the "Halloween ladybug" because of its color and the time of its swarming, they made it to Elmira, N.Y. and to the attention of

Cornell University entomologists in October 1994, a year after their arrival on our mountain.

One reason I had such difficulty identifying it is the species' amazing variation in color and number of spots on its wing covers or elytra. Each winter, as they cluster in our kitchen, bathroom, and the bow window of our sitting room — all warm, sunny, and moist areas — I have counted spots on numerous individuals. Some have only a few or even no spots; others have as many as 20. While most are yellow-orange, some are brick-red, and a few are black with orange spots. For this reason the Entomological Society of America would like to rename it the "multicolored Asian lady beetle."

Although most of them hibernate outdoors beneath leaf litter, under the loose bark of trees, or in clumps of grass, others prefer to move indoors. Old white houses in wooded areas are favorite hibernating spots, hence the popularity of our home. Ideally they need cool hibernating places; so those trapped in our warm living quarters will not survive, the experts say.

Maybe not, but they are lively enough, flying and crawling over windows, sinks, and my house plants, adding a touch of humor to our indoor winter existence. To me, they are the opossums of the insect world, rolling over on their round, hard wing covers and playing dead for several minutes after they are touched. Then they wriggle their legs, hoist themselves over on their stomachs and resume flying or crawling to wherever they are going.

By Marcia Bonta

Please send your grocery receipts from BiLo Foods and Riverside Markets to Anne Borland, at 138A Larch St., Hollidaysburg, PA 16648. Anne redeems the register tapes for \$\$\$ for the JVAS.

Scenic No More!

The billboard industry is celebrating a new federal law that allows billboards along commercial and industrial segments of "scenic byways." Although a 1991 federal law banned billboards on the byways, the Federal Highway Administration, in implementing the law, gave states the option to allow billboards — and scenic byway signs — on the segments. That policy is now law.

"What all this means is, the 'buy' in the Scenic

Byways program will come back to life," said Nancy Fletcher, president of the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (202/833-5566).

One consolation: Rep. Bud Shuster, R-Pa., chairman of the House Transportation Committee, who received \$65,000 from billboard interests in his last election campaign, failed to convince Congress to allow billboards on all major scenic highways.

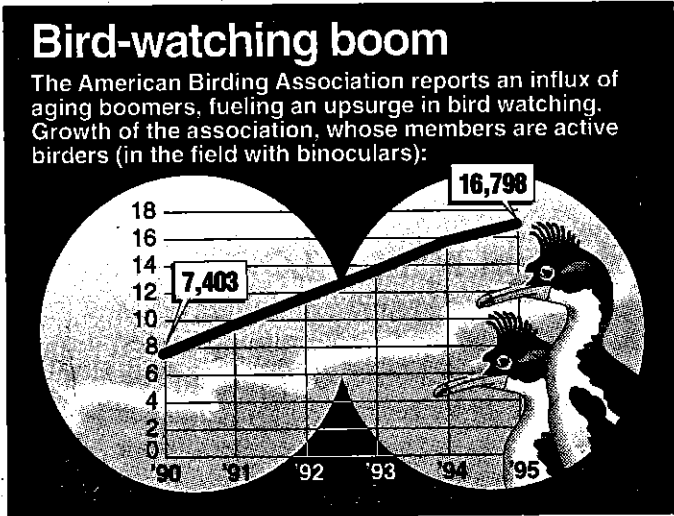
[Source: Common Ground, newsletter of The Conservation Fund]

EDITOR'S NOTE: The deadline for March's issue of The Gnatcatcher is February 29. Please submit articles to editor Charlie Hoyer, P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, PA 16686.

PRINTED BY WICK COPY CENTER, 503 E. PLANK RD., ALTOONA

Juniata Valley Audubon Society
R.R. 3, Box 866
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The JVAS Flock

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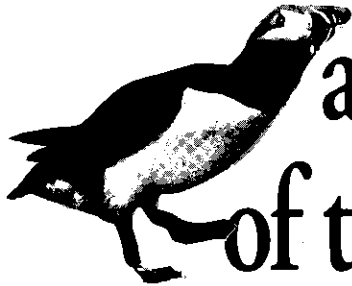
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When you join the National Audubon Society, you become an important part of the most effective environmental organization in the world. An organization for nature and wildlife that reflects your concerns and rewards you with an impressive range of benefits.

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SUMMER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AT AUDUBON CAMPS

NATURAL HISTORY INSTRUCTORS

Audubon Camps are operated at sites in Maine, Connecticut and Wyoming by the National Audubon Society to provide adults with a relaxed educational setting in which to learn more about the natural world around them and the ways in which people are interacting with that world. Through the use of direct field study, lively lecture/demonstrations and discussions, the program strives to help participants develop a stronger understanding of basic concepts of ecology; an increased familiarity with the flora, fauna and physical environment; an increased awareness and understanding of environmental problems; a greater familiarity with resources and field study skills which will enable them to continue their studies on their own; and a greater desire to put their knowledge and skills to work on environmental matters in their home communities.

Workshop participants range in age from 18 to 80 and in knowledge from those with little or no background to others with considerable field experience. Many are teachers or scout leaders who are interested in learning both background information and teaching techniques. The program is designed to provide a balance between basic information for beginners and providing new information and/or teaching techniques for those with more experience.

Qualified individuals with teaching experience in a wide range of natural science subjects and ecological disciplines can become a part of the prestigious staff at one of Audubon's Camps or Workshops. The programs run for approximately eight weeks from mid-June to late August and the positions include salary plus room and board, at our sites in Connecticut, Maine or Wyoming.

STUDENT ASSISTANTS

Since 1936, the National Audubon Society has been offering summer work/learn opportunities to young people who have a strong interest in the environment. The Student Assistant position provides a combination of hard work, meeting interesting people and, through attendance in the Audubon Ecology Workshop & Camps program, a chance to study the many life forms and physical aspects of forests, fields, ponds, streams and seashore environments. As part of the program, each student assistant carries out a field study project. Past projects have included photography of seashore organisms, surveys of ferns, a study of frog vocalizations, breeding bird surveys, studies of bird nesting behavior and many more. The entire summer is filled with learning opportunities, from stimulating, informal field classes, to individual inquiry and consultation with a project advisor, to interaction with strongly qualified instructional staff and interesting participants in this adult education program.

College-age students interested in a summer filled with learning opportunities and great camaraderie in beautiful surroundings should consider joining the staff at the Camp in Maine, Camp in the West, located near Dubois, Wyoming or the Audubon Ecology Workshop in Connecticut.

Students assist in the kitchen or as maintenance assistants in making the program work. In return they are provided with an opportunity to participate in the program throughout the summer, room and board, and a salary, commensurate with the position and camp season.

Interested persons should send their resume to:

**Audubon Ecology Camps & Workshops
National Environmental Education Center
National Audubon Society
613 Riversville Road
Greenwich, CT 06831**

Qualified persons who are selected for consideration will receive a detailed job description and application form.