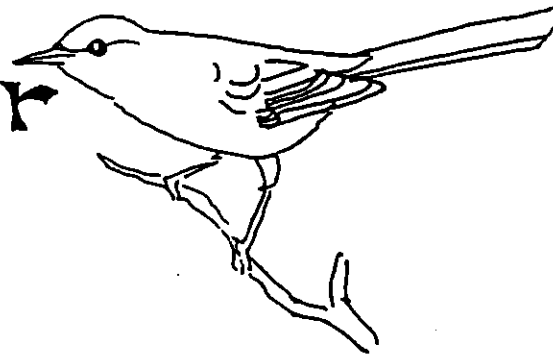


The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the
Juniata Valley Audubon Society

R.R. 3, Box 886, Altoona, Pennsylvania 16601

March 1996

DEP OK's Wetlands Destruction

By Stan Kotala

LAST MONTH the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection published General Permit 15 (GP15), which would allow the construction of houses in wetlands. GP15 takes effect on March 4, 1996 and permits filling up to ½ acre of wetland for residential development.

GP15 is a throwback to the days when wetlands were considered wastelands. It subverts prior efforts that had been made to save the Commonwealth's remaining wetlands.

The beneficiaries of GP15 are corporations, banks, and real estate developers who purchased wetlands on speculation and now intend to fill them and sell these lots to unsuspecting home buyers. The victims of GP15 are Pennsylvanians who will be subjected to increased flood damage, cracked house foundations, wet basements, and degraded water quality. It's a sad irony that our state government, which pleaded for federal aid because of recent flooding problems, is now planning to approve actions that will cause even more flooding.

DEP received an overwhelming number of negative comments when they asked for public input about GP15 in the Pennsylvania Bulletin. Sadly, our input was ignored.

Wetlands are *not* wastelands; they're Pennsylvania's most productive ecosystems. Less than 2 percent of the Keystone State's land mass is wetlands. More than 50 percent of the state's wetlands have been lost since the last century. Of the 16 species of birds that are endangered or threatened in Pennsylvania, 13 are dependent upon wetlands.

DEP has abandoned its mandate to protect our environment and instead is serving the interests of speculators, developers, and real estate companies. When will these people decide that enough land has been destroyed? When will their greed be satisfied?

March Program

"FISHERS' RETURN" — Denise Mitcheltree, of Penn State, will discuss the Fisher Reintroduction Project.

7:15 p.m., Monday, Mar. 11 at Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church, 5th Ave. & 4th St., Altoona

Field Trip

Lakeside hike at Canoe Creek State Park with trip leader Stan Kotala (946-8840). Meet at pavilion No. 1.

2 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 24

Annual Spring Banquet

6:30 p.m., Monday, Apr. 8 in White Oak Hall, at Fort Roberdeau County Park. Speaker of the evening will be Marcia Bonta. (See page 2.)

Next Board Meeting

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

From the Gnatcatcher's Nest . . .

Spring migration is underway, spear-headed by the northerly movement of waterfowl. All along our flyways, tundra swans, black ducks, gadwalls, green-winged teal, and red-breasted mergansers navigate from unfrozen lakes to rivers as the ice breaks up and days grow incrementally longer and warmer.

In hope of seeing some of these avian travelers, our next JVAS field trip will be a lakeside hike at Canoe Creek State Park on Sunday, March 24 at 2 p.m. We'll meet at pavilion No. 1, which is the first picnic pavilion on your right after you pass the park office.

Hope to see all of you there!

Stan

Neotropical Migrants in Trouble?

"Wintering in the tropics is no vacation for migratory birds," said Dan and Lisa Petit, professional wildlife biologists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Smithsonian Institution, respectively, speaking to the New Columbia Audubon Society in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 21, 1996.

Since I plan to participate in a bird research study with Earthwatch in Costa Rica this spring, I made the effort to attend this event to gain a general picture of what I may encounter when I get there.

This husband and wife team studies migratory birds all year long, focusing on our Neotropical migrants, which spend 8 months of the year in migration and breeding before returning to the tropics for the winter and needed rest and recuperation. However, their very existence, as well as that R and R has become severely threatened, they said, by stress throughout their various environments produced by the obstacles of habitat destruction,

pesticides, predation, nest parasitism, and more. They went on to describe the difficulties encountered by these birds throughout their lifetimes.

Stress in migration is created by human development in the areas that the birds need in which to feed and rest en route. In North America, where once they found forests, wetlands, and fields, too often they find suburbs or even hotels and high-rises, especially near shores. Fortunately, some refuges have been set aside. It was surprising to me to learn that many of these refuges, rather than being financial liabilities to the local communities, turn a surprisingly large profit for local innkeepers and businesses.

For example, in the small town of Chincoteague, \$10 million a year is generated by bird-watchers who visit the refuge! In fact, in this country bird-watchers spend as much money each year on their hobby as baseball fans do on baseball tickets, according to the Petits, so there is no financial reason not to set aside land for migratory bird refuges.

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JVAS Annual Banquet

The JVAS Annual Banquet will be held on Monday, Apr. 8 in White Oak Hall at Fort Roberdeau County Park.

A social hour will begin at 6 p.m. with a delicious turkey dinner with all the trimmings being served at 6:30.

This year our speaker will be our own Marcia Bonta, who will present a slide program entitled "Outbound Journeys in Pennsylvania."

Please fill out and send the attached reservation form with payment of \$12 per person to Amy King, 3021 W. Chestnut Ave., Altoona, PA 16601. Please make your check payable to Juniata Valley Audubon Society.

All reservations and money *must* be received by March 31. Any questions? Please phone Amy King at 942-7673.

CONSERVATION

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League of Conservation Voters' 1995 Scorecard Released by JVAS

On Feb. 14 the JVAS conducted 1 of 75 press conferences held around the U.S. to release the League of Conservation Voters' (LCV) 1995 National Environmental Scorecard. It was held on the banks of the Juniata River, where a combined stormwater/sewage overflow dumps raw sewage into the river during heavy rains. Toilet paper was hanging in the trees because of last year's flooding.

Our turnout was excellent. JVAS President Stan Kotala and Conservation Chair Paula Ford gave statements on behalf of the Chapter. Fran Williams, from the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society in Clarion, also attended and helped with distributing copies of the scorecard and our statements.

Representatives from the Pennsylvania Environmental Network, the Sierra Club, the Unity Coalition, and Penn State's EcoAction group also attended, as did several unaffiliated environmentalists.

All three local TV stations attended and provided excellent coverage. *Altoona Mirror* reporters did not attend; however, several local radio stations ran the story after we faxed our press release to them.

What's the Story?

The LCV 1995 National Environmental Scorecard shows conclusively that the 1994 congressional elections produced a decidedly anti-environmental 104th Congress. In 1995, most members voted contrary to public opinion and against people's health and safety.

Bolstered by Congressional leaders, the most adamantly anti-environmental voting bloc in Congress is the 73 freshman Republicans in the House. Almost half — 36 GOP members — received scores of absolute zero.

National polls — including a recent survey by a GOP pollster — tell us that Americans do not want to roll back the environmental gains of the past 25 years, which is precisely what this Congress is trying to do.

When the 104th Congress convened one year ago, the House Republican leadership unveiled the details of their "Contract with America." In the first 100 days of the Congress, the House passed legislation — euphemistically titled unfunded mandates, regulatory

reform, and property rights — that would seriously undermine environmental laws.

Then Congress aimed point-blank for existing safeguards, such as the Clean Water and the Endangered Species acts, and magnificent wild places such as the Arctic Refuge, ancient forests, and the Mojave National Preserve in the California desert.

The care of our natural resources, people's health, and the safety of our children were the farthest things from the minds of the legislators who crafted the anti-environmental initiatives. Worse, in at least two well-publicized cases, the anti-environmental legislation was actually written by special interest lobbyists — Senator Slade Gorton's (R-Wash.) Endangered Species reauthorization bill and Rep. Bud Shuster's (R-Pa.) Dirty Water Act — for members of Congress.

The new Congressional Leadership allied themselves with supporters of the anti-environmental legislation. Provisions to drill the Arctic Refuge, log the ancient forests of the Northwest, limit the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) enforcement powers, and end the designation of endangered species, among many others, were added to budget and spending bills.

Two provisions — halting designations of endangered species and expediting logging of ancient forests — made it through Congress as part of emergency spending legislation and were signed into law.

The impasse between the White House and Congress over the budget, as well as the unresolved anti-environmental provisions and other issues, resulted in a shutdown of the federal government.

The LCV has published a National Environmental Scorecard since 1970, the year it was founded by leaders of the environmental movement. The 1995 Scorecard provides objective, factual information about the records of the members of the first session of the 104th Congress. Experts from 27 mainstream environmental groups volunteered their time to identify and research crucial votes.

Conclusion

We urge all JVAS members to know the scores of their representatives and senators, and to express their views regarding these scores to their elected officials. Before you vote, learn about your representatives' environmental records and about their opponents' environmental positions. Then vote accordingly!
— PF

Bad Manners — Part I

The Blue Jay family — Elvira, Osgood, and Penney — were here this afternoon. They stopped for lunch. First I've seen the three of them together. And they brought their bad manners with them.

Being as they are noisy and quarrelsome (my husband calls them "squawk boxes"), it was only a short time till a quarrel began. Penney wanted to eat with her father, who had flown in to join her and her mother for lunch. In fact, he perched right beside Penney. For a few moments there was peace father, mother, and daughter ate together.

Then suddenly a family feud erupted. Penney decided she wanted that whole side of the bird feeder with some choice tidbits of mixed bird seed and sunflower seed — of which she is especially fond — all to herself. So she started to fight with her father and drove him off. Her mother flew away in disgust; she knew better than to brave Penney's trigger-happy temper. Now Penney had the whole side of the feeder to herself. She could eat to her heart's content.

Sounds almost human, doesn't it? The difference: we have a conscience God has given us. The feathered folk don't.

Bad Manners (In Reverse) — Part II

Elvira made a pop call today. Popped in and popped out. Returned for lunch later, followed by Osgood, who ate his noon meal on the ground. He and Elvira don't always get along good together, being as they are noisy and quarrelsome.

Saw Penney a few moments later. She was flying low and getting ready to make a three-point landing in a vacant lot near the railroad. Would eat her lunch there.

Three separate family members; three separate lunches; three separate eating places. No feudin'; no fightin'; no fussin'. 'Nuf said.

— Rachel Chipperfield
Altoona

... Neotropical Migrants (Cont'd)

What happens when these migrants finally reach their nesting territory in North America? Too often they find forest fragmentation, if not clear-cutting. Opposition to clear-cutting is increasing, but we must realize that forest fragmentation is also a serious threat to our woodland migrants — the bright-colored warblers and tanagers and the thrushes that we all love. Fragmentation opens the way for predators and parasitism; crows, jays, and cowbirds do not frequent the deep woods but prefer the woodland edges. An increasing percentage of nests are parasitized by cowbirds, whose young eliminate the young of the warbler or thrush with which they share a nest.

Half of all nestlings are taken by predators. However, said the Petits, if you find an empty nest with droppings below it, that means the young have fledged successfully. Yet half of the fledged young die within a short time and never make it to their winter home in the tropics.

We receive far more benefits from our insect-eating summer visitors than is generally realized. They eat several times more food here than in the tropics because their nutritional needs are greater here due to the stresses of migration and breeding. Without these birds growers might be forced to use far more insecticides that at present — at a cost to their pocketbooks as well as to the environment.

How do our forest migrants fare when they return to the tropics? Do they have to compete with the "locals" there? Actually, said the Petits, not very much. Local bird residents in the tropics tend to be highly specialized, while migrants tend to be generalists. If they were insectivorous on the nesting grounds, they may become fruit eaters as well on their wintering territory. Some do need dense forest, such as the Kentucky and worm-eating warblers, and share them with such tropical residents as the white-collared manakin, tody motmot, and northern royal-flycatcher, but do not compete directly with these native species. Others, such as the

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JVAS February Field Trip

Despite the cold, the brisk winds, and the snow, seven JVAS members participated in our field trip to Canoe Creek State Park on Sunday, Feb. 18. Shelter from the wind was found along Mary Ann's Creek, where we observed chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and kinglets.

Park manager Terry Wentz skillfully led us through the intricacies of winter tree identification and pointed out a large stand of rough horsetail (*equisetum hyemale*) along the creek. He also discussed the development of a numbered tree trail and an accompanying guide pamphlet that he's preparing.

We hope that more JVAS members will join us on our next field trip at Canoe Creek State Park on Sunday, Mar. 24.

(K)



←
Barb Baird, Shirley Wagoner, Debbie Haine, Marge Hoyer, Terry Wentz, and Stan Kotala observe a mixed flock of black-capped chickadees, white-breasted nuthatches, tufted titmice, and golden-crowned kinglets.



→
Charlie Hoyer, Terry, Debbie, and Marge enjoy a scenic view along Limestone Trail.

BOOK REVIEW



*Eastern Deciduous Forest:
Ecology and Wildlife Conservation*
by Richard H. Yahner
1995, University of Minnesota Press

If you're still a little hazy on the precise applications of such terms as "minimum dynamic area," "uneven-aged management," or "island-biogeography theory," this book's for you. *Eastern Deciduous Forest* is the fourth volume in Minnesota's "Wildlife Habitats" series, and as its subtitle suggests, has less of a pro-management bias than a similar text written 10 years ago would have had. And since its author is a Penn State professor at University Park, many of the examples cited come from central Pennsylvania.

The chief virtue of this book is its 22-page bibliography. (This for a text that, generously illustrated, only comes to 177 pages.) Another attractive feature for me, oddly enough, is the Acknowledgements page, wherein Yahner discloses the funding sources of his research — from the International Paper Company to the NRA to the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.

Given this, and given the nature of the book as a sort of beginning text in ecology, one expects a cautious tone in discussions of controversial issues such as the effects of global warming and acid deposition. What's encouraging is the recognition of the validity of an ecocentric rather than an anthropocentric viewpoint in evaluating these and other issues.

This is certainly a book that tries to look at the whole forest — not just the trees. It succeeds in conveying the complexity of the ecological ramifications of various forest and wildlife management techniques; however, it reads about as smoothly as the first part of this sentence! I found I learned a lot about current scientific theory and very little about the woods itself — perhaps inevitable with a book of this kind.

For those who desire a more anecdotal, nuts-and-bolts approach to Appalachian ecology, I recommend George Constantz's *Hollows, Peepers, and Highlanders* (reviewed here in February 1995). But do ask your local public and high school librarians to order copies of this book.

— Dave Bonta

... *Neotropical Migrants* (Cont'd)

northern waterthrush and the prothonotary warbler, require mangroves — a very specialized habitat that is highly threatened everywhere it occurs.

Some discoveries the Petits have made are that, while many specialists remain insectivorous, many others diversify. Some, such as the yellow-breasted chat and the gray catbird, become fruit eaters. Orioles, which are largely insectivorous on the breeding grounds, become nectar eaters — as does the Tennessee warbler. These species travel together in large flocks, moving from fruit tree to fruit tree.

Insects are omnipresent, so some birds can be territorial in Panama as well as in North America, stated the Petits. Sometimes the sexes separate, with the females feeding in the open and the males in mature forest. It is not known if sexual dominance or adaptivity play the decisive role in this separatism.

Problems with birds' winter homes are largely associated with land use. Deforestation makes room for citrus groves, coffee and cacao plantations, and pastures. In Panama cows outnumber people! Some areas are now desert because of overgrazing. Sugar cane — another highly commercial land use — seems to provide no useful habitat for birds at all. We demand products such as beef, sugar, citrus fruits, chocolate, coffee, and rice. All these products require land formerly used by migratory birds. Can their impact on the land be mitigated in a way that will help to migrant birds — and if so, how?

Coffee, when grown as the understory of a mature forest, is excellent habitat for birds — almost as good as the original forest. Mourning, Wilson's, golden-winged, and Tennessee warblers love these shady plantations, as do local residents such as the red-headed barbet, rufous-capped warbler, and three species of tanagers. However, new varieties of sun-grown coffee have been developed to bear more coffee beans faster than the shaded varieties, and so have come into favor. Unfortunately, the soil wears out faster on the sunny slopes; forest trees kept the soil fertile in the shady plantations. A compromise is now being suggested wherein some trees of the original forest are left standing. This practice is better for the birds and reduces the amount of chemicals needed on the soil.

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February Thaw

How about that February thaw? At first I couldn't believe it. After so many cold weeks in which I strapped on my ice-cleated, Sherpa snowshoes every day, grabbed a walking stick, and set off on slippery, frozen snow for my daily "walk," to be walking on squishy brown earth once again was a shock.

Day by day, despite fog and mist, First Field emerged from the heavy snow pack. Then the south-facing slopes of Sapsucker Ridge melted. Even our flood-damaged road began to shed its burden of ice and snow.

On Ash Wednesday I spotted the first chipmunk zipping across the road. I thought that it was only out to renew its store of food, as chipmunks usually do in February. But by the following Monday chipmunks were defending territory, chasing off encroaching males, and joining males to chase available females. Walking up the road that morning I spotted a couple in *flagrante delicto*.

The first eastern bluebird appeared early on the luminescent morning of February 25. He sang atop the bluebird box, reminding me that I had never cleaned out the last nesting. When I set out to do so later in the morning, he flew in to sit on the electric line above the box as if to supervise my work or, more likely, to defend his chosen territory from any interlopers.

By Marcia Bonta

With the arrival of the bluebird, Bruce tacked up my spring arrivals' list — now in its 25th year. The next day I added another new face to the list. I had wandered over to the derelict house of our long-deceased neighbors, Margaret and Fred. As I neared Fred's old tool shed — its roof collapsed on top of a collection of broken dishes, wash basins, and rusty tools — I heard a loud scratching noise. Surely it was a fairly large animal and not the ghost of Fred.

I approached on cautious tiptoe and glimpsed a furry snout before it popped out of sight. Still not certain of the creature's identity I waited until the scratching resumed in another part of the shed. Slowly I circled the building and had a second quick glimpse of an animal as it dove into a hole.

It was a groundhog, risen from its winter hibernation a little later than Punxsutawney Phil. That reminded me of Phil's emergence back on February 2 — a heavily overcast day. In no way could any self-respecting groundhog have seen its shadow, I thought. But on the evening news I learned that Phil had. Six more weeks of winter, the pundits proclaimed.

So when the February thaw arrived I had a difficult time deciding whether it was the late January thaw that we never had or an early spring. Could Punxsutawney Phil be wrong? Only time will tell.



. . . Neotropical Migrants (Cont'd)

Cacao plantations in the lowlands replicate this situation. Citrus groves, on the other hand, provide thick cover and good habitat. Even parts of cattle pasture can be allowed to go fallow. Soon the vegetation grows and birds begin to use it. Rice cultivation may soon provide the only remaining wetlands.

Sugar cane must be contained! Planning throughout the habitats needed by migratory birds is obviously needed to maintain suitably located environments and to retain the environmental and human benefits of these insect eaters, emphasized the Petits.

— Shirley Wagoner
Huntingdon

Cat Alert

Feral cats — those cats that run wild and live more or less independent of humans — feed on a wide variety of wildlife. Domestic cats also are effective predators. Cats prey on small mammals, migratory and non-migratory birds, reptiles, and amphibians.

The number of domestic cats in the U.S. is between 50 and 60 million, and feral cat numbers are estimated at 60 million! If these cats kill just a

few birds a month, the numbers reach an alarming figure, with conservative estimates that more than 3 billion birds are killed annually in the U.S.

Please help protect our wildlife by becoming educated about the destruction of birds and other wildlife by cats.

— *Daniel Evans, Ph.D.*

Executive Director

Point Reyes Bird Observatory

Don't forget to send your BiLo Foods and Riverside Markets tapes to Anne Borland!

EDITOR'S NOTE: The deadline for April's issue of *The Gnatcatcher* is March 28. Please submit articles to editor Charlie Hoyer, P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, PA 16686.

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