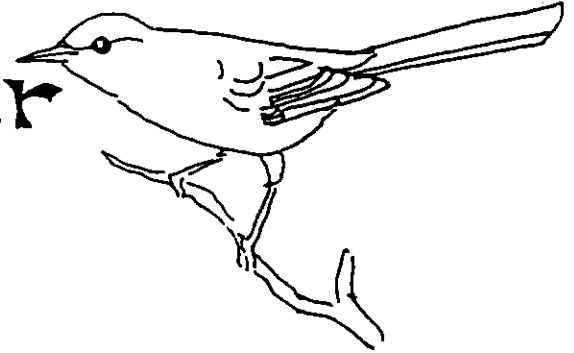


# The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the  
**Juniata Valley Audubon Society**

---

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

May 1996

---

## 4000-Acre Ecological Restoration Planned

*By Stan Kotala*

**T**HE WATERSHEDS OF GLENWHITE RUN AND KITTANNING RUN have suffered tremendously over the past century due to severe abuse by the mining industry. Strip-mining, deep-mining, and clear-cutting have resulted in near death for both these streams that tumble down the Allegheny Front just west of Horseshoe Curve. No fish or significant macroinvertebrate populations are found in either of these streams.

Glenwhite Run provides 7 million gallons of water per day to Lake Altoona, the city's largest source of public drinking water. Acid mine drainage in this stream costs the Altoona City Authority \$120,000 per year in treatment expenses. The real horror story, however, is Kittanning Run, the waters of which are so polluted with acid mine drainage that treatment costs would be prohibitive. As a result, Kittanning Run's waters are rerouted to bypass the reservoir completely before entering Burgoon Run.

In addition to costing taxpayers a bundle and destroying these lotic ecosystems, acid mine drainage also has caused the death of large areas of trees and shrubs around contaminated springs and seeps. Large, barren, eroding areas near these discharges can be found throughout these watersheds.

The Juniata Valley Audubon Society believes that the problems of these streams can be corrected. JVAS president Stan Kotala sits on the steering committee of the Horseshoe Curve Resource Coalition, which was formed early this year for the purpose of bringing about the ecological restoration of the Kittanning Run and Glenwhite Run watersheds.

Five planning meetings have been held and \$3 million have been applied for through the Natural Resource Conservation Service PL 566 program. Other sources of funding include the EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 grants and the Army Corps of Engineers Section 313 of the Water Resource Development Act. Additional funding mechanisms also are being investigated.

We plan to treat the acid mine drainage through bioremediation; acidic discharge will be channeled through wetlands where plants, bacteria, and limestone will neutralize acidity and eliminate iron from the water. Wetlands are far cheaper to build than chemical treatments plants and they require little maintenance.

Much is to be gained by the ecological restoration of these two watersheds, which comprise 4000 acres of the Allegheny Front. We look forward to the day when mayflies and stoneflies populate these streams, and brook trout again inhabit these wildly racing waters.

A lot of hard work lies ahead, but the goal of making Glenwhite Run and Kittanning Run live again will be achieved! ❖

### *From the Gnatcatcher's Nest . . .*

All JVAS members will have the opportunity to participate in the Glenwhite Run and Kittanning Run Ecological Restoration Project, beginning with a field trip to these watersheds in June. This endeavor represents an exciting opportunity to be involved in restoring ecological integrity to two significant streams that have seen severe degradation over the past century.

We'll join other members of the Horseshoe Curve Resource Coalition at the Altoona City Authority Horseshoe Curve Water Treatment Plant at 9 a.m., Monday, June 3 for a 2-hour tour of the watersheds. I hope all of you will turn out for this interesting and educational field trip!

*Stan*

### Comments by the Editor

First, I truly appreciate the dedicated volunteer work of the following individuals: **Stan Kotala** for a multitude of items, **Marcia Bonta** for her charming essays on wildlife at Plummer Hollow, **Paula Ford** for her timely reports on conservation activities, and **Dave Bonta** for his highly professional and entertaining book reviews. Without their regular contributions there would be no *Gnatcatcher*.

And I'd like to thank **Dave Kyler**, **Bill King**, **Jack Cupper**, **Bruce Bonta**, **Mark Henry**, **Janet Huber**, **Mark Henry**, **Shirley Wagoner**, **Greg Grove**, **Rachel Chipperfield**, and **Angeline Stout** for their various inputs over the past 2 years.

Since I get the summer off, this May issue is the last till September. Then, to share with our readers, I hope to receive items for publication from several of you whose names don't appear above!

### May Program

"MICROCOSMOS" — Dr. John Lennox will present a hands-on workshop explaining microscopic ecosystems.

7:15 p.m., Monday, May 13 at Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church, 5th Ave. & 4th St., Altoona

### Field Trips

JVAS "BIRDATHON" at Canoe Creek State Park. Birdathon leader: Stan Kotala (946-8840). Meet at park office.

(See page 8 for complete details.)

8 a.m. till noon, Saturday, May 11

BEGINNING BIRDING at Fort Roberdeau County Park. Trip leader: Stan Kotala (946-8840). Meet at White Oak Hall.

2:30 p.m., Sunday, May 12

WILDFLOWER WALK at Fort Roberdeau County Park. Trip leader: Janet DeMuth (843-5451). Meet at White Oak Hall.

2:30 p.m., Sunday, May 26

GLENWHITE RUN AND KITTANNING RUN ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROJECT. Trip leader: Stan Kotala (946-8840). Meet at parking lot of Altoona City Authority Horseshoe Curve Water Treatment Plant.

9 a.m., Monday, June 3

LOWER TRAIL BIRD HIKE. Trip leader: Dave Kyler (643-3030). Meet at Alfarata trail head.

8 a.m., Saturday, July 13 (rain date, July 14)

BEGINNING BIRDING at Canoe Creek State Park. Trip leader: Stan Kotala (946-8840). Meet at Visitor Center.

8 a.m., Sunday, July 21

LOWER TRAIL BIRD HIKE. Trip leader: Dave Kyler (643-3030). Meet at Alfarata trail head.

8 a.m., Saturday, Aug. 10 (rain date, Aug. 11)

BEGINNING BIRDING at Canoe Creek State Park. Trip leader: Stan Kotala (946-8840). Meet at Visitor Center.

8 a.m., Sunday, Aug. 18

## CONSERVATION

O  
R  
N  
E  
R

This month I'd like to share with you a message I received from the Pennsylvania Environmental Activist E-mail Network and to encourage you to write to the State Forester and tell him what you think about the proposal to increase timber harvesting in the state forests. — PF

### Full Steam Ahead For State Forest Wood Production

The wood fibre fanatics are at it again. Now, through the Bureau of Forestry, they're proposing that wood production on the state forests be increased 137 percent, from an annual average of 35 million board feet during 1990-94 to 83 million board feet per year. The proposal was floated on Feb. 29.

While there's some deference to other values in a "stewardship and sustainable timber management" disclaimer, all this is put in vague words such as "ecologically sound," "sustainable forever," and "considerate of the other forest values and benefits appreciated by our citizens" that vaporize and fly off into nether, nether lands. In sharp contrast to such vapid policy statements on environmental forest objectives are the hard and concrete provisions for just more wood production.

All this is vastly different from what the people of Pennsylvania want. A survey conducted by faculty in the Cooperative Extension Program at Penn State found that among the benefits of forests Pennsylvanians ranked environmental benefits of clean air, clean water, and wildlife the highest and wood production the lowest.

Don't you think it is more than just a bit out of kilter for a state forest agency to promote policies that are at such odds with what the public wants? If you think so, get on your horse and tell the wood production establishment that they're off on the wrong track.

A few major points:

1. What about those other environmental objectives that should be balanced with wood production? One is a substantial and concrete state native biological diversity program. The report, "Conserving Pennsylvania's Native Biological Diversity," issued last summer, has plenty of concrete suggestions. But while the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has announced a commitment to biodiversity, that statement is as vapid and vaporizes as quickly as the "environmental friendly" statements in this wood production proposal.

2. Another environmental objective is a serious effort to restore old growth on the state forests. Instead, what we are told in this wood production proposal is that old growth is

bad and should be replaced with younger trees, which is little more than the age-old attitude of professional foresters that old-growth forests are simply decadent and should be cleared away to make way for the real forests, the new, younger, and "regulated" forest. We've long since destroyed most of the older forests in Pennsylvania; now it's time for a policy to restore some of them. Instead the Bureau argues that even at 60-90 years — the dominant age-class now in the state's forests — they're too old and need to be rid of.

3. The drive for more wood production from the state's forests is more than out of place when the Allegheny National Forest has recently announced that it's reducing the harvest from its lands by 41.3 percent over the next decade. Why? Because their own surveys make clear that tree mortality is much higher than they thought, and the "growing stock" out there is far less than they thought. Does the Bureau think that what harms the Allegheny National Forest — pests, disease, air pollution, and nutrient deficiencies — somehow or other is selective and does not affect state forests? Of course it's easier just to ignore all that and plunge ahead with a 137 percent increase in wood production.

4. What we have here is a one-track approach to managing the state forests, an approach that is fueled by the narrow views of the personnel of the Bureau and by the committee set up to advise the Bureau in this wood production venture. The advisory committee is distinctively loaded with those fibre fanatics who see only wood production. On it one can discern no conservation biologists, old growth experts, native biodiversity wildlife specialists, watershed protection specialists, botanists or environmental quality economists — any one of which might well have said, "Wait a minute; there's something else here."

5. We've long said that the Bureau of Forestry is far more than a wood production agency and that modern environmental objectives need to be brought squarely into its policies. We got only a few words in the state forest plan that might lead in that direction but these were then and still are only gestures, just words that vaporize readily. Now we find that the more solid stuff that comes out as the new Department moves ahead is just as one-sided as the old stuff. Wood production is not only the bottom line but the up-front top line as well.

Don't we deserve better? The proposal to increase wood production 137 percent is — so the Bureau says — open for comment until Apr. 30. If you want to get your two cents worth in, write to James Grace, State Forester, Bureau of Forestry, Rachel Carson State Office Building, P.O. Box 8552, Harrisburg, PA 17105-8552.

And for more information get in touch with Sam Hays, Chair, Public Lands Committee, Pennsylvania Chapter, Sierra Club, 1421 Wightman St., Pittsburgh, PA 15217. Phone (412) 421-6560; e-mail <sph1+@pitt.edu>

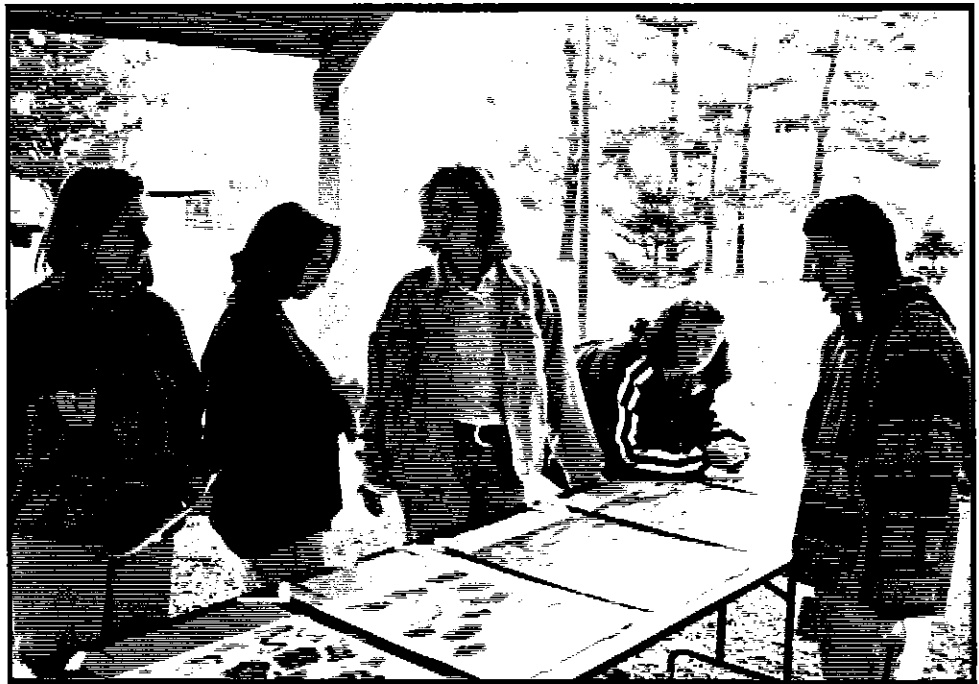
# Blair County



## Fort Roberdeau County Park

April 25, 1996

Blair Co. Conservation District Manager Donna Fisher presents the First-Place Trophy to "Nature's Best," the Altoona Area Vo-Tech team.



Tyrone High Team No. 2 muses over the identity of obscure amphibians and reptiles.

# Envirothon

## Final Results

1ST PLACE: "Nature's Best"  
Altoona Vo-Tech School

2ND PLACE: Central High School  
Team No. 2

3RD PLACE: Central High School  
Team No. 1

*The JVAS congratulates the winners  
and wishes them good luck in state  
competition!*



The assignment of correct names to the fins on this rainbow trout was one of the most perplexing problems at the aquatics station. (Note donuts in foreground.)



Central High Team No. 1 discusses wetland functions.

Photos and text  
by Stan Kotala

## Birding in Texas

By Jack Cupper

The warm mornings of mid-April in the hill country of central Texas are delightful — especially for bird-watchers. In 1 hour we logged 15 species from our breakfast table. But beware of the blistering temperatures by mid-afternoon. Even here in our cooler hill-country location, 70 miles west of Austin, the mercury soared to 95° by mid-afternoon, Apr. 18. While year-round and migrating species abound here — in and around the old German settlement of Fredericksburg — April through September is not a comfortable period for Northerners on birding trips to Texas, especially to points farther south, like Big Bend National Park. If you plan a birding trip to Big Bend, I suggest you come in January or February.

Carol and I have visited Big Bend many times and have logged some interesting species such as vermilion flycatcher, Williamson's sapsucker, Bell's vireo, hooded oriole, summer tanager, rufous-crowned sparrow, black-throated sparrow, lark bunting, curve-billed thrasher, band-tailed pigeon, red-billed pigeon, Inca dove, scaled quail, sora, Wilson's warbler, black-tailed gnatcatcher, and black phoebe.

If you do plan a winter birding trip to Big Bend, I recommend you first write to Big Bend Natural History Association, Big Bend National Park, TX 79834 and request their hiker's guide, bird list, and location of birding "hot spots."

The park itself — not including a recent addition — is more than 30 miles long, so you should schedule at least 2 days to visit Santa Elena Canyon, Cotton Wood Village, Rio Grande Village, and Government Springs. If you are driving a small camper or plan to tent, the best location is at the main tourists' center, called The Basin. Here, at this mid-point, is a modern motel, grocery store, and gift/book shop replete with Big Bend guide books, etc. Reserve your campsite or motel in advance by writing or phoning the park superintendent.

Most birders everywhere want to log the golden-cheeked warbler and the black-capped vireo. The best location to see them is at Lost Maples Natural Area, 30 miles west of Kerrville or at Pedernales Falls State Park, 40 miles west of Austin — beginning in late March for the warbler and in April for the vireo.

Carol and I invite any winter birder from the Juniata Valley Audubon Society to stop off in Fredericksburg next winter and tarry awhile so that you may pick up some information on Texas birding that we have learned in our 30 years of living there. Phone Jack and Carol Cupper at (814) 684-5789 or write them at R.R. 3, Box 115, Tyrone, PA 16686.

## BOOK REVIEW



*Leaning Sycamores:*  
*Natural Worlds of the Upper Potomac*  
by Jack Wennerstrom  
1996, The Johns Hopkins Press

Every once in a blue moon a book comes along that's so good a book reviewer can't find the right words with which to praise it — and in any case, most of the usual ones already appear on the dust jacket: "eloquent," "passionate," "graceful," "memorable" and, of course, "beautifully written." All there. And all true.

Wennerstrom's previous book, *Soldiers Delight Journal* (reviewed here last year), contained hints of a considerable talent, but gave little indication of the full power of this author's literary imagination. At the same time, *Leaning Sycamores* is chock-full of the kind of meticulously observed and described natural history lore that distinguished the first book.

So much has been written about rivers over the centuries, it seems impossible to avoid at least a few of the tried-and-true images found in "every epic and allegory, every tested wisdom, every mythic adventure drawn out in the time-flood of words," warns Wennerstrom in the prologue. Yet somehow he succeeds. *Leaning Sycamores* unfolds its linked narratives according to a kind of felt pattern that — like the river itself — is very pleasing but difficult to grasp (much less to describe). Along the way it visits turtles and canal builders, native myths and hummingbirds, the market for papaws, and a new species of tenebrionid beetle. Eventually the reader tumbles to the underlying logic of the arrangement: nothing more — or less — than the "logic" of every true love story.

Let me conclude with a fairly lengthy quote to exemplify some of the qualities I've been talking about. From page 201, here's Wennerstrom musing on humans' loss of appreciation for the minutiae of the natural world:

*With a dimmed awareness of loose threads in nature, of the oddly raveled detail, we also lose sight of its linkage, of the pattern it is connected to, of the whole cloth that binds our spirit and the fabric that cloaks our soul. Perhaps we should relearn the weaver's touch, the mender's gift for connections . . . . By the river one constantly gathers, for the river gathers itself. It collects bits and pieces under rocks; it draws up the yarn of shadows; it entwines each stipple and glow — that long-handed upper Potomac, ruffle-veined and rock-knuckled . . . .*

And with writing like that, a river probably destined for a lasting connection with Jack Wennerstrom in our collective imagination, just we link Cape Cod with Henry Beston or the Sierra Nevada with John Muir. (Remember, you read it here first!)

— Dave Bonta

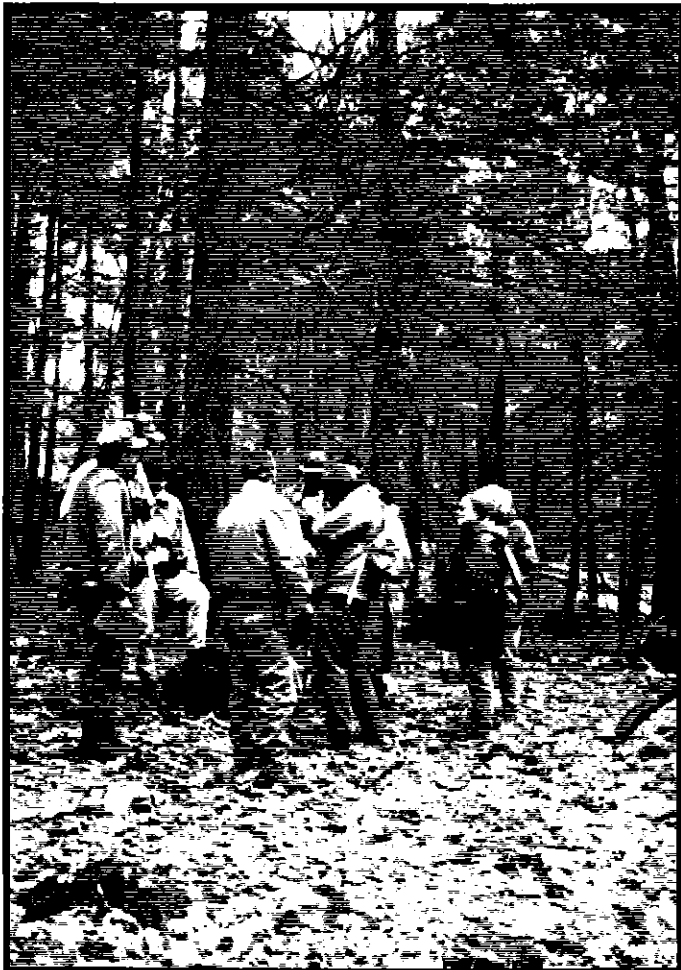
## JVAS Field Trip to Alan Seeger Natural Area

April 14, 1996

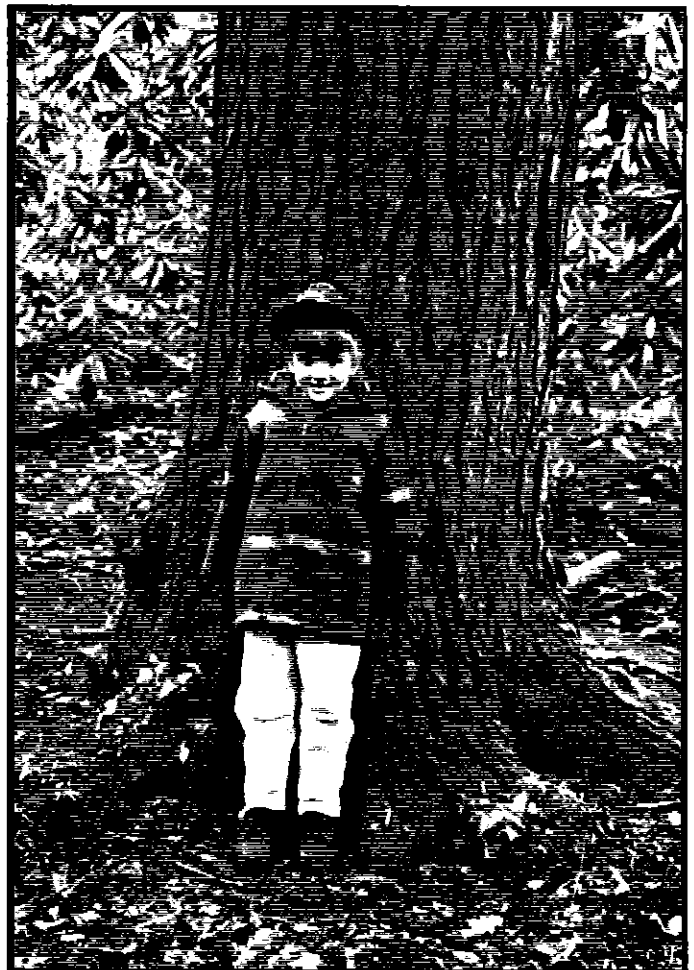


Photos by Alice Kotala

From left — Ruth Henry, Mark Henry, Ken Lynch, Debbie Haine, Terry Wentz, Helena Kotala, Stan Kotala, Jim Rehg, Dr. John Lennox, Arlene Lennox, Paula Ford, Marge Hoyer, Charlie Hoyer, and Elisabeth Kotala.



Dr. John Lennox previews his Microcosmos Program, scheduled for May 13.



Helena Kotala, age 5½, and 300-year-old eastern hemlock.

## 1996 JVAS Birdathon

**What:** Juniata Valley Audubon Society's Birdathon

**Where:** Canoe Creek State Park

**When:** 8 a.m. till noon, Saturday, May 11, 1996

**How:** Bird walk starting at 8 a.m.

Trip leader, Stan Kotala. Meet at park office.

**Questions?:** Stan Kotala, phone 946-8840

### — Seven Widely Asked Questions About the Birdathon —

**1. Just what is a Birdathon?**

Don't try to look it up in *Webster's* because you won't find it. It's an Audubonism for "a really fun way to raise much-needed funds."

**2. Why does the JVAS have one?**

Each Audubon chapter receives only a certain percentage of the membership money that's sent to the National Audubon Society each year. Any extra funds for programming and education are the chapter's responsibility.

**3. Who can be part of a Birdathon?**

Anyone! Whether you're a first-time birder or Roger Tory Peterson's double, you're invited to be a part of the count.

**4. Just what do I have to do?**

If you take part in the walk, you'll be recording the number of different bird species that you see in a given time period. (Four blue jays and nine chickadees count as two species.) You'll be a part of a group so everyone can help with identification and verification.

**5. How does this raise money?**

People will be asked to contribute on a per-species basis — 10¢ per species — or as a flat contribution. You can help by contributing, asking for contributions, joining us for the bird count, or a combination of all three!

**6. What will the money be used for?**

The Juniata Valley Audubon Society hopes to raise over \$300 this year to be used for education and to continue publishing *The Gnatcatcher*. We'd like to continue funding the subscription of *Audubon Adventures* for classrooms as well as increase educational programs for our membership and the general public.

**7. Where do I sign up?**

Simply fill in and return the form below and/or show up on May 11 at 8 o'clock in the morning for a stimulating outing.

**Any more questions?** Stan will be happy to answer them. Let's all work together and make this our most successful Birdathon yet!

**Birdathon Pledge : Support *Audubon Adventures* and *The Gnatcatcher*!**

**YES!** I want to help make the JVAS Birdathon a success. My contribution is \$ \_\_\_\_\_ OR I pledge \_\_\_\_\_ ¢ per species.

Please note: Approximately 50 species of birds will be spotted. A pledge of 10¢ per species will amount to about \$5. If you are pledging a specific lump-sum amount, please include your check with this form.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to the Juniata Valley Audubon Society.

Mail to: Marge Hoyer, JVAS Treasurer  
Attn. Birdathon  
P.O. Box 32  
Tyrone, PA 16686-0032



## Happiness Is . . . .

Happiness is a new pair of binoculars. After more than 20 years, I traded in my old Swift binoculars for a pair of 8x40 Nikon Talons, recommended for eyeglass wearers in the Autumn 1995 issue of *Living Bird*. Author Ken Rosenberg, chief scientist of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Bird Population Studies and captain of Sapsuckers (the Lab's official World Series of Birding team) called the Talons "exceptionally bright and sharp."

As soon as I adjusted my binoculars, I swept Sapsucker Ridge, above First Field, with them. They seemed to gather more light than the mountain possessed, and they were so sharp that I could pick out birds on the ground near the ridgetop. I felt as if I had suddenly acquired new eyes.

The birds themselves glowed with colors I had never noticed before. Walking up our hollow road, I watched several Louisiana waterthrushes teetering on logs, their bubble gum-pink legs brilliant through my binoculars.

Later, as I sat on the veranda, even the chipping sparrows seemed handsomer than usual and their chestnut caps were positively striking. A male American kestrel sitting on the telephone wire stunned me with his burnished red back and silver-gray head. Even the pair of white-breasted nuthatches nesting in a hole in our backyard walnut tree took on a new lustre. Through my binoculars I could actually distinguish the female's duller black head from that of the male's shiny black one.

The binoculars also made behavior-watching easier. For hours I sat on the veranda watching the male nuthatch bill-sweep around the nest hole and up

and down the tree trunk. I could even see the insect he had clasped in his bill that behavior-watchers Donald and Lillian Stokes in their book *A Guide to Bird Behavior, Volume 2* say may leave a scent that deters squirrels and other mammal predators from invading the nest. Bill-sweeping usually occurs before and after stints of nest-building as well as during incubation and nestling periods.

The binoculars also met the test for mammal-watching. As I sat on the veranda reading the other afternoon, I heard a "yip." I grabbed my binoculars and scanned First Field. A red fox bounded along on only three legs, its brushy tail streaming straight out behind it. Its right rear leg was held stiffly, as if its footpad was too sore to use, and I wondered if the "yip" had been the fox's reaction when it stepped on a thorn.

I watched it until it crossed the field to Margaret's Woods, walked the length of a fallen tree, and disappeared into the underbrush. Later I found what looked like a fox den 40 feet above the tree at the edge of the woods.

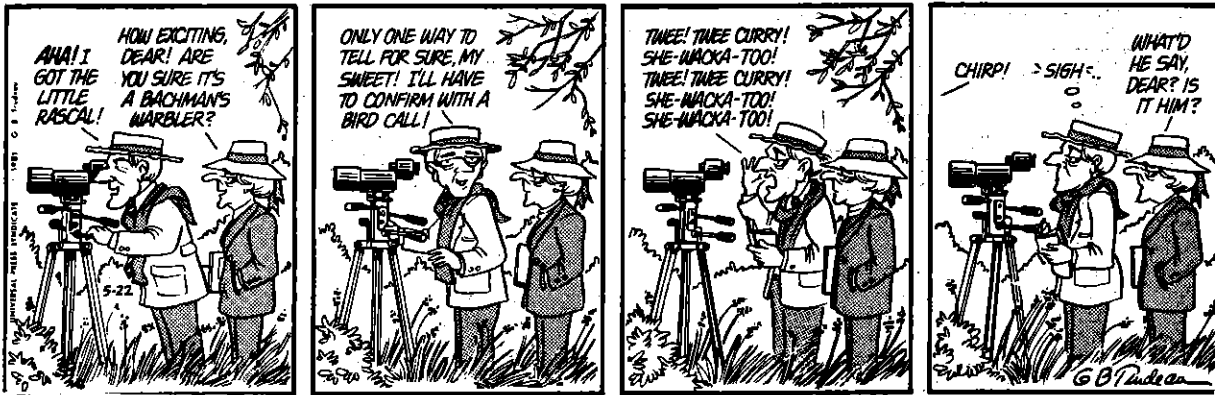
Even on the darkest days, my new pair of binoculars gives me clear views of warblers in the treetops. For the first time in years I am able to see as well as listen to the wood thrushes singing in the dim light of dusk.

Because of my new binoculars I have high hopes for my National Migratory Bird Day count here on the mountain. Although I will rely a lot on my hearing, I will also be able to rely on my eyes with the magnifying assistance of my binoculars. Sixty-five species or bust!



**Don't forget to send your BiLo Foods and Riverside Markets cash register tapes to Anne Borland at 138A Larch St., Hollidaysburg, PA 16648. Anne redeems the tapes for \$\$\$ for the JVAS.**

### Doonesbury



EDITOR'S NOTE: The deadline for September's issue of *The Gnatcatcher* is August 28.  
 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  
 Altoona, PA 16601



Non-Profit Org.  
 U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
 Altoona, Pa.  
 Permit No. 238