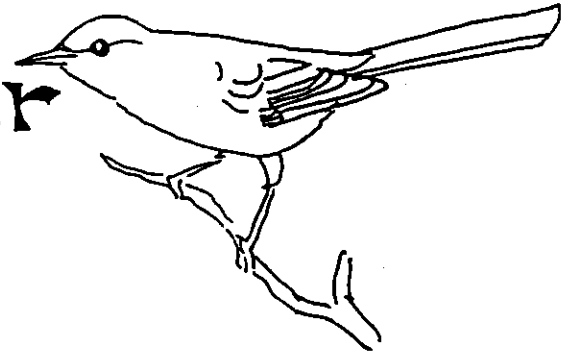


# The Gnatcatcher



## Newsletter of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society

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

Vol. 29, No. 2 — March 1997

### Annual JVAS Spring Banquet Will Be Outstanding

The annual spring banquet for members and guests of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society promises to be one of the best ever held. The place is the newly decorated Coachlite restaurant, in Vale (just north of Tyrone on old Rte 220); the date is Monday, April 21; the time is 6:30 P.M. (social hour at 6 o'clock with punch and cheese & crackers). Dinner — served family style — will begin with a fruit cup and feature both roast turkey and beef with all the trimmings including apple or coconut cream pie.

The speaker is Dr. Joseph F. Merritt, who is a physiological ecologist specializing in adaptations of small mammals to cold (see below). After Dr. Merritt's slide program the annual JVAS Conservation Award will be presented followed by drawings for door prizes.

Please fill out and mail the enclosed reservation form with payment of \$12 per person to Marge Hoyer, P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, PA 16686-0032. Be sure to make your check payable to the JVAS. All reservations and money must be received by Monday, April 14. For any questions or additional information, don't hesitate to phone me at 684-7376.

— Marge Hoyer

#### BANQUET SPEAKER

Our banquet speaker is Dr. Joseph F. Merritt, resident director of Powdermill Nature Reserve, the biological field station of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and author of the excellent *Guide to the Mammals of Pennsylvania*. Dr. Merritt is a specialist in small mammals, but his slide show/talk at the banquet will cover a wide range of Pennsylvania's mammal species.

I've heard him speak several times and can attest to the fact that he's an excellent, entertaining speaker who has great affection for the animals he studies. He's also dedicated to educating the public about them, and his students rate him highly as an innovative, fascinating teacher. Best of all, he has a great sense of humor. We're lucky to get him as our banquet speaker, so I hope there will be a huge turnout for this annual, gala event.

— Marcia Bonta

#### March Program

"SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES CONSERVANCY" — Stan Caldwell, executive director of the SAC, will give a slide show describing the work of the Conservancy in protecting land in the Juniata Valley.

7:30 p.m., Monday, Mar. 17 at the Visitor Center, Canoe Creek State Park, off Rt. 22, east of Hollidaysburg.

#### Field Trips

We're still on a winter break from JVAS field trips and hope to see you again on Sunday, Apr. 20 for a trip to the Dunning Creek Wetlands, in Bedford Co.

#### Next Board Meeting

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

## The Gnatcatcher

is published eight times a year (in February, March, April, May, June, September, October, and November) by the

Juniata Valley Audubon Society  
Charlie Hoyer, Editor  
P.O. Box 32  
Tyrone, PA 16686-0032

Articles may be submitted directly to the editor. The deadline for the April 1997 issue is Friday, Mar. 28.

The Juniata Valley Audubon Society (JVAS) is a chapter of the **National Audubon Society** serving members in Bedford, Blair, Fulton, Huntingdon, and Mifflin Counties.

Program meetings of the JVAS are held in the Visitor Center at Canoe Creek State Park, near Hollidaysburg, on the third Monday of the month in February, March, May, June, September, October, and November at 7:30 p.m. (A business meeting is at 7:15.) The public is invited to attend.

The JVAS Board of Directors holds its meetings, which are open to any concerned JVAS member, as announced in *The Gnatcatcher*.

For membership information, please contact Marcia Bonta at 684-3113.

### Officers

President . . . . . Stan Kotala 946-8840  
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Director . . . . . Anne Borland 695-9718  
Director . . . . . Francis Burgoon 695-5857  
Director . . . . . Dave Kyler 643-6030

## President's Message

Tax time is here again, and I'd like to remind you to consider donating part or all of your Pennsylvania tax refund to the Wild Resource Conservation Fund by means of the check-off on your tax form.

The WRCF has provided money to accomplish several projects of immediate interest to JVAS members. For example, the 1997 WRCF grant awards include \$13,000 for the Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas Project coordinated by Dr. Arthur Hulse, last month's JVAS program speaker; \$7000 for research on Pennsylvania's small forest mammals by Dr. Joseph Merritt, this year's banquet speaker; \$4500 to the Penn State Altoona Campus' Dr. Michael Gannon for a study of bat populations in Canoe Creek State Park; \$4000 for the stabilization of Canoe Creek's bat nursery church, which houses the largest maternity colony of the little brown bat in eastern North America; and \$2500 for the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Wild Action Grant Program, to which the JVAS has applied for \$500 to construct a butterfly and hummingbird garden at Penn-Mont Academy elementary school in Duncansville.

As you may notice, much of the money donated to the WRCF comes back to our area to enrich our lives in a very tangible way.

A gift to the Wild Resource Conservation Fund is a gift to Nature, yourself, and your children!

*Stan Kotala*

### In Memoriam

The Juniata Valley Audubon Society thanks all those who made contributions to the JVAS Education Fund in memory of **Melvin Lane**:

The Bonta Family  
The Brian Cresswell Family  
The Craig Cresswell Family  
The Lynn Cresswell Family  
The Timothy Cresswell Family  
The Van Cresswell Family  
The Kotala Family  
The Kyler Family  
Mr. & Mrs. Edwin L. Reish

**CONSERVATION  
CORNER**

By Paula Ford

## Oppose Senators Kempthorne and Chafee Draft ESA Bill!

Senators John Chafee, R-R.I., and Dirk Kempthorne, R-Idaho, have released a draft bill to reauthorize the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This bill has not yet been introduced into the Senate Environmental Works Committee, but it is being circulated for discussion.

This bill has a strong possibility of moving quickly through the Senate.

While the Chafee-Kempthorne draft bill has some good provisions, it also contains industry-inspired amendments to the ESA that go against the Act's purpose of protecting and recovering endangered species and their habitats.

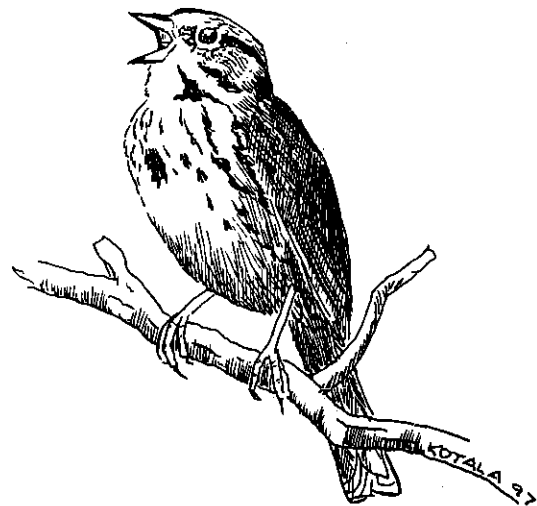
Please urge Senators Santorum and Specter to remove these destructive parts of the bill:

- Allowing states to set water rights that would override ESA protections for fish and wildlife.
- Letting the fox guard the hen house by allowing agencies like the U.S. Forest Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Land Management to decide for themselves whether their actions would harm a species. Called "self-consultation" this provision would give agencies the ability to exempt themselves from the ESA.
- Allowing federal land management plans to move forward without taking into consideration their effect on newly-listed endangered species.
- Trading away wildlife to corporations by codifying the "No Surprises" policy for Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs). In effect, this would compound the scientific problems with HCPs by setting the terms of plans in stone for 50 or even 100 years. Even under "extraordinary circumstances" the already underfunded FWS would be forced to pay for new mitigation techniques on privately owned lands, essentially subsidizing private resource extraction.
- Preventing scientific recovery planning by allowing only those recovery actions that are the "least costly, most cost effective, or least burden-

some" — in effect eliminating many slightly more expensive actions, such as reintroduction, that could be much more effective in achieving recovery and delisting.

The reaction that environmentalists give to this draft bill now will greatly influence the final bill being introduced in the Senate.

Write to Senators Santorum and Specter (U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510) and tell them you want a strong ESA. ❖



### JVAS President Appointed to SAC Advisory Committee

JVAS president Stan Kotala has been appointed to the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy (SAC) Blair County Advisory Committee. As a member of the committee he will make decisions regarding conservation priorities for the Conservancy.

The SAC is a nonprofit land trust dedicated to the preservation, conservation, and restoration of natural lands in the JVAS region. It accomplishes these goals through the acquisition of lands, the development of conservation easements, and the procurement of funds from public and private sources for ecological restoration projects.

All JVAS members are invited to meet Stan Caldwell, the SAC's executive director, who will discuss the Conservancy's role at our program meeting in the Visitor Center at Canoe Creek State Park on Monday, March 17 at 7:30 P.M. ❖

## What's New at Elk Hollow Wildlife Reserve/California Quarries

When Joseph Gurekovich, owner of the California Quarries, bought the land in March 1996, he and his family thought there was no end to the trash and garbage that had been deposited there by the public over a period of 70 to 80 years. Wow! What a difference a family can make when they truly love the land that is a legacy of their family.

Over the past year, Mr. Gurekovich and his family have removed hundreds of bags of trash along the state road which crosses their land. Since the Gurekovich family and friends have adopted this road, this chore is never-ending due to uncaring people who travel the road and have no respect for the law or this pulchritudinous land.

Since March 1996 more than 25 persons have been arrested and most convicted of trespassing, littering, and destruction of property. The land is posted, and if permission is not granted by the owner or caretakers of the property, the State Police will arrest the intruders.

Something wonderful happened in the summer of 1996. Anthony Grace, Tyrone Borough Code Enforcement Officer, contacted Mr. Gurekovich and both did a great deed for the Tyrone Community: The Little Juniata River, running through Tyrone, needed hazard mitigation work in order to prevent future flooding in the borough. Under the direction of Alfred Brayovitch, Jr., Tyrone Borough Manager, Mr. Grace, and Mr. Gurekovich, members of the Pennsylvania National Guard removed stone and gravel from the Little Juniata and transported it to areas along the quarry roads. This was not only beneficial to the residents of Tyrone, but it was also advantageous to Mr. Gurekovich as the stone and debris were placed in areas where the public previously had access to dumping sites. The parking areas along the road were also closed to trespassers. Mr. Gurekovich has saved the taxpayers thousands of dollars and a word of compliment and thanks is sent to him.

We also thank Thomas Bookhamer who worked tirelessly to remove cars, appliances, and debris from the quarries. These efforts will continue until

the quarries are turned into the clean, natural beauty they once were when Mr. Gurekovich was a young man. He's now 75 years young.

In spring, wildflowers flourish in the limestone soil along Elk Run, which is home to many species of native fish such as brown trout, brook trout, and catfish — just to name a few. No fishing is allowed in order to increase the population. Elk Run empties into the Little Juniata River and supplies many anglers with native trout.

Trails have been constructed for visitors as well as roads leading to the site where Mr. Gurekovich and his two scuba-diving experts have made it possible for persons to learn to become certified scuba divers and rescuers while enjoying the underwater beauty. Scott and Mike, firemen from the Roaring Spring area, are the instructors.

Trails leading to Charlie's Lookout, Whistle Pig Lookout, the famous "Big Rock", Tree-Hugging Rock Trail, and to the area containing the large honey locust trees have been cleared. A trip to the California Quarries is a wonderful way to get away from it all and walk or drive into a paradise that only a few have discovered. If you'd like a guided tour, contact Mr. Joseph Gurekovich at 684-3587. Group tours are available at a minimal cost. All proceeds are used to continue the improvement and care of the land.

— JoAnn Reese



**Herpetological Atlas Workshops Scheduled**

The Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas Project is an endeavor to map the distribution of the Keystone State's reptiles and amphibians. The Atlas Project began last year and is expected to conclude in 2003, resulting in a distribution atlas similar to that for the breeding birds of Pennsylvania. Such an extensive undertaking never before has been attempted on behalf of the Commonwealth's herpetofauna.

Obviously, large numbers of volunteer observers are needed for a project of such magnitude. When this endeavor was announced early last year, several JVAS members came forth and offered their help.

JVAS members can take pride in the fact that our local volunteers generated the third-highest number of reptile and amphibian records in the state for 1996. JVAS atlas activities were confined to Blair, Bedford, and Huntingdon Counties.

It's hoped that even more volunteers will come forth in JVAS country — to that end, several workshops have been scheduled to enhance your skills in locating and identifying reptiles and amphibians. Workshops will be held as follows:

**April 19** — Jennings Environmental Center, Slippery Rock (one-day workshop)

**May 3-4** — R.B. Winter State Park, Mifflinburg (weekend workshop; overnight camping)

**May 10-11** — Sizerville State Park, Emporium (weekend workshop; overnight camping)

**May 17** — Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana (one-day workshop)

**July 19-20** — Bald Eagle State Park, Blanchard (weekend workshop; overnight camping)

Both new and seasoned volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend one of these workshops. Please reserve a spot by calling Project Director Dr. Arthur Hulse or Field Director April Claus at (412) 357-2279. ❖



**Membership Matters**

We've had several questions regarding membership rates. For those of you due to renew, here are the rates:

**National Audubon Society:**

- Student or Senior . . . . . \$15
- Basic . . . . . \$35

Note: NAS membership includes a subscription to the JVAS newsletter, *The Gnatcatcher*.

***The Gnatcatcher* subscription only:**

- All persons . . . . . \$10

The only NAS rate that has changed since 1993 is the student/senior rate, which was introduced last spring in response to chapter feedback.

NAS does send renewal reminders to members at rates that are not included above. These are (1) rates that fall between \$20 and \$35, and (2) rates that reflect the level a member renewed at the previous year, if different from above.

The rates that fall between \$20 and \$35 allow a member to reach the basic rate gradually, if they are willing and able to do so. The NAS loses some members if it asks for \$35 the year after new members have paid the introductory rate of \$20 because, for some, it's too much of a jump from \$20 to \$35. Instead, the NAS offers incremental membership upgrades and encourages members to renew at the highest possible level. Many members choose to renew each year for \$50, \$75, \$100, and \$200. All levels of support are vital to the Society's conservation work and the NAS encourages members to give as much as they can. ❖

**REFRESHMENTS AT ALL JVAS PROGRAM MEETINGS AND BOARD MEETINGS ARE DONATED BY**

**NATURE'S PANTRY**  
**1054 PENNSYLVANIA AVE.**  
**TYRONE**  
**684-0393**

## JVAS Video Review by Alice Kotala

### *On the Trail of Pennsylvania Black Bears*

WRITTEN AND NARRATED BY WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST  
DR. GARY ALT, OF THE PA. GAME COMMISSION

This engaging wildlife documentary is born from twenty years of research described as "the most intensive black bear study in North America." By trapping, anesthetizing, and following the radio-collared bears, information is gathered about their behavior, habitat, vulnerability to hunting, and reproductive success.

Black bears are revealed to be surprisingly unaggressive, very adaptable creatures with a great memory and the ability to learn fast. The video explains their survival techniques and unique characteristics such as winter dormancy and shares new discoveries about their newborn cubs.

We see that the study of bears has applications toward human medical research. The viewer gains appreciation of the role of the black bear in the ecosystem and the effects of human disturbance and interference. Amusing cases of black bears interacting with humans are presented as well as situations of human-bear conflict along with some solutions to these problems are offered. The goal of the Pa. Game Commission is to establish and maintain bear populations to an optimum level compatible with current human use and tolerance.

This video is highly recommended for personal entertainment as well as classroom use. When our daughter Helena was five years old, she viewed it in segments at the visitor center in Canoe Creek State Park and gave it high marks.

The video can be borrowed from the JVAS video library. Call Alice Kotala at 946-8840 or Debbie Haine at 695-8293 to make arrangements. ❖

### *Did you know?*

**Edgar Allen Poe was inspired  
to write *The Raven* in  
Trough Creek State Park.**

## BOOK REVIEW



*Spineless Wonders:  
Strange Tales From the Invertebrate World*  
By Richard Conniff  
1996, Henry Holt and Company

If a Stephen King novel is your idea of a good bedtime read, then this book's for you. Mr. Conniff has made it his life mission to ferret out fun facts about some of our most repellant, scary, or annoying fellow earthlings and serve them up in delightfully witty helpings for the readers of *Smithsonian*, *Audubon*, and *National Geographic* magazines. Not surprisingly, given the popular nature of these publications, the essays collected here are written in the first person and focus partly on the personalities of the scientists who've made the study of these creepy-crawlies their life's work. In the essay "Slime," for instance, Conniff visits the "Hagfish Hilton" on Maine's Appledore Island to interview J.B. Heiser and Ric Martini, whom he describes as "the Click and Clack of the slime eel world." And slowly but surely their scientific enthusiasm becomes infectious: As a one-time fossil collector and very amateur geologist, for instance, I was intrigued to learn that hagfish are the leading candidates for the animal origins of conodonts, those ubiquitous, tooth-like structures used to help date rocks all the way back to Cambrian times (i.e., well before Noah).

Besides hagfish, Conniff explores the wondrous worlds of houseflies, fire ants, fleas, tarantulas, mosquitos, giant squid (the world's largest invertebrates), earthworms, beetles, moths, dragonflies, and (in one chapter that your faithful reviewer barely managed to finish) our friends, the leeches.

If all this sounds somewhat less than appetizing, perhaps I should avail myself of the book reviewer's prerogative and quote a brief passage to convey something of the book's unique flavor. Here's how the earthworm essay, "Grunting for Wigglers," begins: "It's a moment charged with nature's drama, akin to David Attenborough creeping up on the mountain gorillas of Rwanda. I am thrashing through the piney flatwoods of the Florida Panhandle, into the secret realm of the great shaper of the earth. Listen! *Runt-runt, runt-runt, runt-runt*. It's a sound like a wild hog wallowing, somewhere out here in the Apalachicola National Forest. Over that way!" (Hooked yet?)

Carrying on where the late Gerald Durrell left off (sort of), Conniff's all-too-brief tour of the invertebrates helps remind us how little we know about the most numerous and least charismatic inhabitants of the biosphere. And it reinforces one often-overlooked grain of wisdom — sometimes the ol' armchair is, indeed, the best place for traveling!

— Dave Bonta

## Brush Mountain Porkies

I don't pay any attention to Punxsutawney Phil's prediction on Groundhog Day. I watch our resident porcupines instead. Despite several bouts of warm weather in February, our porcupines persisted in eating their winter diet of tree bark plus the twigs, buds, and needles of conifers.

I watched at least five different porcupines this winter. Two lived in the hollow and specialized in hemlock and basswood. Three more lived on Sapsucker Ridge. Two of them were large porcupines and fed on chestnut oak bark while a third, smaller porcupine (probably born last May) liked Norway spruce, American hop hornbeam, sugar maple, and grapevine bark.

Porcupines are supposed to be nocturnal feeders but evidently our porcupines haven't read the books. From the end of January throughout February, rarely a day passed when I didn't watch at least one feeding energetically. Those in the 24-year-old Norway spruce planting were often less than ten feet from the ground. And a small, brownish-black porcupine in the hollow chose a small, topless hemlock only a few feet away from the road, so I had plenty of close-up views.

Not only did our porcupines feed while I watched, they defecated, urinated, and even slept, resembling prickly silver balls as they glowed in the winter sunshine.

On February 9 it was 22 degrees, and I snowshoed to my favorite log seat beside Far Field Road in two new inches of fluffy snow atop a ten-inch icy

crust. After sitting for fifteen minutes, I heard a slight sound to my left. A large porcupine had plowed its way silently through the snow from its rock den on the far side of Sapsucker Ridge to its favorite chestnut oak tree fifty feet from where I sat, and was starting to climb up it.

First it raised its long-clawed forefeet to grip the bark; then it hoisted up its hind feet and rear end — an awkward ascent, at best. Once it stopped in a tree crotch to shake off snow. But it was headed for the crown of the tree to eat the bark of smaller branches, jockeying about for the best position and holding tightly to the thin branches with its forefeet. Finally, it started chewing on a small branch.

On February 27, the bluebirds and song sparrows sang, and it was 52 degrees. All the snow was gone. Surely spring was here. But the large porcupine had moved to a new chestnut oak 200 feet from the one it had been feeding on for almost a month. It stood upright on a high branch, moving like a cross between a three-toed sloth and a howler monkey, and alternately bit or broke off small branches with its

forefeet. In the silence I heard the rasping of its incisors as it scraped off the bark of branches.

Even though porcupines steadily lose weight on such a diet because their winter fare is only two to six percent protein, they wait until tree buds swell with 22 percent protein before switching. When they begin eating tree buds, I will know that true spring has arrived. ❖

By Marcia Bonta



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

### WRCF Aids Bat Study at Canoe Creek SP

Dr. Michael Gannon, of Penn State Altoona, recently received a grant for \$4500 from the Wild Resource Conservation Fund for research entitled "Ecology of Bats at Canoe Creek State Park." The work will begin this spring and will be conducted by a graduate student working under Dr. Gannon's supervision as a part of the student's master's degree at Penn State.

Canoe Creek has been designated by the Pa. Game Commission as one of the most important areas of special concern for bats in the Commonwealth. At present it has the largest maternity colony of little brown bats east of the Mississippi.

(About 13,000 females each raise a single pup there each summer.) Located in the park is an old limestone mine that is one of only two confirmed winter hibernacula for the federally endangered Indiana bat.

### New Toll-free Number to Report Bird Bands

Anyone identifying or recovering a bird band can now call a toll-free number to report it. The number 1-800-327-BAND can be called from anywhere in the United States, Canada, and most parts of the Caribbean. The number was developed by the National Biological Survey, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

— *Bay Journal* 12/96

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**Juniata Valley Audubon Society**  
**R.R. 3, Box 866**  
**Altoona, PA 16601**



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