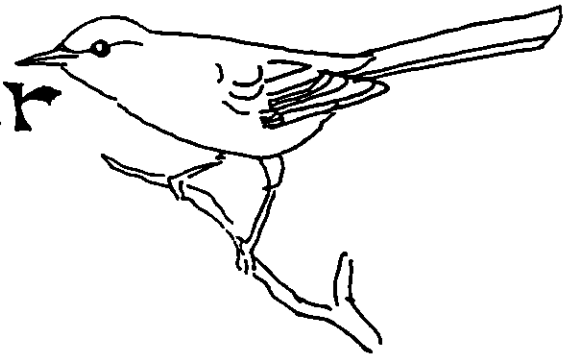


The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society

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

Vol. 29, No. 6 – September 1997

Baffinland Birding

By Shirley Wagoner

In July I made my second backpacking trip to Baffin Island, in the Canadian Arctic. Auyuittuq National Park Reserve, our destination, lies mostly above the arctic circle. Canada's first park reserve above the arctic circle, it was established in 1976. Scoured by glaciers, its sheer cliffs attract rock climbers from around the world. The name means "the place that never melts" in Inuktitut, the Inuit language.

Although the limited amount of precipitation that falls in the arctic makes it kind of desert, there was much surface water — streams descending from summer glacier melt, and water held on the surface above permafrost. The landscape is glacially sculpted — a U-shaped valley following the Weasel River, glacial erratics or rocks of random shapes and sizes varying from huge boulders to piles of sand, and frequent moraines, or rocky ridges — some quite high — left from previous glacial advance.

I birded on my first trip in 1990, but hoped that by being more focused, this trip would be more productive. I was well aware, however, that the total number of species for the island as a whole is far fewer than for many optimum birding locations, even those in Pennsylvania. A huge limitation for me was restricting the habitat I would visit to the Weasel Valley in Auyuittuq; had I been able to visit certain marine areas, the birding might have been far more extensive.

First, the backdrop: The scenery consists of stark mountains fronting a glacial river reached by ascending a twenty-mile fjord. The difference between low tide and high tide in this part of the world is very great — a serious impediment to navigation. At the head of the fjord are large tidal lagoons that at low tide are mudflats. The Penny Ice Cap covering the mountains beyond the river valley shows itself in ice-capped heights above

Cont'd on page 3

September Program

"EDEN HILL CONSERVANCY." Bill Riley, of the conservancy, will present an introduction to Eden Hill. To be followed by next Sunday's field trip.

7:30 P.M., Monday, Sept. 15 at the Visitor Center, Canoe Creek State Park, off Rte 22 east of Hollidaysburg.

Field Trips

STATE GAMELANDS 166. Rob Criswell, land management officer for the Pa. Game Commission, will lead a bicycle tour of SGL 166, exploring deciduous and coniferous woodlands, swamps, meadows, beaver dams, and marshes. Easy riding on a level, dirt road. Trip leader: Stan Kotala, 946-8840

12-4 P.M., Sunday, Sept. 14

IRISH PINES TREE FARM AND NATURE TRAIL. Bill and Marie Riley will guide a tour of their award-winning conservation forestland near Spruce Creek. Bill/Marie Riley, 765-9537

2-4 P.M., Sunday, Sept. 21

ITHACA, N.Y. Visit Cornell University and Sapsucker Woods to view the fall migration and autumn foliage. Trip leader: Janet Huber, 942-5752

Oct. 4 & 5, Saturday & Sunday

Next Board Meeting

7 P.M., Monday, September 8 at the Kotalas' residence. All members are welcome. Phone 946-8840 for directions.

The Gnatcatcher

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Juniata Valley Audubon Society
Charlie Hoyer, Editor
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Articles may be submitted directly to the editor. The deadline for the October 1997 issue is Friday, October 3.

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 Charlie Hoyer at 684-7376.

Officers

President Stan Kotala 946-8840
Vice President Terry Wentz 692-4224
Secretary Eugene Zielinski 353-8212
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Director Dave Kyler 643-6030

From the President's Desk

Our first field trip of the new JVAS season will be a bike tour on State Game Lands 166, the crown jewel of Blair County's natural lands.

Covering approximately 11,000 acres, the game lands encompass the entire upper Canoe Creek watershed from exposed ridgetop sandstone rattlesnake dens to marshes and ponds created by beavers.

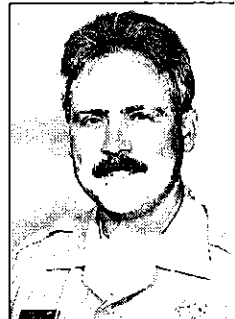
We're fortunate to have as our trip leader Land Management Officer Rob Criswell of the Pennsylvania Game Commission who will guide us on this bicycle tour along four miles of a relatively flat, dirt road. Rob will meet us at the game lands Beaver Dam Road parking lot at noon on Sunday, Sept. 14. Questions? Call me at 946-8840.

Bring your bike and some snacks and be prepared for one of the best outings of the new JVAS year! Hope to see you there!

Stan Kotala

WCO Kleiner Honored

Pennsylvania Game Commission Wildlife Conservation Officer Stephen A. Kleiner, of Hollidaysburg, was honored at the recent Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference held in Framingham, Mass.



Steve, who was graduated from the Game Commission's Ross Leffler School of Conservation in 1978, was named Officer of the Year by the Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs Association. Steve's Blair Co. district is diverse and demanding, ranging from the highly populated Altoona area to some of the most rugged and remote mountains in the state. The veteran officer was recognized for his

organizational skills, demonstrating leadership by example, and his ability to delegate tasks in an efficient manner.

This past January Steve brought to a close an investigation that spanned more than a year and resulted in thirty-four charges of unlawful taking of wildlife and fines of \$8,000. During the course of that investigation he headed a task force consisting of officers from the Game Commission, the State Police, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. ❖

— From *Game News* magazine, Aug 97

CONSERVATION

CORNER

By Paula Ford

Back to School

A bill sponsored in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives by Rep. Carole Rubley, R-Chester, would require schools to notify parents and staff before using pesticides. The bill would require public and private schools to give parents and staff three days advance notice of any pesticide treatment. The measure also would require schools to adopt integrated pest management (IPM) practices and keep treatment records on file for seven years.

The state director of Clean Water Action says a survey of twenty-one school districts using IPM found that more than eighty-five percent were able to control pests with little or no spraying.

The state Agriculture Department, which oversees pesticide use in Pennsylvania, says while school districts should be encouraged to adopt IPM policies, participation should remain voluntary.

What do you think? Do you think parents should know if their children are being exposed to pesticides? If children are being exposed to pesticides, should their parents know what the pesticides are and how often they are being applied?

Let your state representative and state senator know what you think. (Check the blue pages of your phone book for their addresses.) ❖

Conservation Program Still Going Strong

Since its inception sixty years ago, the Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Act has been responsible for collecting and disbursing more than \$3 billion for wildlife conservation and recreation projects across America — made possible entirely through the efforts of and taxes pay by sportsmen.

Known also as the Pittman-Robertson Act after its congressional sponsors, the program began in 1937 and is considered the most successful conservation program in history. Funds are derived from an eleven percent excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition, ten percent on pistols and revolvers, and an eleven percent tax on archery equipment sold specifically for bow hunting. Half of the tax on handguns and archery equipment is earmarked for state hunter education programs. ❖

— From RGS magazine, Jul/Aug 1997
Magazine of the Ruffed Grouse Society

... Baffinland Birding *Cont'd from first page*

steep cliffs and hanging glaciers pushing through to some of the lower slopes. Waterfalls of considerable height can be seen, and icy streams frequently break through the rocky walls in their descent to the river. The world's highest uninterrupted cliff face can be seen here and is often scaled by intrepid climbers. The low vegetation is pure arctic — small flowers, growing in low clumps to maintain root warmth. Arctic cotton, pale yellow arctic poppies, and willows twine on the surface of the sandy soil. Lichens of orange, black, and white splotch the rocks and boulders, looking almost painted on at times. A path along the river — sandy, rocky, and sometimes muddy — is maintained by the park and is marked by Inukshuks, a kind of stone cairn in miniature imitation of those used by ancient Eskimos to direct caribou herds to waiting hunters.

In 1990 the common birds were predatory glaucous gulls patrolling the river, common ravens calling across it, and American pipits tweeting in the low rocks. This year we saw the gulls only at the gateway village of Pangnirtung, where the ravens also congregated in small numbers. Pipits were common in the lower areas of the park and were readily identified by their general nondescript coloring, call notes, sparrow size, and white outer tail feathers, even though they were usually seen flying to some more distant hiding place among the rocks.

As we arrived at the lagoon near the head of the fjord a family group of oldsquaws swam in a long line as far from us as possible, accompanied by several pairs of arctic loons. We also saw geese here on our return two weeks later. They were absent on our arrival, but had left much evidence of their previous presence throughout much of the park. We saw only Canada geese — no snow geese or brant (which we had seen in 1990). Our best sighting during the 1990 trip had been a gyrfalcon soaring over us as we boated up the fjord, but we saw none this year.

When we reached Summit Lake, the highest point of the trip, the campground was inhabited by snow buntings — confiding little birds busily feeding the year's fledglings. The adults were recognized easily by their black and white coloration. The nondescript young were identified best by their begging behavior and association with the adults! We saw none of *Cont'd on page 8*

REFRESHMENTS AT ALL JVAS PROGRAM MEETINGS
AND BOARD MEETINGS ARE DONATED BY
NATURE'S PANTRY
1054 PENNSYLVANIA AVE., TYRONE
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JVAS Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden

**Created at Penn-Mont Academy
Elementary School in
Duncansville**

JVAS Education Chair Alice Kotala (left) applied for and received a \$500 grant from the Pennsylvania Game Commission for the creation of a butterfly and hummingbird garden at the Penn-Mont Academy, in Duncansville.

Penn-Mont Academy students and teachers planted 120 native perennials in an area that formerly was lawn to create an attractive garden for butterflies and hummingbirds.



The creation of the butterfly and hummingbird garden received excellent coverage by WTAJ Channel 10 and the *Altoona Mirror*.



Photos and Text
By Stan Kotala



Students will monitor and care for the garden, recording blooming times and species of butterflies attracted to the native plants.

Education News

By Alice Kotala

BUTTERFLY/HUMMINGBIRD GARDEN PROJECT

Despite the dry summer, the butterfly/hummingbird garden at Penn-Mont Academy has been progressing well. The students completed their planting in May. Over the summer the coreopsis, bee balm, daisies, butterfly weed, orange coneflower, blazing star, purple coneflower, and phlox came into bloom; and this past month the children returned to school to find a stunning display of cardinal flowers and asters.

Of course, we expect a more spectacular show next year, attracting more butterflies and hummingbirds to inspire the students' interest and appreciation. We plan to encourage their study of these fascinating creatures with further programs, and we're documenting the gardens's inception and progress with a slide show.

The project is funded through a 1997 Wild Action Grant that the JVAS has received from the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Project Wild, whose aim is to establish schoolyard habitat for wildlife.

SPEAKERS' BUREAU UPDATE

The JVAS Speakers' Bureau was active this summer, providing an abundance of nature programs for area groups.

- June 27 Stan Kotala — "Ruffed Grouse"
Rotary Club of Tyrone, 30 in attendance
- *July 7 Stan Kotala — "Wetlands/Waterfowl"
- *July 8 Jean Sinal — "Acid Rain"
- *July 9 Stan Kotala — "Streams/Chesapeake Bay"
- *July 14 Stan Kotala — "Birds of the Juniata Valley"
- *July 15 Jean Sinal — "Wildflowers"
Dan Sinal — Wildflower walk
- *July 16 Stan Kotala — "Bluebirds"
- *July 17 Paula Ford — "Wildflowers & Folklore"
*Penn-Mont Academy Nature Discovery Camp,
22 students
- **July 7 Stan Kotala — "Stream Class"
- **July 10 Paula Ford — Wildflower walk
- **July 11 Jody Wallace — Frog pond at Fort Roberdeau

- **Aug. 5 Dan Sinal — "Fossils"
- **Aug. 7 Jean Sinal — "Streams"
**Tyrone YMCA Camp, 15 students
- Aug. 16 Stan Kotala — "Bats"
Canoe Creek State Park, 75 in attendance
- Aug. 31 Stan Kotala — "Bats of Canoe Creek"
Canoe Creek State Park, 45 in attendance

Our foremost endeavor was the Nature Discovery Camp — a two-week day camp we arranged for Penn-Mont Academy students. The general topics were wetlands, streams, acid rain, birds, and wildflowers. Programs included hands-on experiments and productive activities such as building bluebird boxes for the school grounds. The Pennsylvania Game Commission provided a special presentation on forest wildlife, and each week culminated in field study at Canoe Creek State Park led by the park naturalist, Kerry Estright-Pruznak.

The Nature Discovery Camp was such a success that Penn-Mont administrators requested an expanded three-week version for next summer. In appreciation of our work, Penn-Mont donated \$100 to the Juniata Valley Audubon Society for the Melvin Lane Environmental Education Fund, which will help foster further JVAS education efforts. ❖

A Classic Reissued

Birds of an Iowa Dooryard, by Althea Rosina Sherman, was published in 1952, almost ten years after the author's death. It was considered a classic at the time, providing the first reports of the entire nesting cycle of the eastern screech-owl, northern flicker, American kestrel, and chimney swift.

Sherman was a self-taught ornithologist and only the third woman to be elected a fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union.

Now the work is being reissued with a foreword by Marcia Bonta, a frequent contributor to *Bird Watcher's Digest*. The project's proceeds will go toward the restoration of the chimney swift nesting tower that Sherman built to facilitate her studies of the species. ❖

— From *Bird Watcher's Digest*, Jan/Feb 1997

... **Baffinland Birding** *Cont'd from page 3*

the Lapland longspurs or northern wheatears or American dippers we had seen in 1990, although I checked the small streams carefully, hoping to see a dipper.

One day we day-hiked beyond Summit Lake to discover the mystery of a lake with two outlets. (Summit Lake is joined at the head to Glacier Lake and each lake has an outlet at its foot.) On this day we were lucky enough to see a medium-sized, dark falcon darting in zigzag fashion along a ridge not far from the river. No field marks were visible; we think it must have been a merlin.

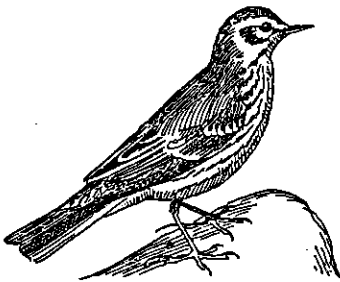
In 1990 one of our last sightings was a phalarope doing its whirling thing in shallow water not far from shore. This sighting was possible because the tide had gone out, and we had to hike across the mudflats to reach the boat. We were glad this was not necessary on this last trip, though I would have been happy to see another phalarope.

In summary, I did not come home with a long list of birds seen — not even as long as that of the 1990 trip. Birding in the arctic is very interesting, but to do it thoroughly requires focusing on varied and specific habitats — especially for sea and shore birds, which was not possible on this hiking trip. ❖

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!

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Juniata Valley Audubon Society
R.R. 3, Box 866
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Marcia Bonta
 Past President, JVAS
 P.O. Box 68
 Tyrone

PA 16686-0068