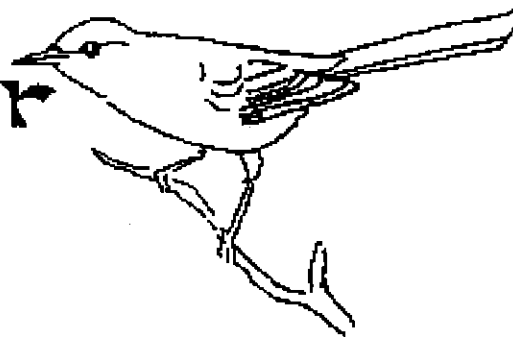


The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society

P.O. Box 71, Tyrone, Pennsylvania 16686

Vol. 31, No. 6 – November 1999

100th Christmas Bird Count

By Debbie Wentz

This year the Christmas Bird Count is 100 years old! The National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count has become the world's largest all-volunteer bird survey. More than 45,000 people participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest-running database in ornithology, representing close to one hundred years of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count, or "CBC," is citizen science in action.

Volunteers are the heart and soul of the CBC. From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the CBC does it for the love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition — and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

As long as there are birds to be counted, the CBC will go on being the most popular, fun, and rewarding bird census the world over!

This year the JVAS will be doing its bird count on Saturday, December 18. Debbie Wentz (same person, different name) again will be compiling the results. To those who helped in the past, we hope to see you again this year. We'd also like to see some new faces.

The Hoyers again have opened their home to us for our evening covered-dish supper. We always have a good time, and it's a good excuse to get out of the house. If you have any questions, contact Debbie at 692-4224 or at <dkw1952@aol.com> or via snail-mail at 405 Lutz Ln., Port Matilda, PA 16870. ❖

November Program

"LOCAL MEDICINAL PLANTS." Harry and Darla Guyer, of Bedford County, will present a program of common medicinal plants of the region. The presentation will run through the seasons, highlighting native plants used for unusual cures, including identification and history of their use. Some of the cures actually are sovereign for various ailments, and the Guyers will discuss their preparation and dosage.

7 P.M., Tuesday, Nov. 16 in the Visitor Center at Canoe Creek State Park, off Rt. 22 near Hollidaysburg.

November Field Trips

NATIONAL AVIARY IN PITTSBURGH. JVAS Field Trip Chair Janet Huber will lead a visit to the National Aviary in Pittsburgh. Newlyweds Terry and Debbie Wentz were given a wedding present: a one-year sponsorship of a bird residing at the National Aviary. And we're going to visit the birdie!

Sunday, Nov. 21. Anyone interested in participating should phone Janet at 942-5752 for carpooling info.

1999 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT. JVAS Director of Ornithology Debbie Wentz will coordinate this year's Audubon Christmas Bird Count. The count is not just for expert birders; being a data taker can be an excellent way to learn or hone your audio and visual birding skills.

Saturday, Dec. 18, all day (*see opposite*)

Next Board Meeting

7 P.M., Tuesday, Dec. 7 at the Visitor Center of Canoe Creek State Park. All JVAS members are welcome!

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VOL. 31, NO. 6 — NOVEMBER 1999

Published six times a year (February/March, April, May/June, September, October, and November) as a benefit for members by the

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

Charlie Hoyer, Editor

P.O. Box 71

Tyrone, PA 16686-0071

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 Tuesday of the month in February, March, May, June, September, October, and November at 7:30 P.M. (A business meeting is at 7 o'clock.) The public is invited to attend.

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President's Message

How many of us would vote to increase our real estate taxes? In Halfmoon Township, Centre County, the majority of citizens who voted in the recent election did exactly that. A referendum on the ballot asked the following question. "Do you favor a 2-mill tax increase on real estate to be used to purchase property for the purpose of securing open space benefits?" The money will be used to purchase conservation easements on farm properties. Halfmoon Township is only the second municipality in the state that will have such a program.

I pondered over the weeks preceding November 2 on whether or not I would support increasing my taxes (about \$150 annually) to support this referendum. I was undecided until I stepped up to the voting booth with my card puncher in hand.

About a year ago surveys were sent to each household in Halfmoon Township to rate growth and rural landscape issues, in addition to others. I was among those favoring the rural nature of the township, which incidentally, this was one of the determining factors that convinced me to move here. Of course my house was part of the increased growth — a catch-22 of sorts.

Development is inevitable! What we need to do is volunteer at the local level to participate on committees, planning commissions, and conservation organizations to get the best compromise. The Centre Region of Governments is cooperatively planning to zone interchanges along the I-99 corridor so that all the land is not developed into commercial businesses.

Keep informed so you can make the best decisions for our environment. At a cost of 49 cents per day, I am willing to support land conservation and open space. How would you vote to curb urban sprawl?

Terry Wentz

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.

CONSERVATION
OR
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By Sarah Miller

**Shade-grown Coffee
 /s for the Birds**

Every day when you sit down to your morning cup of coffee, you probably don't think much about where it came from. But if you care about birds, maybe you should. Most coffee is produced in the rain forests of Central and South America and until the 1970s, was grown in an environmentally friendly manner, under a canopy of native trees. The premise was simple: instead of cutting down the rain forest to make way for coffee plantations, the native trees were left in place and coffee bushes planted beneath them.

There are many advantages to this method of growing coffee. Leaving a forest canopy reduces soil erosion. Overstory trees also protect coffee bushes from harsh weather, furnish nutrients in the way of fallen leaves, and provide habitat for birds and other wildlife. Shade-grown coffee plantations produce better-tasting coffee and are better for the environment because fewer pesticides are required.

For the last twenty or so years, however, coffee growers have been replacing shade-tolerant coffee varieties with high-yielding, sun-tolerant ones in an effort to boost production. As a result, coffee plantations that once rivaled tropical forests in species diversity have become virtual "green deserts" providing little habitat for wildlife. Recent studies in Colombia and Mexico have shown that sun-grown coffee plantations support only one-tenth as many bird species as shade-grown plantations.

In the early 1990s, groups such as Conservation International and the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center began to promote the production of shade-grown coffee in Latin American countries and recently, coffee retailers in the United States have begun carrying shade-grown brands.

Search for "shade grown coffee" on the Internet and you'll find a myriad of retailers selling different kinds and flavors. Shade-grown, songbird friendly

coffee only will be around, however, if people like us support the idea by buying it. Yes, it costs a little more than store-bought brands, but if the extra few dollars per pound saves habitat and brings Neotropical songbirds back every year, I think it is money well spent. In fact, the JVAS is proud to announce that it now serves shade-grown coffee at program and board meetings.

Here's what you can do to help:

- Ask your local coffee house or grocer to carry shade grown coffee;
- Purchase shade grown coffee for your personal use; and
- Spread the word to friends, coworkers, and family members! ❖

**PennDOT Ruins Map Turtle
 Nesting Grounds**

One of Pennsylvania's lesser-known reptiles is the map turtle, an inhabitant of large streams. Its name comes from the intricate markings on its shell, which resemble roads on a map. The turtle can grow to be as long as eleven inches and is olive-colored with yellow highlights. Frequently it can be seen basking in the sun while resting on logs — often in large groups — where conditions are ideal, such as the Juniata River downstream of Mount Union.

Unfortunately, the recent construction of the James Di Cosimo Rt. 522 bypass southeast of Mount Union has destroyed a major nesting ground of this fascinating turtle. In addition, large numbers of female map turtles crossing the highway in search of their customary egg-laying areas were crushed by cars and trucks this spring and summer.

Interestingly, PennDOT's environmental impact statement for the project didn't even mention the presence of this nesting ground in spite of field work by their environmental "experts." Such a lack of thoroughness in the assessment of proposed projects, as well as a general lack of information about much of the Commonwealth's flora and fauna, has resulted

[Cont'd on page 8]

Hawk Banding On Bald Eagle Mountain

Text and photos by
Dr. Stan Kotala



JVAS member Mark Shields has maintained a raptor banding station on Bald Eagle Mountain near Port Matilda for many years. Here he places a hawk in a coffee can to keep it calm during the banding procedure. Bands come in various sizes to fit the tarsi of raptors ranging from kestrels to golden eagles.

A female red-tailed hawk.





Mark and daughter Lizzie with a red-tailed hawk, banded and ready for release.



The banding blind, located high on the western flank of Bald Eagle Mountain. Hawks attempting to capture domestic pigeons used as bait are caught in nets, banded, and released.

Stone Mountain Hawkwatch: September–October Report

It's been a good season for the part-time observers at the Stone Mountain hawkwatch. Before the end of October we easily passed our previous season high for total raptors, though coverage has not been increased. Several species records have been set, and a few more probably will occur before the end of the season. ❖

— Greg Grove, Compiler
McAlevy's Fort, Pa.

	1999 Thru Oct. 31	1998 Totals	Avg. 1995–98
Observing hours	283	377	333
Osprey	90	92	103
Bald eagle	18	13	15
Northern harrier	100*	98	72
Sharp-shinned hawk	959	977	813
Cooper's hawk	159*	143	114
Northern goshawk	11*	6	5
Red-shouldered hawk	65	70	58
Broad-winged hawk	1424*	1134	910
Red-tailed hawk	1152	873	1079
Rough-legged hawk	1	1	2
Golden eagle	27	50	78
American kestrel	212*	179	130
Merlin	26	25	24
Peregrine falcon	25*	15	15
Unidentified raptor	47	43	50
Totals	4316*	3719	3467
*new seasonal record			
Observers: Don Bryant, Nick Bolgiano, Dave and Trudy Kyler, Bill King, Bill Dietz, Pat McIlhenny, Deb and Greg Grove — and a host of guest spotters			

Rails-to-Trails

Bellwood (Blair Co.) Borough Council has agreed to revisit the Rails-to-Trails corridor along the old trolley line. A DCNR grant for \$4000 to do a feasibility study had been turned down originally, but the Borough Council has agreed to take the money. A Rails-to-Trails group has formed to take on the project.

The trail will follow the old Logan Valley Electric Trolley Line, which was established in 1894 and connected Altoona, Pinecroft, Bellwood, Tipton, and Tyrone. The trail is an area where people could hike, bike, or simply sit and watch the trains go by. If you are interested in helping with this group or need more information, please contact Cyndee Simpson at 742-6073. ❖

— *Bellwood-Antis*, Fall 1999, community newsletter

Walking With Bears



o one needs to tell me that bear range has expanded in Pennsylvania. During our first eleven years here there were no bears on our mountain. We even raised honeybees.

Pennsylvania Game News published numerous articles by and about Gary Alt's work with black bears in the Pocosinos and talked in glowing terms about that area and north-central Pennsylvania as primary bear range. In 1981 Blair County was considered to be peripheral bear territory.

The following year our hives were torn apart. Black bears had arrived on Brush Mountain.

Throughout the remainder of the eighties and into the early nineties our bear sightings were mostly of wandering males in search of females. Then, two years ago, I saw my first female with cubs. She hung out in our then five-year-old clear-cut and had twins.

Late last May, as I walked along Black Gum Trail on Laurel Ridge, I suddenly spotted two cubs scrambling to get up a tree, while a third one ran off. As I stopped for a good look, the sow appeared at the base of the tree, peering in my direction. I quickly turned around and retraced my steps, looking back once to see the female still staring at me. Those cubs were good-sized but still cute as buttons. Could the sow have been the same one who had raised the two cubs? Certainly, it was time for her to have another family.

Throughout the summer, I found bear signs, but it was not until early September that the sow and her cubs were seen again. A friend of ours, running up our road at sunset, saw her and her cubs coming up from the streambed just above the big pull-off. A couple weeks later our son Steve, walking home after dark, startled the sow at the same pull-off. She woofed and ran off and he could hear the cubs in the underbrush.

Shortly after those encounters, another friend, sitting beside Ten Springs Trail in the old clear-cut shortly after dawn, watched four cubs walk past. One was larger than the other three and we wondered if it was a female from the sow's first family since females do stay near or in the same range (about four square miles) where they are raised.

Then, late in the afternoon of October 23, my husband Bruce went out for a brief walk in a light drizzle. He was back in a few minutes. "If you want to see the sow and her cubs, come quickly," he told our son Dave and me.

We grabbed our binoculars and ran after him. We needn't have worried though. Mama and her cubs were easy to watch as they wandered over the grassy hillock near the top of First Field. In addition to the light rain, it was cold and breezy, and although we walked within a couple hundred yards of the bears, they never saw us.

For twenty minutes we watched as the sow moved back and forth supervising her cubs. They were clearly messing around, sometimes staying close to her, other times wandering down into the field itself where they were hidden by small locust saplings. Twice I saw them half-climbing the saplings. Not wanting the bears to know we were watching, we retreated while they were still nosing around.

The following day I investigated the area and found no sign that they had been eating. I looked closely at the saplings they had climbed and found a couple tiny areas where bark had been scraped off. Had we not seen the bears, we would never have suspected that they had been on the hillock.

Now I find new piles of bear scat wherever I walk. They use the same trails we do. As I move along them, I am more wary. To know they are about concentrates the mind wonderfully. ❖

By Marcia Bonta



. . . **Map Turtles** [*Cont'd from page 3*]

in many projects destroying areas critical to certain plants and animals.

To avoid disastrous situations such as this in the future, it is necessary to know as much possible about the ecology of a project area. For example, not much was known about the Keystone State's reptiles and amphibians until the ongoing Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas started. This endeavor has resulted in the mapping of thousands of new locations for the seventy-three species of reptiles and amphibians in Pennsylvania.

Public participation in flora and fauna monitoring projects is critical for the survival of many species. JVAS members can help by assisting with

the Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas project. Training sessions for volunteers will take place next spring at Canoe Creek State Park, near Hollidaysburg, in Blair County. If you're interested call regional coordinator Dr. Stan Kotala at 946-8840.

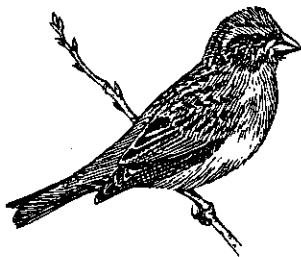
Thanks for your help! ❖ — Dr. Stan Kotala

Thank for the Tapes

JVAS Fund-raising Director Anne Borland extends many thanks to those who have mailed or otherwise delivered Bi Lo Foods and/or Riverside Market cash register tape receipts. Anne redeems the tapes for dollars for the JVAS. "Every little bit helps!" Bring your tapes to the program meetings or mail them to Anne Borland at 138A Larch St., Hollidaysburg, PA 16648. Thank you! ❖

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