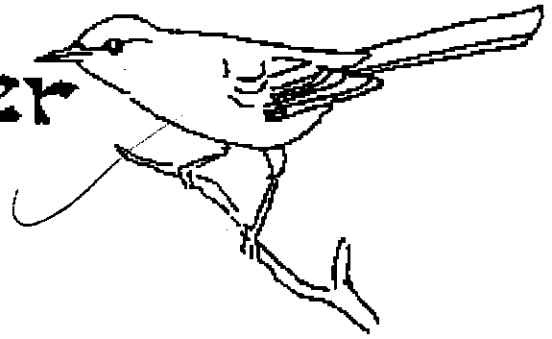


# The Gnatcatcher



## Newsletter of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society

P.O. Box 71, Tyrone, Pennsylvania 16686

Vol. 31, No. 1 — February/March 1999

### Abandoned Mine Reclamation Underway

Slowly, but surely, long-abandoned mining sites in Blair County are being reclaimed. The start of the Horseshoe Curve Resources Coalition (HCRC) in 1995 initiated the inventory, study, and evaluation of the Glenwhite Run Watershed and the abandoned surface and deep mines that cause degraded water quality in the Altoona City Authority's public water system at the Horseshoe Curve. Since 1995 this watershed has received federal approval of the watershed study completed through the USDA, NRCS PL 566 program. Now the nine sites identified in the inventory can have construction designs completed for restoration work and, as funding becomes available, have contracts awarded to complete the work.

The Pa. Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), through its Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation (BAMR), is already underway with a project near the abandoned village of Glenwhite. A series of settling ponds are being built to passively and biologically treat the acid-mine discharge water. The Blair County Conservation District received approval from the DEP for EPA 319 funding to reclaim the "South Trib" site in the watershed. Cost estimates are approximately \$90,000 to collect and passively treat several deep-mine discharges, revegetate a large pile of coal waste, and add limestone for alkaline addition to the stream channel. Designs are being drawn up now, hopefully with work contracted in the spring of 1999. The NRCS

Cont'd on page 3

#### Programs

*"OUR ALASKAN ADVENTURE," 7 P.M., Tuesday, February 16, at the Visitor Center, Canoe Creek State Park, off Rt. 22 east of Hollidaysburg.*

*Join fellow JVAS members Janet Huber, Barb Corle, and Terry Wentz for a slide and video show about their recent trip to Alaska.*

*"MUSSELS OF THE ALLEGHENY RIVER AND THREATS TO THEIR EXISTENCE," 7 P.M., Tuesday, March 16, at the Visitor Center, Canoe Creek State Park.*

*North America harbors the greatest diversity of fresh-water mussels in the world, yet they are threatened by water quality degradation, impoundments, zebra mussels, and activities that alter their river-bottom habitat. Carole Copeyon, endangered species biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State College, will discuss a case study that includes the effects of a bridge replacement project on endangered mussels and the role of the Endangered Species Act in protecting them.*

#### Field Trips

*STATE MUSEUM, Saturday, February 20*

*Janet Huber (tel. 942-5752) will lead a trip to the State Museum, in Harrisburg.*

*BALD EAGLE STATE PARK, Saturday, March 20*

*Join Eugene Zielinski (tel. 353-8212) to observe early migrants at Bald Eagle State Park.*

#### Annual Spring Banquet

*"PENNSYLVANIA ELK," 6:30 P.M., Monday, April 19 (social hour at 6 o'clock), Trinity United Methodist Church, 533 Main St., Bellwood.*

*Merlin Benner, wildlife biologist for the DCNR's Bureau of Forestry, will present a slide program on the status, habitat, and expansion of the elk herd in Pennsylvania. (See page 12.)*

## The Gnatcatcher

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

Juniata Valley Audubon Society  
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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 o'clock.) The public is invited to attend.

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## President's Message

Recently I went to see the newly released movie *Civil Action*, starring John Travolta. *Civil Action* is not the high-action, blow-'em up, sensuous bedroom scenes, or gory mess that most Hollywood movies are today. Instead, it is a suspenseful drama about a small community fighting for just an apology from a third-generation family tanning operation that has polluted drinking water in their area. At least seven of their children have died from cancer over a short time. A law firm head, played by John Travolta, agrees to take on the conglomerate parent company with hopes of a large financial profit.

Enough about the movie; go see it for yourself. Often in today's world we are led to believe that the environmental movement has died with the late 1960s or 70s. *Civil Action* has a subtle environmental message underlying the drama of a court case. It shows what can be done to bring awareness to a hazardous chemical dilemma that has affected neighboring property owners. Exposing flagrant violation of environmental regulations can still grab headlines in the 90s.

This is why it is so important to educate yourself and remain environmentally aware — especially in your own community. The JVAS is one grassroots organization that can assist these efforts.

One of the most important chapter committee chairs, Conservation Chair, remains vacant. JVAS members must search their souls and volunteer for vacant committee chair positions. Please see me or Charlie Hoyer about the duties of any JVAS committee chair.

Terry Wentz



*This is a double issue of The Gnatcatcher because Marge and I shall be vacationing in southern climes during February. You'll receive your next issue in April.*  
— Ed.

### ... Mine reclamation *(cont'd from first page)*

is working on designs for four of the other inventoried sites with construction funding to come from the PL 566 program and the DEP. The BAMR will address the remaining sites.

Glenwhite Run is not the only watershed to have abandoned mine sites reclaimed. In the Shaw Run Watershed, which drains to Bells Gap (another public water supply), a barren hilltop has been restored. The revegetation of the acid surface through the addition of large amounts of lime and surface water collection has been completed through Geographic Initiative funding from the EPA. Manno Construction Co., of Ridgeway, completed the work this past summer. The "icing on the cake" will be the reforestation of the site in the spring of 1999 with money from a Heinz Foundation Grant administered by the Juniata Valley Audubon Society.

The Blair Conservation District is proud of its involvement with these initiatives and looks forward to the successful completion of more abandoned mine reclamation in our watersheds. ❖

— Blair Conservation District  
Newsletter, December 1998

### How to Grow Oaks

The September woods were full and green, the acorns just starting to drop. Eight deer jumped away as a van and several trailing cars parked along a gravel road on Laurel Hill in western Pennsylvania. Scientists from Germany, Sweden, and Canada, as well as representatives of the Sierra Club and the U.S. Forest Service, followed Penn State forester Michael Demchik down a grassy path. "Even a family with kids hiking along this trail could see something's definitely wrong with these trees," Demchik said.

He stopped beside a newly dug soil pit, five feet deep. The visiting scientists gathered around. One climbed into the pit and began breaking off hunks of golden clay and passing them out. Thunder rumbled and the clouds drew close. The scientists pulled up

their hoods, readied their umbrellas. Already that morning they had visited a clear-cut that refused to grow back — ferns and sphagnum bog and bushy striped maple replacing the tall oaks and black cherry trees that had been timbered three years before. They had walked through another cut that, after eight years, had grown up entirely as a black cherry thicket, instead of the mix of species formerly there. Here, against the darkening sky, the snags of dead oaks looked stark and disquieting.

"There's forty to sixty percent mortality in the overstory here," Demchik began. "The overall growth rate is lower than normal, and there's no response by the understory trees to the thinning of the canopy." Ordinarily, a small tree in the understory would respond with a growth spurt when the death of a large neighbor let the sunlight filter farther through the leaf canopy. Here, almost the reverse happened. "The leaf fall is less," Demchik noted, "and there's significantly lower calcium and potassium in the foliage. The soils of the organic layer are no different, but at deeper levels — at the A and B levels — the soil's different from that at a healthy site. Here there's a lower calcium-to-aluminum ratio, which means there are higher levels of aluminum available."

He thrust his notes under his jacket as the hail came pelting down. He raised his voice, but the noise of hailstones hitting dry leaves was too loud to talk over. Lightning crackled overhead, and the scientists scampered for their cars. A stand of dead and dying trees is no place to be in a thunderstorm.

Demchik, who recently earned his Ph.D. at Penn State, is studying the decline of the red oak forests in western Pennsylvania. With his former adviser, Bill Sharpe, a professor in the School of Forest Resources and a member of the Environmental Resources Research Institute, Demchik is sorting out what's stressing the trees and how forest managers might coax the oaks to come back. His audience in the stormy woods was foresters and soil scientists attending the 1998 Pennsylvania Acidic Deposition Conference.

Laurel Hill, they learned, is part of a 25,000-

acre forest at an elevation of 2,600 to 2,900 feet. The forest receives forty-two inches of precipitation a year — much of it as snow and fog — and hasn't had a major fire since it was last logged off in the early 1900s. The large pines and hemlocks cut then did not grow back, but were naturally replaced by a mixed stand of red oak and black cherry, along with various maples and other minor species. Since then, too, white-tailed deer were reintroduced; the deer, brought from Michigan in 1909, are currently at numbers above the carrying capacity of the woods.

"We should be logging 150 to 200 acres a year," said Dave Williams, the district forester for the U.S. Forest Service, "following the hundred-year cycle recommended by the Forest Service. But we've been holding off. We don't have regeneration already established on the ground. We've tried a number of schemes: shelter wood [a forestry technique that leaves a belt of trees to shelter saplings], deer fencing, and spraying to get rid of the ferns and striped maple. Even if fenced, though, ferns and black cherry will dominate. You might ask, 'What's wrong with black cherry? It's a valuable hardwood.' But the point is not simply to have trees; it's to have a mix of species. We want deer, bear, and turkey in these woods." Without healthy oaks and plentiful acorns, the game will find little to eat.

After three years, a clear-cut should be brushy and thick; those at Laurel Hill were open fernlands. Hay-scented ferns, other researchers have proved, can outcompete oaks, choking off the young seedlings. But weeding out the ferns isn't enough to grow an oak woods. In a series of test plots, Demchik compared different regimens of weeding, fencing, lime, and fertilizer. "Without fencing out the deer," he says, "you get no regeneration at all." Deer love the succulent shoots of stump sprouts and would rather lunch on oak seedlings than on any other forest plant. Yet even with the deer excluded by an electric fence, the trees did not grow at the expected rate. Only when the seedlings were fenced in wire mesh cages, and the soil was weeded, limed, and fertilized, did they respond with vigorous growth.

These results lead Demchik and Sharpe to believe that, in addition to deer, ferns, and other stresses like gypsy moths and occasional drought, the trees are battling air pollution. Laurel Hill is close to Pittsburgh, a city known for years as a smoky and dirty town. The Pennsylvania Turnpike cuts through the forest nearby, and other major highways ring it. Car exhaust and industrial pollution, over the years, have combined with other factors to make the rainfall here highly acidic. Dry particles washed down with the rain have reacted with the calcium, magnesium, and potassium in the soil, leaching them out. "When the available cations of calcium are gone," Demchik explained, "the acid deposition starts leaching aluminum. This gets into the water in the soil and is drawn into the trees through their roots." Aluminum is toxic to trees. Worse, on the poor soil of the ridgetops, where most of the forest lies, calcium was always limited. With the high rate of leaching, the red oaks can't draw enough calcium from the soil to grow. Mature trees die more easily, while seedlings and stump sprouts don't bounce back from repeated deer browsing. Black cherry does slightly better on calcium-poor soils; ferns and striped maple thrive.

One solution is to plant and fence red oak seedlings in areas freed of ferns (by herbicide) and well limed and fertilized. When presenting his plan to Forest Service representatives, Demchik noted that such intensive forest management could actually be cost-effective, given the high board-foot price of red-oak lumber. Another option is to introduce more acid-tolerant species, like chestnut oak or various pines, that provide habitat and food for game animals although their lumber value is less. Or, as the Sierra Club representative suggested, we could attack the problem by reducing air pollution. ❖

— Nancy Marie Brown

*Research/Penn State, January 1999*

***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.***

## 1998 JVAS CBC Results

Counters and feeder watchers counted a total of 5900 birds within a 15-mile radius of Culp, in Sinking Valley, on Saturday, Dec. 19, day of the 1998 Christmas Bird Count. Sixty-one species were reported. Temperatures were mild, and the skies were partly cloudy. Observers in the field included Marcia Bonta, Mark Bonta, Barb Corle, Janet DeMuth, Katherine-Everts Temple, Debbie Haine, Charlie Hoyer, Janet Huber, Schuyler Kreitz, Teddie Kreitz, David Kyler, Cindy Moore, Luis Moore, Jesse Perry, John Salvetti, Al Sternagle, Beryl Sternagle, Shirley Wagoner, and Terry Wentz.

### TALLY

An asterisk (\*) marks counts unusually high. Pied-billed grebe 7\*; great blue heron 2; Canada goose 78; mallard 123; northern harrier 1; sharp-shinned hawk 1; Cooper's hawk 3; red-tailed hawk 11; American kestrel 14; merlin 1; ring-necked pheasant 8; ruffed grouse 4; wild turkey 13; American coot 70\*; kildeer 1; rock dove 1073\*; mourning dove 194\*; eastern screech-owl 6; great horned owl 1; belted kingfisher 7; red-headed woodpecker 1; red-bellied woodpecker 33; yellow-bellied sapsucker 2; downy woodpecker 70; hairy woodpecker 14; northern flicker 10; pileated woodpecker 23\*; eastern phoebe 1; blue jay 96; American crow 157; common raven 2; black-capped chickadee 195; tufted titmouse 117; red-breasted nuthatch 2; white-breasted nuthatch 89; brown creeper 12; Carolina wren 24; winter wren 2; golden-crowned kinglet 74; ruby-crowned kinglet 3; blue-gray gnatcatcher 1; eastern bluebird 35; hermit thrush 3; American robin 790\*; gray catbird 1; northern mockingbird 5; cedar waxwing 85; European starling 1241; yellow-rumped warbler 3; northern cardinal 88; American tree sparrow 157\*; song sparrow 20; swamp sparrow 2; white-throated sparrow 40; white-crowned sparrow 5; dark-eyed junco 378\*; brown-headed cowbird 6; house finch 157; American goldfinch 97; house sparrow 211. ❖

— Debbie Haine, CBC Compiler

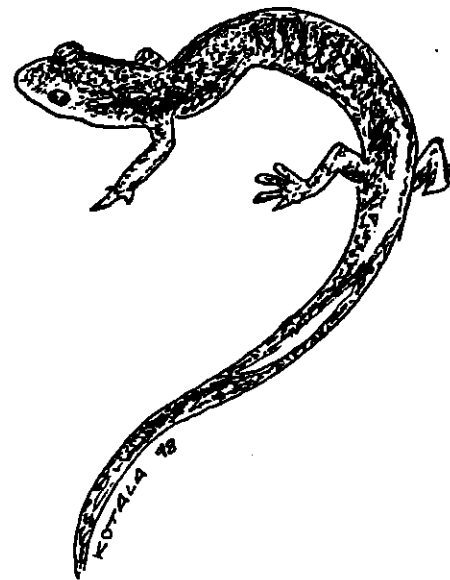
## 1999 Herpetological Atlas Workshops Scheduled

The Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas Project is an effort to establish the range of amphibians and reptiles in the Keystone state. It began three years ago and is now at its half-way point.

Here in the Juniata Valley, volunteers have made many new discoveries that have added immensely to our knowledge of this region's herpetofauna. However, much more field work needs to be done. The project is in need of volunteers to survey parts of Blair, Bedford, Fulton, Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata, Perry, and Franklin Counties.

If you are interested in taking part in the Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas Project, you should attend the orientation workshops to be held at Canoe Creek State Park's Visitor Center on Sunday, April 25 from 2 to 5 P.M. and Sunday, May 16 from 2 to 5 P.M. If you plan to attend these workshops, please call Western Ridge and Valley Regional Coordinator Dr. Stan Kotala at 946-8840. We hope to hear from you! ❖

— Dr. Stan Kotala



*Plethodon hoffmani*

## Paper Reports Citizen Stir Over Factory Hog Farms

### Suggests U.S. EPA May Become Involved

Concern over the planned development of industrialized hog farms in Central Pennsylvania prompted the Harrisburg *Patriot-News* to devote a large portion of its 13-page Sunday, Nov. 22, business section to the subject.

"Across central Pennsylvania — especially in Bedford, Mifflin, and Lebanon Counties — longtime rural residents and newcomers alike are banding together to fight factory hog farms and the odor and manure disposal problems they bring in their wake," the paper reported.

"In Mifflin County, personal-care home owner Stan Westbrook worries that a 2,800 sow farm, Shady Grove, that may be built by Lebanon County hog operators on an adjoining farm will put him out of business.

"Northumberland County residents, led by John and Linda Semicek, stopped a proposed 3,000-sow Hoover-Christianson hog farm at a cost of almost \$40,000 in legal fees.

"Rita Williams fights the Hoover-Christianson Round Top Farms, recently renamed Misty Meadows and a stone's throw from her subdivision in East Hanover Twp., Lebanon County."

The article cited similar objections to three factory farms being developed in Monroe Township, Bedford County by Chiou Hog Farms, of Silver Spring, Md., owned by a Taiwanese businessman. The article noted that factory hog farms are different from what many people imagine a hog farm to be. They raise hogs entirely indoors for efficiency and disease control and have many more animals than regular outdoor farms. The typical size of a factory farm in Pennsylvania is 2,800 hogs compared with an average of 222 for an ordinary hog farm, according to the Agriculture Department.

"But even a 2,800-sow operation will produce significant amounts of manure," the paper said. "The Shady Grove farm three miles east of Mount Union, for example, and the Chiou farm in Clear-

ville will each generate more than 3.3 million gallons of liquid manure annually. All of that must be spread on the hog farmer's own fields or those of willing neighbors. And if the hog industry has made limited progress in reducing odor from manure lagoons, it has made almost none in freshening the pungent odor of newly spread manure."

Looming over the controversy in Pennsylvania, the paper noted, has been the catastrophic hog manure spill of 1995 in Onslow County, N.C. when some twenty-eight million gallons of hog manure burst out of its eight-acre unlined lagoon into the New River, killing all fish for seventeen miles. The volume of the spill was more than twice that of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska.

The *Patriot-News* said that because of the North Carolina spill the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency "has been pushing the state department of Environmental Protection for the past year to develop a road map for applying federal water-pollution law to the largest hog and other animal farms" in Pennsylvania.

"Even though many diverse sources contribute to water pollution, states report that agriculture is the most widespread source of pollution in the Nation's rivers, according to an executive summary of the EPA plans. Municipal sewage and industrial discharges, which had been major pollution sources in past decades, have been largely controlled."

The paper quoted Lamonte Garber, of the Chesapeake Bay Federation, as welcoming EPA's entry into the contentious world of factory hog farm regulation. "It has shifted the nature of the debate," he said. "Up until now, the debate has been conducted within the confines of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania politics. All of a sudden you have the EPA stepping into the mix. I think some people were caught off guard."

— *Springs & Sinks*, January 1999  
Newsletter of The ClearWater Conservancy

## Fall Birding at Cape May and Central Florida

By Shirley Wagoner

I have been fortunate enough to make two birding trips in the last month or so to premier birding spots in the eastern U.S. — a short one to Cape May, New Jersey, and a longer one to central Florida. A friend and I spent most of three days in Cape May at the end of October, hoping to catch some of the fall migration that funnels through the area. Prior to going, we contacted the Cape May Bird Observatory and reserved places on an afternoon guided walk at Stone Harbor the day we arrived. We got an early start and had time to check in at our motel before meeting for the walk. This was a relatively short walk but yielded forty-five different species, including egrets, herons, geese, ducks, raptors, wading birds, gulls, terns, and various small land birds.

The next morning we joined another guided walk near the park at Cape May Point. Here we saw many birds that we had seen the day before, plus some common loons, also tree swallows and American robins migrating in flocks of hundreds or thousands. Yellow-rumped warblers were abundant. Swamp sparrows were present also. We were able to study the differences between American and Eurasian wigeons, as both were there — also between royal and Forster's terns. The hawk migration was being monitored at the point — there were many sharp-shinned hawks flying by, also harriers, an osprey, and a possible eagle in the distance.

The following morning, although rainy, we joined another guided walk. This group was quite small and we followed a path through windy fields into a woodland and to some protected fields. Soon the sun came out and began warming the field edges, and the birds began moving. Here we found more warblers — mostly orange-crowned and yellow-rumped. Woodpeckers were both seen and heard. The major robin migration continued overhead in groups of twenty or thirty, with short intervals between groups. Flocks of tree swallows and a few hawks passed over as well.

The trip was wonderful, even though we may have been late for the main migration. The opportunities to join guided walks were certainly helpful as we were completely unfamiliar with the area and its well-known birding possibilities.

My most recent birding trip was to central Florida, occasioned by a brief family trip to Orlando. I went in time to spend a week birding with a friend who lives near St. Petersburg and a week at a nature study Elderhostel in the area. I saw many great birds and quite a few "life" birds. Some of the most memorable ones were magnificent frigatebirds, white ibis, greater yellowlegs, roseate spoonbills, glossy ibis, anhingas, wood storks, marbled godwits, a reddish heron, red knots, little blue herons, black skimmers, and a limpkin. Most of these birds I saw with my birding friend, who knows her area very well. She lives close to Honeymoon Island on the Gulf Coast where a small wildlife refuge offers various habitats — coastal, piney woods, and sheltered lagoons. Our birding began the very first afternoon when a tricolored heron was occupying the concrete wall that separated the condo yard from the gulf a few feet below. It walked along the edge of the concrete and seemed to be hunting for grasshoppers as it went, while smaller waders occupied the beach just beyond. Later, at dusk, we observed a greater yellowlegs feeding by rapidly moving its bill back and forth in the water, wading and moving at a rather frenetic pace. My friend said that never before had she observed this behavior.

The next morning we checked out the nearby beach and then drove into the park and walked slowly to the spit, amassing a list of thirty-five species as we went, including an excellent and prolonged view of a magnificent frigatebird just overhead, a harrier, many unexpected snowy plovers, and an immature ibis. We also were fortunate enough to see a gopher tortoise, a sea turtle, and an armadillo. On other days we visited other parks,

adding to my Florida bird list and seeing American alligators, raccoons, another turtle, and other animals as well as birds. I birded during the Elderhostel as well from the three rivers we canoed, but with few additions to my Florida list.

Hunting for some rare and endangered species, I had some adventures. The Elderhostel was based near the Withalacochee State Forest, where endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers were reported to be nesting. I visited the ranger who was spearheading a study of this rare species that can be found only in a few southern states. She gave me specific directions as to where and when to locate them. I found the forest road and was taken aback to find it not only unpaved, but sometimes deep in sand. I persevered and managed not to get stuck, although I was glad to meet several friendly bow hunters and know I was not alone in that isolated area. I found the nesting location and waited for the birds to arrive. At the appointed hour, I heard them approaching and got a good look at them before they disappeared into the foliage above me. Returning the way I had come, I was thankful to make it back out.

The other bird I was particularly seeking was a limpkin, a large wading bird that lives mostly in or near the tropics and never comes north. I watched for it on each of the three rivers from the canoe, but never saw one. When I was staying at Orlando, I had one free day to bird and went looking for one,

at first without success, in several ponds north of the city. At one very suburban pond, surrounded by lovely, waterfront homes, I spotted, not a limpkin, but a beautiful male wood duck tangled in fishing line and hanging by one foot over the water. I noticed that it had to keep raising its head out of the water in order to breathe and wondered how long it could last. I tried to get help but there were no boats around and, although people promised to phone for help, I didn't think the duck could survive long enough. So, I took off my shoes and socks, put my sneakers on for stability, and waded into the lukewarm water, a pair of nail scissors in hand. After wading in up to my waist, I was able to cut it loose. It swam hastily to some bushes near the shore.

Dripping, I walked to a nearby convenience store to get some lunch, returned to the pond, and walked around it — stopping at occasional benches to eat my sandwich and fruit. Twice I startled concealed flocks of wood ducks out of their perches on low branches into the water. The second time, I spied a beautiful female anhinga perching high up in the same tree and then another large wading bird half-hidden in the foliage. When I walked around the tree to get a better look, I realized I had found my limpkin! This was one case where a good deed was rewarded, not punished. I would have missed it had it not been for the wood duck I rescued! ❖

...  
The Blues ...  
...

Midwinter blues —

Earth clothed in ice,  
Trees casting a net of branches against a leaden sky,  
Fog misting the woods, screening the hills beyond.

Yet only three days ago blue sky brightly dazzled the eyes.

My window framed a small crowd of avian activity —

As winter birds assembled,  
Waiting their turns at my feeders,  
Feeding almost on the wing:  
Juncos, titmice, finches, and sparrows,  
Chickadees, a cardinal, and a blue jay.

Midwinter blue — a bit of sky seemed to perch on a nearby branch:

An eastern bluebird thrilled me with its presence  
as it seemed to preside quietly over the action.

A large woodpecker hitched up and down the branches  
around the bluebird, as if in challenge.

Midwinter blue, unexpected, placid and calm, bright with the  
Promise of spring.

— Shirley Wagoner



## IN MEMORIAM : FRANCIS B. BURGOON 1911-1998

*Late last fall a red oak tree was planted near the Canoe Creek State Park Visitor Center as a living memorial to Fran Burgoon. Fran, 87 at his death, was a longtime member of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society, where he served many years on the board as membership chair. Fran loved the outdoors and was a faithful participant in the annual Christmas bird count.*

*At Canoe Creek, Fran was one of the initial group of three JVAS members who volunteered to monitor bluebird box trails established in 1982. In 1987 Fran was honored with the statewide Bluebird Monitor of the Year Award given by the Bureau of State Parks for his dedication to the bluebird recovery project.*

*As JVAS president, I often think of Fran's membership report at our monthly meetings. He always reported with a chuckle the number of JVAS memberships that had "expired." Fran thought this was such a terminating word used to describe a membership that was not renewed.*

*Fran expired on October 11, 1998, but his contributions to the JVAS will be remembered at the sight of a fleeting bluebird in the park. Fran's tree will grow to maturity as it provides many with a moment's rest in its shade.*

— Terry Wentz



Mary Burgoon and Terry Wentz put the finishing touch on the planting of a red oak tree on the grounds near the Visitor Center at Canoe Creek State Park as a living memorial to her late husband, Fran.

## "Whitey" Visits Sinking Valley

In early January I received a phone call from my neighbor, Diane Strohm, who told me she spotted an all-white, sparrow-like bird on the ground under the feeder in her yard. She thought it was an albino white-throated sparrow because it mingled with a small flock of white-throats. The next day I visited her yard and, upon closer examination of its field marks, we agreed that the bird was a dark-eyed junco — commonly known as a snowbird.

Nicknamed "Whitey" by Diane, this junco is not a "true albino," but it sure is a "true snowbird!" When Whitey was feeding on seeds dropped from the feeder on the snow-covered ground, he was hardly visible. His feathers are totally absent of melanin (dark coloring pigment) except for a very small amount of gray in the loreal region. His legs and bill are pink, but its eyes are dark — making the junco an "incomplete albino." (Totally albino birds have all-white feathers, pink or red eyes, and very pale or white feet, legs, and bill.)

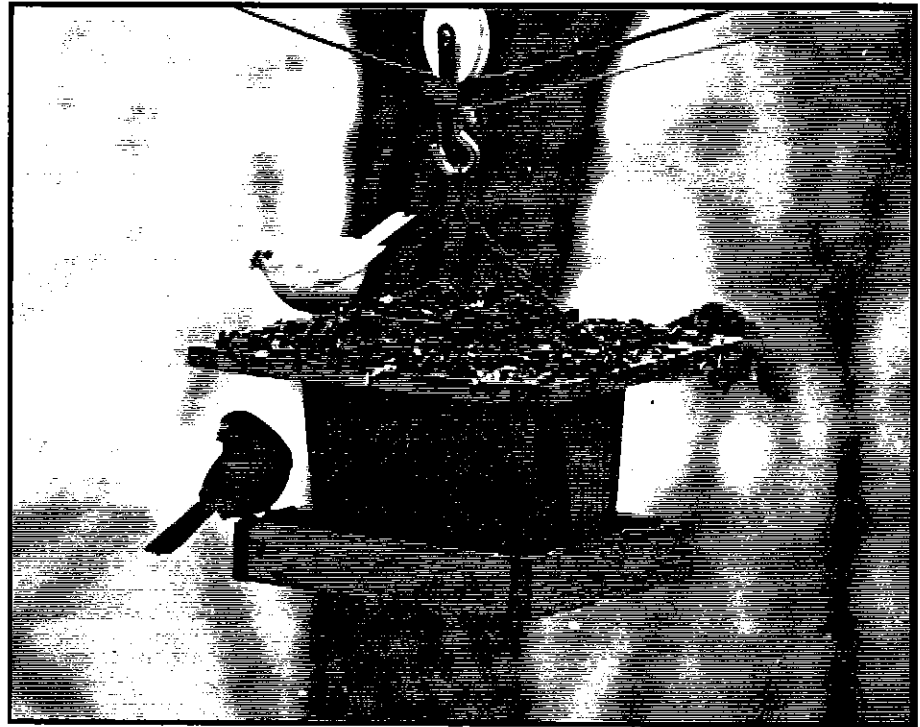
With all the ice and snow in early and mid-January, Whitey stayed in the area with a host of other juncos and white-throated sparrows, along with a fox sparrow and a few tree sparrows. He eventually found his way to my trolley feeder up the mountain from Diane's. We then shared him for a couple of weeks until the late-January thaw melted the snow. Then, with our reliable food supplies of oil sunflower seeds and white millet no longer needed, the birds went back to their prime feeding spots for their regular source of weed seeds.

If the bad winter weather returns in February, perhaps we'll see Whitey again. And, conceivably, we may see him again next winter, because juncos

tend to return to the same areas each year. If you have a flock of juncos every winter, some of them are the same birds that had been there the previous year, and most of the others will be offspring of those birds.

Due to his conspicuousness, Di and I are hoping that Whitey is not spied and preyed on by a hawk. Whitey is close to our hearts and we wish him well.

— Charlie Hoyer



## Spring Nature Programs at Canoe Creek State Park

Sunday, March 21

2 P.M.

**Spring Walk** — Take a guided walk along the Limestone Trail to look for signs of spring. Meet at the Visitor Center.

Sunday, April 18

2 P.M.

**Spring Wildflower Walk** — Enjoy an afternoon stroll along Limestone Trail to look for early spring wildflowers. Meet at the Visitor Center.

## FRUIT-EATING BIRDS

What a wonderful winter this has been for fruit-eating birds. In mid-December, before the cold and ice hit, the mountain was blanketed in robins. Hundreds of them called and sang as if it were spring. All of them feasted on wild grapes and Hercules' club berries. Often they were joined by smaller flocks of cedar wax-

By Marcia Bonta

wings. Bluebirds, too, were abundant. One day the yard filled up with them. They seemed to be eating black gum fruits that still clung to the trees along Laurel Ridge Trail. Although they left our mountain in mid-December, our neighbor Ken Parks, who owns a farm in the valley, reported that one of his nesting boxes held four roosting bluebirds during the bitter cold of early January.

Dozens of white-throated sparrows are wintering on the mountain in the thickets where wild fruits are still available. Flickers and red-bellied woodpeckers also are harvesting the bonanza.

But my best fruit-eating bird discoveries came in early January after the ice storms. Then, the ice-glazed snow was too slippery for me to take my usual walks. Instead, I walked up and down our hollow road every day, carefully following the wide tractor tracks Bruce had made for my walking and his driving pleasure.

It was fourteen degrees and mostly clear on January 4 when I headed down the hollow at 9 A.M. Although our hollow is north-facing, it is sheltered and has a good complement of hemlock trees along with mature hardwoods. The stream was frozen solid in most places and the rhododendron leaves were rolled as tightly shut as cigars. Occasional snow flakes sifted down as true winter arrived with a flourish.

At the big pulloff, the woods were filled with birds — brown creepers, winter wrens, golden-crowned kinglets, white-breasted nuthatches, dark-eyed juncos, black-capped chickadees, and tufted titmice. I stopped to watch and listen to the familiar calls of all those winter regulars.

Then, far up the icy slope, I heard a different song — ringing phrases with short pauses. Had it been early spring, I would have identified the song unhesitatingly as that of a blue-headed vireo.

I sat down to listen. After about ten minutes the bird sang again. Despite pishing loudly, I couldn't entice it down from wherever it was hidden. Yet I was almost certain it was a blue-headed vireo.

The next morning was even colder — five degrees. Again I walked quickly down the road and then more slowly back up, watching the sunlight slide down Sapsucker Ridge toward the still-darkened hollow. Again I heard what could only be a blue-headed vireo singing on the sunny slope above. As it had the previous day, it sang once. Then, after a long wait, it sang again. Both were perfect renditions of a blue-headed vireo's song. According to my books they do eat some wild fruits, particularly wild grapes.

I continued my hollow walks throughout the week and didn't hear the vireo again. But on January 8, during a light snow, I walked down the road without my binoculars. This time the hollow was filled with birds seeking protection from the snow — winter wrens, juncos, chickadees, a pileated woodpecker, titmice, and golden-crowned kinglets — all easily recognizable by the way they flew.

But then, from the stream bank, a different bird flew up and landed on a small sapling a few feet away from where I was standing. Slowly it dipped its tail up and down. Even without binoculars and through the falling snow, I was almost certain it was a hermit thrush.

A hissing rain fell the following morning, making the footing still more treacherous. But when it cleared, Bruce took his snowblower down the road, and I was able to resume my hollow-walking in mid-afternoon. Near the big pulloff, the sun came out and the forest glittered from the sheen of ice covering every branch and twig. Birds crowded the hollow — all the usual ones, including white-throated

sparrows, that had moved down from the thickets.

Then the hermit thrush flew up into a nearby tree and scolded me. This time I had my binoculars and ample time to study it. There was no doubt about what that bird was!

Even if the ice clears and I can walk my usual paths, I think I'm going to continue my hollow walks. Who knows what else I will hear and see this amazing winter? ❖

### **JVAS Annual Spring Banquet Set**

Our annual banquet will be held at 6:30 P.M., Monday, April 19, at the Trinity United Methodist Church, 533 Main St., in Bellwood. The traditional social will begin at 6 o'clock with punch and cheese

'n' crackers. A savory family-style dinner will be served featuring roast beef and turkey with all the trimmings and dessert.

Merlin Benner, a wildlife biologist for the Pa. DCNR's Bureau of Forestry, will give a slide show on the status, habitat, and expansion of the elk herd in Pennsylvania.

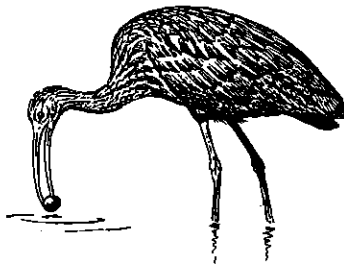
The 1999 JVAS Conservation Award will be presented followed by drawings for door prizes.

Mail the enclosed reservation form with a check (\$12 per person) to Marge Hoyer, P.O. Box 71, Tyrone, PA 16686. Checks must be received by Monday, April 12. We're also seeking items for door prizes. Phone me at 684-7376 if you care to donate an item. ❖

— Marge Hoyer

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