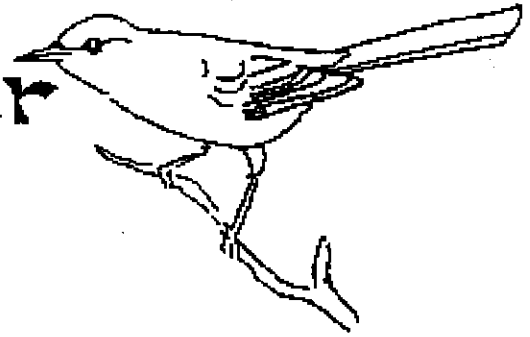


# The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the  
**Juniata Valley Audubon Society**

P.O. Box 71, Tyrone, Pennsylvania 16686

Vol. 31, No. 3 - May/June 1999

## **Growing Greener: Addressing the Issues That Are Important to Pennsylvanians**

By Rep. David G. Argall

For the second year in a row, Pennsylvanians have listed traffic congestion as the worst environmental problem in their community. According to the Public Mind Survey conducted by Mansfield University, traffic congestion is more on the minds of Pennsylvanians than air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, and litter. This should not be too surprising since traffic congestion is the one effect of sprawl that many people see and feel every day. My sense is that people are simply expressing their frustration about sitting in traffic.

Governor Ridge's proposed Growing Greener Initiative takes important steps to address the sprawl issue. Growing Greener will provide funding for farmland and open space preservation projects, environmental infrastructure, the reclamation of abandoned mine lands, and it will encourage sound planning practices at the local level. These are steps that must be taken if we are to revitalize our older communities and preserve Pennsylvania's countryside.

I just returned from a trip to Germany and I was struck by how much open space exists between cities and towns. In Germany the extensive open space makes city limits easily identifiable and you definitely know when you are leaving one city and entering another. Thanks to strong local land use regulations, an efficient and convenient mass transportation system, and policies that encourage infrastructure and development within the city,

*Cont'd on page 3*

### **JVAS Programs**

"A NOVICE BIRDWATCHER IN AUSTRALIA," Jim Dunne, Penn State Professor of agricultural economics, will present a slide show/talk about his trip to southern Australia that stimulated his interest in birdwatching.

7 P.M., Monday, May 17, Visitor Center, Canoe Creek State Park.

PICNIC AT CANOE CREEK STATE PARK. A season-ending picnic will be held that will highlight fellowship and a wildflower walk guided by park naturalist Kerry Estright Pruznak. Please phone Debbie Haine at 695-8239 by June 16 if you plan to attend.

6 P.M., Monday, June 21, Pavilion No. 2, Canoe Creek S.P.

### **JVAS Field Trips**

PRESQUE ISLE AND LAKE ERIE. Janet Huber (tel. 942-5752) will guide a weekend trip to Presque Isle to observe the spring migration.

May 14-16. *Depart Altoona Friday afternoon; return Sunday evening. Two nights' accommodation in Erie, with birding stops at Presque Isle, Asbury Woods, and Conneaut Lake. Double occupancy \$80 per person; single occupancy \$140 per person. Includes hotel, tax, and breakfast. Car pool cost additional.*

REPTILE WORKSHOP. Dr. Stan Kotala (tel. 946-8840) will conduct a reptile workshop in conjunction with observation studies for the ongoing Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas project.

2-5 P.M., Sunday, May 16, Visitor Center at Canoe Creek S.P.

## The Gnatcatcher

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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

When I first heard the words "growing greener," I thought about organic gardening. I suppose organic gardening can be included in the term growing greener, but it is this and a whole lot more.

I first heard about Growing Greener about six months ago at a staff meeting when a State Parks engineer reported on a Growing Greener conference he had attended in Washington, D.C. The conference was a forum for products that are environmentally friendly — such things as parking lot wheel stops made from recycled tires, a lid for paint cans that allows liquids in paint to evaporate without leaving an open can sit around for a long time, and constructing building walls made of straw. This sure sounds like the story of the three little pigs to me!

As it turns out, Growing Greener is a much bigger term associated with all kinds of products, construction techniques, and a sweeping change in Pennsylvania's environmental spending policy. Governor Ridge introduced the Growing Greener initiative in his 1999–2000 budget address this past February.

Since February, bits and pieces of the initiative have been released. Recently, Senate and House bills have been introduced to expand upon the Governor's plans. The Pennsylvania Audubon Society is supporting a coalition of twenty-two environmental groups, land trusts, recreational, planning, community, and heritage organizations to pass an amendment dubbed "*Growing Greener Plus.*" Now is the time to let your legislatures know to support the amendment. Look for additional details in this issue of *The Gnatcatcher*.

*Terry Wentz*



### . . . Growing Greener *(cont'd from first page)*

town, and village limits, Germany today has both vibrant communities and beautiful countryside.

Here in Pennsylvania, communities have become indistinguishable because of ongoing, unplanned strip development. Even worse, parts of the urban cores of our larger communities look more like the war-ravaged Berlin of 1945 than the revitalized German capital of 1999.

Pennsylvania must develop its urban and rural policies in tandem. The newly established Keystone Opportunity Zones will target many of Pennsylvania's distressed urban and rural areas and revitalize them. Growing Greener, with its emphasis on restoring public lands, intelligent investment in infrastructure, and sound land use practices, is another step in the right direction. Governor Ridge recognizes the importance of this connection when he says that one of the biggest factors contributing to sprawl is the condition of our urban areas.

Ever since the Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee was created in 1967, it has been concerned about the reclamation of abandoned mine lands in Pennsylvania. It was one of the defining issues for the creation of the committee. As chairman of the Joint Committee, I have worked with my colleagues in the Pennsylvania House and Senate to obtain more funds and to investigate alternative strategies to reclaim abandoned mine lands. If enacted, Growing Greener would make \$160 million available for reclaiming abandoned mine lands and plugging oil and gas wells. This would be the start of a consistent strategy to address one of Pennsylvania's most serious environment problems.

As a state legislator committed to protecting Pennsylvania's environment and natural resources, I am excited about the Growing Greener Initiative. It will help to achieve both the environmental protection and the economic development that all Pennsylvanians desire. ❖

— *Update*, Newsletter of the Pa. Department of Environmental Protection, March 26, 1999

### Huntingdon's Old Crow Wetlands

By Shirley Wagoner

The Old Crow Wetlands is becoming an increasingly interesting place to bird. In fact during the last week of April I spotted two "life" birds there — Wilson's snipe and solitary sandpiper, plus a possible upland sandpiper (also new to me).

I was out there with Dave Kyler one morning recently to see the snipe with his help. Later, on a beautiful sunny morning after a cold start, I went back by myself to see if I could identify the snipe on my own. There was plenty of action. A gorgeous bushy-tailed red fox was prowling along the edge of the field in back and the Canada geese were honking a loud alert. Mallards quacked, iridescent green tree swallows were everywhere on the wing, chattering as they flew. Robins sang in the background, killdeer called and red-winged blackbirds *konkareed* around the edges of the marsh. A belted kingfisher rattled from different perches, then hovered above a promising looking area and dropped down below my line of sight, reappearing some distance away. I couldn't tell if it had been successful or not in catching a fish.

I tramped through the drying marsh, starting up several sandpipers: spotted sandpipers that teeter when they land and, what I later determined to be solitary sandpipers with conspicuous markings on the tail as they flew. Finally, I started up several snipe, flying zigzag and calling "'scape! 'scape!" before dropping back into the vegetation.

I later spotted another sandpiper that watched me, head-on, as I tried to circle it until I wasn't looking long enough for it to conceal itself somewhere. It looked most like the upland sandpiper in my field guide, but without being able to see the whole bird, I can't be sure. This bird was nearly exterminated some years ago by hunters who appreciated its delicate flavor; I don't know how abundant it is at present.

This wetlands, in place scarcely two years, seems to be functioning with increasing success in

attracting birds and wildlife. This bodes well for other wetland mitigation efforts such as one below Mount Union and another planned by the Juniata Valley schools. ❖

## Woodcocks at Shaver's Creek

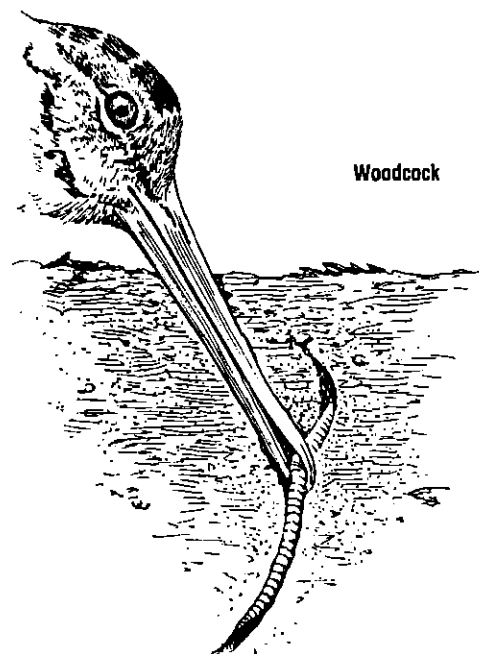
By Shirley Wagoner

Among the many environmental programs at Shaver's Creek Environmental Center this spring was a Woodcock Walk. Billed for all ages, I took my two elementary-school-aged grandchildren along with me on a beautiful spring evening, beginning at 7 P.M. Bringing along a small tarp to sit on, a bird book and binoculars, we were well prepared.

The evening began with a short informative presentation so that all participants would know what a woodcock looks like, in what habitat we should seek it, and how it would sound. Now a woodcock might seem to be a gallinaceous bird, related to grouse or quail. However, it is actually closely related to sandpipers, snipes, or other wading birds. You might think of it as a forest dwelling sandpiper — rather plump in appearance, about the size of a bobwhite, and having a very long, probing bill. It is not uncommon, but is rarely seen unless one is looking for it because it is largely nocturnal.

The bill, which is quite long in order to enable it to find its preferred food of earthworms, is quite unusual. One can certainly imagine its probing deeply to locate a worm, but can you imagine it then opening its bill sufficiently to take hold of the buried earthworm, having to press against rather firm soil in order to open its bill? Well, the woodcock has a unique bill. The tip of its long mandible is flexible so that it can grasp the earthworm and pull it out without opening its bill. The woodcock inhabits the brushy edges of old fields, preferably damp, where it can feed conveniently. It can eat its weight in earthworms in a single night!

It is an early arrival in the spring so it is a special pleasure to greet the returning season by seeking out this bird. And the woodcock will



reward your search with spectacular courting behavior. As it is getting dark, if you have sought out the appropriate habitat, and waited quietly you may hear the beginning of its evening performance — a nasal, repeated *PEE-EENT*. After several minutes of this call, it will suddenly mount into the air with a whistling sound, and then it descends in a back-and-forth motion like a falling leaf, emitting an entirely different and varied succession of chips as it descends.

We heard many times the opening *peeent* but often missed the flight itself even though we could hear the whistles and chips as it danced through the air, especially as it grew darker. The single good look I had reminded me both of a black moth fluttering through the air and a wide-winged bat in its search for insect prey.

Finally, the evening grew dark, the children grew tired and we drove home, exhilarated by what we had seen and heard. This was not my first sight of an American woodcock, but it was my first experience of this spectacular courtship display, which must go on every evening at this time of year! ❖

## Seven Scout Troops Complete Earth Day Projects

By Jody Wallace

Young persons from seven Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops from Sinking Valley and Tyrone dug, planted, watered, and mulched their way to a better environment on April 17 — the Saturday closest to Earth Day. Nearly 200 people were in attendance on a cold, gray day.

Working together under the leadership of Eagle Scout candidate Tommy Bradford, of Sinking Valley, the older boys and girls replaced the “riparian buffer zone” of Sinking Creek along S.R. 1013 that had been environmentally changed by a flood control project. (A riparian buffer zone is a band of trees along a stream or river that filters out sediment and nutrients, controls water temperature, and creates habitat for fish, aquatic insects, and other creatures.)

After a training session, the scouts set 150 trees and shrubs and then erected shelters to protect them against deer and rodents. During the work session each of the older scouts taught — one-on-one — a Daisy (kindergarten) or Brownie Scout, with each little girl planting one tree under her mentor’s direction.

Major funding for this project came from The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, an organization that provides money for local environmental initiatives in the Chesapeake Bay watersheds.

Other troops placed bluebird boxes, sowed wildflower seeds, planted butterfly gardens, and planted landscape-sized trees along the road (trees that replaced the beautiful, old maples that once grew along the country lane in the Tyrone Township-owned project area).

Funding for these undertakings came from generous donations by Penn Re-Leaf, Stream Re-



Eagle Scout candidate Tommy Bradford places a tree protector over a red-osier dogwood donated by Dr. Stan Kotala.

Leaf, Asplund Company, Tyrone Milling, and the Juniata Valley Audubon Society.

Each child had his or her name in a time capsule buried among the roots of their creation. The young “eco-heroes” also received a recognition dinner, badges, and undoubtedly blisters for their efforts. ❖

## Stream Class Presented to Over 1000 Students

By Dr. Stan Kotala

Stream Class, the JVAS coldwater ecology course, has been presented to more than 1000 students since its inception in 1997.

Taught by JVAS member, Dr. Stan Kotala, Stream Class encourages students to view streams as reflections of watershed activities. It emphasizes the importance of the preservation of fully functioning natural ecosystems in maintaining a healthy stream. Students are introduced to the ways in which urban, industrial, and agricultural activities degrade and often destroy streams.

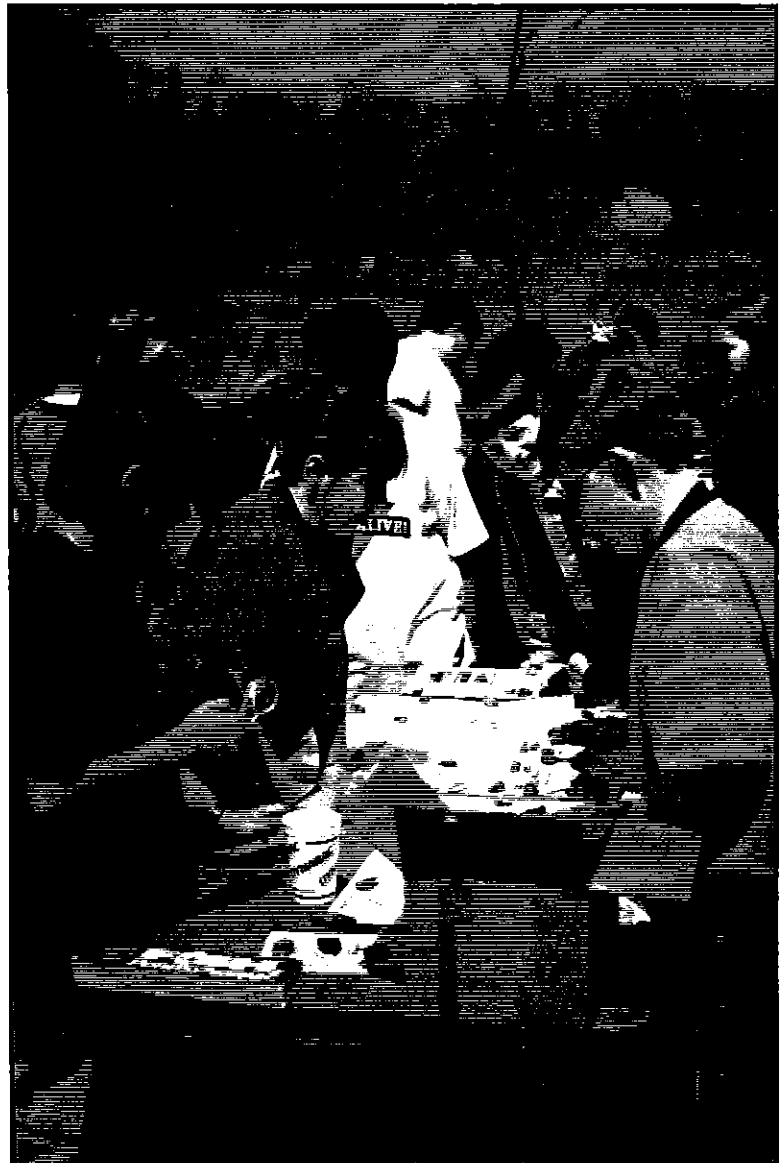
The culmination of each Stream Class is a sampling of the benthic macroinvertebrate population of a stream, during which students identify stream organisms and, by the presence or absence of pollution-sensitive macroinvertebrates, determine the quality of the stream. This always is a fun activity and a great learning experience for all.

If you'd like to have Stream Class presented to your group, phone JVAS Education Chair Shirley Wagoner at 643-4011 or Dr. Kotala at 946-8840. ❖

### BioBlitz Program Arrives In Pennsylvania in June

Biologists, life scientists, foresters, and other experts in plant and animal identification are invited to participate in an intensive data-gathering effort on June 4-5 in Lebanon County.

Bio-Blitz will attempt to gain a snapshot of a small region's biological wealth by surveying the plant and animal species within a 10-square-mile area. The survey is done over a 24-hour period, hence the name BioBlitz.



Frankstown Elementary School Students identify benthic macroinvertebrates from the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River during Stream Class, April 27, 1999.

Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Pennsylvania Biological Society, BioBlitz will begin at noon, June 4 and continue through noon, June 5. The survey is on State Game Lands 211 near Fort Indiantown Gap.

The Gap will provide accommodations at the barracks, in addition to a tent site and a place for data-processing. Each scientist should bring his or her tools necessary for plant and animal identification.

For more information, contact Bob Hill at (717) 878-7067. ❖

## Juniata Wetland Project Seeks Volunteers

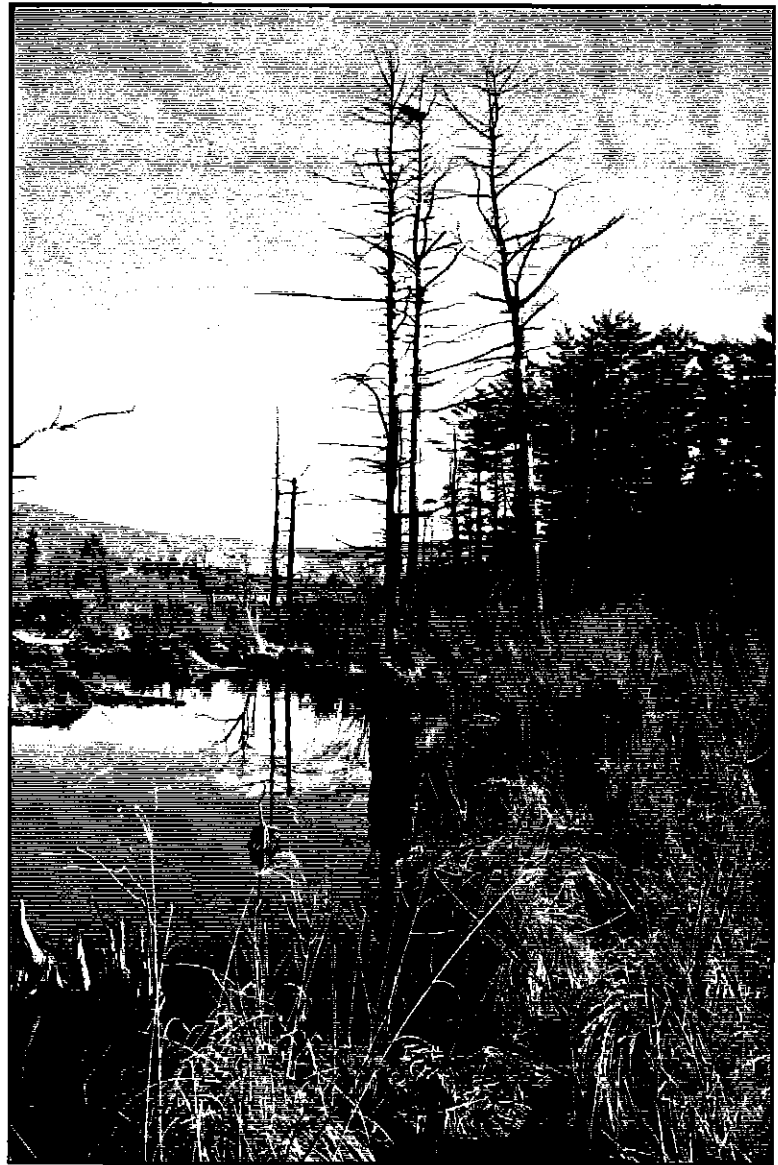
By Dr. Stan Kotala

Are you interested in learning to identify wetland plants? Would you like to help protect our swamps and marshes? If your answers are yes, you'll want to participate in the Juniata Wetland Monitoring Project.

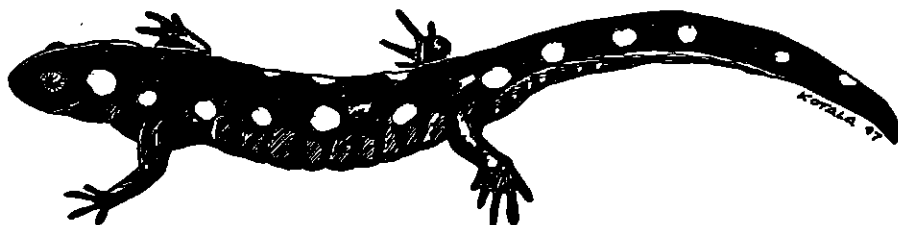
The project is a two-year (1999-2000) effort to determine the ecological condition of wetlands in the Juniata River watershed. It's coordinated by the Penn State Cooperative Wetlands Center and the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy, which will train volunteers to identify wetland plants, soils, insects, and birds that can be used as bioindicators of wetland health.

Following this training, project staff and volunteers will conduct field surveys of the various sites.

If you want to take advantage of this rare opportunity, please call Len Lichvar or Ron Donlan at the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy (814) 623-7900. ❖



The swamp and marsh in the heart of State Game Lands 166, in Blair County, are considered to be "reference wetlands" because of their unspoiled nature. (Note the nest of a great blue heron on the white-pine snag.)



## New Book by Marcia Bonta

AVAILABLE IN JUNE

Due in June is the third book in acclaimed naturalist Marcia Bonta's series on the seasons of a Pennsylvania mountain. As she did in *Appalachian Spring* and *Appalachian Autumn*, Marcia offers a day-by-day account of the natural life of one place — her 648-acre property on Brush Mountain.

In summer, Marcia watches the "waltzing" of a southern red-backed vole, the mating of eastern box turtles, and the stalking of a nest of house wrens by a black rat snake. She chronicles the life histories of fishers, woodchucks, jumping mice, and star-nosed moles, and she has frequent close encounters with black bears, eastern coyotes, red and gray foxes, raccoons, porcupines, white-tailed deer, and fox squirrels.

Along the way, Marcia explores such topics as how dragonflies mate, why butterflies have beautiful wings, the reproductive strategies of ferns, the medicinal uses of St. John's wort and black cohosh, and the breeding of American kestrels, sharp-shinned hawks, and tyrant flycatchers.

Summer is a time of "babies everywhere, wailing, peeping, crying for their parents, for food, for comfort, for the reassurance that their world will remain stable and safe and that they will mature in the goodness of time, each according to his or her own calendar," Marcia writes. In *Appalachian Summer*, Marcia's first grandchild spends her first summer on earth, and her growth is compared with that of the forest animals.

Another important event in this Appalachian summer is the disappearance of a local girl. As the mountain is thoroughly searched, Marcia poses questions about the safety of women in the woods. Do women stay out of the woods because they fear attack by men, or wild creatures and the unknown? Should they have such fears?

In her minute observations of one place, one season, Marcia lays bare the connections we retain to the natural world, which is, finally, our own.

Marcia Bonta is a freelance nature writer and the author of, in addition to her Appalachian seasons books, *Outbound Journeys in Pennsylvania*, *More Outbound Journeys in Pennsylvania*, *Women in the Field*, *American Women Afield* (editor), and *Escape to the Mountain*. She has written more than three hundred magazine articles for such publications as *Birder's World*, *Bird Watcher's Digest*, *Living Bird*, and *Hawk Mountain News*. She writes "Pennsylvania Outbound Journeys for the Family" for *Pennsylvania Wildlife* and "The Naturalist's Eye" for *Pennsylvania Game News*.

A past president of the JVAS and still a regular contributor to *The Gnatcatcher*, Marcia is a popular lecturer on nature and nature writing. ❖

236 pp. Clothbound, \$35. Paperbound, \$15.95.

## JVAS Education Chair Distributes Earth Day Letter to Area Students

### Juniata Valley Audubon Society

April 25, 1999

Dear Students:

Did you know that Thursday, April 22 was Earth Day? Did you celebrate it in your school? The Juniata Valley Audubon Society would like to remind you that one of the best ways to celebrate Earth Day is to remember the Three Rs: **Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle**, and to do these things every single day — not just one day a year.

Some ways that you can help do this follow:

1. **Drive less, walk and ride your bicycle more.**
2. **Buy Green** — use paper that is recycled, chlorine-free, or tree-free. Use phosphate-free detergent.
3. **Use fewer toxic chemicals** — especially pesticides.
4. **Conserve energy** — buy fuel-efficient automobiles, use energy-efficient light bulbs.
5. **Exercise your right to know.** Find out about the quality of your water, your proximity to toxic waste, what chemicals and air pollutants are in your community and how they get there.
6. **Volunteer** — support efforts to clean your schoolyard, a local roadside, or a nearby river or stream bank.

Remember, for us all to have a clean and beautiful environment, we all need to help make it that way. Everyone's efforts count! Do your part!

Sincerely,

/s/

Shirley Wagoner, for the  
Juniata Valley Audubon Society



## God's Dog

Once again my father had fallen. This time he had broken his hip and laid for hours on the cold April ground, calling for help. Luckily, his 87-year-old neighbor had glanced idly out of his window after the evening news and had seen my 85-year-old father lying on his lawn several hundred feet away.

The following morning I had a difficult time going on my usual morning walk, worried about Dad and wondering why he had broken his hip less than a year after he had fallen and broken his leg. But I forced myself outside and walked to one of three new benches our hunter friends had made for us. This one was on the Far Field Road.

I sat drinking my coffee and listening to a singing blue-headed vireo. Looking downslope into Roseberry Hollow, my mind was so busy with questions that I paid little attention to the scene around me.

What if Dad's neighbor had not gone to the window? How much longer could Dad live alone in his beloved country home? Would he survive his hip operation?

A slight movement to my right aroused me from my reverie. Coyote sensed me at the same moment that I sensed him. He was less than ten feet from the bench and had evidently been moseying along as inattentive to his surroundings as I had been to mine.

He was a magnificent, full-grown male who looked me fully in the face for several seconds be-

fore turning around and loping slowly away. I don't have a mystic bone in my body. Yet, when Coyote appeared so unexpectedly, I felt as if I had been blessed by an unseen hand. I remembered that many Native American tribes had venerated Coyote. The Crows called him "First Worker," creator of the earth and all living creatures, and the desert southwest tribes referred to him as "God's dog."

Our eastern coyote is larger and more beautiful than its western counterpart and looks like an untamed German shepherd. How can anyone kill a coyote for sport? It's like killing your pet dog. But then humans kill each other with gusto so why shouldn't they kill mere harmless animals?

I can understand killing animals for food or for pelts to keep you warm in cold climates like our primitive forebears did. But killing animals because they are *Other* is frighteningly akin to killing humans because they are different.

During the hours Dad had laid on the hard table of the emergency room, we kept him company. Despite his own pain, he spent much of the time la-

menting the barbarity in Kosovo. I marveled at his strong will to live and to understand man's inhumanity to man.

Dad came through his hip operation beautifully, and the prognosis for a complete recovery is excellent. Meanwhile, I have christened the Far Field Road bench "Coyote Bench" in honor of God's dog.

By Marcia Bonta



**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.**

## Songbird Presence Can Indicate Area's Ecological Health

Looking at the kinds of songbirds in a given area is a good way to assess that area's overall ecological health — and develop a report card to guide large-scale land use, say two researchers at Penn State's Cooperative Wetlands Center.

Robert Brooks, professor of wildlife and wetlands, and Timothy J. O'Connell, a graduate student in ecology, helped develop a value system for songbirds based on a set of ecological traits. They placed a higher value on species that rely on mature forests and complex food webs over species that thrive in artificially simplified environments like cities and towns. Brooks and O'Connell used this framework to rate the health of bird communities in

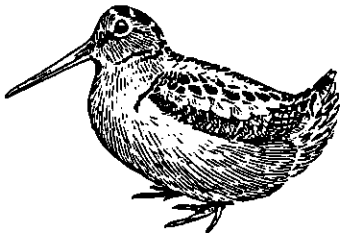
central Pennsylvania and extended the analysis to the ecological condition in the Mid-Atlantic Highlands, which includes all mountainous regions in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

A random sample of sites in this 68,000 square-mile region showed that sixteen percent of the region is in excellent condition; twenty-seven percent is good; thirty-six percent is fair; and twenty-one percent is in poor condition. Sites supporting excellent and good bird communities were at least eighty percent forested.

Brooks and O'Connell collaborated in the study with Laura E. Jackson of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. ❖

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