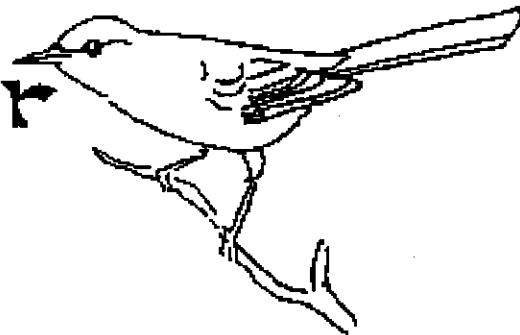


# The Gnatcatcher



## Newsletter of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society

P.O. Box 71, Tyrone, Pennsylvania 16686

Vol. 31, No. 4 — September 1999

### 'Day of Six Billion'

Can we sustain this momentum?

Recently I saw an article stating that the population of India had just reached one billion people. The article went on to explain that one in every six people on the planet is Indian. One in every six ... six times one billion. Does that mean there are six billion people on planet Earth? According to demographers, my math serves me well.

October 12, 1999 has been designated as the day to recognize that the world population will reach six billion — an unprecedented event. Never before has Earth seen so many humans, and we continue to add humans at an astounding rate:

- 1804 — 1 billion people on Earth
- 1927 — 2 billion (123 years later)
- 1960 — 3 billion (33 years later)
- 1974 — 4 billion (14 years later)
- 1987 — 5 billion (13 years later)
- 1999 — 6 billion (12 years later)

In the period leading up to the "Day of Six Billion," I encourage you to look around you and contemplate what a world human population of six billion would mean to the lives of all species on the planet. Look locally at our own traffic problems and water shortages; look nationally at wildlife and human conflicts and housing shortages; and look globally at world hunger, social unrest, disease, and deforestation. Can we sustain this momentum? ❖

— Marci Mowery, Coordinator  
Population and Habitat Campaign  
National Audubon Society

#### September Program

**"MONITORING SONGBIRDS — WHAT WE'VE LEARNED."**  
Chuck Yohn, director of the Raystown Field Station at Juniata College, will consider the possible causes of the declines in the numbers of songbirds, review how biologists are keeping track of songbird populations, and explain what different monitoring programs are — and are not — telling us.

7 P.M., Tuesday, Sept. 21 in the Visitor Center at Canoe Creek State Park.

#### September Field Trips

**BIKE TOUR OF SGL 166, Saturday, Sept. 18.** Steve Kleiner, Blair Co. land management officer for the Pa. Game Commission, will lead a bicycle tour of State Game Lands 166, exploring deciduous and coniferous woodlands, swamps, meadows, beaver dams, and marshes. Easy riding on a level, dirt road. Meet at the Beaver Dam Rd. parking lot at 10 A.M. Phone Dr. Stan Kotala at 946-8840 for further info.

**STONE MOUNTAIN HAWKWATCH, Sunday, Sept. 26.**

At the Stone Mountain hawkwatch platform on this date in late September you may observe the following species of migrating raptors: Cooper's, sharp-shinned, kestrel, broad-winged, osprey, red-tailed, red-shouldered, northern harrier, merlin, and bald eagle. Meet trip leader Dave Kyle (phone 643-6030) outside McDonald's Restaurant on Rt. 22, Huntingdon at 9 A.M. Bring binoculars, lunch, and sturdy shoes. Rain date — Sunday, Oct. 3.

#### Next Board Meeting

7 P.M., Tuesday, Oct. 6 at Shirley Wagoner's brand-new chalet at Blue Knob. Board members should bring a "heavy" hors d'oeuvre to share at 5 P.M. Phone Shirley at 643-4011 for directions. (Chalet phone number is 239-8147.)

## The Gnatcatcher

VOL. 31, NO. 4 — SEPTEMBER 1999

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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY  
Charlie Hoyer, Editor  
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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 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

Welcome to the fall season of JVAS programs and field trips. As accustomed, there will be three monthly programs/meetings and three field trips this fall. The annual Christmas Bird Count will serve as the December program, field trip, and fellowship gathering all rolled into one. The enclosed fall brochure gives the necessary details. Please note that the monthly programs/meetings will be held the third *Tuesday* this year (instead of Mondays) in the Visitor Center at Canoe Creek State Park.

There will be some very important conservation issues coming to the forefront this fall. Billed as "finding solutions to one of Pennsylvania's greatest ecological challenges," the Conference on Deer, September 24-26 in Harrisburg, will explore the impacts of white-tailed deer on the biodiversity and economy of Pennsylvania. The state legislature will be acting on Governor Ridge's Growing Greener initiatives, along with the Heritage 21 amendment that would expand funding for these initiatives. On the local front are highway projects including the I-99 extension, the Route 322 corridor, and improvements to Route 22. Details will be given as they become available.

Once again all JVAS committee chairs are filled with the recruitment of Sarah Miller as Conservation Chair. Please welcome Sarah and offer your support to her and to all committee chairs. The JVAS will become an influential organization when we all team together to support conservation and education issues.

See you September 21 at the first meeting!

*Terry Wentz*



**CONSERVATION**
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*By Sarah Miller*

## Juniata Wetland Monitoring Project Needs Volunteers

As your new Conservation Chair, I thought I'd introduce myself by telling you how I spent my summer vacation. After more than ten years as an environmental consultant — the last three sitting behind a desk pushing paper — I decided it was time for a change. So I traded in financial security for a chance to get back to what I truly love — field work!

This summer I served as a technical advisor in wetland plant identification for the Juniata Wetland Monitoring Project. The project is a two-year effort coordinated by the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy and the Penn State Cooperative Wetlands Center to assess the ecological condition of wetlands in the Juniata River watershed. Through the program a "report card" will be created to indicate the health of wetlands within the watershed. This information then will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of past, present, and future watershed planning and conservation efforts.

This summer's efforts focused on testing the field sampling protocol and training student volunteers in topographic surveying, soil sampling, and wetland plant identification. Approximately fifteen wetlands within the Tuscarora/Buffalo Creek sub-watershed were surveyed as part of the pilot study. Data collected this summer will be analyzed by the Cooperative Wetlands Center over the winter to refine and streamline sampling methods.

Although getting out in the field again was wonderful, the most rewarding part of the project for me was getting to work with the many talented and dedicated students from Penn State University, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, and Pennsylvania College of Technology who participated in this summer's efforts.

Next year, these same students will direct their own sampling teams when the project expands to

encompass wetlands throughout the watershed. As with the pilot study, teams will collect data on topography, soils, and plants in selected wetlands, but field sampling may also include macroinvertebrate and bird surveys.

The Juniata Wetland Monitoring Project eagerly needs volunteers for next summer to form sampling teams. I can't think of a better way for you to get involved in a project that will affect your watershed! No experience is necessary and training will be provided. Please phone Becky Albaugh, Project Director with the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy, at (814) 623-7900 Ext. 5 if you are interested in participating. ❖

## Fort Roberdeau Park Seeks Expansion

– To protect historic site from encroachment –

Visitors to Fort Roberdeau Park, in Sinking Valley, frequently remark on the authenticity of the historic site's setting. Unlike many other such areas, it's not surrounded by houses and shopping malls. The landscape here is little changed from Revolutionary War times.

In order to preserve the Fort's surroundings, the Fort Roberdeau Association has signed options to purchase more than 200 acres of field and forest adjacent to the site. The Association must raise the required funds within the next eighteen months or these lands will go on the general market. The rapid metastasis of the I-99 corridor ensures that — if not preserved now — the site will be spoiled forever. Its authenticity will have been lost.

The Fort's board of directors is exploring various grants to fund the purchase, but you can help by becoming a member of the Fort Roberdeau Association. Dues are \$10 per year for individuals, \$20 for families, and \$50 for patrons.

If you want to join, mail your check to The Fort Roberdeau Association, Fort Roberdeau, R.R. 3, Box 391, Altoona, PA 16601.

Thanks for your help! ❖

— Dr. Stan Kotala  
Elberta, Sinking Valley



## **Pa. Herpetological Atlas Blockbusting Sessions Produce Great Results**

More than 300 records were added to the Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas by this year's blockbusting events in the western ridge and valley region

**Athena Grele caresses  
a common garter snake.**

**Many thanks to all  
who participated!**

**Box turtle observed in  
State Game Lands 166.**

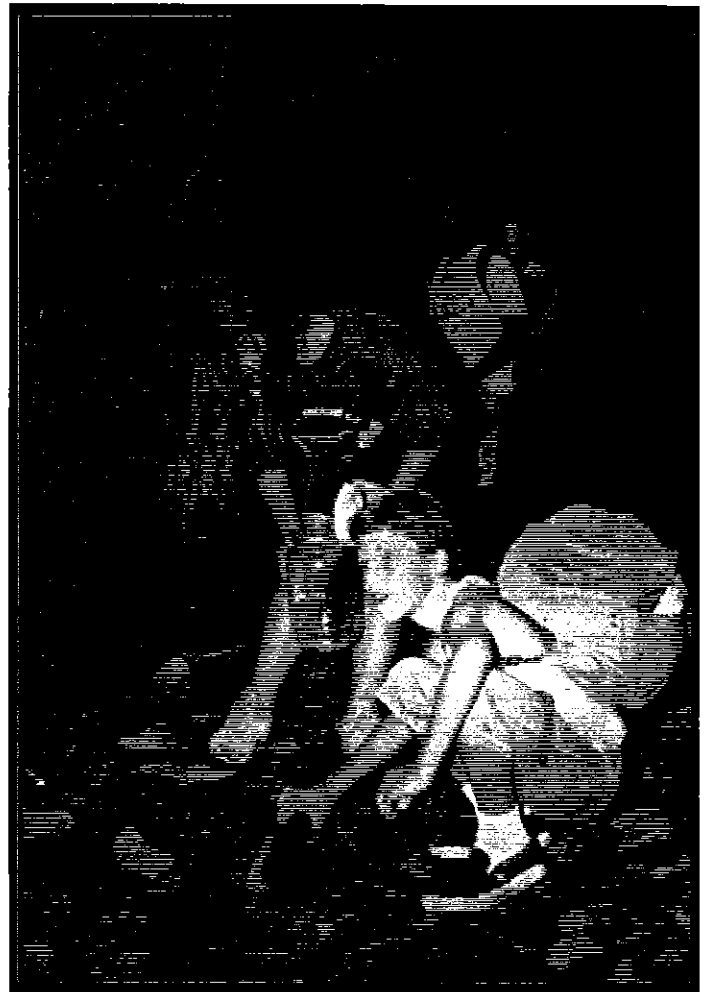


**Spotted salamander  
in SGL 166.**



**PHOTOS BY DR. STAN KOTALA**

**Atlassers survey Mary Ann's  
Creek in Canoe Creek State Park.  
Seven species of salamanders  
were found along the stream.**



## **Water Street Safety Improvement Project Wildlife Habitat Mitigation Project**

As you approach the U.S. Rt. 22 intersection at Water Street while driving south from Tyrone on Rt. 453, you may notice some trucks going on the right leg of the "Y" to make a left turn onto Rt. 22. The reason is that drivers who take the left leg cannot see the traffic coming from the west on Rt. 22. You also may have witnessed numerous accidents at this location. Do not despair. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) will be fixing this intersection soon.

The Water Street Safety Improvement Project is born. A partnership among PennDOT, the Federal Highway Administration, the Pennsylvania Game Commission, and Farm-Game Cooperator landowners is proposing to improve wildlife habitat and mitigate the loss of wildlife habitat due to reconstruction of the intersection.

The mitigation project will occur on five areas managed by the Game Commission in State Game Lands 118 and 166. An additional portion will be done on privately owned land known as Farm-Game Project Numbers 110, 111, and 206.

Landowners in these kinds of projects have long histories of participating in the Commission's public access programs. Through formal written agreements between property owners and the Commonwealth, landowners allow the public to use their lands for hunting, fishing, birdwatching, and other activities. These lands are located in Blair and Huntingdon Counties and are in the proximity of the Water Street Safety Improvement Project.

The mitigation project's goal is to offset upland habitat that will be lost as a result of the construction of the Water Street Safety Improvement Project at a cost substantially less than what would be expected using traditional PennDOT methods.

The proposed work plan includes the following wildlife habitat improvements:

- 8.7 miles of stream-bank fencing
- Establishment of 27 acres of native warm-season grasses
- 31 acres of field border-edge cuttings
- 450 nest structures for various wildlife species
- 500 tree and shrub seedlings
- Establishment of 10 acres of herbaceous openings

Similar projects in the state already have resulted in working partnerships between the Game Commission and local groups and agencies. When the public sees the enthusiastic support for this program by landowners and governmental bodies, it can only have a positive impact on other wildlife habitat programs.

If you live in Farm-Game Project Numbers 110, 111, or 206 and have received a letter from the Game Commission concerning the Water Street Wildlife Mitigation Project or would like additional information, contact the Commission's Southcentral Regional Office, Huntingdon, at (814) 643-1831. ♦

— Luis Moore, Altoona

## **Towers Exacting Terrible Tolls on Birds**

On an overcast night in Kansas last year, 10,000 migratory birds searched for the stars that have guided their species across thousands of miles for millennia, and thought they found them. They found instead the aircraft warning lights on several communications towers, flew instinctively toward them, and

perished, crashing into the towers and their guy-wires, the ground, and one another.

Freakish as that sounds, such incidents are becoming commonplace as America goes wireless. There are as many as 75,000 communications towers at least 200 feet high in the country. But with

## Enmeshed in Webs



leaf hangs suspended in mid-air, slowly revolving like meat on a spit. I look closer, unable to accept what seems an impossibility. Then I catch the shimmer of silken threads and realize the leaf has been caught in the long, anchoring lines that hold the central orb web of the spined micrathena in place.

Since mid-July these unique spiders have been the most abundant creatures I have seen in the woods. Unlike many spiders, the female spined micrathena is easy to identify. Her approximately four-tenths-of-an-inch-long abdomen is shaped like an inverted cone and has six or seven black-tipped spines on its hard, glossy, white upper side. So cumbersome does her abdomen appear that visitors to our mountain think it is a growth on top of the usual rounded spider abdomen. I tell them to look closer. Then we watch as she constructs her web, emitting silk from her black, teatlike spinneret on the underside of her abdomen. She reminded me of a French lace maker we once watched wielding her crochet hook.

*Micrathena gracilis* is a common orb weaver that lives only in large open spaces of North America's eastern deciduous forests. Her web is designed to capture a diversity of flying insects, but because she is relatively slow-moving and clumsy, taking more than three seconds to reach captured prey in her web, she ignores smaller, more abundant insects in

favor of larger, rarer insects that she first bites and then quickly wraps in silk, according to George W. Uetz and his students who studied this species.

Every summer I have seen a few of these spiders, but this summer their numbers have been legion. I dodge under and around them or I carefully dislodge an anchoring thread and move the whole web aside.

Walking through the woods is an exercise in spider-watching, and when I forget, I find myself wiping sticky silk from my face and arms. Sometimes I encounter three webs within fifteen feet; other times I can walk a couple hundred web-free feet. During a half-mile walk to the Far Field Road, I count twelve. Along the mile-and-a-quarter Black Gum Trail I tally twenty-three. After a while I am so focused on trying to avoid webs that I fail to see much else as I walk.

According to the late Reverend Doctor Henry C. McCook of Philadelphia, author of *American Spiders and Their Spinning Work*, Pennsylvania is a "spider paradise." Since spiders probably kill and eat more insects than all other insectivorous animals put together, I should probably continue my peaceful coexistence with them, remembering the old English rhyme, "If you wish to live and thrive, let the spider run alive." But after weeks of spider web evasive tactics, I'm beginning to understand why some folks develop arachnophobia or "fear of spiders." ❖



deregulation of the telecommunications industry and the blazing technology revolution, 100,000 more will be built in the next decade alone for digital televisions, cellular telephones, on-line computers, and other wireless devices. Meanwhile, the existing towers are killing as many as four million birds a year.

Federal wildlife officials and environmentalists say it's time to stop the "towerkill," as it's called. "We're seeing a precipitous rise in the construction of these towers, and the potential for an extraordinary increase in the mortality of these birds," says Al Manville, a wildlife biologist at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). "All 834 migratory bird

species are at risk, but especially the 300 species of Neotropical migrants [such as the wood thrush and the common nighthawk].”

Saving them will not be easy. Deficiencies in the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act make it tough to protect the birds. The USFWS lacks migratory bird specialists to document towerkills. Environmentalists have petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which regulates towers, to study towerkills nationwide. But the FCC says that's not its job. And the telecommunications industry is not exactly eager to embrace new and possibly costly tower requirements to protect the birds, even though a few sound and lighting solutions show promise. In the meantime, expect more

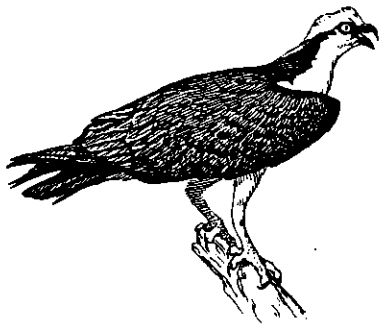
incidents like the one in Kansas, where, according to Gerald Winegrad, vice-president for policy at the American Bird Conservancy, so many birds died, “they had to take them out by the wheelbarrow-full.” ❖

— Robert Braile  
*Sports Afield*, August 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.**

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