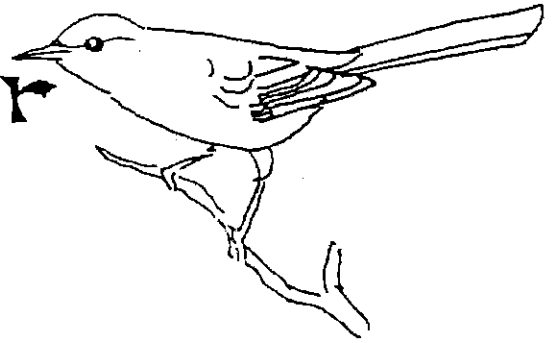


The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society

P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, Pennsylvania 16686

Vol. 33, No. 3 – April 2001

Birds Paying a Price For Global Sprawl

The following opinion piece by Audubon President John Flicker on population and habitat was run in the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* and subsequently was picked up for national distribution by Knight-Ridder Newspapers. This particular version of it ran in the *Bergen (N.J.) Record*.

— Cindy Dunn, State Director
Audubon Pennsylvania

For thousands of years, birds have been one of our most important early warning systems. Birds have predicted the change of seasons, the coming of storms, the presence of land at sea, and the rise of toxic levels of pollution in the food chain.

Now birds are telling us something is terribly wrong with the environment. More than fifty percent of migrant songbirds in vast sections of the United States are in decline.

In Pennsylvania, for example, populations of eastern wood-pewees, golden-winged warblers, blue grosbeaks, and wood thrushes have plummeted over the course of the last twenty years.

Across the nation, warblers are in decline, as are painted buntings, bobolinks, and dozens of other songbirds. Scientists now think the decline of these songbirds is due to habitat destruction — both overseas and in the United States — caused by rapid rates of human population growth.

Many of “our” songbirds spend four to nine months of the year in the tropical forests of Latin America and the Caribbean. These forests are being cut to the ground at record rates.

[Cont'd on page 4]

— Annual JVAS Spring Banquet —

Tuesday, April 24
Trinity United Methodist Church
533 Main St., Bellwood

\$12 per JVAS member; \$15 per nonmember
(Mail enclosed reservation form by April 20)

6 P.M. — Social hour

6:30 P.M. — Delicious family-style roast beef and turkey dinner with all the trimmings

Program by Scott Weidensaul

“LIVING ON THE WIND”

Internationally known author Scott Weidensaul, of Schuylkill Haven, Pa. will present an enchanting program based on his Pulitzer-finalist work, *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere With Migratory Birds*. This wonderful slide and lecture program will explore the mysteries of bird migration and the many challenges that our feathered friends face on their heroic migrations. The program ranges from the Aleutians in Alaska and the frozen edge of Hudson Bay, Canada through the rain forests of Central and South America to the grass-covered pampas of Argentina.

♦ ♦ ♦

— May Field Trip —

TREE WALK ON THE LOWER TRAIL. Arborist David Despot will lead a walk identifying trees and shrubs on the Lower Trail starting at the Williamsburg Trailhead. This is a joint field trip with members of the Rails-To-Trails of Blair County. For more information, phone JVAS Historian Terry Wentz at 692-4224.

1 P.M., Saturday, May 12. Meet in the parking lot at the Williamsburg Trailhead.

The Gnatcatcher

VOL. 33, NO. 3 — APRIL 2001

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

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON
Charlie Hoyer, Editor
P.O. Box 32
Tyrone, PA 16686-0032

The Juniata Valley Audubon Society (JVAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society serving members in all of Blair and Bedford Counties, and portions of Cambria, Centre, Clearfield, Fulton, and Huntingdon 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, September, October, and November at 7:30 P.M. (A business meeting is at 7 o'clock.) The public is invited to attend.

Officers

President Charlie Hoyer 684-7376
<charma@nb.net>
Vice-President Cindy Moore 946-9441
<lmoore8227@aol.com>
Secretary Eugene Zielinski 353-8212
<eez55@earthlink.net>
Treasurer Marge Hoyer 684-7376
<charma@nb.net>

Committee Chairs

Membership Alice Goodlin 946-0150
<guttgirl2@yahoo.com>
Programs Cindy Moore (see above)
Conservation Sarah J. Miller 684-2226
<garynsarah@prodigy.net>
Field Trips Janet Huber 942-5752
<avianao@aol.com>
Publications
& Publicity Charlie Hoyer (see above)
Education Shirley Wagoner 643-4011
<swagoner@vicon.net>
Hospitality Barb Corle 276-3428
<bnbcorle@yellowbananas.com>
Historian Terry Wentz 692-4224
<dtw1999@home.com>

Directors

Fund-raising Director Anne Borland 695-9718
Director of Ornithology Debora Wentz 692-4224
<dtw1999@home.com>
Director-at-Large Dave Kyler 643-6030
<kylerdw@vicon.net>

From the Gnatcatcher's Nest

We're all indebted to Cindy Moore and Marge Hoyer, who were reelected for two-year terms as JVAS Vice President and Treasurer, respectively, at the March membership meeting. This month Marge will start her fifth term as Treasurer.

Cindy, who has been serving a dual role — as Programs Chair and Membership Chair — since September 2000 is pleased to know that Alice Goodlin has agreed to chair the Membership Committee. We thank Alice for taking on this position, which for years hasn't been properly managed in the aspects of conducting membership campaigns to enroll new members and endeavoring to retain those members who fall behind in dues payment. We're confident that Alice's undertaking will benefit the Chapter now that recruiting and keeping Audubon members is now more important than ever.

On another note, no bird lover should miss the opportunity to hear masterful nature writer Scott Weidensaul speak at the 2001 JVAS Spring Banquet on Tuesday evening, April 24 (see box on the first page). He'll present a slide show/talk about the truly astonishing phenomenon of bird migration in the western hemisphere. It will be an unforgettable evening!

Charlie

If you're reading this newsletter but are not an Audubon member, you're invited to join by mailing the coupon to:

Juniata Valley Audubon Society
Alice Goodlin, Membership Chair
R.R. 3, Box 127
Altoona, PA 16601-9207

You'll receive the bimonthly *Audubon* magazine, each one filled with superb nature photography and in-depth reporting on environmental issues. You'll also receive Juniata Valley Audubon's newsletter, *The Gnatcatcher*, containing articles on local conservation topics and nature themes.



AUDUBON Membership Application

- YES, I want to join the Juniata Valley Audubon Society and the National Audubon Society at the special Introductory Rate of \$20.
- As a senior citizen or student, I'm eligible to join for only \$15.

My \$ _____ check, payable to Audubon, is enclosed.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ PA _____

7XCH U03

CONSERVATION

O
R
N
E
R

By Sarah J. Miller

Senate Considering Regulation of ATVs

The Pennsylvania General Assembly presently is considering legislation that would regulate all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in Pennsylvania. HB154 has passed in the house and has now moved on to the Senate Transportation Committee, and a companion bill, SB476 — dealing with liability insurance and penalties — has been introduced in the Senate.

The destruction caused by ATVs to public lands has been well-documented. These studies have shown that ATVs contribute substantially to air, water, and soil pollution. ATVs cause substantial erosion of the soils on which they travel and interfere with hydrologic flows and nutrient cycling. They also disrupt nesting and foraging birds and small mammals and fragment large, forested areas. Unlike passive forms of recreation such as hiking, nature study, and bird watching, riding ATVs is a loud and obtrusive sport. This kind of recreation can only take place to the *exclusion* of all other kinds of recreation on our state lands.

The two bills now in the Senate will do much to protect our state parks and forests from the destruction of ATVs. HB154 would require ATV owners to register with the state and display a registration plate (not the current sticker) to improve ability to report violations. Under the bill, ATV riders would be required to carry liability insurance. HB154 also increases fines for violators and allows local governments to keep fine and penalty money for prosecuting ATV violators. But perhaps the most important part of the bill is a grant program to establish ATV trails on private lands and relieve the pressure from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to provide access on our public lands.

SB476 would provide for \$500 fines if the owner does not have liability insurance. A second offense would result in forfeiture of the ATV.

Although both bills were the result of negotiation and compromise among all interested parties, it

appears that some ATV interests are lobbying to weaken the bills. Lawmakers need to hear from our side! Please contact your senators and ask that HB154 and SB476 be passed without any weakening amendments. ❖

Lil' J Cleanup Will Serve as Earth Day Project for JVAS Members and Others

By Gary Miller

The Blair and Huntingdon Chapters of PA CleanWays, in cooperation with PennDOT's "Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful" program and America Outdoors' "National River Cleanup Week," will conduct a cleanup of litter and dumped areas along the Little Juniata River between Tyrone and the Grier School.

The cleanup is scheduled for Saturday, Apr. 28, beginning at 9 A.M. Volunteers will meet in the parking lot of the VFW Post, on 10th St. just south of Pennsylvania Ave., in Tyrone and disperse from there.

Along with members of Juniata Valley Audubon, members of the Rotary Club of Tyrone, the Women's Club of Tyrone, and the Little Juniata River Association also will be participating; however, more volunteers are needed. If you or someone you know will help out, contact Gary Miller at 684-2226 or e-mail him at <garynsarah@prodigy.net>.

If you're concerned about illegal dumping and littering of our roads, trails, and other scenic areas why don't you and a friend join PA CleanWays of Blair County and help do something about it!

To find out more about PA CleanWays and how you can help fight unsightly dumping and littering, come to the public information meeting on Monday, April 23 from 7 to 8 P.M. in the theater of the Altoona Public Library. Blair Chapter staff and volunteers will show slides highlighting PA CleanWays history and accomplishments and explain local chapter goals and future activities. You also can join us at our chapter meetings held on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 6:30 P.M. in the basement conference room of the Blair County Courthouse, in Hollidaysburg. ❖

... **Birds paying a price** [Cont'd from first page]

In Central America, for example, more than forty percent of the forest canopy has been destroyed in the last thirty years as the population of that region has doubled.

Here in the United States, where we are adding more than two million people a year to our own population, suburban sprawl consumes in excess of 500,000 acres of forest and farmland per year — more than twenty million acres since 1980.

To put it another way, the United States is adding a population larger than the total of Philadelphia, Camden, N.J., Wilmington, Del., and Trenton, N.J. every year, while suburban sprawl is consuming an area five times larger than the city limits of Philadelphia and Camden combined.

In short, whether the birds are flying north or south, they are being hammered by rapid rates of population growth. But it's not just the birds. What's happening to birds in the United States is happening to wildlife habitat all over the world — to tigers and elephants in Asia, to birds and chimpanzees in Africa, to jaguars and parrots in South America.

And while many of the world's creatures are in peril now, the real trouble lies ahead. Across the globe, more than a billion teenagers are now entering their reproductive years, the largest cluster of teenagers in world history.

The choices these young people make in the next decade will determine the fate of our natural world for generations to come. If birthrates remain at current levels, demographers say the world will add more people in the next fifty years than it has in the previous 500,000 years.

The good news is that most of these young people want to do the right thing: They want to have smaller families. Across vast parts of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, however, the kind of basic family planning services that you and I take for granted are simply unavailable: The people are too poor, family planning options are not understood, and access to birth control is limited or non-existent.

One reason for this is that the United States has done so little to help. While world population has

climbed sixty percent since 1970, U.S. family planning assistance, as a percent of total federal budget outlays, has declined by forty percent.

And while we joined with 179 other nations in Cairo in 1994 in pledging specific support for international family planning efforts, the United States actually has made good on less than one-third of that commitment.

Population growth is about more than the environment, of course. It's also about dizzying rates of infant and maternal mortality, crushing unemployment rates, and rising levels of social and economic instability in the developing world.

Most experts agree that no single investment in human health, environmental protection, or political stability can ever match investments made in international family planning.

Yet, here in the United States we continue to act as if population growth never comes home to roost. The birds tell us a different story, however.

They remind us that long before there were multinational corporations or fiber-optic cables, birds connected us to the larger world and served as barometers of environmental health.

Now, like a canary in the coal mine, they warn us of the price we may yet pay, in our own backyard, for failing to adequately fund family-planning services in the developing world. ❖

E-mail comments relating to Flicker's piece (from the Audubon PA listserv):

• *"Population is the problem from which we as a society have collectively averted our gaze. It's the problem that has the power to singly exterminate all animal life even if pollution and pesticides and all other such problems were solved. I'm surprised and encouraged that it was picked up by the popular press, but it is certain that nothing will be done during this presidency, and in fact, ground undoubtedly will be lost.*

"There seems little doubt now that we'll live to see the first wave of extinctions. There are whole ecosystems in decline now awaiting only the fall of a keystone species to extinguish a whole web of interdependent life from microorganisms up to animals.

"When we're old, instead of being able to take our grandchildren to see the rarities of our day, they will sit at our feet and say things like, 'Tell us again about the

red-cockaded woodpecker,' and, 'You mean you actually saw a cerulean warbler alive!'" — Mark Williams

♦ *"As birders we understand . . . but it seems the general public is so preoccupied and hasn't a clue mostly until it will be too late. John Ivanko wrote a book, The Least Imperfect Path : A Global Journal for the Future, dealing with this subject and tells how even something as simple as Coca-Cola can change the way a culture in a remote region can respond. People come there and want these things, and it has a chain effect. Maybe somebody could explain this better than I'm doing.*

"I find that when I'm talking to people about blue-birds and other cavity-nesters, which is my hobby and interest, they are so uninformed about what they see every day and have no idea about what they see. Education seems to be the key. When you do tell people in everyday life, they think you are some kind of bird weirdo. I just keep talking. Some will get it." — Kathy Clark

♦ *"Another essential read on the misguided philosophy of 'growth forever' is Shoveling Fuel for a Runaway Train, by Brian Czech. Czech, a conservation biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, argues, as other progressive economists are, that we must transform our economy into one that revolves around 'the steady state revolution.' Shoveling Fuel is essential (and quite humorous) reading for anyone who wants to understand the connection between 'growth' and the rapidly accelerating loss of wild places, wildlife habitat, and wild life. Shoveling Fuel is available through the various Internet booksellers. It's published by the University of California Press."*

— Alan Gregory

♦ *"Family therapists have a term — 'there's an elephant in the living room' syndrome. This refers to a family in total denial about a massive problem. It appears to me that the whole world, with the exception of China and India, is in total denial about the massive problem of overpopulation. I have yet to hear a politician address the issue.*

"Perhaps birders in northern Pennsylvania have not personally been affected yet, but those of us in southeastern Pa. and I suspect southwestern Pa. are hard hit by loss of habitat and constant 'growth.'

"Poor birds, poor us." — Mari Dickson

♦ *"I was recently at a native plant conference and heard the expression: 'Your end of the lifeboat is sinking.' I think this can apply to human overpopulation problems, too."*

— Mary Jane Seipler

Herp Hunt at PGSP

A search for amphibians and reptiles will take place at Prince Gallitzin State Park on Saturday, Apr. 28 from 10 A.M. till 4 P.M. It will be followed by dinner in one of the state park cabins.

Meet at cabin #8 in the park at 10 A.M. Pack a lunch. Dinner will be provided.

For more information, phone guide Dr. Stan Kotala at 946-8840 ❖



GRAY TREEFROG

Report Card on Sprawl

The Sierra Club, persuaded that sprawl has become a principal form of environmental degradation, has published a series of reports on the subject. One of these, titled, "Smart Choices or Sprawling Growth: The Good, Bad, and the Poorly Zoned, from Alabama to Wyoming," surveys the quality of development patterns in each of the fifty states. Log onto the World Wide Web at < www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/50statesurvey > . ❖

Bring your BiLo Foods and Riverside Markets cash register tapes to the JVAS Spring Banquet for Fund-raising Director Anne Borland. Anne redeems the tapes for CASH for Juniata Valley Audubon.

2001 Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology Meeting To Be Held in Central Pennsylvania

By Katrina Knight, PSO Vice President

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology's annual meeting for 2001 will take place at the Ramada Inn in State College on May 18-20.

Everyone is welcome, whether you're a beginner or an experienced birder or even if not a member of the PSO.

Friday evening will consist of registration, a social, and a business meeting. Field trips are scheduled for Saturday and Sunday mornings. A talk session will be on Saturday afternoon followed by a buffet-style banquet with Scott Weidensaul as the featured speaker.

One field trip will be a combination of natural areas in Rothrock State Forest (Detweiler Run, Bear Meadows, and Alan Seeger). These areas feature the usual red-eyed vireos and ovenbirds, but also will provide a nice mixture of northern and southern species: Canada, hooded, Blackburnian, black-throated blue, and black-and-white warblers, Louisiana waterthrush, winter wren, veery, hermit and wood thrushes, blue-headed vireo, Acadian flycatcher, brown creeper, pileated woodpecker, broad-winged hawk, and common raven. These destinations feature modest patches of old-growth trees in Detweiler Run and Alan Seeger, and bog habitat at Bear Meadows that is found more commonly farther north. This trip will involve a 1.5-mile walk on a hiking trail and old road in Detweiler Run.

A trip to Black Moshannon State Park will include many of the same species as the Detweiler trip, but the emphasis will be even more on the northern species because the park is situated up on the Allegheny Plateau. An extensive bog/lake is a major feature of the park, with extensive trails.

An alternate Saturday trip will be to the "Barrens," a mosaic of forest in various successional stages — site of a Game Commission project on ruffed grouse habitat. These gamelands, a favorite location for birders during migration, feature healthy populations of golden-winged warblers and whip-poor-wills as well as woodcock, wood thrush, and

chestnut-sided and other warblers.

For those who may not care to do much walking, a mostly auto-based trip on Saturday will be to Bald Eagle State Park. Quite different from the forest trips described above, the park features a large lake, open spaces, and brushy fields that contain early successional species possibly including yellow-breasted chat, willow flycatcher, and golden-winged, blue-winged, and prairie warblers.

A Sunday morning trip will be to the Lower Trail, a Rails-to-Trails project that follows the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River through a gap in Tussey Mountain. It's easy walking through a deep valley that holds a healthy population of cerulean warblers as well as an isolated pocket of yellow-throated warblers. Also breeding there are warbling and yellow-throated vireos, Acadian flycatchers, blue-gray gnatcatchers, American redstarts, rose-breasted grosbeaks, and Baltimore orioles.

The Saturday afternoon talks will consist of "Breeding Birds of Central Pennsylvania Natural Areas" — Nick Bolgiano and Greg Grove; "Breeding Biology of the Louisiana Waterthrush in Pennsylvania" — Tim O'Connell; "Birds in Forested Regions: Landscape Effects on Community Structure" — Amanda Rodewald; and "Bird Identification/PORC" — Matt Sharp and Paul Hess.

The banquet will be a buffet-style dinner featuring prime rib, stuffed chicken, and glazed ham. A vegetarian meal will be available. After dinner, Scott Weidensaul will speak about "Mountains of the Heart" — the Appalachians.

The deadline for registration is April 30, and the deadline to reserve a discounted room at the Ramada Inn is April 18. So make your plans now.

To receive a registration form and/or more information, call Shonah Hunter at (570) 893-2062 or via e-mail at <shunter@lhup.edu>. If you'd like to know more about the PSO or become a member, e-mail me at <kknight@epix.net> or by snail-mail at P.O. Box 6802, Wyomissing, PA 19610. ❖

Spring at Last!



hat a blessing those first warm days of April were. After a winter that started too soon and went on way too long, I had begun to think that spring would never come.

The usual harbingers had arrived more or less on schedule despite March's bitter wind and cold. While snowshoeing down First Field on March 6, I saw the first turkey vulture gliding past above Sapsucker Ridge.

A foolhardy eastern phoebe hawked insects from the side of the barn at midday on March 12 and then disappeared for the next frigid week. That same day the last wedge of tundra swans completed their migration over the mountain, a flight that had begun four days earlier.

The following day thick fog enveloped the mountain as a misty rain fell — a perfect red-winged blackbird day. Red-wings rarely nest here, but they always stop over on cold, foggy March mornings, their disembodied songs and calls reminding us that spring is on its way.

A silent flyover occurred on March 18. Had I not looked up at a shadow passing across the snow-covered Far Field, I never would have spotted a flock of ring-billed gulls circling low, their black-accented, white undersides shining like apparitions against the blue sky.

A single golden-rimmed mourning cloak butterfly fluttered in the afternoon light of March 19, and we heard the "peenting" of an American woodcock, followed by the whistling of his wings during his courtship flight over First Field, in March 23rd's deepening dusk.

The first field sparrow added his spiraling, liquid song to the dawn chorus of titmice, chickadees, Carolina wrens, song sparrows, cardinals, and robins on March 28. All the other birds had wintered over, including the robins, but I had marveled at those hardy singers that had sung lustily on 25-degree mornings most of the month. I had also enjoyed the singing of juncos and tree sparrows — winter residents that were tuning their pipes before heading north.

An April-fool towhee spent the cold night tucked into the guest house portico, and the next day his "toe-hee" punctuated the morning songfest. He, at least, was too sensible to sing "drink your tea," even

By Marcia Bonta



though drinking hot tea was exactly what I did to survive the unseasonable cold.

At last the first true spring day dawned on April 4. A hard frost that had whitened the ground quickly dissipated in the bright sunlight, billowing like smoke from our fields, as I sat at the base of Big Tree Trail listening to goldfinches singing in the trees above me. Then a pair of pileated woodpeckers called back and forth, one higher pitched than the other, before the male began his reverberating drumbeats.

I climbed to the top of Sapsucker Ridge and watched a pair of downies on a tree branch. The female was foraging in a business-as-usual fashion. The male followed directly behind her but looked as if he had more on his mind than food. Then a titmouse landed on a nearby tree and sang his ringing "peter-peter!" over and over.

Wood frogs called in the pond. The first crocus bloomed in the lawn. The last tree sparrow sang in the underbrush.

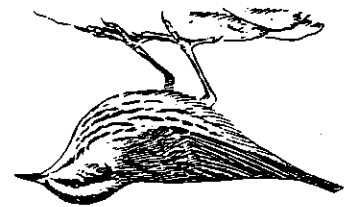
The next day was just as warm and lovely, and the yellow disks of coltsfoot opened along our road. I also spent some quality time watching six male wood frogs calling and swimming in the slurry of green algae that covers our pond, while phoebes

called in the distance.

Our granddaughter Eva spotted the first orange-and-black Compton's tortoiseshell butterfly flitting erratically in front of us as we walked up the haul road in the ten-year-old clear-cut. Later, we sat on the veranda, basking in the afternoon sun, and watched a female northern harrier flying a few feet above First Field. She coursed back and forth several times, giving us a front seat look at the white spotlight above her long, banded tail, before continuing her migration.

Those April days we were outside from dawn until dusk, cherishing the warmth and light, and confident that at last spring had truly come to Brush Mountain. ❖

PRINTED BY WICK COPY CENTER, 503 E. PLANK RD., ALTOONA



Junia Valley Audubon Society
P.O. Box 32
Tyrone, PA 16686-0032

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Altoona, Pa.
Permit No. 238