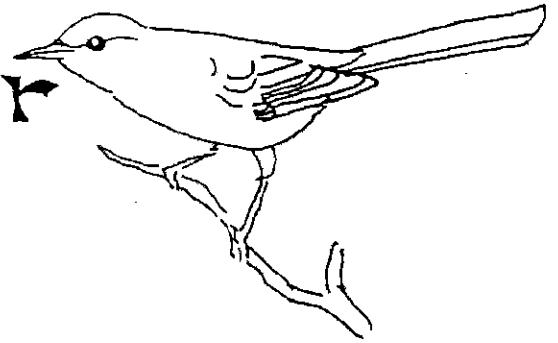


The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society

P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, Pennsylvania 16686

Vol. 33, No. 4 – May/June 2001

JVAS Presents 2001 Conservation Award to Joe Gurekovich

At the Annual Spring Banquet of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society held last month, the 2001 Juniata Valley Audubon Conservation Award was presented to a man whose life has been characterized by service to the community: Joseph P. Gurekovich.

From his tour of duty with the U.S. Marine Corps in the Pacific Theatre of Operations during World War II to his leadership role in conserving Elk Hollow, Joe always has been selflessly devoted to defending and promoting all that is good — often against odds that would cripple a lesser man.

The Society feels that Joe merits the Conservation Award because he took upon himself the monumental task of cleaning up one-half mile of land along Elk Run near Ironville. This land, known as the California Quarries, had been used as a dumping ground for trash. When the land came up for sale in 1996, he purchased it with the intention of removing the junk and trash and creating a nature preserve.

It should come as no surprise to those who know him, that this mission to end the abuse of the land and water has been a huge success. With the help of family and friends, the land once again is a haven for wildlife — as it had been when he was a child.

In addition, Joe led the Adopt-A-Highway project along the road that bisects the property. He has shown, by example, what it means to be a conservationist.

Conservation Chair Mark Henry said, in presenting the award, “It’s with great pleasure that we present the first Juniata Valley Audubon Conservation Award of the new millennium to someone who has unselfishly served the community for so long — a true American hero, Joseph P. Gurekovich!” ❖

— May Program —

“BIRDS AND HIGHWAYS IN PENNSYLVANIA.” Highways are a fact of life in our modern society. They move people and goods, and they help drive our economy. The placement and the need for more highways always has been a subject for much discussion. Audubon PA President Cermen Santasania will focus on the effects of highway placement on biodiversity in Pennsylvania. He’ll discuss the types and causes of habitat fragmentation and how they affect biodiversity.

7 P.M., Tuesday, May 15 in the Visitor Center at Canoe Creek State Park.

— 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.

— June Picnic —

JVAS PICNIC. A season-ending, covered-dish picnic will be held at Pavilion No. 2 in Canoe Creek State Park.

Bring your own eating utensils!

Fellowship and a nature walk will highlight the evening. Please phone Cindy Moore at 946-9941 or send an e-mail message to her at <lmoore8227@aol.com> and let her know what kind of victuals you’re bringing.

6 P.M., Tuesday, June 19 at CCSP.

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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.

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From the Gnatcatcher's Nest

First off, I'd like to: (1) thank Sarah Miller for her efforts in serving as JVAS Conservation Chair for the past year and a half, and (2) welcome Mark Henry, of Spring Mills, to this important post.

In my message to you a year ago I had indicated that I aspired to stimulate those of the JVAS membership who had not attended any of our program meetings. I'm sure those of you who came to hear Greg Grove, Dave Kyler & Gene Zielinski, Jerry McWilliams, Daniel Edelstein, and Scott Weidensaul appreciated our lineup of stellar speakers. On Tuesday, May 15 we'll have our last program of the season: "Birds and Highways in Pennsylvania," to be given by Audubon PA President Carmen Santasania. Our final field trip, a tree walk on the Lower Trail, will be a joint outing on Saturday, May 12 with members of the Rails-To-Trails of Blair County. And don't forget the JVAS picnic at Canoe Creek State Park on June 19. (See the box on the first page for descriptions of these activities.)

Juniata Valley Audubon's quality programs and field trips will resume in September. To all of you, including those who still haven't taken advantage of your Audubon membership, I'll see you in September. Have a great summer!

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 _____

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CONSERVATION
ORDER
By Mark Henry
**Unnecessary Shopping
Center Planned for Forest**

In a recent conversation with the Army Corps of Engineers, it was learned that a developer is planning to build a mall (Logantown Center) between the 17th Street and the Frankstown Road exits of Interstate Route 99 near Altoona.

According to information received from the Corps, the property is to be developed in three phases, totaling 329 acres. There are 44 separate wetlands (totaling more than 4 acres) and 11 unnamed tributaries that would be eliminated by the development. Eventually, the project will extend from I-99 to the top of Brush Mountain.

A couple of thoughts on this kind of development. First, why does the Altoona area need another mall? There's a lot of existing retail stores already in the Altoona area, including the Logan Valley Mall. And, after checking population figures for Blair County, the area's population has remained pretty much the same for the past 10 years, so there can't be that much new demand for more shopping.

However, the developer claims that a few thousand jobs will be created. Well, the way I figure it, when a significant number of stores already in business go out of business because of this new mall, then the people out of work can apply for jobs in the new mall. The net result: few, if any, new jobs and a lot of empty retail space left in existing shopping areas. Is this the kind of development the people of the Altoona area want?

Further, from a natural resource viewpoint, why not build in areas that already have fragmented habitat (existing commercial areas) and save the unfragmented habitat. Remember that the construction of I-99 has destroyed more than 9000 acres of unbroken forest, spring seeps, and wetlands. And in most areas, there was a perfectly good alternative!

How much more do we want to lose — especially for unnecessary projects that really won't benefit the community?

JVAS members who agree that we don't want to lose more interior forest habitat, spring seeps, and wetlands for unnecessary shopping malls, please write the District Engineer, Baltimore District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, P.O. Box 1715, Baltimore, MD 21203 and the PA Department of Environmental Protection, Southcentral District Office, 909 Elmerton Ave. 2nd Floor, Harrisburg, PA 17110. ❖



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 Juniata Valley Audubon.



Joe Gurekovich, holding his 2001 JVAS Conservation Award plaque, is flanked by his daughters, Josie Reese and Judy Woodring, and JVAS Conservation Chair Mark Henry.

Bulldozers in Bear Meadows?

By David Bonta

A few days before Earth Day, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation released the results of a workshop held in State College on February 20 with the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) of the South Central Centre County Transportation Study (SCCCTS). According to an environmental consultant for PennDOT, Jen Granger, this study represents a whole new approach for PennDOT, emphasizing public input at every stage of the project. Accordingly, no suggestion offered up by any member of the CAC — which included such average, local folks as a retired state senator, three mayors, and a representative from a wealthy homeowners association — was too imaginative or too stupid to be ignored. “Be part of the solution!” urged the SCCCTS brochure. The problem, nowhere clearly spelled out, seems to be “developing transportation infrastructures to keep pace with projected growth rates for the Centre region” — or so Ms. Granger thought when I asked her about this slight discrepancy. “A Needs Report is available at the office if you really want to read it, but it’s *highly* technical.”

Among the so-called Preliminary Solutions revealed to the general public in meetings on April 16 and 17 are a series of proposals for new highways. Several of these — they remain quite vague at this point — would take Rt. 322 right through the heart of Rothrock State Forest. In an effort to eliminate the dreaded “missing link” — that portion of 322 between Boalsburg and Potters Mills where it narrows to two lanes — a limited-access cutoff is envisioned, diverging from the existing road (heading west) either at Potters Mills or, more drastically, at the Laurel Run Reservoir in the middle of the Seven Mountains.

In the latter scenario, Penn Roosevelt State Park, Detweiler Run Natural Area, Bear Meadows Natural Area, and the Thickhead Wild Area all fall perilously close to, if not directly athwart, the path of the highway. With a Potters Mills cutoff, Colyer Lake, as well as the Thickhead and Bear Meadows, lie right in harm’s way.

Many *Gnatcatcher* readers are aware of the immense biological diversity of Bear Meadows — home to rare orchids, nesting grounds for sixteen species of warblers — and Detweiler Run, widely considered the finest tract of old-growth hemlock-pine forest in central Pennsylvania. These are not just priceless natural refugia, but spots of great beauty as well.

The Thickhead surrounds both these state forest natural areas and two others as well, Alan Seeger and Big Flat Laurel (Keith Springs): altogether, an expanse of near-wilderness valuable in terms of its size alone, especially for many of our Neotropical migrant bird species that require such large, unbroken tracts. Penn Roosevelt is a piece of American history integral to the evolution of Rothrock State Forest: an old CCC camp turned into a sleepy little state park. Colyer Lake, as a rare expanse of open water, is a favorite destination for water birds and, of course, for birders — it’s one of the main reasons the State College Bird Club regularly out-competes the JVAS on the Christmas Bird Count.

Now the first thing they’ll tell you at the SCCCTS office is, “We just want to put *all* the possibilities on the table, right up front, for people to dismiss as they may.” And they’ll helpfully point out the section of Pennsylvania law that expressly forbids new highway construction in state forests (unless there’s no alternative). But as State College birder Nick Bolgiano points out, “PennDOT operates by placing roads where there is the smallest number of vocal opponents.” I also don’t think it’s inappropriate to ask why, in a democracy, a state agency should mount public relations campaigns, though sadly this has become a standard practice — particularly with state highway departments nationwide.

Finally, a lot of the SCCCTS material I’ve examined strikes me as, at best, seriously misleading, beginning with a bizarre notion of land-use planning that leaves most of the state forest land discussed here off their planning maps and out of their preliminary environmental impact study altogether! A more eloquent example of PennDOT’s reductionist, people-centered approach hardly could be found.

What can we do? First, we can take them at their word and provide the public input that they say they want. According to Ms. Granger, PennDOT plans to spend the next six months “studying all the non-traditional ideas to see if any of them would really help address the problems identified in our Needs Report.” These include: no highways, various mass-transit and railway construction proposals, better management of sprawl, and the like. Other alternatives to new highways fall under the Traditional Ideas heading, includ-

[*Cont’d on page 6*]

Turtle Woods Wildflower Sanctuary

I never should have taken my husband Bruce to see Latham's Acre. Located on top of Dividing Ridge in southeastern McKean County, it was like stepping into a lost world, one that was fenced to keep out the deer back in 1949 by Roger Latham and Stan Forbes.

Outside the fence, the 2300-foot mountaintop supported a forest understory of hay-scented ferns, striped maples, and a few white violets. Inside the fence the vegetation was so dense that we barely could see from one end of the acre to the other.

Lush beds of Canada mayflower, Solomon's seal, round-leaved violets, partridgeberry, white baneberry, Indian cucumber-root, red and painted trilliums, and jack-in-the-pulpits blanketed the forest floor.

Alternate-leaved dogwood and red elderberry shrubs, as well as tree saplings of black birch, sugar maple, shadbush, black cherry, and American beech, filled in the understory. The middle canopy, where most of our Neotropical migrant songbirds nest and feed, was especially impressive. We already had a little experience with fencing out deer to see what would grow on top of our mountaintop. Back in the spring of 1995, Bruce and our son Dave had erected a 20×20-foot enclosure along our Far Field Road. In the fall of 1998 we noticed new plants inside the enclosure on the forest floor. A couple large Solomon's seals displayed deep blue berries amid a thick blanket of Canada mayflower leaves. This spring that small enclosure has a lush carpet of deep green Canada mayflower leaves and at least a dozen Solomon's seals.

By the time those plants were up, though, Bruce had already fulfilled his dream of erecting a three-acre enclosure in the Magic Place, with the help of

our son Dave, Gary Miller, and seven of our hunters. This state-of-the-art, eight-foot-high enclosure, has sturdy steel posts and a wire fence that took hundreds of man-hours to erect. Most of the work was done during the cold, damp days of late March and early April. The day after the three gates were finished, a dead tree fell across the fence, so Bruce and Dave had more work to fix it up again.

My job was to start monitoring the spring wildflowers. I didn't find many. A few aliens — garlic mustard, lady's thumb, rough-fruited cinquefoil, and gill-over-the-ground — and a few natives — Solomon's seal, smooth yellow violet, common blue

By Marcia Bonta



violet, and one small colony of mayapples. Most of the understory is bare except for a few red maple seedlings, hundreds of striped maple seedlings, and several areas of lowbush blueberries. The middle canopy is dominated by witch hazel. A few days ago I sat on Turtle Bench inside the enclosure, which Bruce has named Turtle Woods Wildflower Sanctuary. I was serenaded by red-eyed vireos, blue-headed vireos, scarlet tanagers, and Acadian flycatchers, all of which have nested in the area in past years.

This is to be my old-age research area. In ten or twenty years it should be an exciting place to study. At least, that is our hope. ❖

... **Bulldozers?** [Cont'd from page 4]

ing adding extra lanes to the existing route and adding the ability to change lanes under heavy traffic conditions. Copies of the Preliminary Solutions Report are available at the project office next to the Penn Stater or at their Web site, <www.scccts.com>. Send your public input to:

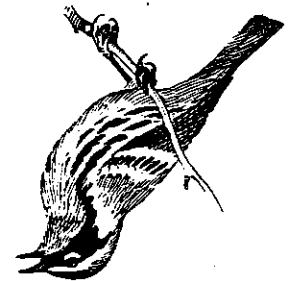
Joe Hlivia, Public Involvement Coordinator
SCCCTS Project Office
Innovation Park at Penn State
101 Innovation Blvd., Suite 115
State College, PA 16803

While you're at it, why not send copies of your comments to your local state representatives and senators; to the two state politicians whose districts include this part of the Rothrock, Representative Kerry

A. Benninghoff (e-mail at <kbenning@pahousegop.com>) and Senator Jake Corman (at <jcorman@pasen.gov>); to the editors of local newspapers; and to anyone else you can think of! Spread the word. If we can't get Rothrock off the chopping block and (as the property-rights wackos like to say) "lock up" Bear Meadows and its environs as Forever Wild, we may have to start handing out those bumper stickers that say "Support Your Right to Arm Bears!" ❖

For those who have e-mail, I'm organizing a list of people who want to stay informed and active in opposing this project. Write to me at <bontasaurus@yahoo.com> and I'll be glad to add your name to the list.

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