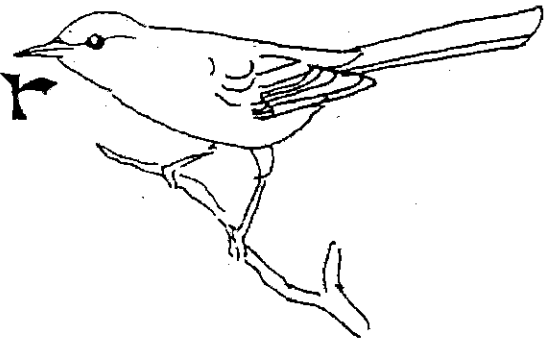


The Gnatcatcher



Newsletter of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society

P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, Pennsylvania 16686

Vol. 34, No. 1 – February 2002

Canoe Creek Watershed Declared Important Bird Area

By Dr. Stan Kotala

BirdLife International, a worldwide conservation organization, developed the Important Bird Areas program in the 1980s in an effort to preserve outstanding habitats for birds. The program's resounding success in Europe quickly spread to North America, where the IBA concept has become pivotal to a continentwide bird conservation strategy.

In the U.S., Pennsylvania is the first state to develop an IBA program. Based on strict scientific criteria developed by the Ornithological Technical Committee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey, 77 sites have been selected as IBAs in the Keystone state.

At its most recent meeting, in October 2001, the Ornithological Technical Committee voted to confer the distinction of Important Bird Area on the Canoe Creek Watershed. This is a great honor for the Juniata Valley Audubon Society because all of the data that were reviewed for this site came from JVAS projects conducted in the watershed, especially the Special Areas Projects done at Canoe Creek State Park and State Game Lands 166.

Under the direction of then JVAS vice-president, Bill King, JVAS members began an exhaustive survey of the Canoe Creek Watershed's birdlife in 1992. Since that time, members have documented more than 200 species of birds in the watershed, of which 110 are confirmed as nesting there. Fifteen

[Cont'd on page 3]

— February Program —

"THE BATS OF CANOE CREEK." Park Naturalist Heidi Boyle will talk about the bats of Canoe Creek State Park. Learn about the natural history of the various bats and what the park and the Pennsylvania Game Commission are doing to manage the bat population in the area. Find out about the famous "bat church" and why bats live there.

7 P.M., Tuesday, Feb. 19 in the chapel at Alto-Reste Park, on Plank Rd., Altoona — directly across from Wal-Mart.

— March Field Trip —

MIDDLE CREEK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA. JVAS board member, Dave Kyler, will lead a one-day field trip to the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area to observe spring migrants at this waterfowl stopover in eastern Lebanon County.

Saturday, Mar. 9 — Meet Dave at McDonald's, Rt. 22, Huntingdon at 8 A.M. A 15-passenger van will be available — 10 persons minimum, \$20 per person. A check in advance will reserve a seat on the van for you. Mail your check (payable to David Kyler) to Dave Kyler, R.R. 4, Box 159A, Huntingdon, PA 16652-9645. The deadline for receiving bookings is Tuesday, Feb. 19 (JVAS program meeting night). For more information, phone Dave at 643-6030.

— Next Board Meeting —

Juniata Valley Audubon board members will meet at 7 P.M. at Alto-Reste Park on Tuesday, Apr. 2. All Juniata Valley Audubon members are welcome. For directions, phone 684-7376 or send an e-mail message to <charma@nb.net>.

The Gnatcatcher

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Charlie Hoyer, Editor
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Juniata Valley Audubon 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 are held temporarily in the chapel at Alto-Reste Park, Plank Road, Altoona (directly across from Wal-Mart) on the third Tuesday of the month in February, March, May, September, October, and November at 7 P.M. The public is invited to attend.

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From the Gnatcatcher's Nest

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) program is a global effort to identify the areas that are most important for maintaining bird populations and to focus conservation efforts at protecting these sites. I'm very pleased to announce that in the JVAS region, the Canoe Creek Watershed and the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River have been declared IBAs. The JVAS is "adopting" these sites; Dr. Stan Kotala is the coordinator for the Canoe Creek Watershed IBA (see the COVER STORY), and Dave Kyler is the coordinator for the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River IBA (Dave will author a similar article in the March issue of *The Gnatcatcher*).

On another note, the latest *Audubon* magazine includes notice of a new option for renewing Audubon memberships, open to all Chapter members. Instead of receiving multiple renewal notices, members can now call (800) 274-4201 and ask to sign up for Audubon's Paper-Free Renewal Program.

Those who sign up will have their membership automatically renewed each year, and will simply receive one bill approximately two months in advance of their membership expiration date. Chapter-generated members will continue to be credited as such, and, of course, you can cancel at any time.

Save paper and simplify your accounting!

+ + +

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

CORNER

By Mark Henry

Proposals — Pluses & Minuses

JVAS members are aware of the many conservation proposals that surfaced last year — both at the federal and state level.

Some of these proposals promoted conservation and some did not. So for this edition of Conservation Corner, I would like to briefly review one or two of them and mention a couple of issues coming up in the new year.

Although there were — and still are — several national issues such as drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge that are not good conservation proposals, there were a few “bright” spots. One of the bright spots last year was the passage of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act. This Act is a five-year effort to conserve and enhance habitats of Neotropical birds, especially in the Caribbean and Latin America. For the 2002 fiscal year, \$3 million was authorized to fund the Act with 75 percent going to partnerships south of the border.

Another bright spot was increased funding for the National Wildlife Refuges. Congress increased funding by \$19 million over fiscal 2001 for the operation and maintenance of refuges. Although still far short of the need, this is a step in the right direction for the refuges.

However, on the negative side of the ledger, drilling in the Arctic Refuge will be proposed again early in 2002 by the pro-drilling people. It is projected that the proposal will be brought forward early in the year and by February, the debate will be in full swing. JVAS members are again encouraged to contact Senator Specter and urge him to vote against opening the Arctic Refuge to drilling.

At the state level last year, the Pennsylvania Game Commission formed an ad hoc committee to prepare proposed land use regulations for game lands. Audubon Pennsylvania was a member of that committee, and reasonable regulations were prepared. The proposed regulations recognize the many uses of the game lands and tries to accommodate the many different users but the Commission will

reserve the right to limit and/or prohibit certain activities in order to protect the resource and maintain appropriate use of the land. A positive step for the management of game lands.

Unfortunately, a few people were unhappy with the proposal and went to their state legislators who in turn, prepared legislation that would undermine the Game Commission in managing the game lands. The bill, HB 2181, would require game land regulations dealing with secondary recreational uses (non-hunting/trapping) to be subject to review by the Independent Regulatory Review Commission. This would essentially take rule-making away from the Game Commission and put it in the hands of the politicians — a very dangerous move.

JVAS members are encouraged to contact their state representatives urging them to oppose this bill. Wildlife management does not belong in the hands of politicians, so your opposition to the bill will help stop this bad proposal. ☞

EDITOR'S NOTE: See page 4 for Juniata Valley Audubon's position regarding this bill.

... CC Watershed IBA [Cont'd from page 1]

species occurring in the watershed are Pennsylvania Species of Special Concern. The work involved more than 500 field trips and more than 3,000 hours of observation by JVAS members.

The Canoe Creek Watershed's exceptional diversity of habitats produces an exceptional diversity of birdlife. The watershed contains very large blocks of contiguous forest; rhododendron and laurel thickets; several miles of riparian forest along Canoe Creek; large complexes of beaver ponds; unspoiled emergent, shrub, and forested wetlands; native grasslands; old-field habitats; and a 160-acre lake.

Due to large expanses of unbroken forest, the site contains numerous breeding forest-interior and area-sensitive Neotropical migrants such as Blackburnian, black-throated blue, and black-throated green warblers. A forested riparian corridor supports large numbers of Louisiana waterthrushes, Acadian

flycatchers, warbling vireos, cerulean warblers, and yellow-throated vireos. Beaver ponds and their surrounding wetlands are home to alder flycatchers, swamp sparrows, veeries, and red-shouldered hawks. Forest openings and old-field areas are used by golden-winged warblers, prairie warblers, and yellow-breasted chats.

The Important Bird Area designation gives the Canoe Creek Watershed an advantage when the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources decides which conservation projects to fund. It emphasizes that this 15,000-acre area has high-quality habitat of great importance to the Commonwealth's birdlife.

Had JVAS members not gathered the necessary data, this region may well have been overlooked. Thanks to their observations, the Ornithological Technical Committee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey recognized the watershed as deserving this distinction. These JVAS members are Bruce and Marcia Bonta, Fran and Mary Burgoon, Rob Criswell, Tom Dubbs, Melissa Focht, Paula Ford, Alice and Darrell Goodlin, Audrey Gregg, Charlie and Marge Hoyer, Stan Kimball, Bill King, Gary Koch, Alice and Helena Kotala, Dave and Trudy Kyler, Tom Lewis, John McCall, Mabel Michael, Gary and Sarah Miller, Dick Mock, Cindy and Luis Moore, Jesse Perry, Mark Shields, Dan and Jean Sinal, Al and Beryl Sternagle, Steve Stroman, Russ Wade, Shirley Wagoner, Jody Wallace, Debbie and Terry Wentz, and Gene Zielinski.

Juniata Valley Audubon has adopted the Canoe Creek Watershed for continued avian monitoring and ongoing conservation and education efforts. Steve Hoffman, Pennsylvania Audubon's Director of Bird Conservation, has asked us to conduct annual point counts in the watershed during May and June to assess the population densities of Pennsylvania Species of Special Concern and Audubon Watchlist Species. If you would like to help with these censuses, please call Canoe Creek Watershed IBA Coordinator, Dr. Stan Kotala, at 946-8840. Several field trips highlighting the birds of this Important Bird Area are planned for this spring. We hope you'll join us in this celebration of birds! ☘

Juniata Valley Audubon Opposes Pennsylvania House Bill 2181

Over the past several years, there has been increasing destruction of habitat on Pennsylvania's state game lands, caused by the illegal cutting of trails by ATV, motorbike, and snowmobile users. On some game lands in the southeastern part of the state, British-style fox hunters on horseback, accompanied by dozens of hounds have trampled over game lands that often are the only natural areas left in that very developed corner of the Commonwealth. In Lebanon and Lancaster Counties, bicycle races with dozens of riders were held on trails cut through game lands, without permission.

These activities have resulted in the destruction of vegetation, damage to trails and roads, erosion, degradation of streambanks, siltation of streams, disruption of wetlands, and disturbance to wildlife and people.

In response to these destructive activities, the Pa. Game Commission held meetings last year to obtain public input regarding these problems. As a result of this process, the PGC has recommended new rules governing these activities on game lands.

Unfortunately, a coalition of those who would like to continue these destructive activities has persuaded the state legislators to introduce Pennsylvania House Bill 2181. The bill would restrict the Game Commission from making any rules governing activities on game lands without the consent of politicians. It also would abolish all current rules restricting the use of game lands.

Passage of this bill would be disastrous to the well-being of the Keystone State's 1.4 million acres of game lands, most of which have few roads or human-centered amenities. Game lands are for wildlife and should remain so. They should be managed by conservation professionals in the Game Commission and not by politicians.

Juniata Valley Audubon opposes Pennsylvania House Bill 2181. If you agree, please write or call your local Pennsylvania State Representative.

Thanks for your help! ☘

— Dr. Stan Kotala

JVAS Site Guide No. 1: Canoe Creek State Park

By Dr. Stan Kotala

Canoe Creek State Park encompasses 960 acres in Turkey Valley, between Brush Mountain and Lock Mountain in the ridge and valley portion of Blair County. It is a relatively new park, having been dedicated in 1979, and is composed of former farms and woodlots. Elevations range from 880 feet above sea level where Canoe Creek flows out of Brumbaugh Dam to 1,360 feet at the crest of Moore's Hill.

The central feature of the park is 158-acre Canoe Lake. The bottom of the lake slopes gently to a depth of 20 feet. At the northeastern end of the lake there is a 30-acre area of partially submerged stumps. Here, Canoe Creek's cool waters flow into the lake. The creek originates in the forested valley composed of the 7,000 acres of the eastern portion of State Game Lands 166. Along the creek within the state park there is a beaver dam complex complete with lodges forming an extremely interesting wetland near the mouth of Canoe Creek at the lake. This area is frequented by belted kingfishers, swamp sparrows, green-backed herons, great blue herons, black-crowned night herons, and wood ducks.

Prior to entering the lake, Canoe Creek is a fast-moving, cold-water stream continuously shaded by oaks, hemlocks, hickories, and beeches from its source 9 miles northeast of the park within the game lands to the point where it enters the lake. Louisiana waterthrushes nest along its banks, and the calls of Acadian flycatchers burst forth from hemlock-bedecked limestone outcroppings along the adjacent trail. Large numbers of American redstarts, cerulean warblers, and yellow-throated vireos inhabit this riparian community.

Another interesting forested wetland exists just below the Brumbaugh Dam in an area with many pin

oaks and sycamores, where migrating blackbirds and wood-warblers often are found.

Two other significant streams in the park are Mary Ann's Creek, which enters the northwestern cove of the lake in a marshy area, and New Creek, which unites with Canoe Creek below Brumbaugh Dam. The area at the mouth of Mary Ann's Creek is dominated by many interesting wetland plants: sedges, rushes, cat-tails, and beautiful marsh marigolds in spring. Rusty blackbirds, Virginia rails, and least bitterns have been seen in this habitat.

New Creek flows through a wide, flat area at the western end of the park that is dominated by grasses and shrubs with some interspersed trees. Kestrels and red-tailed hawks often hunt this area with great success. Northern harriers and rough-legged Hawks have been observed here. This area also is a good place to see willow flycatchers and prairie warblers.

The vegetation of the rest of the park is divided equally between open, grassy/shrubby areas and woods. The largest block of forest is on Moore's Hill, the rocky northern

and western portions of which slope steeply down to Mary Ann's Creek. Wood thrushes, red-eyed vireos, and ovenbirds are easily seen and heard here. The eastern slope is less steep as it goes down to the banks of Canoe Creek. Wild turkey and ruffed grouse often are seen foraging in this area. Oaks, beeches, and hemlocks provide food and cover for birds inhabiting this eastern slope. Screech-owls, barred owls, and great horned owls frequently are found roosting there. Just north of this area is a shrubby woodland with large numbers of redbuds whose pink blossoms make spring days here absolutely delightful. Eastern towhees are abundant among the hawthorns and crabapples. Brown



thrashers can be reliably seen here. Where grassy openings exist, golden-winged warblers can be found.

The southern slope of Moore's Hill is the gentlest, easing down to the shore of Canoe Lake. Most of this area is open fields with old hedgerows and woodlots. Numerous bluebird houses, kestrel boxes, and wood duck houses have been placed in this area and have been very productive. The shrubby and grassy areas abound with field sparrows in summer, and the strange calls of yellow-breasted chats often are heard here on foggy mornings. Cooper's hawks frequently are seen hunting the woodlots, while calls of distant waterfowl drift up from the lake. Orchard orioles nest in the scattered trees around the old house foundation.

Birding is easy in this park, thanks to the outstanding trail system. A comfortable, flat, bicycle trail runs through the open southeastern portion of the park and joins the Lower (rhymes with *power*) Trail along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River. Marsh Trail allows good birding through the wetland near the mouth of Mary Ann's Creek and often allows good views of waterfowl such as coot, bufflehead, canvasback, ring-necked duck, red-breasted merganser, pied-billed grebe, horned grebe, tundra swan, and green-winged teal.

Limestone Trail follows Mary Ann's Creek into a steeply sloping valley where many migrating warblers may be found on spring days. Moore's Hill Trail allows easy birding, even on the steep northern incline of Moore's Hill. This trail traverses the hill, passing through a variety of habitats such as oak-hickory woods, grassy fields, shrubby hillsides, abandoned limestone quarries, and an old limestone kiln complex, then skirts the beaver dam wetlands near the entry point of Canoe Creek into the lake. Plant enthusiasts will be thrilled by the many fascinating specimens along this trail — among them: yellow ladies slipper, wall rue, sharp-lobed hepatica, maidenhair fern, trilliums, and bloodroot.

Beaver Pond Trail provides excellent views of the wetlands formed by the beaver dams along Canoe Creek. This location is outstanding for observing woodcock displays in March.

Fisherman's Path allows one to walk along the forested, steep southeastern shore of the lake. The

path provides good views of waterfowl due to the elevated vantage point close to the water's edge, shaded cover, and very good morning and mid-day lighting.

Sugarloaf Trail traverses a hill with many conifers at the western end of the lake, adjacent to Brumbaugh Dam. Belted kingfishers nest in the steep banks below the trail.

Birding focal points of the park are the northeastern end of the lake for waterfowl (27 species) and herons; Mary Ann's Creek and Marsh and the beaver dam complex for wetland and riparian species; Moore's Hill for woodland birds (36 species of wood-warblers); and the western end of the park for birds of shrub and grassland, as well as hunting raptors.

Anyone taking advantage of the excellent bird-watching opportunities at the park also may want to take part in the many outstanding environmental educational programs given by state park environmental interpreters during the summer months. In addition to a large variety of birds, Canoe Creek State Park hosts the largest maternity colony of little brown bats in Pennsylvania at the Turkey Valley Church, which was purchased for the park by Pennsylvania's Wild Resource Conservation Fund. This was the first property purchased by the WRCF to protect a plant or animal habitat. As if this were not enough, the only known hibernaculum of the federally endangered Indiana bat in Pennsylvania is in a deep limestone mine on Moore's Hill.

If you want to study the park in greater depth, you may want to stay at one of its eight beautiful, modern cabins overlooking the lake. Within a 15-minute drive from the park is State Game Lands 166, which offers 11,000 acres of excellent forest, wetland, and riparian birding, and the 16-mile Lower Trail along the Juniata River's Frankstown Branch for outstanding river-valley birding.

Both the Canoe Creek Watershed and the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River have been designated as Important Bird Areas by the Pennsylvania Biological Survey. More than 220 species of birds have been documented in these two IBAs, including 15 Species of Special Concern in Pennsylvania. ☞

Announcing the 5th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count

February 15–18, 2002

We Invite You to Participate!

- All ages and skill levels welcome.
- No registration required.
- Participation is free.
- Help scientists learn about our winter birds.
- Join Citizen Scientists from Nome to Key West.
- Spread the word.

To learn how to participate, visit:

<www.birdsource.org/gbbc/toc_page.html>

The GBBC is a joint project of Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Why count backyard birds? Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Now that winter has gripped much of the continent, what are our birds doing? Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. We want to take a snapshot of North American bird populations and you can help us. *Everyone's contribution is important.* It doesn't matter whether you identify, count, and report the five species coming to your backyard feeder, or the 75 species you see during a day's outing to a wildlife refuge. Your data can help answer many questions:

- How will this winter's snow and cold temperatures influence bird populations?
- Where are the winter finches and other irruptive species?
- Will late winter movements of many songbird and waterfowl species be as far north as they were last year?

The data that you collect will be combined with Christmas Bird Count and Project FeederWatch data to give us an immense picture of our winter birds. Each year that these data are collected makes them more important and meaningful. So as we see patterns, discover new questions and insights, we'll update you. And we'll ask for your help again. ☞

IN MEMORIAM

Anne Borland, of Hollidaysburg, died Nov. 26, 2001, after a brief illness.

She was a graduate of Seton Hill College. Anne enjoyed gardening and needlework. She was an avid bridge player and loved her dogs.

The Juniata Valley Audubon Society definitely was fortunate to have Anne as a member of its Board of Directors for more than 20 years. In recent years, Anne served as our Fund-raising Director, whereupon she diligently collected Bi-Lo and Riverside Markets cash register receipts from relatives, friends, neighbors, and Audubon members and then redeemed them for cash for the JVAS. Years ago, Anne also held the office of JVAS Secretary and served as Hospitality Chair.

Anne was an ardent supporter of the Altoona Symphony Orchestra, being a member of the President's Circle and a past secretary of the Altoona Symphony League.

Over the years Anne also served as president and secretary of the Spade & Trowel Garden Club, secretary of the Wolf-Kuhn Foundation, president and secretary of Hollidaysburg Friends of the Library, member of the Altoona Women's Club and Hollidaysburg Historical Society, Girl Scout Leader at St. Mary's Catholic Church (for 15 years), and president and secretary of the Hollidaysburg Women's Club.

We certainly shall miss Anne at our Audubon meetings and field trips.

— C.H.



JVAS Officer Nominations Sought

JVAS President Charlie Hoyer's and Secretary Gene Zielinski's terms of office will expire next month. Both have agreed to run for reelection.

If you have any other nominations for these two positions, please send them to Dr. Stan Kotala, JVAS Nominating Committee Chair, R.R. 3, Box 866, Altoona, PA 16601. ☞

Hints for Successful Bluebirding

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is a letter sent last fall to Blair County members of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania by Kelly Baronner, County Coordinator.

To all fellow Blair County bluebirders!

Thank you so much for joining — or maintaining your membership in — the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania. It's through your generous support that we can continue to spread the word about this beautiful bird.

I hope everyone had a great season last year and remembered to submit their nest box reports to Jane at the BSP. (Mine was admittedly late.)

I'm going to try to send a letter to all Blair County BSP members in the fall and spring. I love to hear from fellow bluebirders and am always available for questions. If you're looking to place a new box or move an old one, I'd also be happy to suggest the best placement on your property.

Before spring, you should clean and repair your boxes. I leave my boxes up year round as a safe haven on cold winter nights. (Bluebirds will literally pile up on top of one another in the boxes to keep warm!) I use a solution of 1 tbsp. Clorox to one gallon of water to clean out the boxes. I leave them open for one or two days to dry, then close up and use duct tape to cover up the cracks. You also could use rope caulking in the cracks.

Think about placing predator guards on your poles. (Remember, don't mount those boxes on trees!) I have plans for several cheap guards anyone can make. If you've lost any birds to 'coons, I have info on a 'coon guard that goes around the entrance hole on wooden boxes. An extra large roof also can aid in deterring those pesky 'coons.

I hope everyone has kept those detestable house sparrows from nesting. I believe that house-sparrow control is the single-most important duty of a bluebird landlord. House sparrows are nonprotected, imported species whose No. 1 job is to steal bluebird housing and/or to kill bluebirds. They actually are not a sparrow, but a member of the weaver finch family. Do your best to trap and destroy or remove eggs and nests of house sparrows. They are *not* protected songbirds, and you are lawfully permitted to do this. Consult a bird guide if you're not sure what a house sparrow, nest, and eggs look like. There's nothing more heart-breaking to open a box and find a female bluebird or her babies pecked to death by a house sparrow.

Last, but not least, if your first attempt at bluebirding was not successful, be patient! Make sure that your boxes are placed in suitable habitat. If there's competition from tree sparrows, consider pairing your boxes. Safeguard with predator guards the best you can. Don't be disappointed if your box is used by chickadees, titmice, tree swallows, or if you're really lucky, nuthatches! These are lovely birds that need homes too. (They are cavity-dwellers.)

If anyone has any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to contact me.

— Kelly M. Baronner
Blair County Coordinator
Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania
R.R. 3, Box 139, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

Ph: 696-3945
E-mail: baronner@charter.net

Northern Visitor

Every winter the dynamics at our bird feeders change. Last year we had dozens of goldfinches, as many as 15 mourning doves, and the killer extraordinaire — a sharp-shinned hawk. The killer hawk has returned, specializing in juncos, but the goldfinch and mourning dove numbers are usually in the low single digits. We also have ten American tree sparrows; five house finches; the usual chickadees, titmice, and white-breasted nuthatches; three cardinals; a blue jay; a female downy; a pair of Carolina wrens; and a red-bellied woodpecker.

But the star of our feeders is our first-ever (in 30 years) red-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*). The little mite has been zipping in and out since late November, keeping his own company in as singular a fashion as our lone wintering song sparrow.

Am I merely dazzled by his rareness here to think him far more attractive than his larger congener — the white-breasted nuthatch? He is a male because his cap is black, not gray like the female's. He has a black eye-stripe and above it a white stripe. His breast and belly are a pleasing rusty-red and his back the same silver-gray as the white-breasted nuthatch, but he is at least an inch smaller.

Red-breasted nuthatches prefer coniferous forests

for living and breeding and were formerly known as Canada nuthatches because they are common residents in boreal forests. But when the coniferous cone crop they depend on fails in winter, they head as far south as the Gulf coast of Louisiana and the deserts of northern New Mexico. They have even wandered across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe.

By Marcia Bonta

These irruptive movements occur every two to four years, although at least a few red-breasteds move south of their breeding range every year. One researcher believes that they are driven from their breeding ranges not only by food shortages but by population pressures. However, no researchers have studied the movements of banded irruptive red-breasted nuthatches.



I'm not the only person reporting more red-breasted nuthatches than usual. Our neighbor on Brush Mountain, Charlie Hoyer, whose feeders are three miles as the crow flies from ours, has several coming to his feeders. Other birders throughout Pennsylvania are similarly reporting them.

So, although the pine siskins, crossbills, and common redpolls observed by some folks in Pennsylvania's northern tier have not yet appeared here, I am more than satisfied by our red-breasted nuthatch visitor. ☘

Which American bird is called a "topsy-turvy bird?"

Red-breasted nuthatch.

How many species of nuthatches occur in the Western Hemisphere, and which ones are they?

Four: White-breasted, red-breasted, brown-headed, and pigmy nuthatch.

Does a red-breasted nuthatch hold food in its feet like a chickadee?

No.

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SATURDAY, MARCH 16

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— A day of education, fun, and friendship —

*See the flyer enclosed with this newsletter
or contact Kelly Baronner (See page 6)*

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The winter owl banked just in time to pass
And save herself from breaking window glass.
And her wings straining suddenly aspread
Caught color from the last of evening red
In a display of underdown and gull
To glassed-in children at the window sill.
— Robert Frost, "Questioning Faces"

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