

The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of the

Juniata Valley Audubon Society

P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, PA 16686

<www.juniatavalleyaudubon.org>

Vol. 35, No. 2 – Mar/Apr 2003

Testimony Presented at DEP Public Hearing On Proposed Logan Town Centre Shopping Complex

**Given on February 6 at the
Jaffa Mosque, Altoona**

By Dave Bonta, for the Pennsylvania
Wildlands Recovery Project (PWRP)

I am a citizen conservationist with no formal training in environmental science. But if the analyses prepared for the proposed Logan Town Centre are any indication of the level of knowledge required to be an environmental expert, then I am happy to call myself an amateur. Their lists of birds and amphibians for this site suggest they either never actually set foot on it, or more likely, that they just don't know how to use a field guide. I wonder if, in their eagerness to justify such new chain stores as a Barnes & Noble, they have overlooked the fact that two perfectly adequate bookstores already exist in Altoona where they might purchase a copy of Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern and Central North America*, for instance, or the recently published *Amphibians and Reptiles of Pennsylvania* by Professor Art Hulse. I urge them also to purchase a few pairs of binoculars — available from many of Altoona's fine department stores and sporting goods shops — along with some sturdy boots and a pair of work gloves so they can do a better job next time of locating all our slimy, ground-hugging friends. (I'm talking about the salamanders!)

The authors of the environmental analyses in question further damage their credibility when they

[Cont'd on page 6]

— March Program —

"ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE WHITE-TAILED DEER."

Kathy Randall, Conservation Program Coordinator for Audubon PA, will talk on the overabundance of white-tailed deer in Pennsylvania and their negative impacts on the forest understory and forest birds. Kathy focuses on public education regarding damage to agriculture, deer-vehicle collisions, Lyme disease, and urban/suburban developments. She also addresses the current and evolving deer management policy in Pa.

7 P.M., Tuesday, Mar. 18, at Alto Reste Chapel (see page 2).

— March Field Trip —

MIDDLE CREEK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA. Join us for our annual one-day trip to eastern Lebanon County to view this amazing waterfowl staging area. We'll depart McDonald's in Huntingdon at 9 A.M. Bring a lunch and boots. Van transportation will be available from Huntingdon. Van driver/trip leader Dave Kyler (643-6030) will be your guide. (This event was postponed from March 15 due to ice on the lake.)

Saturday, Mar. 22 [SNOW DATE - SUNDAY, MAR. 23]

— Annual Spring Banquet —

"THE GHOST WITH TREMBLING WINGS: THE SEARCH FOR LOST SPECIES." Scott Weidensaul will give a slide presentation based on his new book (see box on page 5 for details).

6:30 P.M., Tuesday, Apr. 22, at the U.S. Hotel Restaurant, Hollidaysburg.

— April Field Trip —

LOWER TRAIL WARBLER WALK. Join trip leader Stan Kotala (946-8840) for a stroll along the Lower Trail in search of returning wood-warblers and other Neotropical migrants. Meet at the Alfarrata Trailhead at 8 A.M.

Saturday, Apr. 26

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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. The membership comprises National Members along with Chapter-only Members.

Evening program meetings are held in the chapel at Alto-Reste Park, Plank Road, Altoona (directly across from Wal-Mart) on the third Tuesday of the month in January, February, March, May, and September through November at 7 P.M. The public is invited to attend.

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From the Gnatcatcher's Nest

With this issue of *The Gnatcatcher* there are three raffle tickets representing this year's major fund-raising endeavor for Juniata Valley Audubon. If every JVAS member sent a \$5 check by return mail, a substantial sum of around \$1750 — based on 350 memberships — would go toward our education and conservation efforts.

In light of the drastic reduction in the membership dues share from National Audubon, it's imperative that the Chapter raise money on its own!

I ask you to please consider what Juniata Valley Audubon means to you and how your contribution can help us move toward our goals.

And good luck in the Birdwatcher's Adventure drawing!

— Charlie Hoyer

Join National/Juniata Valley Audubon

- Option 1 — National Membership** provides you with the following benefits:
- Subscription to the quarterly *Audubon* magazine, each one filled with superb nature photography and in-depth reporting on environmental issues.
 - Notification of Juniata Valley Audubon's exciting activities including monthly nature programs, field trips, and other events.
 - Subscription to the bimonthly chapter newsletter, *The Gnatcatcher*.
 - Opportunity to participate in local advocacy efforts to help make a real difference.
 - Opportunity to aid in the preservation of the natural world.
 - Opportunity to have FUN! in joining with fellow nature enthusiasts.

Become a National Member with a special introductory rate of \$20 (\$15 for seniors and students). Basic dues thereafter are \$35 annually. Make your check payable to NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY.

- Option 2 — Chapter-only Membership** provides you with all the benefits of Option 1 except for the subscription to *Audubon* magazine.

Become a Chapter-only Member at a minimum annual membership rate of \$15. Make your check payable to JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY.

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CONSERVATION

CORNER

By Mark Henry

Recipe for Greenscamming

EDITOR'S NOTE: For your diversion, Mark passes on the following news item in lieu of his regular column this issue.

A Call for Softer, Greener LanguageBy Jennifer Lee, of *The New York Times*

Over the last six months, the Republican Party has subtly refocused its message on the environment, an issue that a party strategist called "the single biggest vulnerability for the Republicans and especially for George Bush" in a memorandum encouraging the new approach.

The Republicans, as the memorandum advised them, have softened their language to appeal to suburban voters, speaking out for protecting national parks and forests, advocating investment in environment technologies, and shifting emphasis to the future rather than the present.

In interviews, Republican politicians and their aides said they agreed with strategist Frank Luntz that it was important to heed to what his memorandum, written before the November elections, called "the environmental communications battle."

In his memorandum, Mr. Luntz urges that the term "climate change" be used instead of "global warming," because "while global warming has catastrophic communications attached to it, climate change sounds a more controllable and less emotional challenge."

Also, he wrote, "conservationist" conveys a "moderate, reasoned, common sense position" while "environmentalist" has the "connotation of extremism."

President Bush's speeches on the environment show that the terms "global warming" and "environmentalist" had largely disappeared by late last summer. The terms appeared in a number of President Bush's speeches in 2001, but now the White House fairly consistently uses "climate change" and "conservationist."

Senator John E. Sununu, Republican of New Hampshire, was elected to his first term in November after running advertisements promoting his efforts for clean water and forest preservation. "It is only a slight exaggeration to say that historically, Republicans went out and talked about the budget or taxes and the economy and waited to get beat up on the environment and education, hoping that they could hold their own," Mr. Sununu said. "Why wait? Why not step forward and talk about work that you have done to improve the waterways or national parks?"

National environmental groups say the shift has blunted the edge of Republican attacks. "They are not playing defense anymore," said Kim Haddow, a consultant for the Sierra Club who has helped counter some Republican advertisements. "It's like a tennis game. The ball is back in our court, and we need to spend time and energy educating voters."

In his State of the Union address, President Bush singled out a hydrogen-fuel initiative that would revolutionize automobiles and help control global warming. And the Department of Energy announced investments in technology to burn coal without carbon dioxide emissions, the main gas that scientists say contributes to global warming.

Republican officials emphasized their view that a successful communication strategy can work if it is built on these kinds of policies. "The message means nothing if the policy isn't sound," said Scott McClellan, a White House spokesman.

Many new Republican communication strategies match the recommendations of the 16-page environmental memorandum put together by the Luntz Research Companies, the consulting firm run by Mr. Luntz, who was also one of the drafters of "Contract with America," the manifesto of House Republicans under Newt Gingrich, the former speaker.

The memorandum was given to *The New York Times* by the Environmental Working Group, an advocacy group critical of Bush administration policies. "They are showing the message discipline they need to get these anti-environmental policies past suburban voters," said Ken Cook, president of the organization.

Six years ago, Mr. Luntz released a 222-page guide called "The Language of the 21st Century," which offered Republicans a holistic communications strategy.

"It's essential that you communicate your principles if you want your public to understand your policies," Mr. Luntz said in an interview.

The most recent memorandum suggests peppering speeches with phrases like "balance," "safe and healthy," and "common sense" — terms that have been adopted frequently in Republican environmental discussion. In a speech last August introducing an initiative on thinning forests to prevent forest fires, for example, President Bush used the term "common sense" at least six times.

One section of the memorandum, "Winning the Global Warming Debate," asserts that many voters believe there is a lack of consensus about global warming among scientists. "Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled, their views about global warming will change accordingly," it says. "Therefore you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue."

Among the ways to "challenge the science," the memorandum says, is to "be even more active in recruiting experts who are sympathetic to your view and much more active in making them part of your message" because "people are more willing to trust scientists than politicians."

Mr. Luntz, who uses focus groups to test marketing strategies, often has been harshly critical of the party. For example, the memorandum criticizes how the White House handled what Mr. Luntz called the "arsenic in water imbroglio," which he described as the "biggest public relations misfire of President Bush's first year in office."

Before leaving office, the Clinton administration issued an executive order tightening standards for arsenic in water. When the Bush administration delayed the plan, it was attacked because it failed to get its message across, the memorandum said. "The story was not that Bush was delaying a hastily imposed regulation," Mr. Luntz wrote, "but rather he was actively putting in more arsenic in the water."

The memorandum says bad public relations over such issues stem from an underlying problem that, "as with education, Social Security, and so many other issues, the Democrats have been expert at constructing a narrative in which Republicans and conservatives are the bad guys."

The memorandum advises that Republicans stop emphasizing a choice between environmental protection and deregulation and instead become "a champion of national parks," the "best way to show our citizens that Republicans can be for something positive in the environment." The memorandum continues, "Being against existing laws or regulations has been translated as being against the environment."

Each party says Mr. Luntz's advice played a role in elections last fall, including the Senate race in Colorado, where the Republican incumbent, Wayne Allard, ran advertisements promoting his work with the Great Sand Dunes National Park and cleaning up nuclear weapons plants.

"The thrust of the memorandum is consistent with what we tried to do with our campaign, to take issues which have real impact on people in Colorado and work on those problems," said Dick Wadhams, a spokesman for Senator Allard. "The Sierra Club and League of Conservation Voters spent millions of dollars attacking Senator Allard and it didn't work."

That kind of success will encourage more Republicans to embrace these strategies, party officials say.

"We have not engaged in the discussion as enthusiastically as we should on occasion — there are so many governors around the country who have sterling environmental records," said Marc Racicot, chairman of the Republican National Committee. "We are going to talk about these issues a lot over the next election cycle."

National environmental groups say the new strategy has improved the public's view of Republicans. "He's not saying, 'I am going to make environment my top priority,'" Ms. Haddow said of Mr. Allard's campaign. "He's saying: 'You don't have to worry about me. I'm in sync with you.'"

"Luntz's advice is right," she said. "It's very smart — confounding, troubling, but smart." ❁

Win a Birdwatcher's Adventure!

How'd you like to spend a grand week viewing birds on the Eastern Shore of Maryland during a stay in a fully furnished, three-bedroom townhouse? Imagine visiting birding hot spots including Assateague Island National Seashore, Blackwater and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuges, Kiptopeake State Park, Va., and Cape May, N.J. (via the Lewes Ferry).

Can you picture yourself spotting pelicans, ospreys, and thousands of swallows and wading birds while strolling along the beach? How about checking off peregrine falcon, merlin, and bald eagle on your life list as you canoe the vast coastal marshes of Sinepuxet Bay? If canoeing sounds too ambitious, you could just look out your bedroom balcony or living room deck and identify gulls and waterfowl in the bay while you sip your morning coffee.

Take a rainy day visit to the Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art in Salisbury, the largest display of decorative and working bird carvings in the world — some of which are amazingly realistic.

If all of this appeals to you, then you must participate in the 2003 JVAS Birdwatcher's Adventure Raffle! For a \$5 donation (three tickets for \$12), you'll receive a chance for a seven-day, rent-free stay at Gullway Townhouses, Ocean City, Md.

The townhouse features three bedrooms, two baths, kitchen, living room, dining room, carport, and boat dock. It's fully furnished and usually rents for \$500 to \$800 per week. It will be available for the winner from spring through fall. This generous *First-prize* is donated by Mrs. Lucille Donelan.

Second-prize: A limited-edition print of "Dog Day's Breakfast," by Taylor Oughton. It depicts a snowy egret on the search for its morning meal — a crayfish on the edge of a stream. The image area of the print is 14½ x 21 inches is signed and numbered (234/500) by the artist. Print donated by Audubon Pennsylvania.

Third-prize: A Fiftieth Anniversary Edition of a Roger Tory Peterson Field Guide, *Eastern Birds' Nests*. The text and photographs are by Hal H. Harrison, the bird sketches are by Ned Smith, and the map and endpapers are by Mada Harrison. This is a collector's "Lifetime" edition, bound in leather, with gilt-edge pages, published by Easton Press. Book donated by Marge and Charlie Hoyer.

The raffle drawing will be held at the JVAS Spring Banquet, April 22. To enter, mail your ticket(s) (enclosed with this newsletter) along with a check, payable to JVAS, to JVAS, P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, PA 16686-0032. You may photocopy the tickets and mail in as many as you like. Of course, all entries must be received by the

Annual JVAS Spring Banquet

Tuesday, April 22

Liberty Hall

At the

U.S. Hotel Restaurant
401 S. Juniata Street
Hollidaysburg

\$20 per person

6 P.M. — Social hour

6:30 P.M. — Choice of Chicken Cordon Bleu or
Sliced Roast Beef Au Jus

— Presentation —

2003 JVAS Conservation Award

— Program by Scott Weidensaul —

"The Ghost With Trembling Wings:
The Search for Lost Species"

From ivory-billed woodpeckers in the swamps of Louisiana to Tasmanian tigers in the mountains of Australia, we cannot let go of some animals. Though written off as extinct, tantalizing hints of their continued existence surface from time to time — enough to keep alive the hope that they may not be gone. And every so often, one of these lost species does in fact reappear, like a gift to a depaupered world. What is it about these ghost species that enthral us, compelling some people to spend their lives in the hunt for evidence? And what does the rediscovery of species once thought extinct mean in this day of global biodiversity loss? Join naturalist and author Scott Weidensaul for an exploration of this fascinating and complex subject, based on his new book, *The Ghost with Trembling Wings*.

— Door Prize Drawings —

— Raffle Drawing —

evening of the banquet, at which time tickets will continue to be on sale right up until the drawing. You need not be present to win! All monies received will go directly to the JVAS treasury for its conservation and education efforts.

For more information, send an e-mail message to Education Chair Jody Wallace at <jwaljshiel@aol.com> or phone her at 684-2425. ☉

... DEP Hearing [*Cont'd from first page*]

seek to downplay or denigrate the ecological integrity of Brush Mountain. They claim that it isn't really valuable as contiguous forest, and that the project area itself has little importance to wildlife. Clearly, they have never gone hunting for turkey, ruffed grouse, woodcock, white-tailed deer, black bear, gray fox, or bobcats, and have little concept of the habitat needs of these critters. Again, if they do a little hunting through the Altoona yellow pages, they will discover a plethora of local businesses able to fully outfit their employees for a variety of healthy and wholesome outdoor pursuits.

Frankly, I don't think Morris Management is getting its money's worth from the EADS Group consultants. Their arguments could be dismantled by an alert twelve year-old. What they're really saying boils down to this: "Paving over large tracts of mountainside woods full of springs and seeps won't hurt a darn thing — and besides, it doesn't matter, because this area is worthless anyway!" If the first part of that statement is true, what do you need the second part for?

But come to think of it, "overkill" is the major theme of this whole venture. Morris Management and the EADS Group have even gone so far as to propose the creation of a plastic-lined, artificial wetland adjacent to the mall, complete with man-made meanders to "mimic current conditions." This is not only stupid, but downright dangerous. In the unlikely event that they succeed in playing God, this artificial paradise for amphibians will operate as a death trap. Vast numbers of frogs, toads, newts, and salamanders will perish on roads and parking lots in the course of regular, seasonal migrations and the dispersal of young.

The head consultant, Mr. William J. Wilson, is correct, however, when he states that this instant wetland will serve an educational purpose. Local schoolchildren and bored shoppers should find it invaluable as a case study in ecological degradation, since it will without a doubt operate as a safe harbor and a beachhead for alien, invasive plants. Alien, invasive plants are one of the main culprits behind

the rapid disappearance of native wildflowers throughout our region.

I believe most responsible environmental consultants would admit that even the best of artificial wetlands cannot make up for the loss of natural wetlands functioning as a part of intact ecosystems. But there are a lot more water issues at stake here. I am not competent to speak on the hydrogeomorphological ramifications of carving out a big ol' gash in the side of Brush Mountain. But I *have* done some research on the hydrological importance of forests. It turns out that intact forests such as those on Morris Management's Parcel C — slated to be destroyed at taxpayer expense as a Keystone Opportunity Zone — act to conserve water in four basic ways.

First, by physically braking the force of rainfall and rapidly absorbing surface flows, forests prevent flooding. Second, a healthy forest acts as a sponge, absorbing water both above and below ground and slowly releasing it into the water table, preventing or mitigating droughts. Third, forests release more water vapor into the atmosphere than any other type of groundcover (especially roofs and parking lots). The gradual loss of forest cover throughout a region leads in time to less clouds, higher local temperatures and more frequent drought-like conditions. And the fourth way in which forests help to conserve water is by purifying it — trapping groundwater pollutants of various kinds and preventing siltation into creeks and rivers.

Forests not only ensure a safe drinking supply, they help purify the air we breathe, and they even reduce global warming through the absorption of carbon dioxide. Surely, given the proliferation of highways in our region, with more and more cars and trucks spewing CO₂ into the atmosphere, these are not trivial services. The environmental assessment prepared for Morris Management fails to explain how the loss of *any* of these ecosystem services will be mitigated.

Finally, an honest assessment of the ecological impact of this development cannot ignore the economic impact — two sides of the same coin. This

[*Cont'd on page 7*]

Shrew-watching

The first day of my Great Backyard Bird Count was not about birds but about sitting in the gray, gathering gloom of the oncoming big snowstorm and watching a northern short-tailed shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*).

I had stopped to watch (and count) a Carolina wren on our power-line right-of-way when a short-tailed shrew scuttled past five feet away. I've been enamored with these small, fierce creatures ever since I discovered one dashing frenetically around the bottom of an old bucket in our basement sink one winter almost three decades ago.

Knowing that they are nearly blind, I stood still while it paused to forage in nearby open patches of leaves and dried grasses. Next, it pushed its head under a snowy patch for ten minutes and busily ate whatever it had caught. Then, I sat down on my "hot seat" to watch it. It was too close to focus my binoculars and remained oblivious to my presence.

It attacked its prey vigorously, its pointed nose questing, its clawed back feet pumping, its front feet digging like a frantic terrier. Once it pulled what looked like a caterpillar from under the leaf duff and chomped it down.

A small, plush, charcoal-gray, furry ball, it literally scuffled as it moved over the snow. Its pink nose constantly sniffed while its naked pink feet

scratched the thin snow layer or the open turf. It ate so much that it even paused to excrete. No eyes were visible, which is why some folks call it the "mole shrew." To make up for its lack of good eyesight, it has terrific hearing and sense of smell, which helps it find food. Probably it was searching for insect larvae and pupae, its major winter foods, although it also eats plant material.

After almost forty-five minutes of high-octane hunting and eating, it ran under a log at the edge of the woods. No doubt it was returning to its resting nest. This apple-sized nest, constructed of grasses, sedges, and leaves in the shape of a hollow ball, is

located as much as six to sixteen inches below ground or under logs, stumps, or old boards. From the nest, openings lead to a complex underground burrow system that includes separate caching locations and latrine areas.

Mostly, northern short-tailed shrews sleep in the winter to reduce their need for food. But such periods are alternated with intense active hunting periods that usually occur below the snow cover where it is warmer. Researchers claim that northern short-tailed shrews spend only brief periods above ground during cold weather.

But perhaps the shrew I watched — like the birds — sensed the approaching storm and was busily stoking up. ☼

By Marcia Bonta



[Cont'd from page 6]

project will degrade the quality of life in Blair County by making it less livable for residents and less attractive to visitors. While a few local elites stand to get richer, even more of our tax base will

be sacrificed. A few dead-end, low-wage jobs may be created, but they likely will replace similar jobs lost in existing stores that cannot compete with the stores in this new complex. Given the difficulty and great expense of restoring the sites of those now-

abandoned stores and parking lots to their natural state, this represents a net loss. And if the future of Blair County lies in service industry jobs that can barely pay the rent, who will have money to shop at all these new boutiques and retail behemoths?

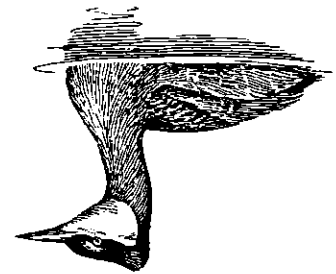
If this project is approved, that will give the green light to many more projects of a similar ilk, further accelerating the decline of once-vital downtown areas. In this manner, habitat fragmentation contributes to social and cultural impoverishment as surely as it decimates ecological communities and condemns isolated populations of many species to inbreeding depression and extirpation. More and more young people will flee the area or seek refuge

in the artificial paradises of heroin and methamphetamines. Habitat-sensitive birds and other wildlife will also flee the area if they're able to — though fewer and fewer refuges exist among the tangles of roads, highways and developments. Even the money spent in all those new chain stores will fly away, feathering the nests of alien and invasive profiteers. We are depleting our natural savings account, and biodiversity — unlike other forms of investment — has no exchange rate. When it's lost, it's *gone*.

I strongly urge the denial of any permit for the construction of the Logan Town Centre.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and God bless America! ☼

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