

The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of the

Juniata Valley Audubon Society

P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, Pennsylvania 16686

<www.juniatavalleyaudubon.org>

Vol. 35, No. 5 – September/October 2003

Juniata College Starts Osprey Hacking Program

The osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*, is a common raptor seen in the Juniata River Basin. Although at least one pair has attempted to nest at Raystown Lake, permanent nesting areas have not been established. Juniata College, in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, has established a hacking program (introduction of chicks) that would facilitate the osprey nesting process in this region. Several nesting towers already have been constructed at the lake by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

The goals of the hacking project are to reestablish an inland breeding population of ospreys in the Juniata River Basin and to provide educational opportunities for students and the community relating to the conservation of a species of special concern.

The introduction team raised six osprey chicks this summer and will introduce more over the next three years in an effort to establish a breeding population at Raystown. On June 23, six birds were obtained from a wildlife biologist in Pomonkey, Md. and carefully transported by private plane to Juniata College's Raystown Field Station. The birds were banded and placed in the hacking tower. A hacking tower is designed so that the birds are able to venture outside during daylight hours but be sheltered from predators at night. The birds were fed by the monitoring team, but humans did not have direct contact with them so as to reduce the chance of imprinting.

(Cont'd on page 3)

– September & October Programs –

"OSPREY REINTRODUCTION AT RAYSTOWN LAKE" –

Tanya Dierolf, a senior at Juniata College, will talk on the institution's Raystown Field Station focusing on its osprey reintroduction project. The introduction team raised six osprey chicks this past summer and will introduce more over the next three years in an effort to establish a breeding population at Raystown Lake.

7 P.M., Tuesday, Sept. 16 in the chapel at Alto-Reste Park, on Plank Rd., Altoona – directly across from Wal-Mart.

"BIRD GARDENING" – Attracting birds with plants can liven your yard, fence, or garden. The birds return thanks by helping keep down the insect population. JVASers Gene Zielinski and Dave Kyler will give a slide presentation on the kinds of plants that will entice birds into your yard as well as the various bird species that will be attracted.

7 P.M., Tuesday, Oct. 21 in the chapel at Alto-Reste Park, on Plank Rd., Altoona – directly across from Wal-Mart.

– September & October Field Trips –

JUNIATA COLLEGE'S RAYSTOWN FIELD STATION – Join us for an introduction to this new Huntingdon County addition and a subsequent woodland walk looking for fall migrants.

Sunday, Sept. 21. Meet for carpooling at McDonald's, on Rt. 22 in Huntingdon at 9 A.M.

STONE MOUNTAIN HAWKWATCH – We'll be visiting this JVAS-sponsored site for the day in hopes of seeing as many as thirteen species of migrating raptors. Bring a box lunch and sturdy hiking boots.

Saturday, Oct. 11. Meet for carpooling at McDonald's, on Rt. 22 in Huntingdon at 9 A.M.

RAIN DATE – SUNDAY, OCT. 12

The Gnatcatcher

VOL. 35, NO. 5 — SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2003

Published bimonthly as a benefit for members by

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

Juniata Valley Audubon is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, serving members in all of Blair and Bedford Counties along with portions of Cambria, Centre, Clearfield, and Huntingdon Counties. The membership comprises National Members and 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

Why the extra copy of the JVAS Fall 2003 Programs and Field Trips brochure?

It's for you to pass on to a friend or relative so that he or she might attend one of our quality programs, participate in field trip, and support the Audubon cause by mailing the membership registration form and becoming a **National** or **Chapter-only** member. Ongoing JVAS Chapter-only memberships coincide with the calendar year. For someone joining now, his or her membership will expire **January 1, 2005**.

And instead of discarding this copy of *The Gnatcatcher*, please pass it on to your friend too? It will give him or her further insight into what our society is about.

Thank you, and I'll see you at the JVAS program meeting about the osprey reintroduction project on Tuesday evening, Aug. 19th!

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. 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:
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CONSERVATION
CORNER
By Mark Henry
Tune In 'NOW With Bill Moyers' On PBS

Bill Moyers, as many of you know, is an award-winning journalist with more than twenty years experience. He has been an analyst and commentator on CBS and NBC news, was publisher of the New York daily, *Newsday*, and currently is the host and producer of the Friday night PBS series, "NOW With Bill Moyers."

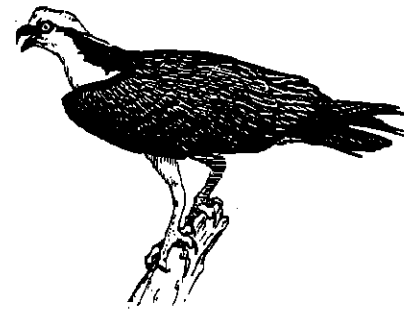
Grist magazine interviewed Mr. Moyers, and his insight and understanding of the environmental issues facing this country are worth reading. For example, regarding global warming, Mr. Moyers stated, "The facts on the ground. I'm a journalist, reporting the evidence, not an environmentalist pressing an agenda. The Earth is sending us a message and you don't have to be an environmentalist to read it. The Arctic ice is melting. The Arctic winds are balmy. The Arctic Ocean is rising. Scientists say that in the year 2002 — the second hottest on record — they saw the Arctic ice coverage shrink more than at any time since they started measuring it. Every credible scientific study in the world says human activity is creating global warming. In the face of this evidence, the government in Washington has declared war on nature. They have placed religious and political dogma over the facts."

Mr. Moyers goes on to state that the current administration is much more sophisticated in their attacks on the environment than the Reagan Administration. In commenting on current public-relations strategies, Mr. Moyers stated, "They (Bush Administration) learned a big lesson from the Watt era: Not to inflame the situation. Use stealth. If you corrupt the language and talk a good line even as you are doing the very opposite, you won't awaken the public. Gale Norton will be purring like a kitten when she's cutting down the last redwood in the forest with a buzz saw."

Mr. Moyers goes on to say that eventually, the public will recognize the damage but that it could very well be too late — for example, global warm-

ing. We should be taking steps now to significantly reduce green-house gasses, but the current administration is "dragging their feet;" in fact, they refuse to even consider the international agreement to reduce green-house gasses.

For JVAS members interested in reading the entire interview, it can be found on the Web at: <http://www.gristmagazine.com/maindish/griscom082603.asp?source3Ddaily>. ☉


Osprey hacking | Cont'd from front page |

Until 1998, the osprey was listed as endangered in Pennsylvania and is still listed as a threatened species. Much of the severe losses are as a result of the use of DDT, a commonly used insecticide until banned in the United States in 1973. Biomagnification caused the chemical to collect in fish tissue and consequently fish-eating birds like ospreys and eagles are among the most affected species. These ingested chemicals can cause eggs to become so fragile that they break before hatching. The effects of DDT decimated osprey populations throughout the world, especially in the highly industrialized countries in Europe and in northeastern United States. The effects are still a concern, as countries where ospreys winter continue using DDT.

Adopt an osprey: Each of the six osprey chicks costs \$100. If your school, class, or organization would like to adopt one of the osprey chicks, please contact Raystown Field Station Director Chuck Yohn at 641-3572. ☉

Information for this article courtesy of Juniata College's Raystown Field Station Web pages. Log on to <<http://services.juniata.edu/station/osprey.html>>.

— Jennifer Park
JVAS Wetlands Chair

Rothrock State Forest Meeting: Half Full or Half Empty?

By Dave Bonta — Member, JVAS Conservation Committee

At the Bureau of Forestry public meeting on August 28 in the Huntingdon Days Inn, a small knot of anxious citizens pored over the maps of Rothrock State Forest laid out on tables in the conference room.

“What the heck *is* this here *bioreserve*, anyway?”

“I don’t know. But I do know that I don’t like our cabin bein’ in one!”

I was just about to chip in my own two cents — after all, I’d read through the entire State Forest Resource Management Plan, which weighed in at a full two pounds when I printed it off the Web — but then I realized something. I didn’t know exactly what a bioreserve was myself! Beyond a series of vague generalities about an “overall statewide bioreserve strategy” and promises to conserve “rare, unique, and imperiled species,” the forest plan avoids spelling out how bioreserves differ from Natural and Wild Areas, and how these in turn differ from Old-Growth Management Areas (OGMAs). And it’s completely unclear to me how or why certain areas were designated for one or more of these overlapping categories.

The Rothrock map shows proposed OGMAs on nearly every dry, rocky ridgetop or marshy area — areas already off-limits to large-scale commercial logging. “The purposes of the state forest bioreserve system include ... representation of all native biological communities occurring on state forest lands,” says the forest plan. It’s hard to believe that all of Rothrock’s native biological communities are so obliging as to have representative examples in places where the ground happens to be too steep or swampy for logging. But if the new map is to be believed, the only bioreserve actually designated so far coincides with the Thickhead Mountain Wild Area.

Will the Thickhead and Trough Creek Wild Areas be permanently protected from logging and allowed to attain a fully wild character, as the Pennsylvania Sierra Club’s Resolution on State

Forest Wild Areas — endorsed by Juniata Valley Audubon — recommends? Will closed roads be removed and revegetated? How is the hemlock woolly adelgid invasion being handled? Is there any plan to regulate the growth of the trail network to protect the most vulnerable species, such as box turtles, wood turtles, timber rattlesnakes, and Allegheny woodrats (if any still exist)?

Three hours later, we were none the wiser. District Forester Gary Rutherford’s lengthy presentation dwelt upon the history of the forest district and the recreational opportunities Rothrock afforded. This was, no doubt, fascinating for all the guys who were there from the main office in Harrisburg. But for the regular forest users in attendance, there were only a few nuggets of new information. These included the revelation that the district would soon be launching a motorized camping system, with eight sites scattered throughout the forest at unspecified locations; that the state gets an average of \$1526 per acre from timber sales in Rothrock, which isn’t quite enough to cover overhead; and that Rothrock hosts a total of thirty-two fenced “regeneration areas” — clear-cuts where trees won’t regenerate unless they are fenced from deer. It wasn’t clear how twenty-five miles of woven-wire fencing would persuade oak seedlings to outcompete red maple, however.

Mr. Rutherford did say that the Thickhead would remain fully protected “as far as I’m concerned.” He also assured us that he welcomed the challenge of working with the folks from Scientific Certification Systems, who oversee the “green” certification program for all wood harvested from state forests and, according to Rutherford, “make lots of tough demands on us.”

Next, we were treated to a ten-minute Power-Point presentation on the building of a parking lot at the bottom of Galbraith Gap. Apparently, the folks at the district office were convinced that everyone’s main interest in coming to the meeting

was to find out about new recreational opportunities. Assistant District Forester Randall White's presentation on Natural and Wild Areas made this point loud and clear. He claimed that the Thickhead Mountain Wild Area — which has been expanded by an additional 650 acres — has been set aside so that people can enjoy peace and solitude; he said nothing about imperiled species or native biological communities. His own lack of familiarity with those communities was obvious: He stated that both black and red spruce grow at the Bear Meadows Natural Area (only black spruce has been found there); he referred to the Alan Seeger Natural Area as a "virgin hemlock stand" (it isn't); and he introduced a slide of a trillium at the Rocky Ridge Natural Area as "just another flower."

By this time, it was getting late, so the major talk of the evening — which might have explained about bioreserves, OGMAs, and other minor details of the new plan — was subjected to a severe thinning. The nice young man from the planning office in Harrisburg, Roy Brubaker, regaled us with a few more fascinating glimpses into history, then told us he would spare everybody with all the boring stuff and skipped straight to the end of his planned presentation. The main thing we need to know, he said, was that the planning process now would generate a new plan every five years, with almost continual public meetings just like this one. "That will give us many more opportunities to talk to you," he concluded cheerfully.

After a break for refreshments, we all found our assigned tables and set about providing the foresters with feedback, according to strict guidelines designed to limit interactions between members of the public (speak by turns; make one point per turn; address all comments to the facilitators). Some tables were more talkative than others. The next table over from mine included Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River Important Bird Area Coordinator Dave Kyler, Sierra Club Moshannon Group President Dave Coleman, Clearwater Conservancy Director Kathy Ombalski, and Mid-State Trail architect Tom Thwaites. I couldn't help noticing that they seemed to be having a lot more

fun than we were. Most of the folks at my table didn't have much to say. Two of them admitted that they had come to learn about the plan and were having difficulty providing input since they didn't really know anything about it yet. Three gentlemen from a snowmobiling club kept asking why certain roads within and around Thickhead had been closed to snowmobiles, but not to cars and trucks during hunting season — much less to other recreationists. A reasonable question, I thought, but the guys from Harrisburg who were jotting everything down didn't know the answer.

After things wound down, I had an interesting conversation with the guy who sat next to me at the break-out session. Mark Richards is assistant executive director of the PA Forest Products Association, and as you might expect, he had a lot of clearly articulated views on many subjects relating to the environment. At last, a truly educational experience!



A few days after I sent the above report to the Friends of Rothrock listserv on the Net, Dave Coleman wrote in to say that, considering what he's seen at other state forest district meetings, we should be grateful that Rothrock foresters are so concerned about forest values other than timber. Even though they may focus a bit more on recreational uses than some of us hardcore eco-freaks may like, they *have* managed to design a protected-areas system that makes some sense. "Rothrock is the most enlightened district in the state," Dave cautioned. Other attendees of the August 28th meeting chimed in to stress how much they felt their comments in favor of road closures, expanded wild areas, etc. were noted and appreciated by the moderators at their respective tables. Dr. Stan Kotala even offered to write me a prescription for Prozac! Meanwhile, they're marking trees for a massive "salvage logging" clear-cut on both sides of the Bear Meadows Road, with predictable consequences for water quality and for the survival success of the hemlocks along Galbraith Gap Run.

My request for an explanation was met with a curt, two-line response from the district office. ☉

September 30 is the due date for written comments on the State Forest Resource Management Plan. To read the plan or to submit comments on line, log on to <<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/sfrmp/index.htm>>.

Good analyses of the plan are available on the Pennsylvania Sierra Club Web site, <<http://pennsylvania.sierraclub.org>> (under "Alerts" or "Conservation") and the Allegheny Defense Project Web site, <<http://www.alleghenydefense.org>> (click on "State Forest Plan Released, Public Meetings Scheduled").

Local Developers Set Sights On Public Lands

Local development boosters in Cambria County are attempting to take over about seventy acres of public land in Prince Gallitzin State Park as part of a privately leased golf course and resort. Reports indicate that the development will include an eighteen-hole golf course, tennis courts, and a resort lodge with as many as 300 rooms.

Prince Gallitzin is a 6,249-acre park west of the Allegheny Front, surrounding the 1,600-acre Glendale Lake. It's part of a 45-mile-long, unbroken chain of public lands stretching from Altoona to Milesburg. Rather than assist the state in preserving the wild character of this region, the head of the Cambria County Industrial Development Corporation, Ronald Budash, touts the proposed resort's potential to spur residential and commercial developments and new highways. He told the *Johnstown Tribune-Democrat* newspaper that the resort "would be a regional project to tie northeastern Cambria County into Blair County and the Black Moshannon Valley."

From what we have learned of this project so far, it's likely to be an economical and ecological dud and would set a dangerous precedent for the entire state park system.

To learn about upcoming activities to protect Prince Gallitzin State Park, please contact Dave Bonta at <bontasaurus@yahoo.com>. ☉

— Dave Bonta

CREP Comes to Blair, Centre, Huntingdon, and Mifflin Counties

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a federal, state, and local partnership to provide wildlife habitat, improve water quality, and reduce soil erosion on farms. Established in Pennsylvania in 1999, CREP is a voluntary land retirement program in which farmers sign contracts to implement conservation practices that will protect soil and water on marginally productive farmland. Beginning this fall, farms in Blair, Centre, Huntingdon, and Mifflin Counties may enroll in CREP. It is estimated that approximately 20,000 acres eventually will be enrolled in these four counties.

Eligible farmlands are those within 180 feet of a stream or any farmland that is subject to high rates of erosion. CREP is available only for lands that are marginally productive for farming. Land may be enrolled for ten to fifteen years at a time, during which native grasses, shrubs, and trees must be allowed to grow unimpeded on the land.

CREP will pay farmers to plant native grasses, shrubs, and trees in place of crops on marginal farmland. It also will pay for fencing cattle out of streams, restoring wetlands, and creating habitat specifically to benefit wildlife.

Enrollment of land in the program is rewarded by payments to the farmer for signing the contract as well as annual rental payments for each year that the land is out of crop production. Establishment of conservation cover and habitat enhancements are paid for by the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. Because only marginal farmlands are eligible for CREP, it is likely that farmers will make more money from CREP payments than from farming the enrolled land.

If you would like more information about CREP in Blair, Centre, Huntingdon and Mifflin Counties, contact your county conservation district office.

— Dr. Stan Kotala

Turkey Vultures on the Wing

While hiking recently in the hills near Trough Creek State Park, I came into a clearing on a ridge and was excited to find a “birds-eye” view of turkey vultures soaring below me. From my lofty perch, I was afforded a rare view of these amazing scavengers.

The turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*) is a common sight in Pennsylvania, and fairly easy to identify. With a wingspan of six feet and a body length of 27–32 inches, the turkey vulture is one of our largest birds. From my vantage point, it was easy to see dark brown feathers and featherless red head as the birds circled around. When in flight, vultures hold their wings in a V, unlike eagles or hawks, which hold their wings straight out. The vultures also rock, or appear unsteady in flight. They often are seen soaring gracefully for hours on warm days, riding the thermals over hills and mountains.

It is their flight ability I find so captivating. Vultures can ride thermals, ascending in altitude, without ever flapping. They actually have smaller breast muscles compared to similar-sized birds because they are such efficient gliders. I still enjoy watching vultures to count seconds or minutes between flaps.

Despite their outstanding flight skills, most people view the turkey vulture as a repulsive bird — an omen of death. So many have perceived vultures as morbid eaters of carrion, their silhouettes bringing evil tidings.

In fact, they are amazingly adapted to their gruesome job of finding and eating dead flesh. Their scientific name, *Cathartes aura*, is Latin for “cleansing breeze.” (No, really!) Their sense of smell is amazing. They have been known to be able to detect carrion from more than a mile away. They can actually smell carrion within twelve hours of

death. Vultures have the largest olfactory system of all birds. They sport a perforated septum, which is said to enable them to retain a large, but lightweight beak that is more aerodynamic than cumbersome, considering their olfactory capacity.

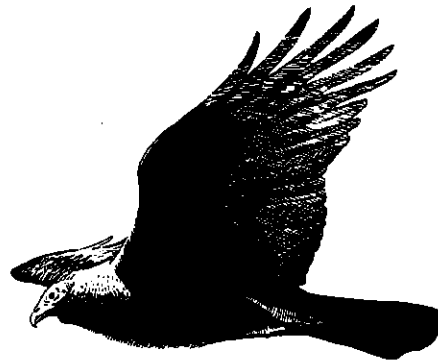
The vulture’s head is bald, thereby helping prevent bits of carrion from sticking to skin as they would to feathers. They are one of the few scavenger birds that can’t kill their prey. Their feet are useless for ripping into prey; instead, they have powerful beaks that can tear through tough hide. Despite their gruesome reputation for eating rotting flesh, they actually prefer fresh carrion and won’t eat extremely rotted carcasses.

Vultures even are adapted for eating decaying flesh. The digestive system has the unique ability to kill any virus and bacteria in their rotting meals. One doctoral study recently reported that their diets include as much as fifty percent vegetative matter, and their droppings are “clean” and do not carry disease.

As fascinating as those facts are, turkey vultures are not without their, um, indelicate side. They will defecate on their feet to cool them off on extremely warm days. They utilize the repulsive but effective adaptation of projectile vomiting to frighten away an attacker. There are even some reports of vultures rolling over and playing dead. In other words, not a great house pet!

But enough of their negative side; vultures actually have a soft and cuddly side as well. Reports have been made of vultures becoming emotionally bound to their handlers. They have become attached to people, often being around to greet them when they come home from work. They even have been seen playing games, such as tag and high-diving, often when returning to their evening roost.

By Heidi Boyle



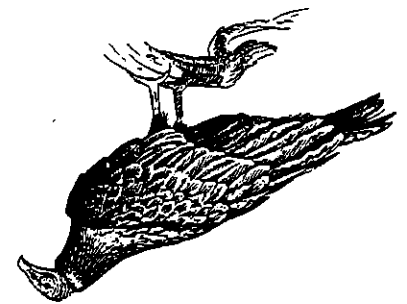
Vultures will roost together, sleeping at night in a tall tree. They often will come back to the same tree for many years. Breeding season occurs in early spring. Eggs are laid usually in early April, although earlier nesting has been reported. The birds rarely build a nest; two mottled eggs are laid on a rocky ledge or crevice. Young are hatched about four weeks later and leave the nest at ten to eleven weeks of age.

In Ohio, the annual Buzzard Festival celebrates the infamous birds. The festival takes place the first Sunday after the 15th of March to celebrate the return migration of the turkey vultures. Of course, their vultures usually have been soaring around for several weeks previous to the festivities. Generally,

the vultures are not seen in the coldest months of December through mid-February, although this can vary.

As autumn commences, the vultures will begin to "kettle up." We should soon begin seeing great numbers of birds soaring together in great kettles. Each year, this is one of the many signs that mark my "naturalist's calendar" of events. As bright hues slowly creep their way over the hills, the fascinating turkey vultures and black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) of south-central Pennsylvania will begin making their way south, looking for still-warm meals on southern roadsides. For my part, I will miss these amazing birds and will keep my nose up for the February return of the "cleansing breeze." ☼

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



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