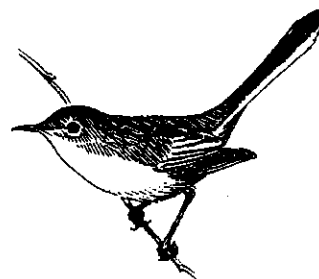


# THE GNATCATCHER

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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[www.juniatavalleyaudubon.org](http://www.juniatavalleyaudubon.org)



## **SECOND PENNSYLVANIA BREEDING BIRD ATLAS PROJECT LAUNCHED**

By Dr. Stan Kotala

Twenty years ago Pennsylvania's birding community began the first-ever systematic assessment of the status of the Keystone State's breeding bird population. The first breeding bird atlas brought together more than two thousand birders for a five-year effort to map the distribution of the more than one hundred eighty species of birds that nest in the Commonwealth. The results were published in the Atlas of Breeding Birds of Pennsylvania, the gold standard by which other state atlases are measured.

This year, the second Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas is being launched under the sponsorship of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and, like the first atlas project, will run for five consecutive field seasons. Guided by Project Director Dan Brauning, Project Coordinator Robert Mulvihill, and Assistant Project Coordinator Mike Lanzone, fifty-seven Regional Coordinators will be responsible for recruiting local birders to determine the breeding status of birds in the 4,928 atlas blocks in Pennsylvania.

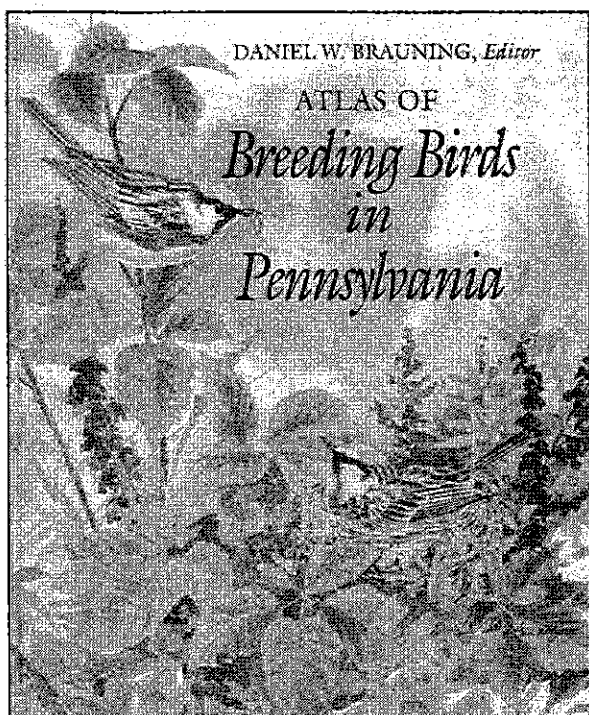
A major goal of the second Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas will be to encourage participation of novice birders and to draw non-birders into our hobby. Project Coordinator Robert Mulvihill stated

"Whether it is an observation made by a grade school class and its teacher of a killdeer nest next to the soccer field, of a family caught up in the drama of watching an American robin pair raise its brood in a nest built on the porch post, or a traveler on the Pennsylvania Turnpike who happens to spot a red-tailed hawk flying into its bulky nest in a large tree at the edge of a field, the more data that is contributed, the better. The more people who become interested in and knowledgeable about birds is also for the better. Data for existing projects in bird study around the state, including the Special Areas Project, Important Bird Areas, Breeding Bird Surveys, and more, will add directly into the Atlas results, and Atlas efforts, in turn, will supplement these important programs - all in the name of bird conservation."

Birders of all skill levels are needed to make the second breeding bird atlas a success. Volunteers will look for signs of breeding, such as singing, territorial defense, nest construction, eggs, and young birds. This should then be reported online to the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas website administered by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, where atlas participants will register, request or modify block assignments, and enter data. This will be accessed via the project's main website, [www.pabirdatlas.org](http://www.pabirdatlas.org) which will be maintained by the Powdermill Nature Reserve staff.

All JVAS members are strongly encouraged to participate in this very important project. To do so, please contact Project Coordinator Robert Mulvihill at [mulvihill@pabirdatlas.org](mailto:mulvihill@pabirdatlas.org) or Assistant Project Coordinator Mike Lanzone at [lanzone@pabirdatlas.org](mailto:lanzone@pabirdatlas.org). Thanks for your help!

*Editor's note: Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas Project Coordinator Robert Mulvihill will present a program detailing the goals, objectives, and methods of this project on **Wednesday, March 24, at 7:00pm** in the **Second Floor Meeting Room of the State College Municipal Building**, located on South Allen Street between East Beaver Avenue and East Foster Avenue in State College. Guests are welcome at this State College Bird Club program.*



The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania, published in 1992, was the end result of the first Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas Project. This almost 500-page book details the breeding locales of the close-to-200 species that nest in the Commonwealth. With detailed species accounts And accurate maps and overlays this book should be included in the library of every serious birder. This is the gold standard by which all other breeding bird atlases are measured. The second Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas will take place from 2004 till 2008. All JVAS members are strongly encouraged to participate!

## SPECIAL FIELD TRIP: INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

By Stan Kotala

International Migratory Bird Day celebrates the incredible journeys of migratory birds between their wintering ground in South and Central America and Mexico and their breeding ground in North America. The event, which takes place on the second Saturday in May each year, encourages bird conservation and increases awareness of bird conservation through hikes, bird watching, and programs about birds and bird migration.

IMBD was created in 1993 by visionaries at the Smithsonian Institution and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Now under the direction of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, IMBD continues to focus attention on one of the most important and spectacular events in the life of a migratory bird: its journey between its winter and summer homes.

Birds have long inspired important conservation actions around the world. Many of these measures are far-reaching laws enacted by federal governments. Others are individual or group efforts that have resulted in important changes in human attitudes towards birds and conservation.

In celebration of International Migratory Bird Day and coincident with the North American Migration Count, a continent-wide "snapshot" of Spring migration, Juniata Valley Audubon will sponsor a **special two part field trip at Canoe Creek State Park on Saturday, May 8th. Portion A** of this trip will begin at 8:30am at the **Canoe Creek State Park Education/Visitor Center** and will put a strong emphasis on birding. Participants will be guided on an educational birding walk along the Limestone Trail along Mary Anne's Creek and the Marsh Trail,

visiting riparian forest, open hillside, shrub, wetland, and open water habitats. We hope to see fifty species of birds during this portion of the field trip. **Portion B** will begin at 10:30am at the park's **Education/Visitor Center** and, although featuring birding, will be more of a general nature hike along the four miles of the Moore's Hill Trail, where we will see numerous wildflowers, including the rare yellow ladies slipper. This part of the field trip will end at approximately 1:00pm with a picnic lunch. Participants may elect to take part in Portion A, Portion B, or both. Those who choose to join us for both parts of the field trip will see about 100 species of birds. The JVAS has invited Pennsylvania Native Plant Society members, Ridge and Valley Outing Club members, and Sierra Club-Moshannon Group members to join us in this celebration of Spring. Sturdy shoes and a bag lunch are must-bring items! If you have any questions, please call trip leader Stan Kotala at (814) 946-8840 h, 239-2211 w, or e-mail him at ccwiba@keyconn.net. **We hope to see you at Canoe Creek on May 8th!**



## **JVAS SHAVER'S CREEK BIRDING CUP TEAM FORMED**

By Stan Kotala

The Shaver's Creek Birding Cup was established thirteen years ago as a fund-raiser for educational programs, research, and raptor care at the Shaver's Creek Environmental Center in northern Huntingdon County. Nestled within the Penn State Experimental Forest and adjacent to the Rothrock State Forest, Shaver's Creek is central Pennsylvania's premier environmental education facility, presenting close to two hundred programs each year at schools, sponsoring the record-breaking Tussey Mountain Golden Eagle Watch, caring for two dozen non-releasable injured raptors at the center, training environmental education interns, providing an ongoing series of nature programs for visitors, conducting saw-whet owl banding, and hosting summer camps for elementary, junior high, and high school students.

The Shaver's Creek Birding Cup competition consists of teams birding for a 24-hour period, this year from 8:00pm on Friday, April 30 till 8:00pm Saturday, May 4, with the cup being awarded to the team that sees the most species. Each team solicits pledges - either a flat amount or on a per species basis - that go to the Shaver's Creek Environmental Education Center.

Juniata Valley Audubon's team, the Gnatcatchers, will again be in the field for this fun event. Currently consisting of Stan, Alice, and Helena Kotala, and Cindy and Luis Moore, our team will confine its birding to the Canoe Creek Watershed Important Bird Area in Blair County, with particular emphasis on State Game Land 166 and Canoe Creek State Park, where we hope to see at least one hundred species of birds during the assigned 24-hour period.

If you'd like to make a Birding Cup contribution to help the Shaver's Creek Environmental Center, please fill out the form below and send it to JVAS Gnatcatchers, RR 3 Box 866, Altoona, PA 16601-9206. Make checks payable to the Shaver's Creek Environmental Center/PSU. If you have any questions, please call JVAS Gnatcatchers team captain Stan Kotala at (814) 946-8840 (home) or (814) 239-2211 (work).

**Yes!** I'd like to help the Shaver's Creek Environmental Center perform its important work by making a donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ (flat amount) or \$\_\_\_\_\_ (per species). I've enclosed a check for \$\_\_\_\_\_ payable to SCEC/PSU.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this completed form to:

**JVAS Gnatcatchers  
RR 3 Box 866  
Altoona, PA 16601-9206**

# HIKING THE MID STATE TRAIL

By Ben Cramer

Many Pennsylvania outdoor enthusiasts are unaware of an outstanding long-distance hiking trail that offers hundreds of miles of premier hiking and some of the best views in Northeast. The Mid-State Trail (MST), much of which has been in place since around 1970, is projected to extend uninterrupted from Maryland to New York State, rambling well over 300 miles through the central portion of Pennsylvania. Planned connections to other regional trails in Maryland and New York will offer backpacking opportunities to rival the more famous Appalachian Trail.

Strangely, the MST is little known outside of Pennsylvania's hardcore hiking crowd. For example, although the trail passes within 10 miles of State College, the Centre County Visitors Bureau has shown little interest in promoting the MST in favor of the much less wild, and far easier, Nittany Mountain tourist trails, according to longtime Pennsylvania hiking expert and activist Tom Thwaites (himself a major force in the ongoing construction and maintenance of the MST).

The MST is either a well-kept secret for hiking aficionados, or a potential outdoor sports and tourism blockbuster. In any case, it offers a unique, wild, and often extremely challenging hiking experience. The trail is almost always less than two miles from a road, passes near several cities, and traverses a dozen state parks and picnic areas, making it easily accessible and good for both day hikes and long-distance backpacking.

The core section of the MST (walking northbound) begins on Route 22 near Alexandria in Huntingdon County. After tackling a few intermittent hills and the Little Juniata River, the MST ascends Tussey Mountain, which it follows northeast for dozens of miles. The very sharp top of this long, snaking ridge offers mostly level but incredibly rocky hiking, which will test even the most rugged footwear, not to mention the most athletic knees and ankles. The Tussey section of the MST offers nearly continuous and spectacular vistas of the farmlands and cities of Happy and Penns Valleys. The trail bids farewell to Tussey Mountain in the aptly named Seven Mountains region east of State College, charging up and down probably all of the said ridges towards an overpass crossing of I-80 near R.B. Winter and Ravensburg State Parks. Now traveling directly to the north, the MST offers two tremendous vistas in Clinton County, first encompassing bucolic Nippenose Valley, and then the West Branch Valley containing Lock Haven, Williamsport, and the gates of Pine Creek. After plunging down into this valley, the character of the MST changes dramatically as it follows a series of paved roads through the developed areas near Lock Haven, passes under Route 220, and conveniently crosses the Susquehanna on a road bridge. This easy road walking soon comes to an abrupt halt as the MST reenters the backcountry, strenuously climbing up the Allegheny Front toward the wildlands of Pine Creek Gorge. The rocky ordeal of the southern parts of the trail is now replaced with almost continuous climbing of some of the steepest mountains in the state. The MST currently ends in Tioga County at the West Rim Trail, deep within the Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania.

In the late 1990s a southern extension from Alexandria to Maryland was constructed. First utilizing the Lower Rail Trail, the new section of the MST mostly follows the southern leg of Tussey Mountain through the wilds of Bedford County, connecting with Maryland's Green Ridge Hiking Trail at the state line. Meanwhile, a northern extension is being planned through Tioga County, which may extend from Pine Creek toward Tioga-Hammond Lakes through the very rugged backcountry along routes 287 and 15. The goal is for the MST to connect with the outstanding Finger Lakes Trail in New York state, which would then make it possible to hike from Maryland to New York by way of more than 300 miles of rugged Pennsylvania wilderness.

The Mid State Trail is the epitome of the Pennsylvania hiking experience and is only beginning to attract the attention it deserves. There is hardly a better way to experience Pennsylvania's rugged beauty while never straying too far from civilization.

*The trail is maintained by the hardworking Mid State Trail Association. Write to them at PO Box 167, Boalsburg, PA 16827 for detailed maps and their very informative guidebook.*

*Ben Cramer is a freelance writer, outdoor enthusiast, and graduate student living in State College. He is also a local group committee member for Sierra Club.*

*"I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements."*

*-Henry David Thoreau*



This monument to Tom Thwaites, creator of the Mid-State Trail was erected last fall at the intersection of the Mid-State Trail and Kettle Trail near the Little Flat tower on the edge of the Thickhead Wild Area in the Rothrock State Forest. Tom Thwaites and his wife Barbara admire the new monument at left..

## **GAME LANDS ANNIVERSARY**

By Stan Kotala

This month marks the twentieth anniversary of the largest single land protection acquisition in Blair County's history, the purchase of the 16,672-acre Blair Gap Water tract by the Pennsylvania Game Commission in 1984. Located in Antis and Snyder Townships on the Allegheny Front in northwestern Blair County, this forested mountainous property tied together four large parcels of State Game Lands 60, 108, and 158.



Negotiations leading to this very significant addition to the Commonwealth's 1.4 million acre game lands system had been underway since 1962. The land was purchased by the Pennsylvania Game Commission in 1984 for \$170 per acre, a total price of \$2,834,240 for 16,672 acres, a true bargain. As wildlife habitat this tract is priceless. It is home to bobcats, black bears, timber rattlesnakes, black-throated blue warblers, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, hermit thrushes, and Canada warblers. In conjunction with adjoining game lands and with the Moshannon State Forest to the north, this huge tract of unbroken forest is of immense value to both resident wildlife and migrants.

In addition to being the largest land protection acquisition in Blair County's history, this purchase was also the PGC's second-largest land purchase ever, the largest being State Game Lands 211, St. Anthony's Wilderness, north of Harrisburg. Since Blair County is the only county in JVAS territory that is not blessed with state forest land, the county's game lands are extremely important to wildlife conservation. Visit our Allegheny Front game lands this spring for a great wildlife experience. You'll be richly rewarded!

# PENNSYLVANIA HERPETOLOGICAL ATLAS PROJECT NEARS COMPLETION

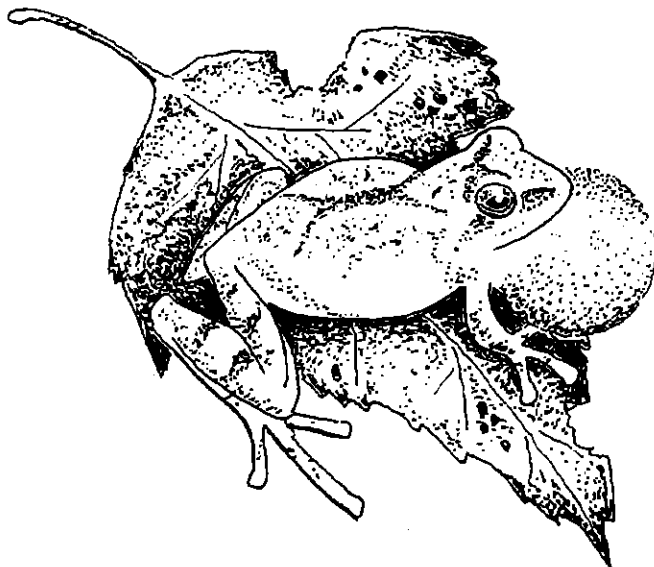
By Stan Kotala

For the past six years, Juniata Valley Audubon has participated in the Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas Project. Co-sponsored by the Pennsylvania Biological Survey, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, this was a seven-year effort to document in detail the statewide distribution of reptiles and amphibians. As of October 2003, the field surveys for the project officially have ended, but the data continue to be processed. This project has a variety of tasks to accomplish. Here are just a few:

- »Provide detailed distribution maps for all species of amphibians and reptiles in our state.
- »Provide a detailed database that will aid environmental managers in making informed and ecologically sound decisions regarding resource utilization within the state.
- »Provide a database for use in environmental impact statements.
- »Identify potentially critical habitats supporting unique species.
- »Identify localities of endangered or threatened species so that they might be protected.
- »Aid in determining the status of a number of species whose present status is undetermined.

I had the privilege to act as a regional coordinator for the project, and, with the help of more than forty dedicated volunteers, surveyed numerous sites throughout Blair, Bedford, Huntingdon, Fulton, Juniata, Mifflin, Perry, and Franklin Counties. Each year our group would begin its activities on February nights to document the earliest emerging amphibians. In later spring the focus would shift to daytime surveys, and these would continue into October. Beginning this year, we will concentrate on data processing and further study of special species and regions that have received little or no coverage (i.e. northcentral Pennsylvania).

Many thanks to all who helped in this endeavor!



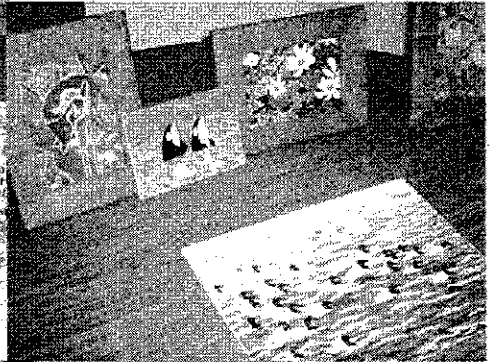
KOTALA 99

*"As I draw near the Swale, my anticipation grows. I begin to see turtles where there are none. I lean on my walking stick and let my eyes move slowly, almost independently, over the wetland before me. The smell of the warming earth alternates with sudden drifts of chill air and watery scents of quick breezes off the Swale. An exhilarating chorus of spring peepers rises up and moves through me; I can feel the chorus as much as hear it. I become lost in the sights and sounds and scents of the awakening spring and can all but taste the season."*

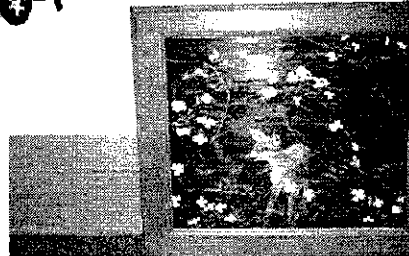
*-David M. Carroll  
The Year of the  
Turtle*



# JVAS MEMBERS NIGHT



January 20, 2004



## WARRIORS MARK RESIDENTS: KEEP TOWNSHIP RURAL

By Stan Kotala

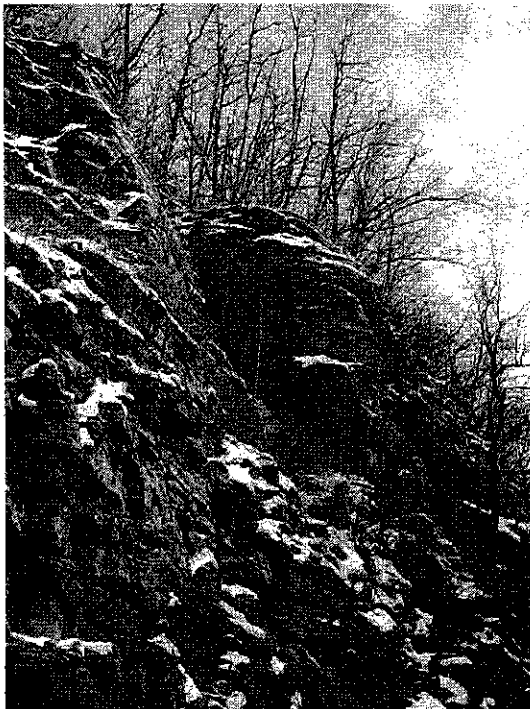
A recent survey commissioned by the Warriors Mark Township Supervisors revealed that residents strongly favored keeping the rural character of the township. The survey asked residents to respond to a panel of about fifty questions regarding the future direction of the township. Sent to about a third of the township's 1,600 residents, the survey generated a response rate of almost forty percent.

Responses indicated that residents felt that "residential development should be discouraged in some areas due to environmental conditions or lack of infrastructure." Land use regulations to manage growth and ordinances to protect farmland were strongly supported by respondents. Overwhelmingly, Warriors Mark Township residents believed that developers "should identify and protect specific environmental features" in new subdivisions. 73% supported increased land use regulations. Water quality and flooding were found to be major concerns. Residents expressed interest in expanding recreational opportunities such as the creation of jogging paths and hiking trails throughout the township.

One source of information to help the township in protecting natural features is the recently-completed Huntingdon County Natural Heritage Inventory. Under the direction of the Huntingdon County Planning Commission, ecologists from the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy identified the most notable natural areas of the county. Available at the Huntingdon County Planning Commission office, the

Huntingdon County Natural Heritage Inventory lists several notable features in Warriors Mark Township: the Dungarvin Ponds North Biological Diversity Area in the township's northeastern corner and the Gensimore Run Biological Diversity Area and Birmingham Biological Diversity Area in the township's southeastern corner. The Dungarvin Ponds North BDA is part of the Gatesburg formation and contains numerous vernal ponds important for amphibian populations and is home to rare plants including clasping-leaved St. John's wort (*Hypericum gymnanthum*), which was believed to be extirpated from Pennsylvania until the recent discovery at this site. The Gensimore Run BDA supports cattail sedge (*Carex typhina*), a rare calcareous wetland plant and the Birmingham BDA consists of limestone bluffs providing habitat for the globally-rare spreading rockcress (*Arabis patens*).

Warriors Mark Township Supervisor Stewart Neff said that he was pleased with the response rate of the survey and stated that the results give the board of supervisors guidance in making decisions about the township's future. Other municipalities should follow Warriors Mark Township's lead in surveying its residents opinions rather than just assuming that any tax-generating new development is desired. Juniata Valley Audubon members should be very active in voicing their opinion regarding the preservation of nature in their municipality. Let's make our voices heard on behalf of the natural world!



Limestone cliffs along the Little Juniata River east of the village of Birmingham in Warriors Mark Township, Huntingdon County are home to the spreading rockcress (*Arabis patens*), a globally rare plant, which has colonized the exposed rock at the crest of the bluff, a habitat unsuitable for most plant species. A small population of the rare brome grass (*Bromus kalmii*) is scattered sparsely throughout the dry oak-heath woodland at the top of the bluff.

*"Objects are concealed from our view, not so much because they are out of the course of visual ray as because we do not bring our minds and eyes to bear on them."*

*-Henry David Thoreau*



## **BOBS CREEK GROUP: THE STREAM GUARDIANS**

By Rob Berns

One needs only to consider the large amount of work put forth by the Stream Guardians of the Bobs Creek Watershed in order to understand the importance that the community places on it. In just 2002, the Guardians planned and executed two dump cleanups and held a Watershed Meeting and a Watershed Day, along with mailing information about Bobs Creek to 1,100 landowners (to inform them about Bobs Creek and to ask for participation).

The Stream Guardians, the group associated with Bobs Creek, is a sub-committee of the Pavia Sportsmens Club, Inc. Stream Guardians is chaired by Chris Ickes and co-chaired by Tim Clingerman. The Stream Guardians' mission is to protect and rehabilitate the watershed on private and public lands, so that it will be available for future generations at a high-quality level. Some goals the Stream Guardians listed for the Bobs Creek project include clean up of water within the watershed, developing a newsletter about the watershed, monitoring water quality, and educating the public on both watersheds and nutrient issues.

The Bobs Creek watershed is located primarily in northwest Bedford County, and expands into parts of Blair and Cambria Counties, encompassing sixty-five square miles. More than 45% of the Bobs Creek watershed is forested and managed by the Bureau of State Parks or PA Game Commission. The rest of the watershed is composed of agricultural land that includes a few small communities.

The Stream Guardians chose to monitor for several reasons. First, monitoring will allow them to determine the ecological conditions of the watershed. They then can prioritize areas for restoration and protection projects. Second, the Stream Guardians are interested in improving and protecting the water quality for wild trout. Finally, water monitoring allows the Guardians to cooperate with local schools on education programs, which is one of the many goals they hope to achieve through the project.

While deciding which parameters to monitor, the Stream Guardians first had to decide which water quality issues were most important for Bobs Creek. The Guardians considered sedimentation, illegal dumps, and nutrients to be of paramount concern. Parameters to be monitored in Bobs Creek are temperature and turbidity as physical indicators and pH, alkalinity, nitrate, dissolved oxygen, and orthophosphate as chemical indicators.

The Stream Guardians have a three-year plan for the cleanup of the Bobs Creek watershed. One main focus of the Stream Guardians is to conduct this project "at no cost to the landowner". The Guardians have recieved funding from the Western PA Conservancy, the Blue Knob State Park Staff, and the Pavia Sportsmen. The group also recently recieved funding from the Cold Water Heritage Program to conduct an assesment of the entire watershed and to launch partnerships with local school districts. The Stream Guardians hope that this project will keep the natural resources of Bobs Creek safe for the next generation of landowners and recreational users in the watershed.

## **PRESIDENT'S BUDGET SEEKS INCREASE IN STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS**

The President's budget for Fiscal Year 2005 requests \$80 million for State Wildlife Grants, the nation's core program for preventing species from becoming endangered. His budget reflects a \$20 million increase above last year's request and \$10 million above the Congressional appropriation of \$70 million for 2004. The State Wildlife Grants Program provides funding to states to restore and protect declining wildlife and habitat. Since Congress enacted the program in 2001, states have worked with private landowners, conservation groups, and other agencies to restore degraded habitat, reintroduce native species, and promote the effective stewardship of private lands. By making early, strategic investments in wildlife conservation, the program helps states recover declining wildlife, saving taxpayer dollars and reducing conflicts over endangered species listings.

The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies - representing all state fish and wildlife agencies - has identified the program as its highest priority for federal funding. Baughman praised the Office of Management and Budget, the Council for Environmental Quality and the US Department of Interior for their responsiveness to this critical program. "The President's request for \$80 million represents an excellent starting point for State Wildlife Grants in 2005," Baughman said. "However, wildlife conservation needs an even greater commitment of funds if we are to truly succeed in saving taxpayers many more dollars in the future." During the "Teaming with Wildlife Fly-In Days" on February 24-25, 2004, supporters of State Wildlife Grants from across the nation converged on Capitol Hill to advocate for funding for the program. More than 3000 groups, from sportsmen and environmental groups to outdoor and tourism businesses, support this effort as part of the "Teaming with Wildlife" coalition.

## SPRING REFLECTIONS

By Heidi Boyle

*"Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air; drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of each... Be blown on by all the winds. Open all your pores and bathe in all the tides of nature, in all her streams and oceans, at all seasons."*

—Henry David Thoreau

I enjoy a good thaw! Such delight there is in the earliest warm days of spring, though they are disguised in the still-present snows of later winter. Days such as these draw the two- and four-footed creatures from their winter holes and into the sunshine, if only to feel the warmth on shell, fur and feather.

On such a late-winter day I found myself crawling down an icy snow bank into a tangle of willow branches to enjoy sunshine and solitude. In a small, thawed area next to a spring, I sat on a large patch of moss and enjoyed the peace of the day.

As I settled in, motion in front of me drew my gaze to the branches. White-throated sparrows were perched low in the willows above the shallow channel of the spring. Busy bathing, the birds quickly flew between water and branches, fluttering their wings in short, startling 'whirrers,' preening in the afternoon sun.

These beautiful sparrows, capped in stripes of black and white, remain in small flocks and feed together on the ground at this time of year. They are regular visitors at my birdfeeders throughout the winter but spend a great deal of time low in thickets. The willow stand surrounding the spring is an ideal feeding and resting spot for the small flock. The sparrows seemed content to bathe and preen together, giving their "Tseeet" calls as they moved together through the mottled light of the willows.

As the sparrows flitted above, soft squeaking at my feet drew my attention to the base of the willows. I could see tunnels just under the leaf litter and moss, which moved as a tiny animal came nosing along under the duff. My curiosity was soon rewarded with the sight of *Blarina brevicauda*, the short-tailed shrew.

As this tiny mammal moved under the leaf litter, it allowed me only a few glimpses of its 3-4" form, clad in beautiful, sleek gray fur. Shrews typically stay under cover during daylight, although they are active both day and night. The hyper little specimen nosed about quickly in its tunnels, searching for a meal. Shrews rely primarily on their keen sense of smell and touch to find food; they have no external ears, and their eyes are miniscule. As the small creature moved along under the moss I could hear it crunching small invertebrates and other nameless morsels.

*B. brevicauda* is one of only a few mammals on earth that have poisonous saliva, which may serve to hinder respiration and heartbeat in its prey. Several times as I watched, worms crawled out of the moss, just ahead of the long furry nose, and escaped. Once, the shrew caught up with a worm and crunched away on its wriggling snack.

Shrews live in a variety of habitats; their tunnels are apparent just under leaf litter. Because their fast metabolisms require a constant demand for calories, the animals are frequently seen as they search their territory for food. It was especially rewarding to sit for almost an hour and observe this tiny mammal go about its search for afternoon nourishment.

While watching the busy shrew, I was startled to see a large crayfish slowly and carefully picking its way along the bank to the spring. The crayfish was enormous, almost 6" in length, its shell a mottled, rusty red. As I watched, it reached the spring, moved across the watercress, and slipped into the water. It then moved at a leisurely pace down the channel, feeding on detritus.

As it feeds, this familiar yet bizarre-looking animal plays an important role. By breaking down organic matter, including dead animals and plants, it makes nutrients and energy available for other organisms. I followed its progress as it slowly moved under leaf packs and sticks, unhurriedly churning its way through the leaves and aquatic plants in the cold water.

Winter is an important season for crayfish. It is a time when many predators simply aren't around to pose a significant threat, and so winter is ideal for breeding. Females secrete a sticky substance that covers the bottom of their abdomen, onto which they deposit their eggs. When the eggs hatch, the juveniles stay attached for a while until large enough to drop off and move away. In early spring, it is common to find crayfish with many young clinging to a female's underside as she moves along a stream on cleanup detail.

Ignoring the shrew as it dipped in and out of the water's edge nearby, I continued to follow the robust crayfish as it moved along a two-foot section of the channel and came out of the water to move along on top of the water-cress. This beauty had no eggs or young clinging to its underside, but its sheer size and deep coloring was rewarding to see. Of North America's 300+ species of crayfish, few in our area grow to be larger than this one.

The sunlight disappeared for a few moments, and the crayfish moved to the other side of the spring. The shrew hung around for another few minutes, and crossing the water, disappeared under the roots of some willows. The rustling and squeaking at my feet now gone, I looked overhead for the sparrows, but the small flock had also flown off, possibly for their usual late afternoon gathering at the birdfeeders.

A more rewarding hour and a half, I cannot imagine. Many naturalists have proclaimed the merits of solitude and observation, and on this winter day, with all its hints of the spring to come, the rewards were many.

*"...At the foot of the water-fall he sits sequestered and hidden in its volume of sound. The birds know he has no designs upon them...His enthusiasm anneals him and makes him pliable to the scenes and influences he moves among...(The stream) runs through his thoughts not less than through its banks there; he feels the fret and thrust of every bar and boulder...its beauty haunts him for days."*

—John Burroughs

## **CONSERVATION CORNER**

JVAS members - get ready! Congress is getting ready to again consider several conservation issues this year and a lot of it is not good. President Bush is again going to try and get approval to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling via the budget process or other means. The Arctic Refuge is an intact wilderness ecosystem and millions of birds that migrate through the lower 48 states including Pennsylvania, nest in the Refuge. To endanger this ecosystem is unconscionable and JVAS members are again encouraged to contact our U.S. Senators urging them to oppose the drilling.

Another issue of concern is the Endangered Species Act. This Act is now under attack by both the Bush Administration and certain powerful Senators even though this Act is responsible for the protection and recovery of endangered/threatened species. These anti-environmentalists are using terms like "streamline" the Act and using "sound science" - all of which is a "smoke screen" to weaken the Act. Their goal - to weaken the Act in order to allow certain wealthy special interests to exploit our natural resources without any responsibility for the potential destruction of critical wildlife habitat.

An example of the current Administration's efforts to weaken the Act is the proposal to exempt the Environmental Protection Agency from consulting with the Fish and Wildlife Service in regards to the potential hazards of pesticides and other chemicals. This has been required by the Endangered Species Act but the Administration wants this requirement to be removed. If this happens, then the EPA could approve pesticides/chemicals with little or no consideration of their impacts on wildlife - a return to the days of Silent Spring. Again, JVAS members are encouraged to contact their federal legislators and express their support for the Endangered Species Act and not to weaken it.

However, there is some good news. As a result of the objections of thousands of Audubon members, environmentalists, hunters, anglers and citizens, the Administration has withdrawn their proposal to exempt isolated wetlands from Clean Water Act protections. It is still questionable how aggressive the Corps and EPA will be in enforcing the regulations but at least they still exist and we can always appeal to the courts for "relief".

The bottom line is that with Congress back in session, we must continue our vigilance and pressure on them because if we don't, the anti-environmentalists will and the protections put in place over the past 30-35 years will be pushed back to the "dark ages".

—Mark Henry

\*\*\*\*\*  
**ANNUAL JVAS SPRING BANQUET**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 20**

**LIBERTY HALL**

**AT THE**

**U.S. HOTEL RESTAURANT**

**401 S. JUNIATA STREET**

**HOLLIDAYSBURG**

**\$25 PER PERSON**

**SEATING AT 6:30 P.M.**

**DINNER - CHOICE OF CHICKEN CORDON BLEU**

**OR**

**SLICED ROAST BEEF AU JUS**

**PRESENTATION OF 2004 JVAS CONSERVATION AWARD**

**PROGRAM BY DR. CHUCK YOHN**

**"ENVIRONMENTAL JEOPARDY" - AN INTERACTIVE SLIDE-SHOW GAME**

**DOOR PRIZE DRAWING**

**RAFFLE DRAWING**  
\*\*\*\*\*

**IT'S RAFFLE TIME!**

You have a better chance of winning at this year's Annual JVAS Raffle at Banquet Time. Instead of offering a "grand prize", JVAS Education Chair Jody Wallace has put together a package of choices. Special this year are donations of Audubon member's unique time and talent. Enter to win one of these Mini Audubon Excursions.

**The Falconer's Apprentice:** Join master falconer Mark Shields for a couple hours to experience what it would be like to be a medieval falconer's apprentice.

**A Birder's Morning:** Naturalist, educator, and JVAS member Roy Boyle will lead you on an exclusive tour of a local birding hot spot.

**Wetlands for Dummies:** Get your feet wet with wetlands biologist Sarah Miller for an afternoon.

These excursion prizes are open to you and a few companions. The time will be arranged later. Check out these more tangible prizes:

**Birding By Ear-** by Walton and Lawson. You are more likely to hear birds than see one. Sharpen your skills on your way to your favorite birding spot. Two prizes: Birding By Ear- 3 cassettes, Birding By Ear- 2 CD's

**Winged Migration DVD-** Own this masterpiece of bird cinematography

**The Life of Birds-** a book by David Attenborough

**The Garrison and Military Life-** by Ro Emerson. A gift from Fort Roberdeau

**Fort Roberdeau Pottery Mug-** a gift from the fort.

**Butterfly Garden Plants**

**Bird House**

*(see next page for information on how to enter the raffle)*

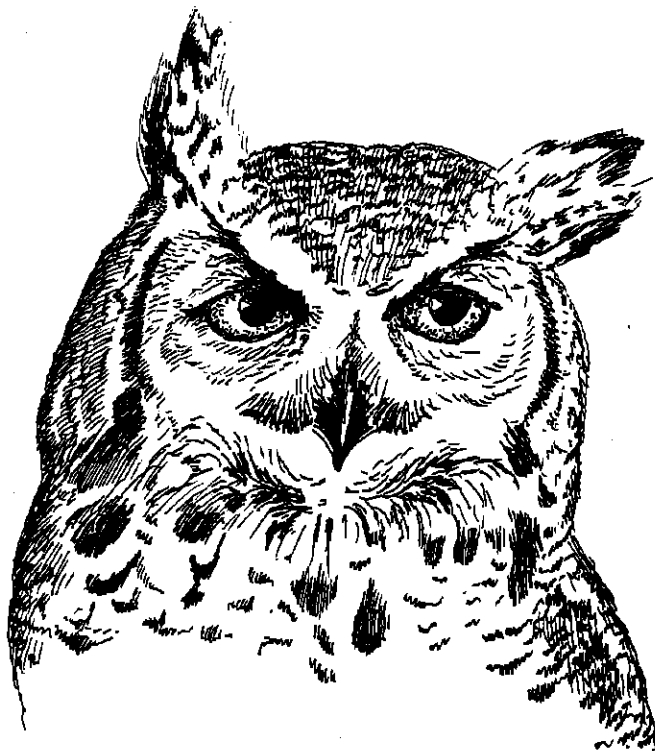
## HOW TO ENTER THE RAFFLE

Simply enter at the banquet on April 20, 2004. Fill out the raffle tickets enclosed (**NOTE: They may be photo copied!**). Be sure to fill out which prize you are trying for. These will go into a box with the other tickets for the prize's random drawing. The cost is \$2 for one chance and \$5 for 3 chances. If you do not plan on attending the banquet, send in the completed raffle tickets along with the appropriate amount of money. Make checks out to JVAS and send to:

Marge Hoyer  
JVAS Treasurer  
P.O. Box 32  
Tyrone, PA 16686-0032

**Do you have to be present to win?** No, but a few prizes cannot be sent, and you will have to arrange for a pick-up.

The money collected from the raffle will go into the JVAS education fund. For more information, call Jody Wallace at 814-684-2425.



Make the wise choice.

Attend the JVAS

Spring Banquet!

KOTALA 03

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This issue of *The Gnatcatcher* carries my last "message," as my term as president will expire in April. A new president, to be elected at the March general meeting of the JVAS, will succeed me on the evening of the spring banquet (annual meeting) on April 20.

At the regular meeting of members on March 16, Nominating Committee Chair Stan Kotala will present the names of candidates for the offices of President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Before the election of officers at that meeting, additional nominations may be made from the floor. The elected officers will be installed at the spring banquet.

Speaking of the annual spring banquet, it will be an evening at the U.S. Hotel Restaurant, in Hollidaysburg, that you won't want to miss! Dr. Chuck Yohn, of Juniata University, will present an interactive slide-show game called "Environmental Jeopardy," which should prove to be both entertaining and informative. And as we know from last year, the U.S. Hotel proprietors will provide us with a truly enjoyable dining experience. However, the cost per dinner this year will be \$25 due to a considerable increase in prices at the restaurant. (See page 12 and 13 for more information, including details on this year's JVAS fund-raising raffle to be conducted at the banquet.)

I would be remiss in this column not to mention the JVAS Board of Directors' recent loss of Gene Zielinski, whose job transfer has taken him to Augusta, Georgia. Gene, who served as recording secretary since 1990, also led several JVAS field trips over the years. In January, at a farewell pot-luck dinner at the Friends Meeting Room, in State College, members of the State College Bird Club and Juniata Valley Audubon bid farewell to Gene. On behalf of the JVAS, it was my pleasure that evening to present a certificate of appreciation stating: "In appreciation of Gene Zielinski, who for fifteen years (1990-2004), has capably and affably served Juniata Valley Audubon in the office of Secretary. Not only did he keep accurate minutes of the proceedings at JVAS board meetings, he also provided invaluable guidance to the board members during those proceedings."

Good luck to you, Gene, in your professional endeavors in Georgia, and we hope it won't be long until you tire of the South and return to your roots in central Pennsylvania.





## JOIN JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON!

- ☐ Option 1— Juniata Valley Audubon membership provides you with the following benefits:
- 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 chapter-only member at a annual membership rate of \$15. Make your check payable to Juniata Valley Audubon Society.**
- ☐ Option 2— National Audubon membership provides you with all the benefits of Option 1 with the addition of a subscription to the quarterly *Audubon* magazine.
- Become a National Audubon member for a annual rate of \$35. Make your check payable to National Audubon Society.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ PA \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

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## JVAS BOARD MEMBERS

## OFFICERS

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

Field Trips.....Dave Kyler 643-6030  
<davidkyler@pennswoods.net>  
Publications  
and Publicity.....Helena Kotala 946-8840  
<ccwiba@keyconn.net>  
Hospitality.....Barb Corle 276-3428  
<bncorle@yellowbananas.com>  
Historian.....Terry Wentz 692-4224  
<dtw1999@adelphia.net>

## COMMITTEE CHAIRS

**Membership.....**Charlie Hoyer (see above)  
**Programs.....**Cindy Moore (see above)  
**Conservation.....**Mark Henry    349-5774  
                                <mshenry1@juno.com>  
**Wetlands.....**Jennifer Park    793-3486  
                                <jhapark@pennswoods.net>  
**Education.....**Jody Wallace    684-2425  
                                <iwalisheil@aol.com>

## DIRECTORS

**IBA Coordinator.....Dave Kyler (see above)**  
**IBA Coordinator.....Dr. Stan Kotala   946-8840**  
                                <ccwiba@keyconn.net>  
**CBC Coordinator.....Debbie Wentz   692-4224**  
                                <dtw1999@adelphia.net>

*"This is the first really spring day....Something analogous to the thawing of the ice seems to have taken place in the air. At the end of winter there is a season in which we are daily expecting spring, and finally a day when it arrives...."*

-Henry David Thoreau

## **MARCH AND APRIL PROGRAMS**

**March 16, 2004**

Stan and Helena Kotala will present a program about the **Amphibians of the Juniata Valley**.

**April 20, 2004**

Join us for our annual **Spring Banquet**. The speaker will be Dr. Chuck Yohn of Juniata College. He will present a program entitled Environmental Jeopardy, which will feature teams answering questions about environmental topics. See page 12 for details.

**ABOUT JVAS PROGRAMS:** Programs are presented on the third Tuesday of each month. They begin at 7 PM in the chapel at Alto-Reste Park on Plank Road, Altoona. Our programs are designed for a general audience, and are free and open to the public.

## **MARCH, APRIL, AND MAY FIELD TRIPS**

**April 24-26, 2004**

### **Delmarva Birding Bonanza**

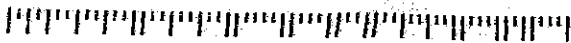
We will visit many of the east coast's birding hot-spots during this 72-hour birding blitz. Saturday: Bombay Hook NWR, Cape Henlopen, Indian River Inlet and finally Ocean City. Sunday: Chincoteague NWR and Pocomoke River State Park. Monday: Blackwater NWR on the way home. We have traditionally found over 150 species of birds on this three day trip. Leave Huntingdon at 7 AM on the 24th. Return 8 PM on the 26th. Van Transportation will be available from Huntingdon. Call Field Trip Chair Dave Kyler at 643-6030 for more information.

**May 8, 2004**

### **Canoe Creek State Park International Migratory Bird Day**

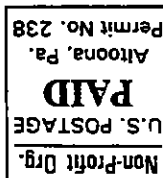
See page 2 of the newsletter for details.

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Marcia Bonta  
P.O. Box 68  
Tyrone, PA 16686-0068  
Exp: 9/1/04



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

MAY BE PHOTO  
COPIED

<p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>State _____ Zip _____</p> <p>Phone: _____</p> <p>E-mail: _____</p> <p>Bring this ticket to the banquet on April 20, 2004 or mail to:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">JVAS P.O. Box 32 Tyrone, PA 16686-0032</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>JVAS RAFFLE</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">To benefit Juniata Valley Audubon</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Circle prize you are trying for:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Falconer's Apprentice A Birder's Morning Wetlands for Dummies Birding By Ear cassettes Birding By Ear CD's Winged Migration DVD The Life of Birds Garrison and Military Life Bird House Fort Roberdeau Mug Butterfly Garden Plants (must be present to win)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1 chance-\$2 , 3 chances-\$5</p>
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## Juniata Valley Audubon

### ANNUAL SPRING BANQUET — 2004

DR. CHUCK YOHN: "ENVIRONMENTAL JEOPARDY"

Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ place(s) for me at the Annual JVAS Banquet to be held in the Liberty Hall banquet room (a smoke-free facility) at the U.S. Hotel Restaurant & Tavern, 401 S. Juniata St., Hollidaysburg, on Tuesday, April 20 at 6:30 P.M.

\_\_\_\_\_ Chicken Cordon Bleu      \_\_\_\_\_ Sliced Roast Beef Au Jus

At \$25 per person, I'm enclosing a \$ \_\_\_\_\_ check, payable to JVAS.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Mail your check by April 15 to  
Marge Hoyer, P.O. Box 32, Tyrone, PA 16686-0032  
Phone: 684-7376