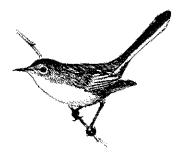
THE GNATCATCHER

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon



Vol. 37 No. 6-Nov/Dec 2005

www.juniatavalleyaudubon.org

Draft Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory Completed

A three-year long project to identify and map the most significant natural areas in Blair County was completed this past summer and its results unveiled at a public meeting in the Blair County Courthouse on September 6th. Prepared for the Blair County Planning Commission and conducted by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, the Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory will be available to the general public, developers, and municipalities.

The inventory began with a thorough review of the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory database to determine where sites supporting species of special concern and intact natural communities were known to exist in Blair County. Reconnaissance flights were conducted over the county and areas identified as unique were scheduled for ground surveys. After obtaining permission from landowners, sites were examined to evaluate the condition of the habitat and classify the communities present. The flora, fauna, level of disturbance, age of the community, and local threats were among the data recorded for each site.

The draft Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory divides the most significant natural areas, designated as

Natural Heritage Areas, into two categories:

Biological Diversity Areas - areas containing plants or animals of special concern, exemplary natural communities, or exceptional native diversity.

Landscape Conservation Areas - large contiguous areas that are biologically important because of their ecological integrity and/or inclusion of one or more Biological Diversity Areas.

The inventory found 51 Biological Diversity Areas (BDAs) and 21 Landscape Conservation Areas (LCAs) in Blair County. These sites were ranked as being of *Exceptional Significance*, *High Significance*, *Notable Significance*, and County Significance.

Blair County's largest blocks of Landscape Conservation Areas were on the Allegheny Front (mostly encompassed by State Game Lands 158), Brush and Canoe Mountains (portions of which are within State Game Lands 166), Lock and Loop Mountains (portions of which are within SGL 147), and Tussey Mountain (mostly encompassed by SGL 118). As you can see, the Pennsylvania Game Commission is the largest single landholder in Blair County's Landscape Conservation Areas, so much of the stewardship responsibility for these areas falls into their hands.

The county's most significant Biological Diversity Areas should be familiar to all Juniata Valley Audubon members: Beaver-dam Wetlands BDA in SGL 166 (the headwaters of Canoe Creek), Canoe Creek Valley/ Lock Mountain Bat Habitat BDA, and Tytoona Cave BDA in Sinking Valley.

The inventory found that natural communities have redeveloped along the Allegheny Front and the ridges since the timber boom of the early 1900s. Large areas of contiguous forest now provide abundant habitat for forest-dwelling species and protect water quality in streams. Some areas, however, are fragmented by roads, utility rights-of-way, and artificial clearings.

Despite this, Blair County's forests have the potential to support species which are declining in other areas of Pennsylvania due to lack of habitat. In addition, the ridges and the Allegheny Front form regional corridors of forest habitat which are important for dispersal and migration. The report stresses the importance of maintaining forest contiguity through the encouragement of the use of previously altered landscapes for development needs.

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy's ecologists believe that Blair County has the potential to benefit our natural heritage by managing some areas to become old-growth forests. They noted that some species can find appropriate habitat only in old-growth forests because the structures they need for shelter or the foods that they require are not present in younger forests.

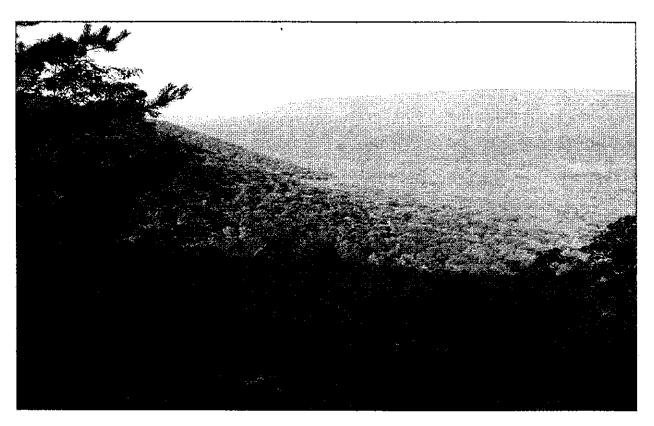
Unique wetland communities, including forest seeps, headwater shrub swamps, calcareous marshes, floodplain wetlands, and vernal pools were found throughout the county. The inventory noted the importance of these areas in light of the loss of 50% of the Keystone State's wetlands over the past century.

The greatest loss in the county has occurred in our valley landscapes, where few unaltered habitats remain. The Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory recommends the establishment of corridors connecting the few remaining pockets of natural habitat in our valleys to enhance their potential to support wildlife. By routing such corridors along streams we can improve water quality and enhance the habitat value of waterways, reduce flood damage, and improve the scenic and recreational value of our waterways.

The most important aspect of encouraging the conservation of the Natural Heritage Areas (LCAs and BDAs) is the careful review of proposed land use changes or development activities that overlap with these identified areas. Conflicts may be avoided if developers first contact either the Blair County Planning Commission or the Blair County Conservation District to determine whether their project has the potential to adversely impact the county's natural heritage.

JVAS members who would like to review the Blair County Natural Heritage inventory may contact JVAS president/conservation chair Dr. Stan Kotala at 946-8840, ccwiba@keyconn.net, or view the inventory at the Blair County Planning Commission office or the Blair County Conservation District office.

On page 3 is a map showing the location of the Landscape Conservation Areas and Biological Diversity Areas in Blair County.



Looking west from State Game Lands 166 in the Brush Mountain East LCA to the Brush Mountain West LCA across Sinking Valley.

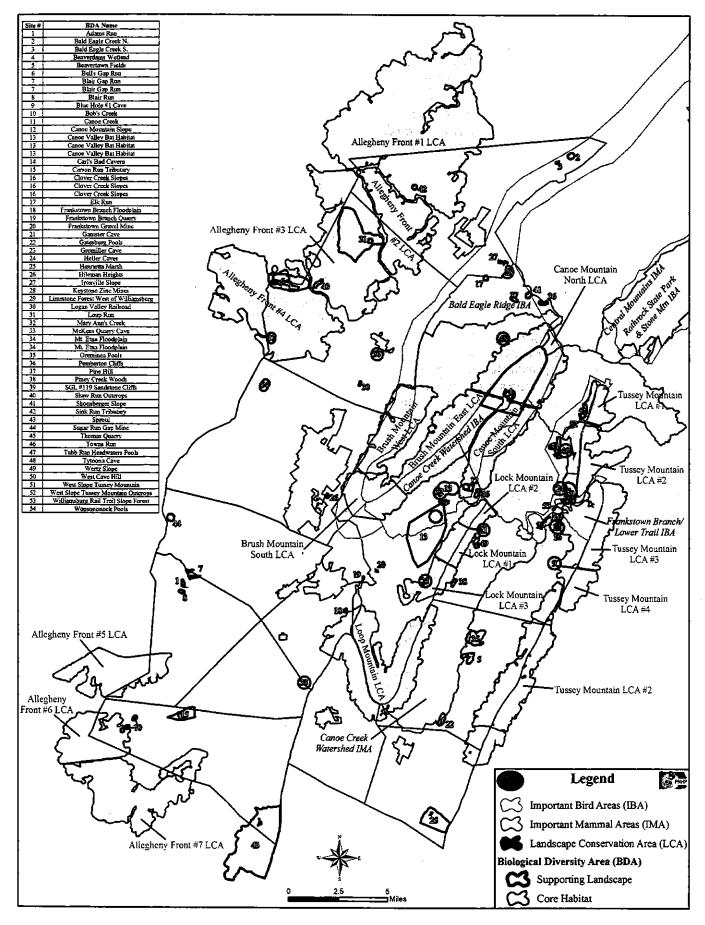


Figure 1. Natural Heritage Areas, Important Bird Areas, and Important Mammal Areas of Blair County

JVAS adopts Butterfly Garden at Canoe Creek State Park

The JVAS board has voted to adopt the butterfly garden at Canoe Creek State Park.

You may have visited the Canoe Creek State Park education center and adjoining butterfly garden. The garden, enjoyed by so many visitors, is in trouble. Non-native plants are taking over and, unless the garden can be maintained, it may have to be turned over to grass. To that end, Garden Days are being set in order for volunteers to help save the garden.

Our goals include:

- 1 Establishing routine maintenance and weeding of garden
- 2 Increase diversity by purchasing and planting more native species in the garden
- 3 Removing non-native plants
- 4 Controlling plants such as Canada thistle, hedge and black bindweed, and grasses that are intruding

Garden Days will be the third weekend of the month (Saturday or Sunday) from May to August, 8 – 10am. If you are unfamiliar with what plants to weed, we'll be making it easy by marking the plants we want to keep. Trowels and gloves will be provided, along with cold water.

Contact Heidi Boyle at 696 6025 or JVAS President Dr. Stan Kotala at 946 8840 or ccwiba@keyconn.net if you are interested in signing up to help on these days.

BIRDSONG 'IDENTIFLYER' AVAILABLE FOR BEGINNING BIRD WATCHERS

To assist beginning bird watchers, the Pennsylvania Game Commission is offering a birdsong audio "Identiflyer" through "The Outdoor Shop" on its website (www.pgc.state.pa.us). Just click on "Merchandise," select "Misc. Items" and scroll down to the birdsong Identiflyer. The Identiflyer also is available at the Game Commission's Harrisburg headquarters and Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area Visitor Center. (These items are not available in agency Region Offices.) The device, which sells for \$35.50, comes with two audio cards, an earphone for in-the-field use, a bird-watching guide booklet and three AAA batteries already inserted.

JVAS participates in Community Planning Course

JVAS members Alice Fleischer and Dr. Stan Kotala recently completed a community planning course offered by the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Education Institute for residents of Blair, Bedford, and Huntingdon Counties. This three-session 10-hour course included in-depth instruction on the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and recent amendments, the technical components of comprehensive planning and land use regulations, as well as guidance for building effective working relationships among planning commission members, the governing body and the public. Hands-on exercises and discussions were built into each session.

The purposes of the course were to learn the authority for planning in the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and how to use it as your basic reference for planning, to understand the planning process and learn the roles and responsibilities of planners and other official agencies, as well as to acquire the fundamental body of knowledge needed to participate effectively in the work of planning commissions. Juniata Valley Audubon will use the knowledge gained in this course to work with local governing bodies for the preservation and conservation of natural landscapes.



The Paw-paw Path

by Helena Kotala

It was a cool September morning as my parents and I pulled up to the home of Alice Fleischer, a fellow JVAS member. She invited us all inside for coffee, which we sipped as we discussed our plans for the day. Our real reason for driving over to Huntingdon that morning was not simply to partake in Alice's wonderful hospitality: It was to seek out the fascinating Paw Paw trees, which had recently been discovered by Alice herself on Terrace Mountain, southeast of Huntingdon.

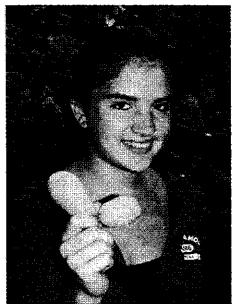
The Paw Paw tree is native to the woods of the eastern United States. It grows to be about 20 feet tall, and produces root suckers several feet from the trunk that also grow up to be Paw Paws. They do well in moist, wooded environments, such as stream valleys. The oblong leaves are almost tropical-looking, and can grow to be about 12 inches long. In autumn, they turn yellow and fall. Paw Paw flowers are maroon-colored and about two inches across. They normally bloom for about six weeks, sometime between March and May, depending on climate. The fruit is about five to six inches long, and tastes like a mix of mango and banana, with a creamy custard-like texture. After finishing our coffee, we were eager to set out on our journey. The four of us, plus Alice's dog, Magic, piled into her car and we were off! Once we got to the dirt road, Alice let Magic out of the car to run ahead up the mountain. The spunky Doberman sprinted ahead, yet was trained enough to stay on the side of the road and to ignore all other traffic. Once we reached the trail, Alice parked the car on the side of the road and we geared up for the three mile walk to the Paw Paws. We checked the map, then headed out for a day of adventure.

The hike started out downhill in a forest owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The path was nice and clear without much brush. However, once we crossed over onto private property which recently had been logged, it became tedious going. The trail was almost completely overgrown and there was invasive Ailanthus everywhere. We paused to admire a brightly colored Marbled Orb Weaver spider, then were on our way again. Soon we crossed back into public property, and the trail became clearer and more shady. After walking for about 30 minutes, I became hungry, and we all stopped to take a rest while I ate my roast beef submarine sandwich. The food gave me energy, and when we set off again, I was pumped and couldn't wait to find the Paw Paws. Soon, we sighted one along the edge of the trail, and we looked up the hill to find many more. The Paw Paws were located near an inlet of Raystown Lake. They occupied a small area, about 50 feet by 20 feet. We scrambled up the rocky hillside to get a better look, and hopefully pick some fruit. After searching for several minutes, we spotted some fruit, hidden in the leafy canopy. There were several that were closer to the ground that we were able to pick. My father, Stan Kotala, maneuvered the extension cutter while Alice Fleischer pulled the string to cut the fruit off the tree. Within minutes, I was holding a Paw Paw in my hand. It was not ripe yet, so it was still green. We picked a total of two Paw Paw fruits, then headed back the way we had come. The temperature was rising, and on our way back to the car, we found ourselves taking off our jackets. It was uphill most of the way back, so we got a good workout!

After arriving back at Alice Fleischer's house, we cut open the Paw Paw and nibbled little bites to try the fruit. Since it was not ripe yet, it was very bitter and not good at all. However, when the Paw Paw ripens, it is supposed to taste very tropical and be very good to eat. We were hungry, and since the Paw Paw didn't satisfy our empty stomachs, we set off for Hoss's in Huntingdon. It was a great end to a wonderful day of Paw Paw hunting.

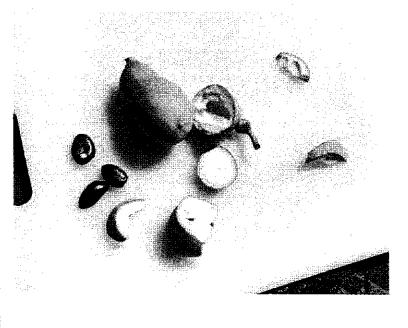




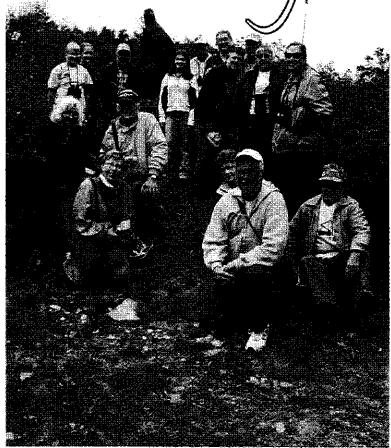








Allegheny Front



Field trip participants clockwise: Helen Morrow, Jim Morrow, Marsha Bradley, Emily Majcher, Diana Majcher, Luis Moore, Helena Kotala, Warren Baker, Dick Mock, Debbie Wentz, Terry Wentz, Cindy Moore, Shirley Wagoner, Georgia Bottenfield, Bob Bottenfield, Dave Kyler





Bald Eagle



Notes from a Beech Grove

by Heidi Boyle

The dry wispy calls of Cedar waxwings rose in the crisp air. A small flock dipped overhead, settling in the wild grape vines twined among the upper branches of a young beech tree. The sapling was one of many surrounding the huge 70' mother tree against whose trunk I was settled.

I was 'stump sitting,' a practice of settling in quietly to observe and journal. A travel mug of hot coffee and a small portable sleeping bag provided some comfort as I enjoyed the life of the beech grove.

The enormous knobby American beech (Fagus grandifolia) against which I sat towered among the surrounding hemlocks. The shade-tolerant beech is one of the few trees that can survive and grow in a hemlock forest. A blowdown had provided sunlight to a small part of this dense forest, an island of light among the dark evergreens.

The bright winter sunlight lit up the parchment-like beech leaves as they shivered in a slight breeze. I was tucked in among the roots, and the many beech drops (*Epifagus virginiana*) growing in the duff tickled my ankles. These small, scaly brown plants are wildflowers although they lack chloro-

phyll. Instead, they are parasitic, the beech roots playing host to colonies of these often-overlooked flowers.

As I sat, chickadees teased each other with their "dee dee dee" among the lacy hemlock branches. A lone nuthatch proudly 'anked' his way through the forest and landed on the silvery trunk of another stately beech. I watched

him scrabbling and hopping as he climbed

the trunk in a spiral, peering at me suspiciously. I craned my neck, watching him probing cracks and crevices for a breakfast of insect larvae.

Working his way up the silvery bark, he moved past marks left by determined bears. Many beeches sport claw marks in their thin bark, since the bruins often scale the trees to reach the tasty nuts before they fall.

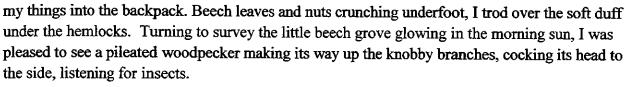
The triangular nuts, encased in a prickly cover, mature and fall in late September and October. High in protein and oils, the small nuts feed bears, squirrels, chipmunks, opossums, deer, raccoons, foxes, mice, grouse, turkeys and a multitude of other birds. As a result, the beech maintains a high ecological importance as a mast-producer in our woods.

A scold of brilliantly colored blue jays swooped in, displacing the disgruntled nuthatch, which muttered to itself as it flew off. The jays had probably arrived to feed on the abundant carpet of beechnuts littering the ground, but upon spying the strange figure sitting against the trunk, abruptly flew off. Blue jays are closely associated with beech trees, seeking out the tasty nuts to cache for winter,

a process referred to as *ornithochory*. Because of their dedication to storing beechnuts, jays are thought to play prominently in the spread of the American beech.

A red squirrel's midden, its store of nuts, was nestled among the shallow roots where I was sitting. Leaning over to count the nuts (80+), I was surprised to glance up and see a rufous-colored eastern screech owl (*Otus asio*) sitting sleepily in a cavity of the other large beech tree. Its feathers puffed up against the chilly air, the little owl dozed while I watched it. The cavity in which it sat looked to be where a large branch had broken off. Rain, fungus, insects and woodpeckers had probably finished the rest, providing the owl a cozy spot for a roost.

I stood up carefully so as not to disturb the little owl. My cold legs protesting, I rolled my bag into its little pouch and stuffed



Later I would go home and open my journal to that wintry morning, and again recall the life of the forest: chickadee, cedar waxwings, crow, blue jay, cardinal, titmouse, white and red-breasted nuthatches, golden crowned kinglets, pileated and downy woodpeckers, chipmunk, gray squirrel, tracks of opossum, raccoon and deer, deer rubs and turkey scrapes... The list would bring back the cold silver bark and crisp whisperings of leaves in the sunlight.

I frequently tramped eight or ten miles through the deepest snow to keep an appointment with a beech-tree, or a yellow birch, or an old acquaintance among the pines.

~Henry David Thoreau

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2005 JVAS Christmas Bird Count Scheduled for December 17

HOW DO I COUNT?

- 1. Bird in the JVAS CBC area (a 15-mile diameter circle centered around the village of Culp in Sinking Valley) and keep a total count of the birds you see.
- 2. Bring the completed checklist to the follow-up dinner on Dec. 17th or mail a copy to Heidi Boyle by Jan. 4th, 2005
- 3. Feeder watchers remember that you don't total all of the same birds seen in a day, instead, count the highest number seen at one time.

WHAT DOES IT COST?

- 1. There is a \$5.00 per field observer fee per CBC.
- 2. Feeder watchers and observers 18 years old or younger don't have to pay.
- 3. Refunds are given only if a count is cancelled by the compiler.
- 4. Pick up your participant form and checklist at the next Juniata Valley Audubon meeting or call Heidi Boyle to have forms mailed to you.
- 5. Please make checks payable to JVAS and return the participant form to Heidi Boyle.

IS THERE FOOD INVOLVED?

Of course! Come to Fort Roberdeau's White Oak Hall at 5:30 pm on Saturday,

December 17 for a pot-luck dinner so that results can be compiled. Please contact Heidi

Boyle at 949-9302 or email her at hboyle@state.pa.us sometime before Dec. 15th to let her know what you will bring.



"Whooo's participating in the 2005 JVAS Christmas Bird Count?"

Great Horned Owl

by JVAS Gnatcatcher editor Helena Kotala

Species of Concern Spotlight: Indiana Bat

By Dan Mummert, Pennsylvania Game Commission Wildlife Diversity Biologist

Bats probably are the most misunderstood, underappreciated mammals. Worldwide, there are 925 species of bats comprising almost one quarter of all mammalian species. They are a highly successful group vital for the pollination of many plant species and extremely valuable in their role of controlling many insect pests. Here in Pennsylvania, for example, each little brown bat (Myotis lucifugus)—that's the brilliantly creative name of Pennsylvania's most common bat species, not just a descriptive phrase-will consume approximately 3,000 insects every night. Using simple multiplication, this means that the 300 bats that roost in the barn at Fort Roberdeau will eat about 900,000 insects every night from neighboring fields and forests. Consequently, bats make excellent neighbors and I'm always envious of people who have colonies of little browns on their property.

Nearly identical in appearance to the little brown bat is the Indiana bat (Myotis sodalis). This currently is the only mammal listed as Federally Endangered in Pennsylvania and therefore deserves to be this month's Spotlight Species. Only a handful of people in Pennsylvania can tell the difference when confronted with specimens of both species. Subtle diagnostic characteristics of an Indiana bat include a bulge in the tail membrane, a muzzle with slightly less fur than a little brown giving the Indiana's face a pinkish appearance; and my favorite, distinctly curled toes with short hairs that do not extend past the knuckles. Obviously, it's impossible to tell the difference between these species when they're flying. For the conservation of this species understanding the seasonal distributions and habitat needs of this extremely rare bat is important.

In Pennsylvania, only one summer maternity site exists where the Indiana bat is known to reproduce. This is in an abandoned church at Canoe Creek State Park. In addition, only one site in Pennsylvania is known to hold more than 500 wintering Indiana bats. This is also at Canoe Creek State Park in the disused Hartman Mine and serves as a hibernaculum for about half of Pennsylvania's known Indiana bats. Indiana bats are known to hibernate at only 12 other sites in Pennsylvania. Several of these sites are also in Southcentral Pennsylvania.

Even though only one summer maternity colony is documented in the state, other maternity roosts most certainly exist, especially in Southcentral Pennsylvania where our state's largest hibernaculum is located. Landowners wishing to help this species can provide suitable habitat for Indiana bat maternity colonies by enhancing habitat characteristics preferred by this species. Maternity roosts, as documented in neighboring states, are often associated with large trees with exfoliating bark and daily exposure to several hours of sunlight. Large snags (standing dead trees) and mature shagbark hickory trees make excellent maternity roost sites and should be promoted. If an exceptionally large tree with exfoliating bark is within a closed canopy, partially daylighting the tree by cutting down some of the surrounding trees would be beneficial. When selecting possible roost trees, it is also helpful to know that most Indiana bat roosts throughout the United States are located within one-half mile of water. By promoting these habitat preferences you may play a significant role in the conservation of Pennsylvania's endangered Indiana bat.

If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than with contempt, then we must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it.

President Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964

THE FOLLOWING LETTER TO THE EDITOR BY JVAS PRESIDENT DR. STAN KOTALA WAS PUBLISHED IN THE ALTOONA MIRROR ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2005

To the Editor:

Juniata Valley Audubon, a local conservation organization with close to 400 members in Blair, Bedford, and Huntingdon Counties, is very disappointed in the U.S. House of Representatives for passing Congressman Pombo's bill to weaken the Endangered Species Act, a landmark wildlife conservation law that has served our nation well for 32 years. We are also severely disappointed in Representative Bill Shuster, who cast a crucial vote for this pro-extinction bill which is a gigantic giveaway to greedy development interests.

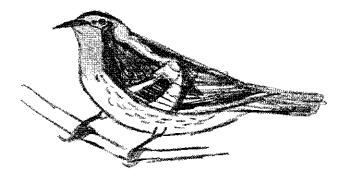
The Endangered Species Act is a conservation safety net for wildlife on the brink of extinction. It has been extremely successful, leading to the recovery of the bald eagle, the osprey, and the peregrine falcon, among many others. Of the more than 1,000 species that have been listed under the Act since 1973, only 9 have become extinct. Polls show that nearly 90% of Americans support the Endangered Species Act.

Representative Shuster should recognize that we, as caretakers of creation, have the duty to prevent human-caused extinction because once an entire species is gone we cannot bring it back. Furthermore, it would be prudent for us to be responsible stewards of the natural interdependent systems which supply us and future generations with air, water, food, and shelter.

Representative Shuster voted for special interests and against our nation's natural heritage. Juniata Valley Audubon hopes that Senators Santorum and Specter will recognize their duty as guardians of our natural heritage and now work to save the Endangered Species Act.

Sincerely,

Stan Kotala, M.D. President Juniata Valley Audubon



Blackburnian Warbler

By JVAS member Emily Majcher

JOIN JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON!

Juniata Valley Audubon membership provides you with the following benefits:

- Notification of Juniata Valley Audubon's exciting activities including nature programs, field trips and other events
- Subscription to the bimonthly chapter newsletter, The Gnatcatcher

•	Opportunities to	participate in	conservation p	rojects and	environmental	advocacy,	and have fun!
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Become a chapter-only member: _____Individual: \$15 _Family: \$20 Friend of JVAS: \$50 Corporate: \$100 Life Membership: \$500— JVAS Life Membership provides you with all the benefits listed above for a once-in-alifetime fee of \$500. Name_ ____State____Zip___

Mail this form to

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NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP

be present. Meet at McDonald's in Huntingdon at 9 AM.

searching for possibly 15 species of waterfowl that may

meanders from Huntingdon to Lewistown. We will be

of the "nooks and crannies" of the Juniata River as it

Juniata River Waterfowl- Join us as we follow some

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER PROGRAMS

sbbroach.

"Vernal Pool Restoration"- Since 1600, over half of all November 15, 2005

County illustrates the promises and limitations of this wetlands habitat. Data from an ongoing project in Mifflin pools—a particularly valuable and vulnerable form of will discuss the emerging science of recreating vernal and Wildlife Service Wetlands expert Kathleen Patnode verely degraded. Will we ever get them back? U.S. Fish wetlands in Pennsylvania have been destroyed or se-

nual one-day census of winter birds. More into on p.12 more information on how you can take part in this annot au.sq.este@elyodn no 202e-e4e at e4e-pa.us for Christmas Bird Count - Contact CBC Coordinator December 17, 2005

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

Bring binoculars and scopes. Restaurant lunch.

November 19, 2005

notify you of upcoming trips by email or phone. Kotala at ccwiba@keyconn.net or 946-8840. She will name added to the Juniata Club roster, contact Helena to weather and water levels. If you would like your JAAS Junista Club River Trips take place according

Golden Eagle

By JVAS member Emily Majcher

Marcia Bonta P.O. Box 68 Tyrone PA

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