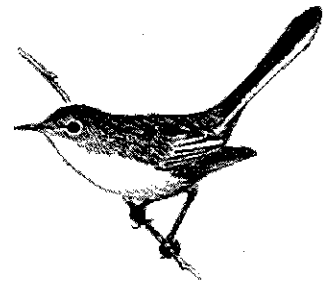


# THE GNATCATCHER

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

Vol. 39 No. 1 — Jan-Feb 2007



## Congress overwhelmingly passes Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act

Before adjourning last fall, the House and Senate passed the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act. The bill authorizes \$75 million per year until 2011 for the Secretary of the Interior to provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners to restore, enhance, and manage habitat on private lands through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. This program has existed for 20 years, but up to now has been funded through a line item in the Service's general budget. The new Act codifies the existing program and provides a dedicated budget. The bipartisan supported legislation was quickly signed into law by President Bush.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that to date, 35,000 agreements with landowners have been signed under the existing program, resulting in the protection, restoration, and enhancement of nearly 2.5 million acres of habitat. Of these lands, 722,500 acres are wetlands and nearly 6,000 acres are riparian corridors, crucial to the well-being of species such as the cerulean warbler, the river otter and the wood turtle.

## Federal Communications Commission Announces Rulemaking that Could Protect Millions of Migratory Birds

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has announced that it will propose a rulemaking that could help prevent the killing of millions of migratory birds at nearly ninety thousand communications towers.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) estimates that as many as 50 million birds are killed each year at towers throughout the United States. An American Bird Conservancy report analyzing documented tower kills ([www.abcbirds.org/policy/towerkill.htm](http://www.abcbirds.org/policy/towerkill.htm)) lists 230 species – over one third of all avian species found in the United States – that are known to be killed at towers, including many species of conservation concern such as the blackpoll warbler, the gray-cheeked thrush, and the yellow-billed cuckoo.

The vast majority of bird mortality occurs during fall and spring when night-migrating birds are attracted in large flocks to the aviation safety lights on towers. The lights, especially red solid-state or slow pulsing lights, interfere with the birds' celestial navigation cues, particularly during poor visibility conditions such as rain and fog. Confused, the birds fly around the towers repeatedly, crashing into one another, the tower, its guy wires, or the ground. Others simply drop from exhaustion.

In 1999, the FWS Director wrote the FCC Chairman urging action in completing a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement on tower kills under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In 2000, FWS published *Guidelines for the Siting and Construction of Communications Towers* to minimize the mortality of migratory birds. These measures, advocated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and backed by scientific research, include: collocating antennas on existing structures, building towers less than 200 feet tall to avoid having to light them for aircraft visibility, using red or white strobes on towers over 200 feet tall instead of solid state or slow pulsing lights, and using monopole construction rather than guy wires. The FCC has thus far ignored these guidelines, as they have ignored the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) recommendations on the use of white or red strobes on towers because of their higher visibility to pilots and their reduced impact on birds.

# JVAS Members Visit the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art

*By JVAS Membership Chair Dr. Alice Kotala*

On Saturday November 4th a group of JVAS members took a pleasant 2 hour drive via Route 22 to Millersburg, 30 minutes north of Harrisburg, hometown of the late Ned Smith and home of the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art.

The late E. Stanley "Ned" Smith, renowned nature artist and author, created nearly 120 cover paintings for *Pennsylvania Game News* as staff illustrator for the Pennsylvania Game Commission and gained additional fame as writer of his popular "Gone for the Day" column, which was a regular feature of the *PA Game News* during the 1960's. Subsequently, he went on as a freelance writer and artist for *Pennsylvania Angler*, *National Wildlife*, *National Geographic*, and other magazines.

After Ned Smith's death in 1985, his wife Marie was looking for a venue to display her extensive collection of Ned's art and inspired the idea for the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art which was founded in 1993. The construction of the present permanent facility which recently opened two years ago was partially funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

This environmental education center and art gallery is located on 500 acres on Berry Mountain and along Wiconisco Creek which can be explored by a 12 - mile network of trails.

THE WILDLIFE ART OF NED SMITH  
AND THE  
NED SMITH CENTER FOR NATURE AND ART

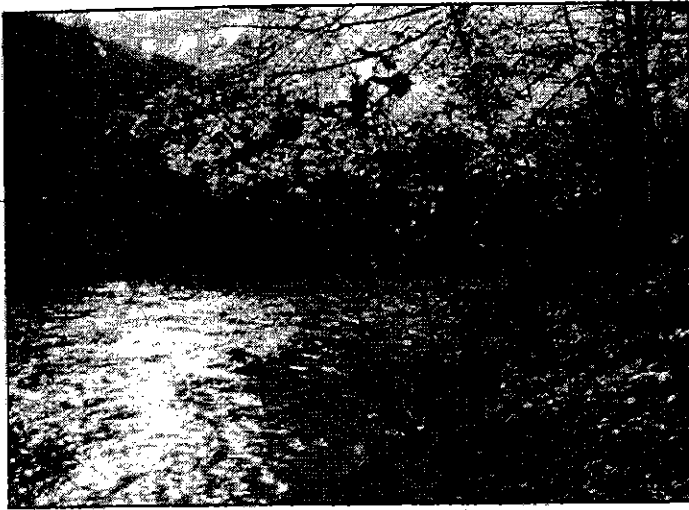


ABOVE: Ned Smith sketching on top of one of his beloved mountains overlooking the Susquehanna Valley.



JVAS members attending the Ned Smith Center Sibley Exhibit Field Trip, L to R: Debbie Wentz, Sam Dietze, JVAS Historian Terry Wentz, JVAS Gnatcatcher and E-News Editor Helena Kotala, JVAS Staff Artist Emily Majcher, JVAS Membership Chair Dr. Alice Kotala, Luis Moor, and Cindy Moore. Not shown, but attending the exhibition, were JVAS President Dr. Stan Kotala, Doug Wentzel and JVAS Hospitality Chair Maxine Leckvarcik.

The Ned Smith Center and Berry Mountain are in the background.



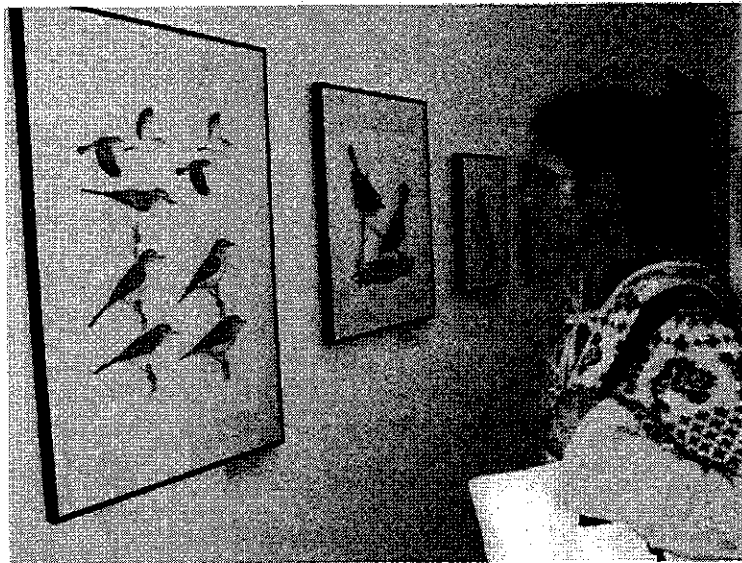
*Wiconisco Creek flows through the Ned Smith Center's property on the north side of Berry Mountain. Trails climb from the streamside to the mountaintop, traversing areas frequented by Ned Smith.*

The center also displays works of other artists and photographers around the country in changing exhibits. It offers educational programs for schools and the general public year-around. In addition, the center's researchers and volunteers are involved in the northern saw-whet owl migration banding projects.

The field trip provided the opportunity for JVAS members to see some of the original gouache paintings and ink drawings that were published in David Allen Sibley's books as well as some preliminary drafts and earlier work. It was interesting to hear his own recounting of his career as he led us through the gallery and discussed how his approach toward the creation of his *Sibley Guide to Birds* evolved.



*David Allen Sibley guides a tour of the exhibition of his artwork, including commentary on his development as an artist and the evolution of his field guide.*



*ABOVE: JVAS Membership Chair Dr. Alice Kotala admires some of David Sibley's original artwork. More than 500 visitors came to the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art on the Saturday of the JVAS field trip. At the end of the day, the famed field guide author was exhausted from the book-signing!*

Another tour led by naturalist writer Scott Weidensaul further elaborated on Mr. Sibley's expertise as bird illustrator as a product of artistic acumen combined with extensive field experience, starting in his youth in the company of his ornithologist father and colleagues, and advancing further with his decision to leave college to go birding full-time. On a practical note, he was fortunate to be able to find employment as a full-time birder through hawk-watching, bird-banding, and birding tours.

*BELOW: Pulitzer Prize nominee Scott Weidensaul leads a tour of the gallery displaying original artwork for David Sibley's field guides.*





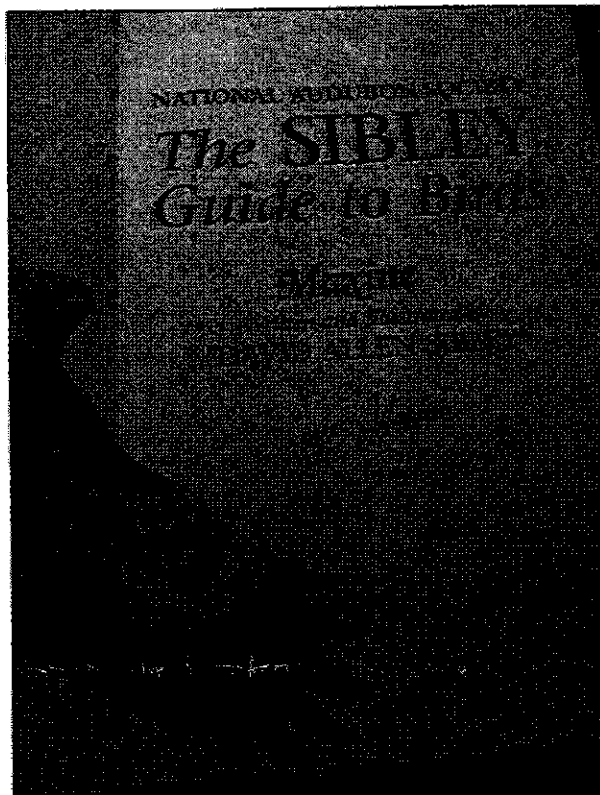
*David Allen Sibley with two of his fans, JVAS Gnatcatcher Editor Helena Kotala (L) and JVAS Staff Artist Emily Majcher, both of whom took part in the renowned artist's bird drawing workshop.*

JVAS Staff Artist Emily Majcher and JVAS Gnatcatcher Editor Helena Kotala took part in bird drawing workshop conducted by David Sibley. During the art workshop, Mr. Sibley effectively explained how knowledge about the common core structure and feather pattern of songbirds enable one to draw their characteristic external forms, individualized mainly by color and patterns of the feathers. Using pencil, pen and sketchpad, the 30 people enrolled in the class practiced the basics of bird illustration with new-found insights.



*JVAS Staff Artist Emily Majcher discusses bird illustration with David Allen Sibley. Emily learned techniques that will enhance her artistic abilities. Gnatcatcher readers may want to save issues in which Emily's artwork appears!*

It was interesting to note that the artworks produced by local Pennsylvania youth on display at the gallery were at least par with the several drawings presented from David Sibley's youth, illustrating that inspiration, dedication, and perseverance are keys to advanced achievement.



*Bird guide superstar David Sibley signed more than 300 field guides on the Saturday that JVAS visited the center, including this one for JVAS Hospitality Chair Maxine Leckvarcik.*

***The Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art is a worthwhile day trip. The gallery and gift shop are open 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM Tuesday through Saturday. Directions and a program of events can be obtained on their website at***

***[www.nedsmithcenter.org](http://www.nedsmithcenter.org)***

# Pennsylvania Biological Survey issues Statement on Industrial Windplants

The Mammal Technical Committee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey recognizes the need and desire to promote a clean renewable source of energy for the future. Wind energy offers such promise, and is being widely considered within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. However, the development of this industry also has been shown to be extremely hazardous to wildlife, especially bats.

Bats are the major predators of night-flying insect in Pennsylvania and throughout the United States. As such, they are keystone species whose impact on the environment is linked strongly to many other plants and animals. These include humans in both biological and economic terms. It is estimated that the value of the insect control that bats provide in the U.S. is in the billions of dollars annually. Bats already are declining throughout the U.S.. With their exceptionally low reproductive rates, further declines in bat numbers would be a point of deep concern for all.

After reviewing the growing evidence from locations in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Tennessee, the Mammal Technical Committee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey strongly concurs with the position of Bat Conservation International that the impact of wind power facilities on wildlife is severe.



*In forested ridgetop settings east of the Mississippi River, industrial windplants kill 50-100 bats per turbine per year. A mortality rate of this magnitude would rapidly wipe out small colonies of bats, such as the 600 Federally Endangered Indiana bats at Canoe Creek State Park.*



*Industrial windplants in forested settings have a devastating impact on wildlife through direct mortality, forest fragmentation, and the induction of avoidance behavior. Each wind turbine requires the clearing and grading of several acres of forest. One mile of wide heavy-duty road is required to connect every 8 turbines. Transmission lines are carved through the forest and further scalping is required for the construction of electrical substations and other infrastructure.*

# Weasel Encounter

By Heidi Boyle

The large, heavy snowflakes were hypnotizing as they fell silently among the skeletons of agrimony and ironweed. Almost losing my balance and slipping into the freezing water, I snapped back to the business of hopping awkwardly between snow-covered grassy hummocks in the marsh.

Pausing to pull on my gloves, I froze on the spot as I caught a flicker of brown in the brush. A long-tailed weasel, its white belly flashing in the weak winter sun, leapt delicately onto a prickly hummock, holding one paw in the air as if to make fun of my clumsy, overbalancing gait. Its intense gaze was almost comical; its wide-open eyes giving it a surprised look as it eyed me up and down.

The alert little long-tailed weasel, *Mustela frenata*, belonged to the Mustelidae, the bold family that includes skunks, badgers, wolverines, mink, otter and ferrets. The beguiling, wide-open gaze of *M. frenata* is deceptive, for it is indeed a predator; the kind of predator that demands notice and respect for its efficient hunting methods and brassy behavior.

My ramble had brought me through field and marsh; typical habitat for long-tailed weasels. They are most often seen in farmland, brushy fields and hedgerows, usually near wet areas. This glossy specimen stared fearlessly, despite its slender, almost skinny build. Weasels only weigh 250 - 500 grams and yet will take on larger prey. I apparently posed no threat because the brown and white mottled animal continued nonchalantly on its way sniffing around before easing into a thick stand of dogwood.

Each time I've been fortunate enough to spot a weasel, they've not seemed at all concerned with my presence, an almost unsettling clue to their confidence and intelligence. That unerring, wide-eyed gaze is only initially cute, until you realize their forward facing eyes are typical of a predator. Their small and pointy mouse-like face is set far forward on a long skull. Their skulls, like those of other mustelids, house a remarkably large brain - imbuing a peculiar intelligence in such a delicate-looking predator.

*Mustela frenata* live throughout the United States and parts of Canada, a range that tests their ability to adapt to a wide variety of extremes. Their frail build, however, is deceptive, according to Bernd Heinrich, author of Winter World. "*They must contend with intense cold throughout their range, yet they are small, skinny and poorly insulated with little body fat, all of which facilitate rapid rates of heat loss. To compensate, their resting metabolism is twice that of other animals their size. Yet they have small stomachs and unlike their cousins, the striped skunk, they put on little body fat. As a result, they have to eat more food per day than any other winter-adapted animals.*"

The weasel I had seen fit quite nicely among the close trunks of dogwood as it searched for prey. These bold predators consume a

wide variety in summer, from bird, eggs, insects, rodents and other small mammals. In winter, their diet turns to rodents and small mammals almost exclusively.

It is their narrow, serpentine build that makes long-tailed weasels excellently designed as predators. Their long, skinny body enables them to follow small mammals and quickly enter their tunnels and burrows. Weasels are opportunistic; they rarely fashion a den or nest of their own; they simply use the living quarters of their victims to eat, rest and even cache food. Much of their time is spent eating and resting in others' quarters before again setting out to find more food.

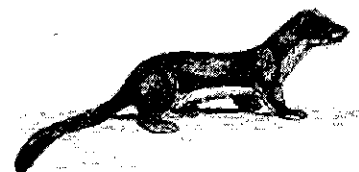
Long-tailed weasels will often follow the wandering tunnels and pathways of small rodents under the snow, rather than hunting randomly above the snow. In northern climes, *M. frenata* turn white in winter, except for the black tip at the end of their long tail. Southern residents retain their brown coat throughout the winter.

I searched around the dogwood stand for signs of the weasel, but could find no tracks. There were several tunnels down into the snow - the weasel had probably entered the subnivean world under the snow to search for its next meal out of sight of large predators such as hawks, coyotes and foxes.

As I ducked under branches I could imagine the minute prey it was searching for, quietly nibbling on seeds in the loose layer of snow next to the ground. It would be suddenly dispatched by a fierce and precise bite at the base of the skull, its life ended quickly. Long-tailed weasels have well-developed senses of sight, hearing and smell, which allows them to be efficient in their tracking and hunting.

A single, sharp squeak came from under the snow - I wondered if the weasel had found dinner, but had no way of knowing which way the lithe little predator had gone. The silence of the marsh was illusory, given the battle for survival below the snow. Weasels undoubtedly play an important part in the life of field and marsh by helping control populations of rodents and rabbits. As these small mammals strip bark and buds from trees and shrubs in winter, they no doubt affect other species that are dependent upon the greens, seeds and fruit of the trees and shrubs throughout the seasons.

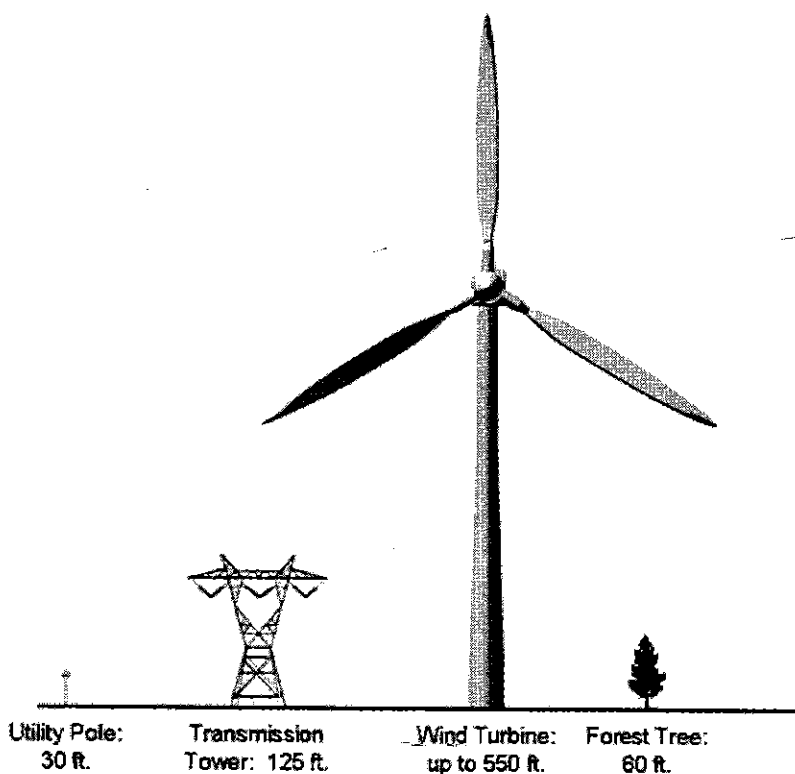
Trudging down the road at the edge of the marsh, I hoped the bright-eyed weasel was under the snow, contentedly wrapped around its prey. I felt fortunate to have been allowed a glimpse of one of the predators that unknowingly help balance lifelines unseen in the landscape of the marsh.



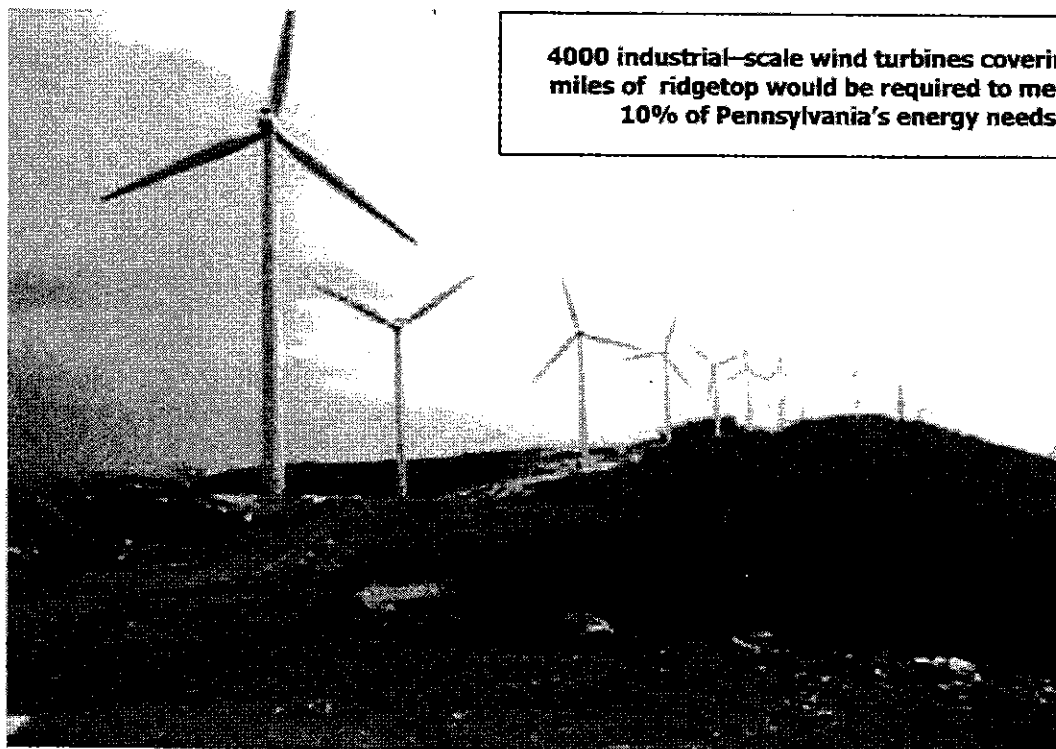
Even by the most conservative estimates, tens of thousands of bats are being killed by wind turbines in these states each year.

The cumulative effect on bats from such sites could be devastating. Further development of wind power facilities cannot be condoned until solutions are found to minimize the effect of these turbines on bats.

We fully support the need to develop research and the appropriate monitoring of mortality of bats at existing sites for this purpose. Minimally, the environmental impact on bats should be examined and included as a factor in any site selection being considered for future wind turbine construction. Specifically, we recommend that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania require companies to have adequate pre-construction monitoring of bat activity levels for at least 2-3 years prior to construction, follow-up studies during construction, and monitoring of bat kills for a minimum of 2-3 years after construction. Because of carcass scavenging, these surveys need to be done on a regular basis and are especially critical during the migration season. In addition, the development of a standardized methodology for these surveys would allow for between-site comparison.



With commitment from the wind energy industry to work with the scientific community to find solutions to the bat kill problems associated with wind turbines, the impact of wind farms on wildlife can be minimized. This commitment would only strengthen the development of wind power as a safe, renewable source of energy for the future.



**4000 industrial-scale wind turbines covering 500 miles of ridgetop would be required to meet just 10% of Pennsylvania's energy needs.**



# REGISTER FOR JVAS e-NEWS!

JVAS members interested in receiving timely notice of events such as meetings, field trips, JVAS Juniata Club river trips, and local conservation issues should send their name and email address to JVAS E-NEWS editor Helena Kotala at [ccwiba@keyconn.net](mailto:ccwiba@keyconn.net) to subscribe to our free news service.

## Sign up for JVAS Juniata Club River trips!

JVAS' canoe and kayak group enjoyed many great river trips on the Little Juniata and Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River last year. These trips are done at a leisurely pace with wildlife and observation in mind. Trips last 1-4 hours and are on Class 1-3 water depending on river conditions. Notice of upcoming trips is done by phone or email to take advantage of optimal weather and river flow. If you'd like to be added to the JVAS Juniata Club roster, call or send an email to JVAS Juniata Club Leader Helena Kotala at 814-946-8840 or [ccwiba@keyconn.net](mailto:ccwiba@keyconn.net)

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# 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 projects and environmental advocacy, and **have fun!**

Become a chapter-only member: \_\_\_\_\_ Individual: \$15      \_\_\_\_\_ Family: \$20      \_\_\_\_\_ Supporting: \$35  
\_\_\_\_\_ Friend of JVAS: \$50      \_\_\_\_\_ Corporate: \$100

\_\_\_\_\_ Life Membership: \$500-- JVAS Life Membership provides you with all the benefits listed above for a once-in-a-lifetime fee of \$500.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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**Juniata Valley Audubon**

**c/o Dr. Alice Kotala**

**Membership Chair**

**RR 3 Box 866**

**McMullen Road**

**Altoona, PA 16601-9206**

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CBC Coordinator.....Heidi Boyle      949-9302

<hboyle@state.pa.us>

NAMC Coordinator.....Dr. Stan Kotala      (see above)

## PROGRAMS

**BAT ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION—January 16:** The ecology of bats has received much attention and study in recent years, and is of concern as we consider wind as a resource for energy. Join naturalist and Canoe Creek State Park Environmental Education Specialist Heidi Boyle for an entertaining and informative look at bat ecology, including echolocation, roost sites, and conservation measures for local bats.

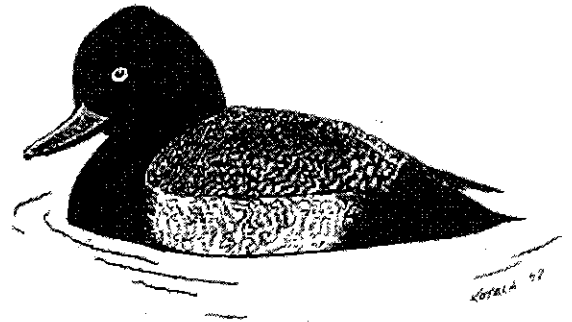
**BARN OWLS IN SOUTHCENTRAL PA—February 20:** Barn owls are the focus of an ongoing censusing and conservation effort by the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Join PGC biologist Dan Mummert, one of the leaders in the effort, for an in-depth look at this once-common species and to learn how you can aid this owl's recovery.

**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.

## FIELD TRIPS

**SINKING VALLEY BIRDING—Saturday, January 20:** Look for winter birds, such as rough-legged hawks, horned larks, and northern harriers in bucolic Sinking Valley. Meet at Unkel Joe's Woodshed in Altoona at 9am. Trip leader—Terry Wentz, 693-6563, [twentz2@verizon.net](mailto:twentz2@verizon.net)

**HARRISBURG STATE MUSEUM AND JUNIATA RIVER BIRDING—Saturday, February 24:** We'll visit the Pennsylvania History Exhibits and Planetarium at the state museum as well as stopping at pull-offs along the Juniata River to look for waterfowl. Meet at McDonalds in Huntingdon at 9am. Restaurant lunch along the way. Trip leader—Terry Wentz, 693-6563, [twentz2@verizon.net](mailto:twentz2@verizon.net)



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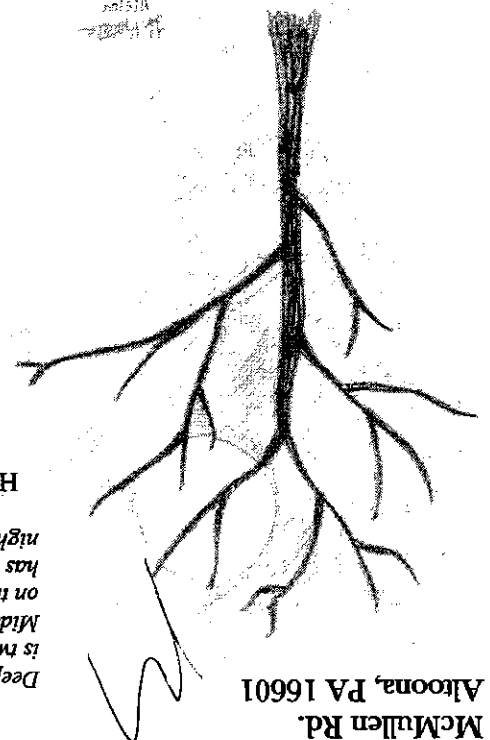
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8/1/2007

Marcia Bonta  
P.O. Box 68  
Tyrona PA

Hal Borland—Twelve Moons of the Year

Deepening dusk and the hooting of the great horned owl  
is twice as loud, twice as fierce, as it was in October.  
Mid evening and the moonlight casts ink-black shadows  
on the snow. The night is so full of reflected light the sky  
has only half its stars, a cold, bitter, ice-edged January  
night that engraves itself on the senses.



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10TH ANNUAL  
GREAT BACKYARD  
BIRD COUNT

FEBRUARY  
16-19, 2007

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- Discover more about the birds around you • Track results in real time online
- Count *anywhere*—in your backyard, balcony, schoolyard, park, refuge
- All ages and skill levels welcome • No fee or registration required

For extra copies of this 10th Annual Great  
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[www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc)

10th ANNUAL  
GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT  
FEBRUARY 16-19, 2007

TAKE PART BY VISITING  
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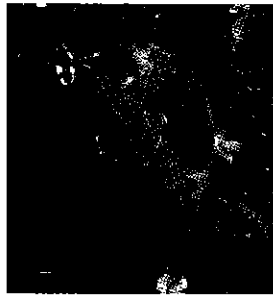
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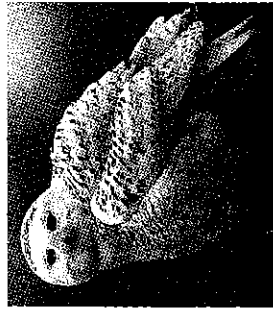
CORNELL LAB of  
ORNITHOLOGY

# Discover where the birds are this winter

Tens of thousands of people will be outside (or looking through their windows), counting birds February 16–19. You can be one of them! Which birds are spending their winter with you



AMERICAN ROBIN / © ANNE MIDDLETON



SNOWY OWL / © KIM L. GRAHAM



BLACK SPINNER / © THOMAS J. DUNKERTON



BROWN CREEPER / © CONNIE BINGHAM

this year? Take part in the tenth annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) to see how your local birds fit into the landscape of North America.

You'll learn more about the birds around you. People of all ages and all levels of experience and skill can take part. Whether you count the five species at your backyard feeder, or the 75 species you see during a day's visit to your neighborhood park or wildlife refuge, it's important that you report what you see to the GBBC website [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc). Your bird list, however short or long, helps us all understand

## Top 10 most commonly reported species in GBBC 2006

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Northern Cardinal  | 6 Blue Jay               |
| 2 Mourning Dove      | 7 House Finch            |
| 3 Dark-eyed Junco    | 8 Tufted Titmouse        |
| 4 American Goldfinch | 9 Black-capped Chickadee |
| 5 Downy Woodpecker   | 10 American Crow         |

more about birds across the continent, as indicators of the state of the world around us. As you enter your results, you'll see how a group of tens of thousands of birdwatchers can paint a picture of our birds in winter.

In 2006, with cold air trapped in Canada and Alaska by a northerly jet stream, and a record-breaking warm winter in the lower 48, GBBC results revealed:

- an increase in the numbers and northern distribution of Tree Swallow to 20 U.S. states;
  - Common Redpolls and other winter finches remained in northern Canada in the West, and flooded South in the east;
  - American Robins returning early to the Northwest were pushed back by cold weather in British Columbia to rest in huge numbers in the fruit-growing areas of Washington state;
  - record counts of Snowy Owls south of the U.S.–Canada border;
  - Pine Warbler and Orange-crowned Warbler reported by more observers farther north into Nova Scotia and British Columbia.
- Join other birders in 2007, and have fun as you learn more about the birds around you.

For extra copies of this brochure-poster please email [citizenscience@audubon.org](mailto:citizenscience@audubon.org) or visit [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc)



Sponsored in part by Wild Birds Unlimited

If you like birds and want to help them...

## ...count for the birds February 16–19, 2007!

It's easy...here's how.

**Before you count**, go to [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc) for easy-to-follow instructions and local checklists.

**Count the birds** in your backyard, park, or refuge—anywhere! For each kind of bird, write down the highest number of individuals you see at any one time during your count. (Don't add a bird every time you see one at your feeder: you could be counting the same individuals many times.)

Take part on one, two, three, or four days. Watch the birds for as long as possible (15 minutes or more) each day.

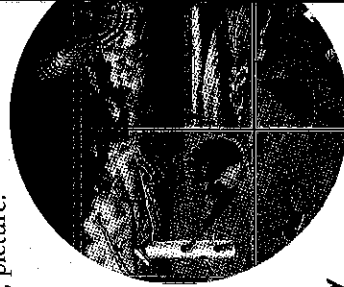
**Report your results online.** Go back to the GBBC website [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc), complete an online checklist, and report your sightings electronically.

**View your results!** You can see lists and maps online, continually updated throughout the count. See how you and your town fit into the big picture.

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- Open to all
- No need to preregister
- No fee required

The bird photos above left were taken by GBBC participants in 2006. You can view and submit photos in the online **GBBC Photo Gallery** at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc).



THE 10TH ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT IS HOSTED BY THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY & CORNELL LABORATORY OF ORNITHOLOGY



CORNELL LAB of ORNITHOLOGY