

# The Gnatcatcher

## Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

Volume 40 No. 1 January/February 2008 [www.jvas.org](http://www.jvas.org)

### JVAS Chapter-only Memberships due

Juniata Valley Audubon has about 450 members. Close to 100 of you have opted to be chapter-only members, that is, members only of the JVAS and not the National Audubon Society. Chapter-only membership costs only \$15 per year for individuals, and family as well as other levels of membership are considerably less than National membership.

Chapter-only membership in the JVAS confers all the benefits of National Audubon membership with the exception of Audubon magazine. However, all chapter-only dues stay with the JVAS and are used locally here in the Juniata Valley for conservation education and advocacy in Blair, Huntingdon, Centre, Bedford, and Mifflin Counties.

**Chapter-only membership is on a calendar-year basis, thus chapter-only members' dues for 2008 are due now.**

If you're a chapter-only member or would like to become one, then please fill out the membership form below.

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 \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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

Mail this form to

**Juniata Valley Audubon**

**c/o Dr. Alice Kotala**

**Membership Chair**

**RR 3 Box 866**

**McMullen Road**

**Altoona, PA 16601-9206**

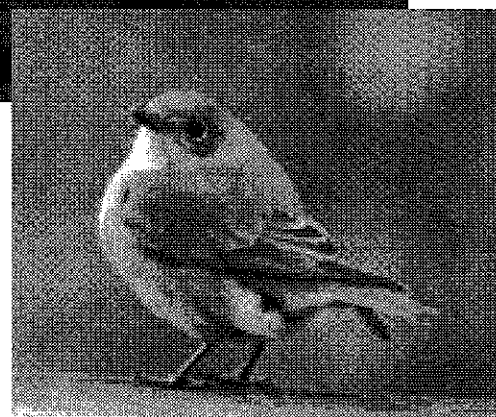
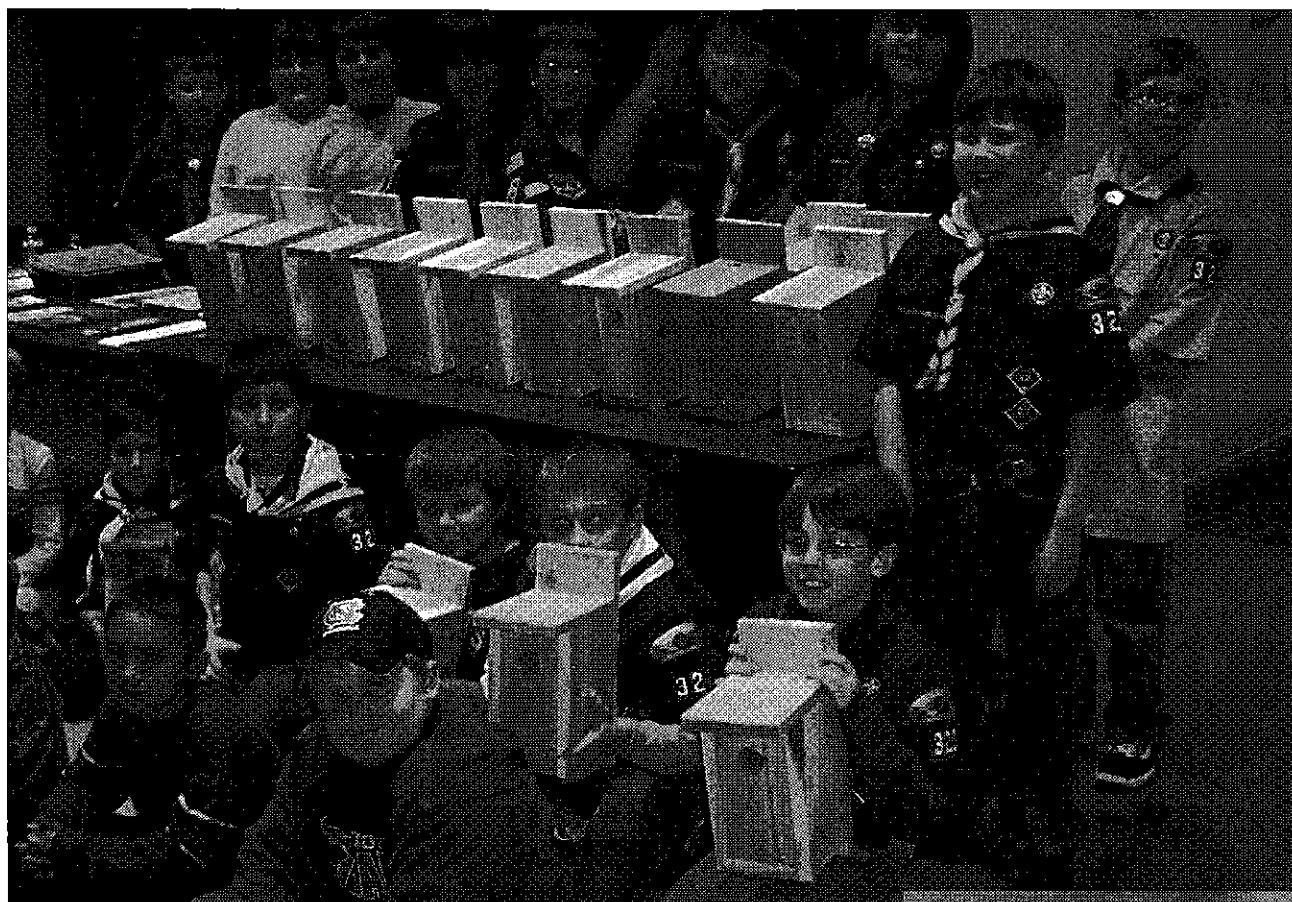
*To know that even one life has breathed easier  
because you have lived, that is to have succeeded.*

*- Ralph Waldo Emerson*

# Tyrone Cub Scout Pack 320 donates 20 Bluebird Boxes to Juniata Valley Audubon

Each year Tyrone Cub Scout Pack 320 does a large number of community service projects, several of which are conservation-oriented. They've planted tree seedlings at Tyrone's Railroad Park and Soldier's Park locations, conducted litter clean-up programs in the Borough of Tyrone, and traveled to Black Moshannon State Park each year to assist with their Park Care Day program. Pack Leader Harry Mogle wrote *"We've attended several of the great programs that Heidi Boyle instructs at Canoe Creek State Park and it was during one of these outings that I decided to have the scouts assemble bluebird nesting boxes as a conservation project for this year."*

The Pack acquired white cedar planks and assembled the bluebird houses to specifications provided by the Pennsylvania Game Commission. The bluebird boxes will be mounted on metal posts with predator guards at various appropriate locations throughout Sinking Valley. **Thank you, Cub Scout Pack 320!**



# JVAS Member donates Easement on Canoe Mountain

Long-time Juniata Valley Audubon member Tom Dubbs, dedicated conservationist and forest steward, has donated an easement on his 65 acre mountainside property in Huntingdon County to the Central Pennsylvania Conservancy. The property is located on Canoe Mountain and is a beautifully wooded area with incredible scenic vistas looking toward the gap in Tussey Mountain at Water Street. Located in close proximity to the Canoe Creek Watershed IBA, the conservation of this ridge-top property ensures protection of valuable habitat for migrating birds as well as significant interior forest habitat for resident birds. In addition, the property is home to several of Pennsylvania's listed species of concern, including the five-lined skink, the wood turtle, and the timber rattlesnake.

*Right: JVAS member Tom Dubbs  
and the view from Dubbs Hill*



## JVAS FIELD TRIP: NATIONAL AVIARY & PHIPPS CONSERVATORY

The field trip on Saturday, February 23 for Juniata Valley Audubon is to Pittsburgh to enjoy some inside activities visiting the National Aviary <http://www.aviary.org/> and Phipps Conservatory <http://www.phipps.conservatory.org/>.

The National Aviary has been designated as a national avian site and includes more than 200 species of birds with about 600 total birds from around the world. Currently there is a special exhibit on the flight of birds with several trained birds flying close range while an educator describes how birds fly. Bring a ball cap for this visit; you never know what falls from the sky as birds swoop overhead!

After the aviary, a quick stop for lunch then on to Phipps Conservatory for a leisurely walk inside their greenhouses. The greenhouses have 13 different gardens and a tropical rain forest. There always is a special seasonal garden display, so bring your cameras for some great blooms and relief from cabin fever.

Van service will be provided for the first 12 who sign up and pre-pay. The van will leave from Uncle Joe's Woodshed at 8 AM. Costs involved:

Van transportation - \$18.50  
Aviary admission - 9.00  
Phipps admission - 12.50  
Total per person - \$ 40.00

Lunch will be at your own expense. Reservations on a first come basis when pre-payments are received.

Call Terry Wentz 693-6563 or send check for \$40 payable to

Waxwing Associates, 140 Queen Ann Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

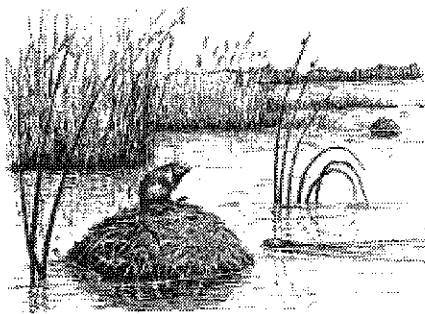
*Deadline for reservations February 13.*

# Red In Tooth and Claw

By Heidi Boyle

A fierce front had come through the previous night, leaving billowing dark clouds scudding across the sky. The temperature was in the low 40s as I headed out the door and squished my way down to the marsh. Atypical of a January morning the weather was a contemptuous mix of angry winds and ragged clouds, providing hopeful glimpses of brilliant blue sky. The ground was mushy and muddy and now that the winds were having their last say, branches were down everywhere. Mud bespattered the back of my pants and water hissed and popped under my boots as I worked my way into the wetlands along a well used deer trail.

Velvety triangular pods of tick trefoil clung to my pants and jacket and winter grass whispered and scratched in the stiff breeze. Mounds of dirt showed evidence of moles along the trail and I passed a shredded sapling that had been a deer rub near at the



edge of the lake. Cattails rustled and bobbed and I could just make out the top of a muskrat lodge; a lumpy pile of cattails and mud - the only still thing seemingly undisturbed in the wind that thrashed lake and rattled the alders.

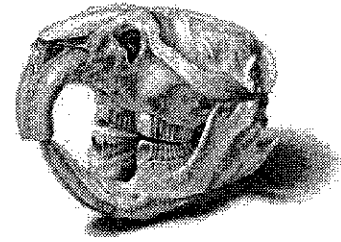
Turning back onto the trail, I nearly blundered into a pile of scat. I knelt down to take a careful look - it was pointed at the ends, long and cylindrical (instead of the pellet-like scat of an herbivore) and filled with lots of hair - probably from an eastern coyote (*Canis latrans*) that had visited the marsh in search of small critters. Digging into it with twigs, I uncovered some small fragments of bones, but nothing recognizable.

Farther down the trail, a few graying stumps remained as a sign of past visitors. A pile of ragged, wet chips surrounded the poplar stumps. Examining several chips, I could still make out the angled edges where a beaver's teeth had chiseled them from the tree. Most of the stumps were 3 - 5" in diameter but no trunks remained. The beaver had used the entire cutting in fashioning its dam or lodge.



Carnivores such as the Eastern coyote don't hold sole claim to strength. The skull of the beaver (*Castor canadensis*) is heavy, designed to support the muscles that provide the crushing power necessary to drive its chisel-like teeth through wood. A beaver can take down a small tree in just a couple of hours and move

right onto the next. The tools of *C. canadensis* are four large incisors typical of rodents that are sharp and chisel-like, designed for cutting plant material, although a beaver is the only rodent large and strong enough to take down trees.



As form follows function, the beaver's smaller cousin, the muskrat (*Ondatra zibethica*), is more delicately put together, relying on cattails and other wetland plants for its food and lodge material. As such, muskrats have a much lighter skull and musculature designed for cutting and eating herbaceous growth.

Herbivores in general require sharp incisors in front for shearing off plant material. But since plant material can be quite fibrous, they also need teeth for grinding fibers before swallowing. Beavers, muskrats, groundhogs, mice - all have thick, flattened molars that are grooved to break down plant material, and their mouths are hinged in a way that allows the jaws to move horizontally to slide the molars across each other to grind their food.

The sometimes predator of the muskrat and beaver, the coyote, that had traveled along the adjacent path had left its scat as evidence of its recent meal. A coyote's prey consists mainly of small mammals it can swallow whole, but they will also take on larger prey - requiring long sharp canine teeth and the strength to deliver a killing bite. Carnivore jaws are also hinged in a way that enables a wider bite so as to clamp around the neck of the intended prey.

Another predator of the muskrat is the slender mink (*Mustela vison*) - an animal almost equal to its prey in size and weight. Although equipped with long sharp canines that neatly kill its prey, the mink relies on the specially angled pre-molars and molars of a carnivore that provide the cutting surfaces it needs to shear off pieces of meat.

Just near where I could overlook the muskrat lodge was the nearly hidden entrance to the burrow of a mink. Since mink live in proximity with their prey, it is no wonder that muskrats prefer to operate in tunnels and dense undergrowth and will construct a 'plunge hole' in their lodge to immediately escape danger.

The tools of carnivores not only include a wide bite, sharp canines, strong jaw muscles and shearing molars, they also have jaws designed for vertical rather than horizontal action, allowing them to employ a scissoring action to shear off chunks of meat with their sharp molars. Watching a rabbit, muskrat or groundhog chew is to see the side-to-side grinding of its jaws; but get up early to observe a mink at work quickly ripping into a frog and you'll see only the up and down jaw motion of a true carnivore.



I pocketed some of the beaver's wood chips to take back and found a perch on a log, somewhat sheltered from the gusts of wind. As I huddled with my hands thrust deep in my pockets to stay warm, I reflected that nature certainly provides fodder for discovery under the skin as well as in observable behaviors. Many of the bones and skulls I've found on rambles through the woods and fields have yielded an amazing look at the varied structures of both herbivores and carnivores.

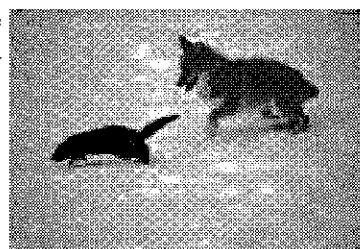
Skulls and jaws of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) reveal them as herbivores lacking upper incisors entirely. An adult has six incisors and two canines in the lower front. Most mammals including herbivores have canines, the exceptions being rodents and lagomorphs (rabbits and hares). In herbivores, canines are small and flattened, resembling incisors. A deer essentially grips plants between its lower incisors and thickened gums on the upper jaw and rips.

Rabbits have skulls that show lagomorphs as unique. They have a second, smaller set of incisors behind their upper incisors. Rabbits snip plants off with their front teeth, as do rodents.

The feeding strategies of omnivores such as raccoons, opossums, fox and bear require the full set of incisors, canines, premolars and molars to deal with both meat and plant material, so their jaws and muscles are designed as are carnivores.

The only mammalian carnivores that have fairly uniform teeth belong to the insectivores - bats and shrews. Their teeth are sharp and pointy for crushing the exoskeletons of insects, and have little surface for grinding.

I sighed as I rose stiffly from my cold perch. I hadn't seen any activity from the muskrat lodge and it had remained quiet in the marsh - maybe the stiff blasts of wind were keeping critters tucked away. I could picture the muskrat placidly munching away on cattail stems in the darkness of its muddy lodge and wondered if it remained alert for the sounds and scents of its lithe predator, the mink, that lived nearby waiting to deliver its deadly bite.



Once again the marsh had delivered glimpses into the lives of the creatures that live here. Nature had designed these creatures with the physical tools to get food and defend themselves - the reference to 'nature red in tooth and claw' was never so apt.





# Public-Private Partnership Protects 3,500+ acres in Southcentral PA

The Conservation Fund (TCF) [www.conservationfund.org](http://www.conservationfund.org), a national non-profit land and water conservation organization, last month purchased 3,500+ acres in Huntingdon, Bedford, Fulton, Cumberland, and York Counties for \$9 million from Glatfelter Pulp Wood Company. Much of this land lies within Pennsylvania's ridge and valley province and is adjacent to existing public lands.

"This acquisition will help us enhance what we treasure in Pennsylvania - our beautiful forests, streams and natural areas," State Forester Dan Devlin said. "Adding this piece of Pennsylvania's great outdoors to four state forest tracts will mean we are able to protect wildlife habitat, and that future generations will be able to enjoy the land for outdoor recreation, including hunting, fishing and hiking."

"This acquisition protects some of the most important privately held conservation lands along the southern tier of Pennsylvania," said Todd McNew, Pennsylvania representative for TCF. "Glatfelter's cooperation and commitment to working with this partnership was key to ensuring that these lands have permanent conservation status and will be forever open to the public."

"Cumberland County is pleased to be part of this public-private partnership," said Cumberland County Commissioner Gary

Eichelberger. "Preservation of our forested ridgetops is essential to the quality of life in our region, particularly for clean drinking water for generations to come."

Funding for the acquisition was supported by a mix of private and public sources. TCF raised more than \$3 million in private funds, more than half of which came from the Pittsburgh-based Richard King Mellon Foundation. DCNR contributed more than \$5.5 million. Additional funding came from York County, Cumberland County and WPC.

"The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is pleased to partner with TCF in this great conservation effort," said Greg Socha, senior director of forest conservation for Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. "The acquisition of the Glatfelter tracts provides protection of a larger conservation landscape in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. We are particularly excited that one of the Glatfelter tracts is adjacent to land previously protected by WPC, which is also planned to become an addition to Buchanan State Forest. We look forward to partnering with TCF and DCNR to continue to protect Pennsylvania's natural heritage."

"In today's world, one must truly work at preservation in order to pass treasures on to future generations," said Lori O. Mitrick, president of York County Board of Commissioners.



**Female Northern Cardinal**

*By Helena Kotala  
Nature's Images*



**Barred Owl**

*By Helena Kotala  
Nature's Images*

# ***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!**

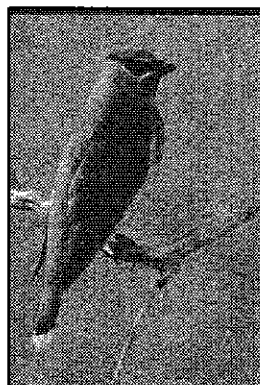
JVAS' canoe and kayak group enjoyed many great river trips on the Little Juniata and Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River last year. These trips are done at a leisurely pace with wildlife and observation in mind. Trips last 1-4 hours and are on Class 1-3 water depending on river conditions. Notice 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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## **Nature's Images**

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## **The Creature Teacher**



**Jody Wallace**

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## JANUARY AND FEBRUARY PROGRAMS

### January 15 — "Finding Nature on the Web"

JVAS vice president **Dave Bonta** will explain why an on-line habit and a love of the outdoors aren't necessarily incompatible, with a multimedia presentation on nature blogs, photo-sharing sites, nature identification resources, and more.

### February 19 — "Birding Veracruz"

JVAS members **Mike and Laura Jackson** will present photos and stories from their eventful birding pilgrimage to Veracruz, Mexico's "river of raptors."

## JANUARY AND FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS

### Saturday, January 19 — State College Farmlands and Scotia Barrens

Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot of Unkel Joe's Woodshed, Altoona. We will spend the morning looking for horned larks and northern harriers. **Terry Wentz** [twentz2@verizon.net](mailto:twentz2@verizon.net)

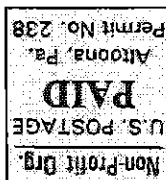
### Saturday, February 23 — The National Aviary, Pittsburgh

Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot of Unkel Joe's Woodshed, Altoona. Van to Pittsburgh — two hours. Bring snacks and drinks. Lunch along the way. **Terry Wentz** [twentz2@verizon.net](mailto:twentz2@verizon.net)

**ABOUT JVAS PROGRAMS:** Programs are presented on the *third Tuesday of each month, September through May (except December)*. 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.

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By Chet Gottfried

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