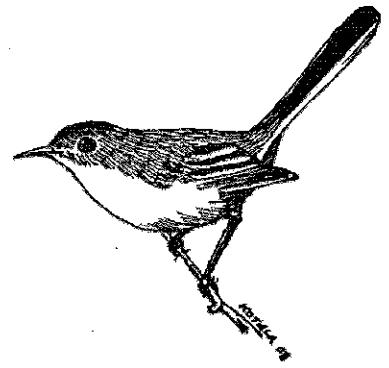


# The Gnatcatcher

## Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon



Volume 42 No. 2 March/April 2010

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



### The annual Juniata Valley Audubon banquet returns!

**When:** Tuesday, April 20, at 6:00 p.m. with dining to commence at 6:30

**Where:** The banquet room at **Hoss's Steak & Sea House**, 170 Patchway Road, Duncansville (right off Old Rt. 220)

**Who:** Anyone — you don't have to be a member of the chapter (though we encourage everyone to become a chapter-only or National Audubon member)

**Menu:** A la carte.

**Program:** **Timber Rattlesnakes in Pennsylvania**, by Jim Chestney and Aura Stauffer

**Reservations:** Please cut out and mail the form below by April 13<sup>th</sup>

After a couple years' hiatus, we've decided to bring back the annual banquet. This time, we're trying a location where most everybody should be able to get what they want: Hoss's ample salad bar should satisfy those who crave vegetables (and soup, bread and desserts!) and people can order what they want off the menu, too. A 20% tip will be added to everyone's check to cover the cost of the banquet room for the evening. This way, we don't have the hassle of collecting money and menu orders ourselves in advance. We do still need you to let us know if you'll be attending, though, so we can let Hoss's know how many to expect.

We're also looking for donations for a silent auction. Be sure to arrive at 6:00 if you plan on bidding. Unlike the raffles we've held in the past, there isn't any guesswork about whether you'll get something at a silent auction -- you simply have to enter the highest bid(s) on the clipboard devoted to the item(s) of your choice. Contact Georgia Bottenfield, 832-2273, or Laura Jackson, 652-9268, if you have an item to donate.

We're really excited about the program. Jim Chestney, venomous species coordinator for the Fish and Boat Commission, and Aura Stauffer, wildlife biologist with the DCNR, will jointly deliver a presentation on one of the Commonwealth's most fascinating, misunderstood, and charismatic critters. They'll discuss the history, biology, management, and conservation status of the timber rattlesnake in Pennsylvania and the Northeast, and describe the findings from the new statewide den survey they've been conducting. Just how widespread are rattlesnakes in Pennsylvania these days? How genetically diverse are they? How should we manage rattlesnakes in light of this new information? Come to the JVAS banquet and find out!

We will also be installing the new officers, but we promise that no speeches will be given.

Mail this form to

**Juniata Valley Audubon  
Vice President Dave Bonta  
P.O. Box 148  
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648**

### BANQUET RESERVATIONS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Number in party \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

# JVAS Canoe Creek State Park Moore's Hill Trail Hike

## January 23, 2010

The only sunny day in a two-week stretch of clouds, freezing rain, and snow set the stage for our first hike of 2010. A dozen hikers, led by JVAS conservation chair Dr. Stan Kotala, learned about the history of Canoe Creek, and Moore's Hill in particular, while curing their cabin fever on this 4-mile trek on one of the park's most interesting trails.

Due to the rain the previous week, as well as recharge from melting snow on the eastern flank of Brush Mountain, Mary Anne's Creek was flowing high and rapid. In the stream, hikers learned, northern spring salamanders, long-tailed salamanders, northern dusky salamanders, and northern two-lined salamanders continue to be active throughout the winter months, feeding on aquatic insects such as stonefly larvae, mayfly nymphs, and caddisfly larvae. Also along the stream, we observed the ancient horsetails, or scouring rushes that line the banks. Because its streambanks are forested, Mary Anne's Creek is able to sustain a full complement of riparian fauna, and, when warmer weather arrives, we will see wood turtles, Louisiana waterthrushes, Acadian flycatchers, and mink along the stream corridor.

The forested shady northwestern flank of Moore's Hill provides a cooler microclimate for species such as the sugar maple, which is common on that face of the hill. Just 2 months from now, this area will be the site of spectacular displays of the rare yellow ladies slipper.

Hikers easily ascended the steep switchback just downslope of the bat hibernaculum and soon reached the top of Moore's Hill Trail, which offered us a great view of Canoe Creek valley to the north, surrounded by Brush Mountain and Canoe Mountain in SGL 166.

The descent towards Canoe Creek brought us to another riparian zone that has recovered from the ravages of industrialization. A century ago, this area where tulip poplars, eastern hemlocks, and beech trees grow tall was home to a thriving mining industry, with kilns and railways.

We hiked along the old railroad bed paralleling Canoe Creek and marveled at the interesting plant life along the riparian corridor and on the hillside. Walking ferns on a limestone outcrop, skunk cabbages alongside a vernal pool, muscular ironwood trees, and pit-mound formations created by massive fallen red oaks all held our interest. The large numbers of hardy Christmas ferns at the base of the hill delighted us all.

Of interest was the bench at the top of the hill which 20 years ago was the site of an informational DER display, which offered tips to hikers who wanted to take photos of Canoe Lake from that site. At the time, the lake was visible over the fields and shrubs, but now, 30-foot-tall tulip poplars and hickories block the view from this site. The forest has returned.

The final portion of our hike brought us through the early successional fields managed for golden-winged warblers. Native grasses in the fields flanking these areas provide food and cover for many species of wildlife.

With its varied habitats and correspondingly varied flora and fauna, the Moore's Hill Trail is one of the crown jewels of Canoe Creek State Park. Try hiking it throughout the seasons for a never-ending display of nature's awesome beauty.



# Through the Branches

By JVAS member Deb Tencer

## A Walk in the Woods

On a sunny January day, a day to keep me optimistic of a spring that will indeed come, eventually, I venture out. I hike on a thin film of ice barely strong enough to keep me from breaking through the several inches of snow. My hiking companion rushes, full of excitement to the entrance of a familiar path. I have hiked these trails hundreds of times, and every time it feels different and wonderful, invigorating. I keep my eyes open for glimpses of the subtle signs of spring. Even in the middle of winter I find hope.

I'm very thankful to have the freedom and my health to be able to hike and experience the woods so often. It would be very difficult for me to lose that. Life has a way of throwing awful curveballs at us. So often we must fight for our health, and I have learned not to take it for granted.

I believe we all have our favorite places and trails that we can go to when we need to recharge our "batteries". Locally, Blue Knob is my favorite (Rothrock State Forest a close second). I'm not sure as to exactly why. Perhaps it's all the mountain ridges and the closeness to nature I experience there. Perhaps it's the solitude. I always feel content after being there. The tiredness I feel is welcome. I become so relaxed and ready to "face the real world again".

I always know when it's time for "my woods fix". I become antsy and, if you ask my kids, "a little irritable." The sound of birds, the smell of the damp woods; it revives me. I'm a new person again; centered, mellow, and yes, happy. I feel lucky to be alive. How could just a walk in the woods so easily do this for us? I'm not sure, but thankful for it.

While hiking on this January day, I pass through the campground smiling at all the memories of time spent there. I visualize my very active daughter at the age of 7. She's been riding her scooter down the wet and slippery hill (against my better judgment). And she wipes out, like many other times. "Mom look! I'm bleeding! Cool!" And she gets right back up and rides till darkness surrounds the campground. Memories of a warm campfire and roasting marshmallows on a stick to make lots and lots of s'mores. Chasing fireflies and stargazing until my children's lids can no longer stay open. I can't imagine raising my children without sharing my love of nature.

A spring camping trip was described in a poem I had written in my journal...

It's April 18th and about 73 degrees. It's my first camping trip this year.

Spring is finally here!

The smell of campfire fills the air.

Buds quietly open to the feel of a warm breeze.

Birds sing happily, thankful for the long winter to be over.

Campers rejoice and laugh loudly, celebrating the renewal of life. Spring flowers push through a blanket of leaves towards the warm sun.

While a butterfly flutters past lazily as if spring and summer will last forever.

Several years later on another spring camping trip I wrote...

April 19th. 76 degrees. Sunny and so warm!

I'm at Blue Knob camping. There's only 3 campers counting me. It's so peaceful. Little flies keep swarming my head. They must have just hatched. They are so busy and full of excitement for life.

I hiked all day. The woods seem so different without leaves, but just as refreshing. Purple violets and fiddler ferns bring a smile to my lips. I barely recognize the trails that I've hiked so many times before. I got to see (or should I say startled) a pheasant and a quail, and I heard the deer nearby. I relaxed while watching the sunset into the mountains. It is so easily seen without the leaves on the

trees, seemingly bolder than summer, less shy, and so pleasant. Tomorrow I hope to hike till I drop!

The next morning I had written...

Waking up to the smell of campfire  
The morning spring air surprisingly warm  
A hot cup of steaming coffee  
The anticipation of a day hiking  
So much to look forward to

I have learned to appreciate the gift of a beautiful spring day and have realized the importance of nature in my busy life. I can only hope that my children will carry this love and respect I have for nature to my grandchildren and future generations. They are so busy with today's technologies and so forgetful of the importance of our natural world. I'm afraid they don't see the delicate balance of the woods and our health, both physically and emotionally, and the footprints we leave behind.



# Send Rendell a strong message: No Additional State Forest Drilling

*By Representative Greg Vitali*

Gov. Ed Rendell plans to lease — perhaps as early as this spring — more Pennsylvania state forest land for Marcellus gas drilling. This would be in addition to the almost 700,000 acres of state forest land already available for Marcellus drilling.

No one knows what the impact of the anticipated drilling will be. That's why I have introduced legislation to impose a moratorium on further leasing until we know more.

The governor plans to raise an additional \$180 million from state forest leasing for the 2010-11 budget. He needs no legislative approval to do this.

About 1.5 million acres of Pennsylvania state forest land sits atop the Marcellus Shale formation. With the leasing of 32,000 acres in January, 692,000 acres of state forest land is now available for drilling. Yet the governor wants to lease more.

The Marcellus Shale formation lies about a mile below about 60 percent of Pennsylvania and neighboring states. Embedded in this formation are vast quantities of natural gas that can now be accessed by an advanced drilling technique known as hydrofracturing, or fracking. This technique involves pumping millions of gallons of water mixed with chemicals into the ground to fracture the shale, releasing the trapped natural gas.

Fracking a single well typically requires more than a million gallons of water. Several acres of land need to be cleared for the drilling pad. Access roads, a water sediment basin and other infrastructure need to be installed and a high volume of truck traffic is required to transport drilling equipment and water to and from the drilling site. This activity impacts state forests and puts local water quality at risk.

Right now there are only three Marcellus wells producing gas on Pennsylvania state forest land. About 100 wells are currently being drilled. It is conservatively estimated that about 5,000 to 6,000 Marcellus wells will be drilled in the next 15 years. No one knows what the cumulative impact of this drilling will be on state forests or how it will affect the quality of drinking water in the Marcellus region.



We need to stop leasing state forest land until we can better assess the impact of this anticipated drilling. That's why I have introduced HB 2235, The State Forest Natural Gas Lease Moratorium Act. This bill would impose a five-year moratorium on further state forest leasing. The bill also would require the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to study the impact of drilling and provide an annual report to the governor and General Assembly.

Instead of leasing more state forest land to balance this year's budget, Pennsylvania should impose a severance tax on gas drillers. Almost every other state that extracts

natural gas imposes such a tax.

**The residents of Pennsylvania need to send a strong message to Rendell and the General Assembly that our state forests and the quality of our drinking water are too important to compromise.**

*Greg Vitali is a Democratic state representative from Delaware County and serves on the House Environmental Resources and Energy Committee. He can be reached via [www.pahouse.com/vitali](http://www.pahouse.com/vitali).*

**If you are opposed to additional Marcellus shale gas drilling in Pennsylvania State Forests, then please sign, stamp, and send the enclosed postcard. The postcards will be sorted by zip code and sent to your local representatives.**

# GOVERNOR RENDELL'S ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACY

## \$1.3 Billion Diverted, Cut From Environmental Programs Over Last 8 Years

If Gov. Rendell's proposed 2010-11 budget becomes law, a total of \$1.3 billion has been diverted or cut from environmental programs to help balance the state budget or to fund programs that could not get funding on their own over the last eight years. Here's the rundown-

- \$428 million in Act 339 grants intended to support wastewater plant operations over the last eight years were eliminated to balance the budget;
- \$143 million diverted from the DCNR Oil and Gas Fund to balance the FY 2008-09 budget;
- \$79 million cut from the DEP and DCNR General Fund budget during FY2009-10;
- \$60 million diverted from the DCNR Oil and Gas Fund to balance the FY 2009-10 budget;
- \$100 million in 2002 from the Underground Storage Tank cleanup insurance fund to balance the budget (although this is slowly being repaid over 10 years);
- \$52.7 million one-time diversion from the Keystone Recreation, Parks and Conservation Fund in 2006 to balance the budget;
- \$50 million in 2007 and 2008 from the Environmental Stewardship Fund, which supports mine reclamation and watershed restoration, to fund the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Program because there was no agreement on how to fund that program;
- \$85 million in FY 2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10 from the Environmental Stewardship Fund to pay debt service on the Growing Greener II bond issue and taking funding away from restoration projects each year for the next 25 years reflecting a pattern of only environmental programs being required to address their own bond debt service;
- \$15 million from the Recycling Fund in to balance the FY 2008-09 budget;
- \$18.4 million put into budgetary reserve in 2008-09 from the Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Conservation and Natural Resources;
- \$5 million reduction in Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) farm conservation tax credit program in FY 2009-10;
- \$79 million cut from the DEP and DCNR General Fund budget in proposed FY 2010-11 budget;
- \$180 million diverted from the DCNR Oil and Gas Fund to General Fund in proposed FY 2010-11 budget;
- \$5.5 million reduction in Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) farm conservation tax credits in proposed FY 2010-11; and
- \$5 million in additional cuts to the agencies to balance the FY 2010-11 budget.

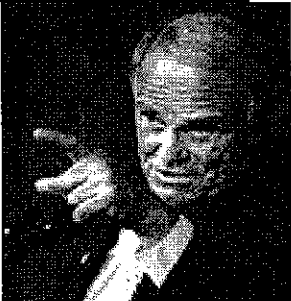
### Bankrupting Growing Greener

For the first time, more than half of the income in the Environmental Stewardship Fund (Growing Greener) will go for debt service in the proposed 2010-11 budget-- \$36.8 million-- with only \$33.2 remaining for projects. In addition, the proceeds from the Growing Greener II bond will be exhausted this year to support projects.

Debt service payments will increase to \$60 million of the \$66 million in new revenues coming into the Fund annually leaving little funding for mine reclamation, watershed restoration, oil and gas well plugging, agricultural best management practices, recreation and farmland preservation.

***"Rendell's a city slicker – he doesn't understand that a century-old state forest system is a treasure of the Commonwealth."***

*Rep. Dave Levdansky (D) Allegheny, Washington*





# 1st fly rod

By Billy Ray Anderson

Growing up in my Wilmington, Delaware neighborhood, teenage boys had names like "Bugsy", "Duffy", "Rags" and "Butchy the Mouth Battaglia", or just "Mouth" so named because he could guzzle a 16 oz. Dr. Pepper, complete ---- while someone else poured it ---- without swallowing! This feat was repeated whenever Butchy could collar a new mark willing to buy him another soda at Coleman's corner store. "Bugsy" was another Billy (we had a lot of them) --- last name Briggs. He was most famous for racing home the instant the streetlights came on. "Bugsy" was also personally infamous for knocking my right front tooth into a position, 90 degrees from its mate. He accomplished this with an elbow --- during a "touch" football game in the middle of Scott Street. This worked out ok though when I pushed it back in place with my thumb, thus avoiding telling my parents and being forced to endure a much feared dentist office visit (40+ years later I still have this tooth).

Strangely - Billy Wheatley had no nickname --- just Billy or Wheatley. Maybe it was because he was always busy doing the right things --- like working after school, delivering papers in the morning before dawn, helping his mother around the house and generally giving all the rest of us a pain in the posterior. Wheatley was the example our mothers brought up when we were on the way out the door going to the river with rod in hand or headed to the B&O station yard to play baseball. Wheatley had no nickname because he was too darn perfect! Then one day I learned from Duffy that Wheatley had a fly rod, which he wanted to sell.

I had spent many rainy day hours pouring over the *Outdoor Life's* and *Field & Stream* magazines lying in two-foot high piles in Augie's screen enclosed back porch. (Augie deserved his nickname. It stood for John Augustine Avanzato and he was a "far from perfect" son of a city cop). Along with the ads guaranteeing a fortune selling Cloverine Salve, there were articles written by A. J. McLane, Ted Trueblood, Joe Brooks and other great fishermen. They were always holding up a huge bass or trout caught on hair bugs or streamers and always on a fly rod. They were gods!

At thirteen I was a veteran fisherman having spent every summer since I was nine fishing for anything that swam in the Brandywine River, an easy ten block walk from our house on 15<sup>th</sup> street. I was even experienced at fishing flies --- but it was a challenge to get them more than a few yards from the end of my spinning rod --- accomplished by whipping the mono feverishly back and forth.

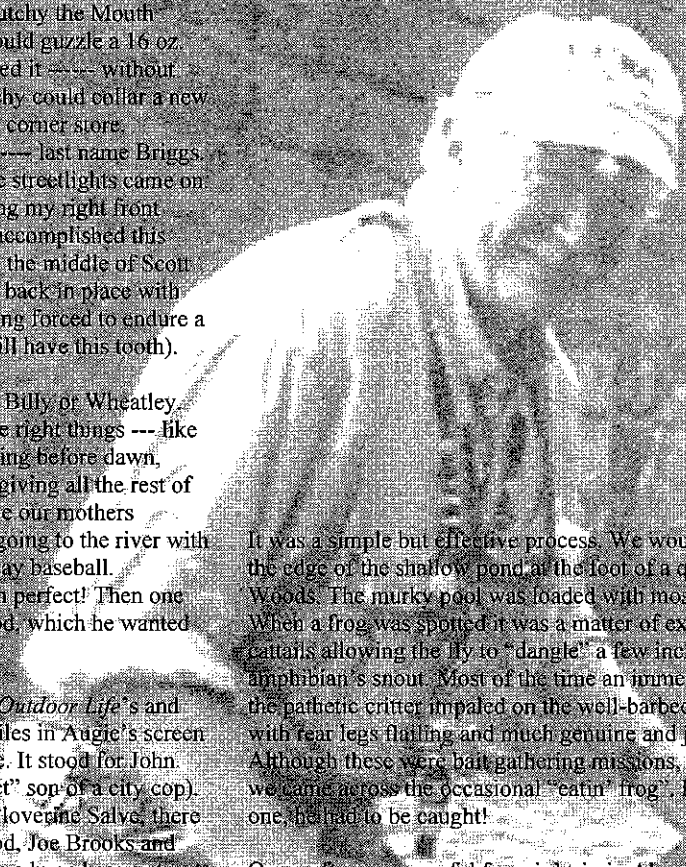
My technique, though tackle limited, was perfected from hours of practice. I would wade out into the Brandywine until I was standing upstream --- and up-wind from a school of sunfish, then after much false "thrashing", I would deliver my best cast of about 12 feet, allowing immediate slack coils to fall in the current carrying my offering to the waiting sunnies. I was fly fishing and catching loads of willing "wild" fish, but what I knew I really needed was a -- fly rod.

Notwithstanding the improvised tackle, my flies were of the finest quality, purchased at Baldo's Hardware store at the corner of Delaware Avenue and Scott Street. Mr. Baldo had a large styrofoam box with a vast assortment, each fly costing \$0.25. There were choices, too many to make, black, red, yellow or white. My personal favorite was a bumblebee-like pattern with alternating black and yellow stripes on the body. It also sported a generous rusty brown collar hackle and a bright red tail. The sunfish absolutely ate this thing up and so did the frogs we would catch for bass bait. For this we used a local technique known as "danglin'".

It was a simple but effective process. We would carefully sneak along the edge of the shallow pond at the foot of a quarry cliff in Alapocas Woods. The murky pool was loaded with mostly smallish bullfrogs. When a frog was spotted it was a matter of extending the rod through the cattails allowing the fly to "dangle" a few inches from the trusting amphibian's snout. Most of the time an immediate "strike" resulted with the pathetic critter impaled on the well-barbed hook, fighting his fate with fear legs flailing and much genuine and justifiable, loud croaking. Although these were bait gathering missions, it was too tempting when we came across the occasional "eatin' frog". Even though we never ate one, he had to be caught!

Once, after a successful froggin' trip in Alapocas, Ricky Crawford and I were on the way down Lovering Avenue, bait bucket full of frogs (including one large eater) in hand. I noticed a stone wall around one of the many fancy houses owned by a Dupont executive. At 12 years, I knew this because "everybody" knew that all the rich folks in New Castle County were either Duponts, or at least worked at the Dupont Company. Peering over the wall, we could see a very beautiful and carefully landscaped fishpond. It had schools of slender gold colored fish swimming in unison around a full scale, nude, Greek lady on a small island. The only thing the pond really needed for perfection was a two-pound bullfrog! We happily accommodated. It was with evil delight that we imagined the midnight chorus of loud "Bonkkks" that the rich neighborhood snobs would be treated to.

After that first success, releasing large bullfrogs in unlikely places became a sport all to its self. The most memorable frog stocking effort came several seasons later when we placed a particularly large specimen in the enclosed courtyard surrounded on three sides by Dembey Hall, a four story apartment building inhabited by mostly senior widows. Between the flagstone paths leading to the front entrance there was a rectangular pond maybe 12 feet long, and three feet deep, complete with lily pads and assorted other dense frog cover, but no frogs. It was the perfect amphitheater for nighttime frog solos. This time we did not have to just imagine the results. The apartments were on Billy Wheatley's Sunday paper route. He got an ear full from the ladies after they were disturbed every night for a couple of warm July weeks (before the days of air conditioning). Especially after we spread the rumor that it was he who released the baritone amphibian! The landlord finally drained the pond and eventually filled it in!





After a successful frog/fly-fishing trip we would take our catch in a minnow bucket to the Alum ponds located beside the Brandywine below the Augustine Bridge. The Alum ponds were two one-acre, rectangular storage reservoirs set side by side with a 12 foot strip of mowed grass separating them. They were right up against the brick mill building on one side and there was a water gate between them with a gate valve operated by a cast iron wheel positioned a few yards out on a small broken down dock.

I caught my very first fish on that dock, a sunny of course. I would lie prone, with a hand-line baited with corn, dropped through an opening provided by a broken board. I remember once while teasing a group of sunnys with my baited hook hanging three feet below on the end of my line, I saw a large dark shape cruise in between the crossoted dock posts. Heart in throat, I watched frozen, as the huge fish tilted up and pumped my three kernels of whole yellow corn, #4 hook and 6 inches of line, into a mouth that would do Martha Raye justice! --- You gotta be a Boomer to know who she was --- but trust me --- it was a very big mouth!

The fight was brief but painful. I had several turns of the 40 lb braided line wrapped around my small fist when the carp turned to leave with his prize. My arm shot through the hole until my shoulder stopped hard against the rough boards. Lucky for me the knot pulled out, or my fishing career and any other future activity requiring two arms would have ended at that instant! Beginning in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade I would carry this hand-line, wrapped on a wooden clothespin, in my pocket at all times. Lesson learned... I never wrapped it around anything important again!!

Fishing for largemouth bass in the Alum pond was a big deal for me and although I tried, it was clearly impractical with a hand-line. Serious bass fishing was out of my reach until I grew some and received a new rod and reel for Christmas when I was eleven. With my new Mitchell 304 and Garcia rod (big-time spinning gear), I would catch an occasional 12 or 14" bass by casting a night-crawler in front of a cruiser. I would see them from atop the ten-foot stone retaining wall on the north side of the ponds. However, the big boys didn't cruise in plain sight. To catch them we needed frogs. The real game was to place a #4 Eagle Claw through the frog's lower lip, then lob him into the middle of the pond. The frog, appearing to know what was happening, immediately began a feverish breast stroke, dragging the 10 lb mono and large hook back to shore --- that is, if one of the several really large Alum pond bass didn't cut his trip short.

At Baldo's Hardware, fly color selection may have been a challenge, but getting the size right was easy since each fly was tied on a stout #12 hook. In another box, wooden with brass hinges, there was an assortment of poppers. They were painted wood, frog eyes glued on, with green or yellow saddle hackles sticking several inches out the back --- but who could afford them?

After a particularly fruitful soda bottle collection trip, I bought one yellow popper and set about whittling my mother's clothespins into reasonable facsimiles of my purchased popper's body. The hooks were troublesome. I could never quite get them glued on straight and more than once my vigorous casting technique resulted in a body-less hook with just white rooster feathers tied to the back. (I learned later that I had inadvertently created a streamer, which would catch the occasional Smallmouth if allowed to swing in the current).

This effort led me back to Augie's porch and an F&S article. It gave a detailed description of how to make bass bugs from nothing more than deer hair! I figured that, even in the city, I could find somebody who had shot a deer and surely he would give me some of that "useless" hair. Finding a successful and at the same time, generous, deer hunter, though, would take months. In the mean time I still needed a fly rod more than ever! And Billy Wheatley, every mother's dream kid, had one for sale!

In a brilliant maneuver, my best friend Coleman arranged a date for us to play Hearts with Duffy's sister, Patricia, and Wheatley's sister, also a Patty. While the contrived card date was effective in getting a chance to see Wheatley's fly rod, it proved to be a life-changing mistake for Pat Duffy and a memorable embarrassment for me, when, a few weeks later, she asked me to her junior prom. (I learned years later that Coleman conspired with the Pattys and, beginning with the card party, he had set me up! And I thought he was helping me realize my dream of acquiring Wheatley's fly rod!)

I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade --- small for my age --- with no time for girls. I'll never forget arriving to pick Pat Duffy up. I was all decked out in a new shiny metallic green suit my mother made me buy --- with a red and yellow striped tie. I had a small wrist corsage in a clear plastic box for Patty. When my father and I pulled up in front of the brick row house, on 17<sup>th</sup> street, with the typical adjoining front porch --- there were all my "friends" --- hanging on the railings and draped over the front steps. The "traitor", Coleman, was leading the chorus as they collectively taunted me in a manner that would bring immediate fines and penalties to today's NFL players.

I ran the gauntlet across the porch and into the living room where poor Patty was waiting. I remember mumbling something about the flower and then led her out through a chorus of hoots and whistles. When we got to the '55 Pontiac, I opened the back door for Patty and, instead of getting in with her, --- I quickly closed the door and got in the front seat with my father! This was just the beginning of a very forgettable night for Patty.

When Coleman and I came through the back door at Wheatley's, the rod was standing by the refrigerator. Fortunately I could still see it from the dining room table where I was pretending to play hearts with the Pattys. It was a beauty! --- Eight feet long, three piece, bamboo, with only a minor 30-degree bend beginning about 8" from the tip. A Perrine spring-loaded, self-winding, reel was mounted on the reel seat, making it the perfect outfit. I was sure it would cast just fine after I stretched some of the "slinky" coils out of the heavy line. After much fondling (of the rod) between hands of "Hearts", I was in love!

True to his reputation, Billy Wheatley proved to be a tough negotiator. He wanted \$8, take or leave it, which totaled approximately 400 soda bottle deposits. Of course there were nickel deposits to be had on quart bottles, but these were harder to come by. I could also haul groceries at the Acme on Pennsylvania Avenue, but it was still winter. Snow shoveling was great money, but who could predict when, or if, it would snow again. It was evident that with fishing season coming up soon --- and my seasonal peak revenue stream, which came from selling blackberries picked along the railroad, months away --- there was only one choice --- I had to trade something.

Then I remembered that, more than once, Billy Wheatley had borrowed my one good baseball bat at our pickup games on the B&O Station lawn. It was a Louisville Slugger with Hank Aaron's signature burned into the barrel. I was a major Milwaukee Brave fan and Hammerin' Hank was my favorite hitter. So in spite of the troublesome fact that the Louisville Slugger was 3 inches too long and a half pound too heavy for my 4' 10" frame --- I was very attached to it! I couldn't swing it, but I enjoyed carrying it around. Besides, it was a Christmas present, which cost my parents more than \$8 for sure.

The day after the card game, the deal was consummated with an exchange of bat for rod at Coleman's corner and I was --- in my young mind at least --- finally and officially a "fly fisherman"!

*Note. Recently, while in Delaware for my dear 93-year-old mother's viewing, Coleman, who I hadn't seen in 35 years, told me that Patricia Duffy became a Catholic nun.*

# Why some JVAS members receive 2 newsletters

The JVAS publications chair has received several phone calls, emails, and notes from JVAS members wanting to know why they are receiving 2 *Gnatcatcher* newsletters. **It is because those of you who receive 2 newsletters have chosen to have BOTH a National Audubon Society membership AND a chapter-only JVAS membership.**

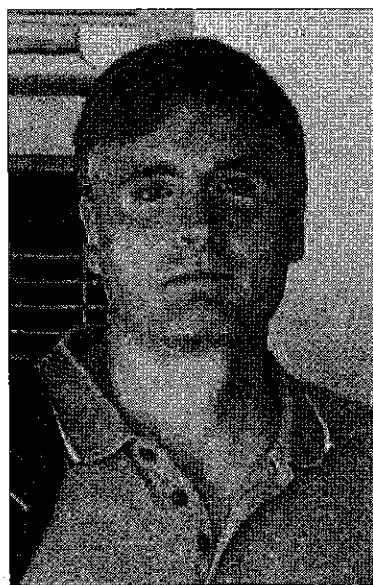
That is fine if you wish to provide additional financial support to BOTH organizations. You should know, however, that membership in the National Audubon Society, while much more costly than chapter-only JVAS membership, automatically confers membership in the JVAS.

If you are a chapter-only member of the JVAS, then all of your annual dues payment stays with our chapter to be used for conservation education and advocacy. There is a substantial cost savings to you if you choose chapter-only JVAS membership, but you will not receive Audubon magazine, only the *Gnatcatcher* newsletter.

Those of you who insist on being BOTH chapter-only members of Juniata Valley Audubon AND members of National Audubon will continue to receive 2 newsletters because the newsletter labels are generated independently: chapter-only labels are made by the JVAS publications chair, while National Audubon labels are provided by the national office in New York. Because the number of members who have chosen BOTH National Audubon Society membership AND Juniata Valley Audubon membership is so small (about a half-dozen out of 450 members) it would be extremely time-consuming for the JVAS publications chair to go through BOTH sets of labels looking for duplicate names each time the newsletter is mailed. **Therefore, if you receive 2 *Gnatcatcher* newsletters, then give one to a friend or neighbor, drop one off at a school or doctor's waiting room, or give it to a library.**

## 2009 CBC Report

The 2009 Juniata Valley Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count took place in the first significant snowstorm of what has turned into a winter for the record books. Despite dicey driving conditions and poor visibility, roughly two dozen people turned out to find what they could under less than optimal conditions. The resulting tally was low on numbers but surprisingly high in the total species count, including a number of fine birds like wood duck, American pipit, and white-crowned sparrow. The highlight of the day for this counter was a snow-covered barred owl that flew up unexpectedly and landed on a branch in Plummer's Hollow.



By

*JVAS CBC Coordinator  
Steve Bonta*

Sinking Valley yielded a number of good species, including snow buntings (seen by two different observers) and red-winged blackbirds, while Stan Kotala's bird feeder played host to red-breasted nuthatches. One new and very enthusiastic addition to the JVAS count is Eli Swarey, who lives on a large farm less than a mile from Culp. Although still in his teens, Eli is a very competent birder who logged many miles on foot and in buggy and contributed a number of unique species to the count.

While the weather could have been better, the final count of 60 species (+ 1 Accipiter sp.) was a very respectable result. Here's hoping next year's count will be just as fruitful, but with more favorable weather. *Many thanks to all those who participated!*



# Love is In the Air

By Heidi Mullendore

Red-seared my eyelids as I walked in the full sun of a March morning, my jacket off, my winter white arms bared to catch the sun. These early days of spring provide tantalizing tastes of summer as hints of greenery are coaxed from the forest floor, the sudden cheer of birdsong accompanies my mornings, and days when clouds and chill relax enough to allow the sun's warmth to seep into my skin.

On days like this, calm and warm with full sun, people step out in droves. It seems more each year are dressing in skimpier outfits – even on a 60° day men and women will wear the smallest shorts and tank tops. It reminds me of a Far Side cartoon in which a biologist pokes fun at the mating behaviors of animals. It appears we aren't so far removed as we think from the 'lower orders.' The onset of warm weather reveals the lengths animals will go to attract a mate.



Spring is the season of love – warblers show off their bright plumage, plants produce fantastically colored and patterned flowers to attract pollinators, the landscape comes alive with birdsong and frogsong in a mad race to find a mate. And yet for snakes, love is in the air, literally.

The woods are bright and warm, not yet cooled by a green canopy of leaves. Towhees, robins and squirrels create a ruckus in the dried leaves as I wander among patches of spring beauties and early greens. A continuous crunch and of dried leaves catches my ear – something is thrashing around near the rocks. Heading up the slope I see a restless squirming in the leaves – a ball of tightly entwined garter snakes, pulsing in the bright sun.

I immediately stop and crouch down, shifting to get comfortable as I watch the curious form separating and reforming as individual garters seek a better position in the mass. This is a mating ball – one of the annual events on the spring calendar.

As winter releases its grip on the land, male garter snakes emerge from hibernation (called brumation in reptiles). Soon after, females come out to advertise their charms via pheromones – snake perfume. Males are scenting the air with their tongues, tasting the breezes for the perfumes of females in the mood to mate. As pheromones do their work, males race to get to the female – the female is swarmed by many males, and in their frenzy to mate, they form a writhing ball of love.

Snake communication relies on pheromones. They can find each other by following trails laid with these chemical messages. And like all perfumes, they can pass on a variety of messages. Male and female pheromones are very different, and yet in the race for survival, the males of some species of garter snakes take advantage by producing both male and female pheromones. And, as also probably seen on reality TV, this can attract other males

into a mating ball. Thus, the male producing the female perfume can take advantage of the thermal mass by 'stealing' the heat of the other males. This allows the so-called 'she-males' to have the advantage of extra energy available in attempting to mate with females.

The eastern garter snake, *Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis*, is common throughout Pennsylvania. This highly adaptable snake is not finicky when it comes to habitat or food, making it one of the most widespread species in North America.

As a child, I can remember being fascinated by Sam, a rather portly garter snake who hung around the jumpers outside the garage. Typical of eastern garters, Sam had a dark dorsal strip and two lateral stripes, separated by varied blotches on his greenish-brown body.

Summers were passed watching Sam patrol the lawn and parking area in search of slugs, grasshoppers, worms, and what mice and salamanders he could catch. Like other cold blooded animals, our garter snake would bask in the sun, soaking up enough energy to raise his body temperature enough to be able to hunt and likewise digest his food.

Garter snakes are great to have around for pest control, a fact that never eased my Mother's mind as she fiercely defended her territory with the push lawnmower, reconciling many snakes to the great reptilian beyond.

Our Sam had fortunately survived the blades for many years, likely spending the winter under the foundation of the house or under the sandstone outcrops in the adjacent woods. Each spring garter snakes may travel long distances to get to a good summer site. At our house, Sam hung around the small area immediately around the house and gravel parking area, often leaving his snake skins twined among the garden tools in the garage.

A good summer site provides easily accessible hiding spots, basking areas, and plenty of cover for their prey. Sam had all this around our house and shared his territory maybe a dozen others.

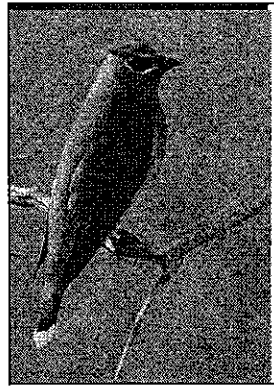
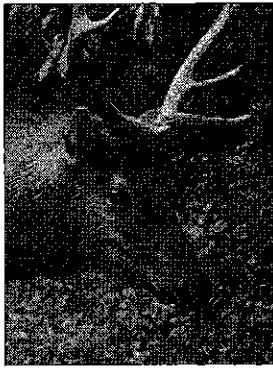
Despite the familiarity we kids held with our friend Sam, he never quite took to us capturing him. Garter snakes are a suspicious lot and are disagreeable held, trying to writhle and bite and will often exude a foul-smelling secretion. Their bites may sting a bit, but it is the malodorous goop which makes a hawk, crow, raccoon or fox release the ensnared snake.

Only a few times did we see young garter snakes – the young are born alive and are independent from birth, not hanging around for long. Since garter snakes only live 5 – 10 years, we saw Sam only four years running before his place in the jumpers was occupied by another.

Each year when I patrol the woods, enjoying the first warm days of spring, I ease into the warm season, ticking each spring sighting off with joy. The emergence of the garter snakes is something I anticipate each year, a sure sign that spring has come and love is in the air.



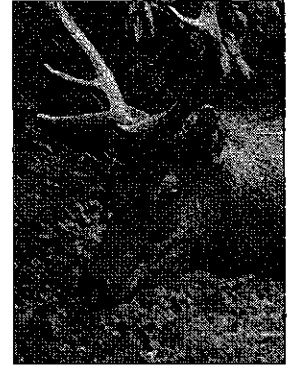
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## Featured 2010 Field Trip — Pine Creek Gorge

### March 26-28

### Rafting, Hiking and Optional Camping

On Saturday, March 27, join us for a guided raft trip on Pine Creek, led by **Pine Creek Outfitters**.

On Sunday, March 28, we will hike in the gorge.

Overnight camping will be available for both Friday and Saturday nights.

There are also a few hotels in the area for people who don't want to camp.

*The cost for anyone going on the guided raft trip is \$20. This covers the trip itself, wetsuit rental, and a catered lunch provided by PCO. This is half of what the trip normally costs.*

If anyone wants to bring their own canoes/kayaks, they can tag along with the rafts, but will *not* be provided with lunch or the shuttle service. Pine Creek Outfitters does offer shuttles.

**Reservations are required for the guided raft trip.**

**Please RSVP by March 18.**

For more information contact Helena Kotala [h\\_kotala@yahoo.com](mailto:h_kotala@yahoo.com) 814-502-7967.



# 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

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## MARCH/APRIL PROGRAMS

**March 16 — "Introduction to The Nature Conservancy and the Working Woodlands Program"**

In 2008, The Nature Conservancy purchased the Brush Mountain Woodlands Preserve above Hollidaysburg. Join TNC forester Mike Eckley and Molly Anderson, manager of the volunteer program in Pennsylvania, to learn all about a forest management system that puts wildlife first.

## April 20 — JVAS BANQUET

"Timber Rattlesnakes in Pennsylvania"

See page 1 of this newsletter for details.

## MARCH/APRIL FIELD TRIPS

**APRIL 3 Saturday — IRONSTONE TRAIL SHUTTLE HIKE:** Five-mile downhill hike from the top of Tussey Mountain, along Shaver's Creek to the Shaver's Creek Environmental Center grounds. Meet at Jo Hays Vista on Rt. 26 at the top of Tussey Ridge at noon. Helena Kotala 502-7967, h\_kotala@yahoo.com.

**APRIL 10 Saturday — TIMBERDOODLES AT CANOE CREEK STATE PARK:** The park has a variety of wetlands and old fields that provide ideal habitat for woodcocks. Observe the fascinating and unique flight of the timberdoodle. Meet at Pavilion 1 at 7:30 p.m. Dr. Stan Kotala 946-8840, ccwiba@keyconn.net.

**APRIL 18 Sunday — FROGWATCH AT FLOWING SPRING:** Meet at the Lower Trail Flowing Spring Trailhead at 6:30 p.m. for a short walk to listen to spring peepers, wood frogs, and perhaps other species, and possibly observe salamanders in the pools between the trail and the river. Bring a flashlight and/or headlamp. Dr. Stan Kotala 946-8840, ccwiba@keyconn.net.

**APRIL 24 Saturday — BEAR MEADOWS LOOP:** Three-mile hike on the trail around this national natural landmark in Rothrock State Forest. Spring peepers and wood frogs will be in full chorus. Possibility of seeing spotted salamanders. You *must* bring a headlamp and/or a flashlight, as we will be completing the hike after dark. Meet at the Bear Meadows Natural Area parking lot at 6:30 p.m. Dr. Stan Kotala 946-8840, ccwiba@keyconn.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 **BELLWOOD-ANTIS PUBLIC LIBRARY**. Take the Bellwood Exit off I-99, go straight thru the traffic light at the Sheetz intersection, proceed about 4 blocks and turn right just before crossing the railroad overpass. Turn left at the next intersection, another 2 blocks and the library is on the right.

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