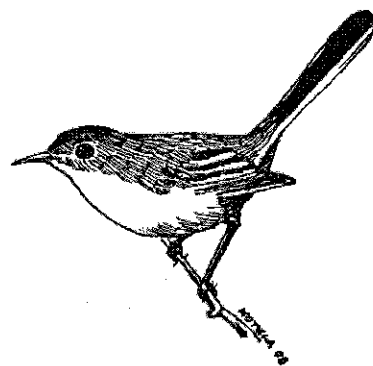


The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon



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JVAS President's Message

By Dave Bonta

By the time you read this, the mid-term elections will be over. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Juniata Valley Audubon Society is not permitted to endorse candidates or political parties, and that's fine, because our group certainly includes people from all across the political spectrum who share an interest in nature and conservation. It's a real tragedy that environmental issues are increasingly seen as the province of just one of the two major parties, because it means that in an increasingly partisan political climate, very little environmental legislation can ever get passed. If you are one of the minority of voters who tell pollsters that environmental protection is a core value, then the Democrats assume you'll continue to vote for them as long as they give lip-service to the environment and their opponents don't. If you're a sportsman, the Republicans assume that all they need to do is yell about the bogeyman taking your guns away and you'll vote for them, so they feel no strong need to do anything to protect wildlife or public lands.

We see this here in Pennsylvania with the deadlock over Marcellus shale drilling. Gov. Rendell flip-flopped twice on whether to support a severance tax, which the divided legislature has so far been unable to pass. A bill to impose a moratorium on any further leasing in state forest lands — strongly recommended by the biologists and foresters in DCNR — also failed. Rendell issued an executive order to halt leasing, but his successor could easily undo it with another order. The Marcellus shale gas boom represents the gravest threat to the waters and forests of the Commonwealth in decades, the DEP is woefully understaffed and underfunded, our public lands are under assault... and our elected officials argue over whether to impose a piddling tax, some small portion of which might be

used to repair a bit of the damage.

Part of the problem here in Pennsylvania, I think, is a deeply ingrained utilitarian outlook: elected officials and bureaucrats tend to be skeptical of people who love nature for its own sake. In almost any contest between someone who stands to make a buck and someone motivated by selfless idealism, it's the latter, not the former, who invites suspicion. Several years ago, when then-JVAS President Stan Kotala spoke to the Tyrone Borough Council in opposition to Gamesa's proposed wind development in the borough's watershed, some council members questioned him sharply about his motives and sought to dismiss his arguments. By contrast, the representative from a multinational corporation with no ties to the area was treated with extreme deference, and almost all his claims, no matter how absurd, were taken at face value. I don't mean to pick on Tyrone; it's just the first example that comes to mind of a depressingly familiar pattern.

So the election may be over, but that's hardly the end of our duty as citizens. Really, it's only the beginning. Elected officials need to hear from us as often as possible, by email, by regular mail, by phone call or during visits to their offices, how important wildlife issues are to us. If you do have the opportunity to meet with them in person, try to educate them a little — respectfully, of course — about things like habitat fragmentation, biodiversity, and the global extinction crisis. If you get a blank stare, or they start trying to tell you that climate change is a matter of opinion or that the earth is only 6000 years old, keep it simple and say: *"I care about wildlife, and I vote."* I guarantee they'll understand that.

A Day on Brush Mountain

The Nature Conservancy works to restore forest after extensive logging

Reprinted from the September 19, 2010 Altoona Mirror, with permission

- By Mark Leberfinger, Altoona Mirror Staff Writer

Cricket chirps, bird songs and even the hoot of an owl replace the din of traffic coming from Frankstown Road, Interstate 99 and Pleasant Valley Boulevard.

It's a place where Deb Tencer goes several times a month: the Brush Mountain Woodlands, a 640-acre tract of land in Logan and Frankstown townships owned by The Nature Conservancy.

The conservancy, with more than 1 million members, is the world's leading conservation organization working to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people, said Todd Sampsell, Pennsylvania's deputy director.

It has protected more than 119 million acres of land and 5,000 miles of rivers and streams worldwide, he said. Work is ongoing in all 50 states and more than 30 countries.

The conservancy has opened the Brush Mountain Woodlands to public hunting, hiking and birdwatching, Sampsell said. People can access the land from Starling Drive in the Sylvan East development.

The only protected lands on the mountain, which runs about 30 miles and is more than 2,500 feet high, are the conservancy's land, municipal watershed and a small portion of State Game Lands 166.

"It's really peaceful here," Tencer said during a recent hike. "I enjoy being outdoors and going hiking. You get to see a lot of wildlife and plants."

The conservancy purchased the land from Scarlet Oak Acquisition LLP of West Milton in 2008 as part of an effort to en-

courage science-driven conservation of the forests of the Central Appalachians region of Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee.

The land is important for conservation because it is a large unbroken forest - one of the last examples in Blair County, Juniata Valley Audubon Society Conservation Chairman Stan Kotala said.

The woodlands provide habitat to the federally endangered Indiana bat, which roosts two miles away in the old Turkey Valley Mennonite Church at Canoe Creek State Park; the largest maternal colony of little brown bats in Pennsylvania; and the Allegheny woodrat, a threatened Pennsylvania species, he said. There are also species of special concern - Eastern red bats and silver-haired bats - along with black bears, wild turkeys and deer.

Brush Mountain is considered important bird and mammal areas by the Pennsylvania Biological Survey, a nonprofit research organization that collects data on the state's biological diversity and provides it to the general public, scientists, state and federal agencies and lawmakers.



Red Eft



JVAS hikers at the Brush Mountain Preserve, September 2010

"Along Bald Eagle Ridge and Brush Mountain, there are updrafts so [raptors and other birds] can migrate. They soar on the winds deflected by the mountains," Kotala said.

The Brush Mountain project is not the conservancy's first work in south-central Pennsylvania. It helped the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy acquire 68 acres in Bedford County in 1991 -

the first conservation project on the Pennsylvania side of the Sideling Hill Creek watershed in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

'A demonstration project'

Scarlet Oak's owner approached the conservancy and wanted to sell the Brush Mountain land after conducting logging operations there, Sampsell said.

"It just happened to be a good fit for us," he said.

Although sections of the land were heavily forested, it is considered among the best forested areas in Pennsylvania, with a mix of oak and hickory species, Sampsell said.

"This is a globally significant area in the Central Appalachians, which contains some of the highest amount of biological diversity," Sampsell said. "It's an area that was potentially threatened by more development."

The woodlands are adjacent to the Sylvan East development.

"We bought this property as a demonstration project," Sampsell said, noting it will demonstrate good conservation practices that can be shared with private landowners interested in working with the conservancy through its Working Woodlands program, he said.

Working Woodlands is offered at no out-of-pocket cost to the landowner, who enters either into a long-term land management agreement or forest conservation easement with the conservancy to prevent the land from being converted to nonforest uses and unsustainable management practices.

Brush Mountain Woodlands is enrolled in the program, which means a propertywide forest assessment will be conducted and a Forest Stewardship Council-certified forest management program created.

There had been a lot of "high-grading," a logging practice where



Wood Frog by Helena Kotala

only the best trees are taken and the forest is left in a less than healthy state, Sampsell said.

An aerial map shows bald spots throughout the property where the high-grading occurred.

"There's still some harvesting we can do - taking the undesirable for the desirable," Sampsell said.

Privately held forest land, which com-

prises more than 70 percent of Pennsylvania forests, is susceptible in several ways, Sampsell said. Owners may not have the professional guidance to properly manage their forests or be forced to quickly harvest trees or sell the land because of financial circumstances.

Trees capture carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, which plays a role in climate change, Sampsell said. Using the power of the forest, landowners can trade the trees' carbon-capturing ability with private industry, which needs environmental offsets to continue its work.

Long-term agreements with landowners are necessary, because "once an investment has been made [by industry], then we have to ensure the carbon doesn't disappear," he said.

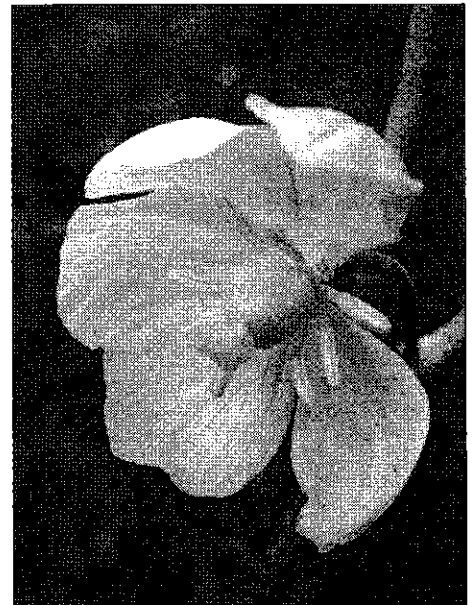
The conservancy has partnered with Blue Source, one of the nation's largest carbon project developers and marketers, Sampsell said. Foresters determine how many tons of carbon are captured in a forested area and that data is used to determine its value in the trading marketplace.

Carbon trades for about \$3 to \$4 per ton - a modest price, Sampsell said.

Landowners have a new revenue stream in addition to what may be generated through harvesting, Sampsell said. The conservancy takes a share of the carbon money as its fee for the Working Woodlands program.

Cooperative effort

Although The Nature Conservancy has nearly 1 million members worldwide, groups like Juniata Valley Audubon Society, the Brush Mountain Sportsmen's Association and the Blair Woodland Association, as well as people like businessman Philip Devorris, are necessary to make projects work.



Mayapple

Blair Woodland Association is a nonprofit group comprised of private landowners and others interested in sustainable forest management practices and educating others about them.

Devorris, who used to live in the neighborhood, has hiked on Brush Mountain for about 20 years and still owns a small piece of land on the mountain.

He said he became concerned that the peace and tranquillity of the mountain would be lost.

"You don't worry about the forest until it starts to disappear," Devorris said. "You take it for granted. You realize what you're going to be missing."

He started to look into ways to preserve the forest when he learned about the conservancy's efforts and helped to bring a group of people together to support its work.

"The Nature Conservancy is very well financed and educated in forestry and is a global leader. This land establishes a beachhead for them and allows other like-minded individuals to contribute money and/or offer significant tracts of land [to add to the work]," he said.

Devorris has been a great supporter of the woodlands, which has allowed the conservancy to establish contact with other conservationists and adjoining property owners, Sampsell said.

"We're about the plants, animals and natural communities," he said. "The question is: 'How can we work and live better with nature?'"

A find on the mountain

A gentle breeze blew on the mountain as Tencer kept a steady pace on the dusty, rocky trail - once a logging road.

She stopped when something caught her eye. Of all the acorns on the trail, Tencer focused on one. It jumped out among the sea of fallen green, golden brown and brown oak nuts.

"It's a black one," she said.

Tencer examined it, then quickly put it in her pocket.

"I'm like a kid putting things in my pocket. I'm glad I do the laundry [at home]," she said.

Tencer, who is the Juniata Valley Audubon Society's field trip coordinator, later would consult her nature books to find out more about her find.

On other trips to the mountain, Tencer said she's seen deer, wild turkey and lots of birds.

"I've also seen the Allegheny woodrat, which is pretty elusive. I'm pretty lucky to see one," she said of the animal whose preferred habitat is rocky areas in deciduous forests.

When hikers reach the top of the trail, they are treated to a vista of Altoona, Chestnut Flats and Allegheny Ridge wind farms and Wopsononock, Cresson and Blue Knob mountains. After a short walk to the left, the Turkey Valley toward Lock Mountain comes into view, somewhat obscured by power lines.

"It's great being so close to the forest. Within minutes, you're in the woods [from Altoona]," she said.

On the way out of the forest, Tencer took something else with her.

She picked up a bunch of Rolling Rock beer bottles - some broken, some intact - that partiers left behind in a fire ring.

"They'll go in my recycling bin," she said.



JVAS hikers at
The Brush Mountain
Preserve August 2010

The Nature Conservancy Workday at the Brush Mountain Preserve

Sunday, November 14

Rain Date: Sunday, November 21

Overlooking Altoona, in the heart of the Central Appalachians, Brush Mountain is home to wild turkey, black bear and rare species, such as the federally endangered Indiana bat. Timber rattlesnakes – a species of conservation concern in Pennsylvania – live among the rocky outcroppings. Comprised largely of mixed oak and hickory species, the 640-acre Brush Mountain Preserve protects part of a large, intact forest area considered a high priority within the Central Appalachians. Conservancy staff and scientists from six states are working on the Central Appalachians initiative to save one of the Earth's healthiest, most biologically diverse, deciduous temperate broadleaf forests.

Because of its significance to bats as well as to the Pennsylvania-endangered Allegheny woodrat, Brush Mountain is designated as part of the Canoe Creek Important Mammal Area. The site is also the southern terminus of the Bald Eagle Ridge Important Bird Area, a significant migratory route for raptors and a large intact forest utilized by neotropical migrants. Just to the east of The Nature Conservancy's tract, Brush Mountain is part of the Canoe Creek Important Bird Area, home to more than 200 species of birds. The site's ecological value is also noted in the Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory, which designates Brush Mountain as a County Natural Heritage Area and a Landscape Conservation Area.

The objective of this workday will be to work in small groups to attach tree stand removal notification letters to the permanent

and temporary tree stands scattered throughout the 640 acre Brush Mountain Woodlands.

Suggestions: Wear sturdy hiking boots suitable for walking over uneven and wet/muddy terrain. Leather gloves will also be useful as well as staple gun. Additional supplies will be provided. **Snacks and water will also be provided.** Please note there are no restroom facilities at this preserve.

Meet at noon at the end of Starling Drive/start of Fire Tower Road.

Directions: *The Brush Mountain Preserve is located in Logan and Frankstown Townships in Blair County. Travel on I-99 to Frankstown Exit at the Logan Town Centre Shopping Center/. Frankstown Road. At light at the end of exit ramp, turn Left onto Frankstown Road. Travel on Frankstown Road for a few miles and turn Left onto Sylvan Oaks. Take Sylvan Oaks to the end of the development and stay straight as it turns into Starling Drive (at right-hand bend in the road). Travel on Starling Drive to the end where the dirt road (Fire Tower Road) begins.*

Please let us know if you plan to come so we know to expect you and can update you on any last minute changes. Contact Molly Anderson at molly_anderson@tnc.org or at (717) 232-6001, extension 117. If you need to reach someone on the day of the workday, please call Molly Anderson on her cell phone at (717) 418-9518.

Shadow In the Shallows

by Heidi Mullendore

The hot June sun glared fiercely with the determination of early summer as my kayak nosed through the new growth of lily pads. I leaned back, resting the paddle across my lap, letting the boat drift to a stop in the small cove. The music of summer was warming the morning, the popping of lily pads, faint calls of wood pewees, plopping noises of painted turtles jostling for position on logs, and the whisper of lily pads parting as frogs eased into the sun.

I could see the forms of bluegills hiding under the shadows of my paddle. I put my feet up on the hull and simply sat, enjoying the heat and solitude, watching the lake come to life around me.

The scent of decay drifted as bubbles rose to the surface. A lily pad lifted crookedly and a broad olive green skull and pointed

nose slowly came into view. Small, primitive eyes in black and gold watched me. We both sat motionless for long minutes, cautiously watching each other until the shadow eased out into the sunlight. The huge snapping turtle seemed undisturbed by me, maybe not expecting to find a predator sitting in his/her basking spot.

I had seen many snappers in this end of the lake, but none so huge as this. The carapace was a good fifteen inches and was blurred with smudges of algae except for a broad whitish slash near the tail, possibly a scar from an encounter on a road. Judging from the size and smooth surface of the shell and its massive head, this specimen had to have been many decades old. Sources report snappers as living 30 – 40 years in the wild, and others report them as living up to 80 or more years.

Over the next months I visited the cove many times and saw the giant turtle with the scar basking or hunting. Only once did I see it out of the water, as snappers prefer to bask floating at the surface. Mid morning I'd usually find Grendel, as I came to name him, basking in the cove, his nose and eyes at the surface, his body a shadow in the murky water. Evolution has endowed the snappers to bask like this, camouflaged and hidden, but able to breathe at the surface while watching for predators.

After warming himself, the snapper would disappear (I never did see him in the afternoon), presumably working the shallows for prey. They are aggressive hunters with thick, muscular legs. Excellent swimmers, they rarely come out of the water, except to travel overland to find nesting sites or move to other freshwater ponds and lakes. They eat just about anything from plants to fish, frogs, snakes, ducklings and even small mammals.

Only once in August did I see Grendel sunning on a tussock of grass at the edge of the cove, shell half dried in the sunlight. As I eased the kayak ever closer, he lifted this thick neck, opening his maw with its bony hooked beak as if in a casual threat. Had his primitive brain recognized me in the bright orange boat? There are few predators that would challenge a full grown snapping turtle with its powerful jaws. Despite appearing slow and ponderous, snappers can strike with lightning speed with a neck that stretches surprisingly far.

Grendel continued to appear on my forays, eyeing me suspiciously and sinking into the murk if I came too close. The summer days turned somewhat cooler into September and his cover of lily pads thinned. The songs of the cicadas went silent and the trees began shedding their leaves. Now I peered from shore at Grendel's shadow creeping through the shallows as he foraged for crayfish and newts. In the weakening sun he no longer spent time sitting motionless to bask.

The hills were now showing gray and rust with only a few oak leaves clinging to the branches. Morning temperatures were now dipping below freezing and the lake turtles were now entering into hibernation.

As with other animals, snappers face the challenge of surviving cold temperatures; a challenge that causes the creatures to significantly lower their metabolism to help conserve energy. But snapping turtles face an additional obstacle – how to get oxygen as they hibernate underwater. Snappers breathe with lungs, surfacing to take in draughts of air before diving again. But in winter, with a barely functioning metabolism, staying still is the key to reducing their need for oxygen. This lack of movement as a life-style suits snappers quite well.

And yet, as Grendel waits out the winter locked under the ice, he is able to take in a small amount of oxygen through his skin. Scientists have found aquatic turtle species with legs and head extended to make the most of their surface area for taking in oxygen. Yet snappers frequently bury themselves in mud, possibly to reduce predation by raccoons and other predators, since they prefer the shallows, which thaw quicker and are more readily accessible come springtime. Snappers as such are an enigma; with possibly zero oxygen intake while buried, how can they survive?

The snappers that live at the edge of our periphery, deep in shadow and anonymity are living examples of some of the extraordinary miracles evolution has wrought. These turtles have

a relatively short season in which to gain back the energy losses of winter, to mate, grow, lay and mature eggs. In winter, they are simply surviving, existing in a state of limbo. Their heart is barely, if at all, beating and their metabolism shuts down almost completely at 0°C. They have changed very little in 200 million years because their system of adaptations works for them.

Grendel, with his huge clawed legs, bony maw and ancient eyes is truly a miracle of nature. As ugly as people consider snappers, they are

nearly perfect as evidenced by their lack of change in the fossil record. Despite many species of turtles facing threats by the ever-growing pet trade, I find it satisfying that snappers are so ugly, let alone dangerous, so they are naturally undesirable as pets.

Come spring, Grendel may find a mate within the lake, or may venture forth to another body of water, finding a mate purely by chance. Chance? Think of it – turtles have no voice, no pheromones, do not communicate by scent trail or spoor and do not sport flashy colors to signal for a mate. They literally find their mate by chance. As such, the females emerge to find a sunny sandy bank in which to dig a hole and lay dozens of eggs. The female may even be able to lay fertilized eggs for several years after one mating, another evolutionary advantage to a species that must mate anytime during the year as chance presents itself.

As the water warms and meltwater enters the lake, Grendel will stir in his murky depths, his heart will begin beating and he will sluggishly push his way out of the mud to rise to the surface. His shadow will once again be warmed as he eases his nose above the surface and takes his first real breath in five or six months.

As Grendel rises from winter hibernation into the spring air, I will drag my boat out of the basement and ease it into the water. Paddling to his small cove, I will float motionless as the lily pads stretch to the surface and I will be watching for the shadow with the white scar. No doubt Grendel will be surfacing for years longer than I'll be able to get into my boat as his shadow continues to cruise the shallows in search of food and a mate.



Catharine Township Quarry Plans endanger Hibernaculum of Threatened Bat

In Pennsylvania, the small-footed bat, also commonly referred to as small-footed myotis, is listed as threatened and protected under the state Game and Wildlife Code. It also is a "priority species" in the state's Wildlife Action Plan.

Historically rare in the eastern United States, the small-footed bat (*Myotis leibii*) is fairly widespread within its range, but spottily distributed and rarely found in large numbers. It is a species of deciduous and coniferous forests of eastern North America, with most reports coming from forested uplands in the Ridge and Valley physiographic province. Most occurrences and the largest known populations of this species are



in Pennsylvania, New York, Virginia and West Virginia. Research published in 1989 reported small-footed bats in winter hibernation sites in eight counties in central, south-central and southwestern Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, despite the increase in known sites, this species is no longer found in many of our caves where it was observed in the 1930s and 1940s.

The small-footed bat has brownish fur, often with a golden sheen, that contrasts with its blackish face and ears, and blackish-brown wings and tail membrane. It can be distinguished from other myotis species by its black mask and small size. The body is little more than 3½ inches long, including a 1½-inch tail. Its small feet, which provide the common name, are less than a half-inch long and its wingspan ranges from 8¼ to 9¼ inches. This species flies slowly and erratically, usually about one to three yards above the ground.

Most published information comes from studies of wintering populations from Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont and Ontario. There is evidence that this species may enter hibernation later and leave earlier than other bat species, often selecting a location close to the cave or mine entrance where temperatures are lower. It usually roosts singly, rather than forming clusters like the common little brown bat. A single pup is typical, born in late spring or early summer. There is

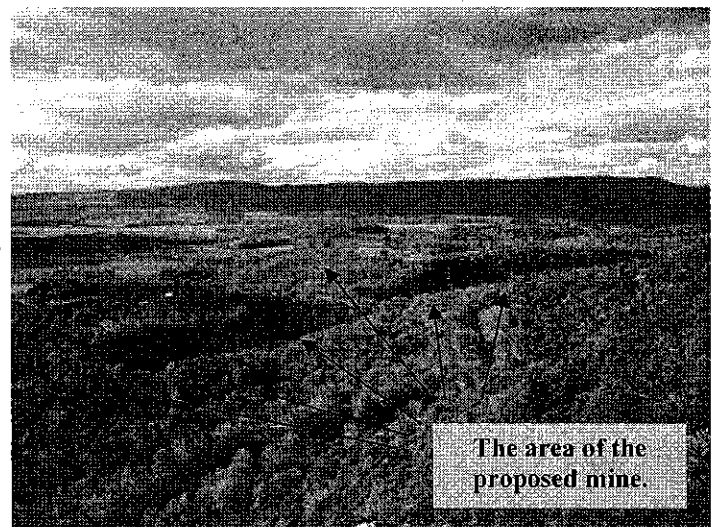
no published data on food habits. Year-to-year survival is significantly lower than the little brown bat.

The Heller Caves Biological Diversity Area in Catharine Township, Blair County, is a hibernaculum for eastern small-footed bats. This Blair County Natural Heritage Area is within the boundaries of the proposed Gulf Group limestone mine.

According to the *Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory* done under the direction of the Blair County Planning Commission from 2001-2006, the Heller Caves BDA hibernacula can be destroyed by adjacent blasting or other earth-moving activities that disrupt bedrock. In addition, the *Inventory* states that a reduction of forest cover would reduce habitat area for roosting and feeding needed by these bats. According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission "*forested areas with caves, mines, rock outcrops or talus provide key summer habitat*" for small-footed bats.

The *Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory* goes on to state; "*Blasting and other activities that will affect the bedrock should be avoided within this area so as not to damage the cave being used as a hibernation site*" and "*maintaining and cultivating forest cover will increase the amount of available habitat for bats.*"

Juniata Valley Audubon and 15 allied organizations support the protection of the Heller Caves Blair County Natural Heritage Area. **We have asked the Catharine Township supervisors to adopt an amendment to the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance to provide a 1/4 mile setback from the Heller Caves BDA to any mining activity.**



THE LOWER TRAIL: A Threatened Treasure

by JVAS Conservation Chair Dr. Stan Kotala

Fall is a great time to observe wildlife and there are few places that offer better opportunities to do that than the Lower Trail, a 17-mile rails-to-trails route along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River between Flowing Springs, near Canoe Creek State Park in Blair County, and the village of Alfarata in Huntingdon County. Enjoyed by more than 100,000 people annually, the 18-mile Lower Trail is one of Blair County's major recreation assets. The trail was recently named a US National Recreation Trail. The Lower Trail is open to the public, free of charge, for hiking, jogging, bicycling, horseback riding, birdwatching, cross-country skiing, and other non-motorized recreation. The trail also provides access to the river for fishing, kayaking and canoeing.

The Lower Trail runs through an outstanding example of a Ridge and Valley riparian forest. The combination of steep, wooded slopes, floodplain forests, and high soil moisture produces a diverse, healthy lowland riparian ecosystem. The northern portion of the trail runs through a narrow gorge with a low ridge to the west and the high ridgeline of Tussey Mountain, up to 1500 feet above the river, to the east. There is little human disturbance there other than the trail. To the south, the river meanders through mostly forested riparian habitat that contains some agriculture and sparse human settlements.

Access to the trail is easy and you have many access points from which to choose: from downstream to upstream, they are Alfarata (Near Alexandria), Mt. Etna, Cove Dale/Carlisle, Williamsburg, Grannas Station, and Flowing Springs. All the trailheads have ample parking facilities. Picnic tables, pavilions and toilets can be found at the Alfarata, Mt. Etna, Williamsburg, and Flowing Springs Trailheads. The trail is 8 feet wide and has a hard surface of crushed limestone, perfect for bicycles, even those with skinny tires. Wide grass berms alongside the trail accommodate horseback riders. Being an old railroad grade, the trail is flat with a minimal grade as you make your way upstream, with mile markers posted at each mile. The trail is open year round, free of charge, and is well-maintained by volunteers of Rails-to-Trails of Central Pennsylvania.

This site was identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by the Ornithological Technical Committee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey in October 2001. Juniata Valley Audubon has officially adopted this site for the purpose of stewardship and bird monitoring. More than 150 species of birds have been observed along the Lower Trail since Juniata Valley Audubon began a Special Areas Project there in 1995.

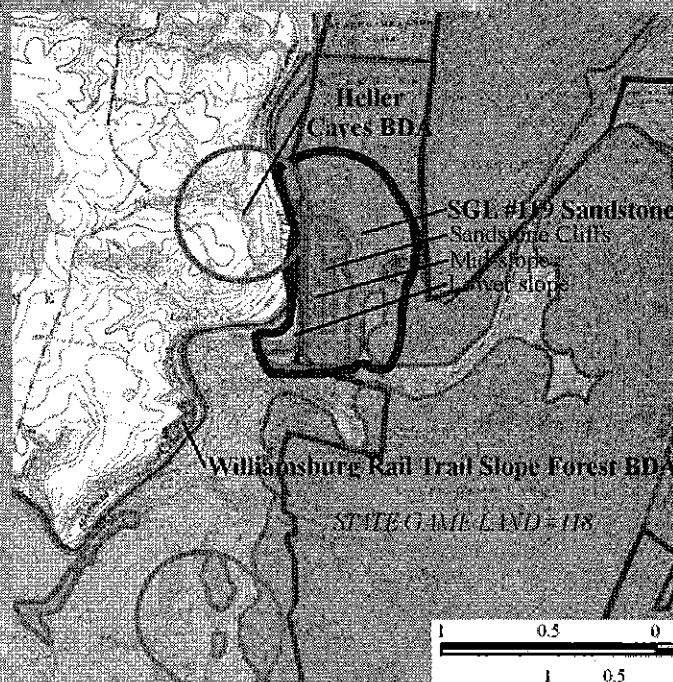
Immediately adjacent to the trail near Cove Dale/Carlisle is the Heller Caves Biological Diversity Area (BDA). The Heller Caves serve as hibernacula for eastern small-footed bats, a Threatened species in Pennsylvania and a "priority species" in the Commonwealth's *Wildlife Action Plan*.

Sadly, a proposed 135 acre limestone quarry adjacent to the Lower Trail in the Cove Dale area would have a severe adverse

impact on the trail and its users, local residents, the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River IBA, and the Heller Caves BDA. Catharine Properties, which owns approximately 200 acres fronting the trail for close to a mile, is proposing to develop a limestone quarry next to the trail, with its attendant blasting, bulldozing, heavy truck traffic, dust, noise, etc. The BDA and a portion of the IBA are part of the proposed mine.

According to the *Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory* done under the direction of the Blair County Planning Commission from 2001-2006, the Heller Caves BDA can be destroyed by adjacent blasting or other earth-moving activities that disrupt bedrock. In addition, the *Inventory* states that reduction of forest cover would reduce habitat area for roosting and feeding needed by these bats. According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, "*forested areas with caves, mines, rock outcrops or talus provide key summer habitat*" for small-footed bats. The *Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory* goes on to state; "*Blasting and other activities that will affect the bedrock should be avoided within this area so as not to damage the cave being used as a hibernation site*" and "*maintaining and cultivating forest cover will increase the amount of available habitat for bats.*"

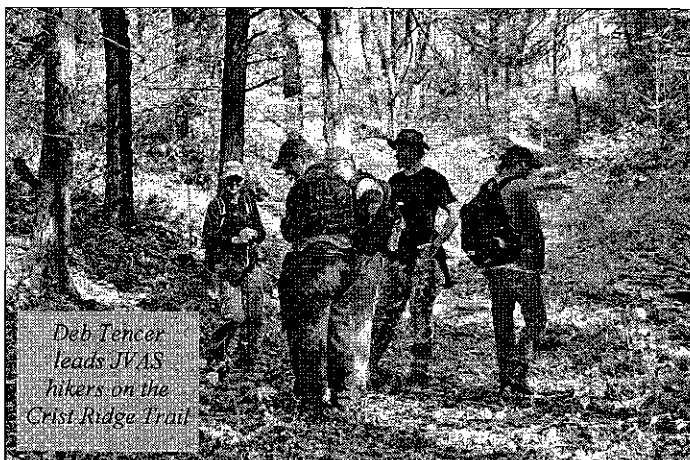
It's important for people to protect special places from destruction and degradation. To many, the Lower Trail is such a place. 15 organizations ranging from the Mid State Trail Association to the State College Bird Club to the Moshannon Group of the Sierra Club have come out in opposition to this destructive project. Enjoy the trail and support the groups that are fighting to save it!



Through the Branches

by JVAS Field Trip Chair Deb Tencer

I start hiking down the steep mountain along a worn trail. Rocks surround the trail and leaves crunch under my feet, a love/hate thing. I enjoy the crunching sound, but know it's a sign of deep changes. This year the acorns, like all the butterflies, are very abundant. I instinctively duck my head and run for cover. Ouch....ouch....got to be careful. Like raining cats and dogs, but it's just acorns. Yellow, brown, green and occasionally a real dark one. Food will be plentiful this year for all the critters who must spend the winter in the deep rocky mountains of Pennsylvania. I soon pass through an area that is heavily grown with hemlocks and spruces. I love this part of the Crist Ridge Trail. It reminds me of being in a dim cave. The sounds of the world seem muffled out, so silent and peaceful.



As I write this I begin to yearn for the night air. The house feels stuffy, so I take a break and sit out on the porch for a few moments to recharge. The moon is full and the light feels eerily serene. I listen closely to the night sounds. A few more weeks, or perhaps another the month, and the noises of summer will be gone. The katydids, the crickets, the frogs and the whip-poor-wills will be silent. I will miss them and soon after there will be few birds to waken me as the sun begins to rise in the cold mornings. I think about my wonderful hike at Blue Knob again. Along the trail are many of my favorite parts of the state park.

Going downhill I follow a section frequently used by mountain bikers. I'm not that brave to go down the mountain in that manner. I'll stick with both feet on the ground. This area has many downed trees. Many years ago a very strong wind followed these ridges and threw huge trees like toothpicks. The strength of mother nature is not something we should forget, as fascinating as it can be. The tress and many of their branches

have now formed homes for many of the mountain critters while others have broken down into the soil to become an extremely rich compost to feed the earth..

I pass by a very old and huge downed tree that has lain for many years. A very thick vibrant green moss has continued to grow and cover the entire tree. I have tried on numerous occasions to photograph this sight but have always failed to capture its beauty. It's a challenge for an amateur photographer such as myself. I enjoy trying every time though.

As I cross the park road at the bottom, I enjoy the quiet picnic area. So few people come here to enjoy its serenity. I start to climb the trail back to the top. Here I cross a winding stream that always is different, forever changing. There are many springs in this park and depending on the amount of seasonal rain I sometimes have to wade through the trail.

I love the stonework and the ancient footbridges built during the Depression. This park provided many jobs to feed numerous families through a very tough time in our history. The trail becomes harder to follow further up. Very few people hike this steep section so the berry bushes and the picker bushes have made this trail their own. I feel with my feet the worn rock steps and push myself to go further on my way.

This area is well worth the strenuous climb. In the fall and winter through the naked branches I can see the many ridges and valleys I earlier hiked. The view is one of those awe moments that make the hard hike worth it all! As I reach the top I take a minute to catch my breath and slow my heart rate. I have returned to the field of wild peas and fill a bag for my supper later. Supper.....after I take a nice long nap!



Trumpeter Swan makes Canoe Creek Watershed Home

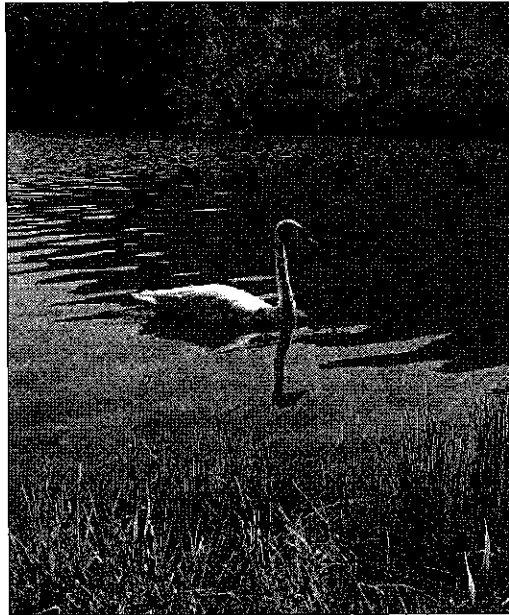
The trumpeter swan is North America's largest waterfowl and one of its rarest native birds. To many people, it is the embodiment of grace, beauty, and unspoiled wildness. It is also an inspiring reminder that we can save some species that have been reduced to near extinction. Trumpeter swans once flourished across much of North America, but by 1900 were nearly extinct due to commercial and subsistence hunting. In recent decades, Trumpeters have begun a wonderful recovery due to the efforts of many people and agencies and now have the potential to securely reoccupy much of their former range.

Their secure restoration requires that we provide adequate long-term habitat, rebuild essential migrations, and create broader distributions that will reduce vulnerability to large-scale die-offs from disease or severe winter weather. Knowledge of the species and its needs, effective advocacy, vision, public involvement, and proper habitat management are essential to success.

Trumpeter swan survival is based on a foundation of strong family bonds and crucial learned patterns of habitat use (traditions) acquired by associating with older more experienced birds, usually family members. When trumpeters were reduced to near extinction, the damage was much greater than simply the great decline in numbers. Crucial knowledge of traditional migration routes and winter food sources was also lost. Recreating that knowledge is one of the greatest challenges in the effort to rebuild secure populations.

Trumpeters may live 20-30 years in the wild. They usually maintain very predictable annual movement and habitat use patterns unless faced with a significant habitat change. In turn, they teach these patterns to their cygnets. Pairs usually mate for life and return each year to the same nesting wetland, often using the same nest mound. After gaining flight in September, cygnets follow their parents to their wintering area and learn its resources and hazards while they remain with their parents through their first winter. Cygnets often remain with their

broodmates through at least their first year and may regroup with their parents at the usual family wintering site in subsequent winters. These strong family bonds help cygnets continue to learn key migration routes and food resources from more experienced adults.



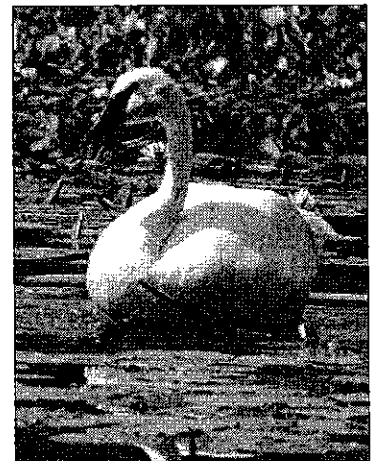
Their breeding habitat is large shallow ponds and wide slow rivers. They lay, on the average, three to eight eggs. One egg is laid every other day until the clutch is complete. The hen does not begin incubating until her clutch is complete so that all cygnets will hatch within 24 hours of each other. Only one clutch of eggs is laid per year. The incubation period is approximately 34 days. The swans build their nests out of stems and leaves from plants such as cattails and sedges. Trumpeters often nest on top of muskrat houses or beaver lodges.

These birds feed while swimming, sometimes up-ending or dabbling to reach submerged food. The diet is almost entirely aquatic plants. In winter, they may also eat grasses and grains in fields. The young are fed on insects and small crustaceans along with plants at first, changing to a vegetation-based diet over the first few months.

Adult swans eat aquatic vegetation, including the leaves, seeds, and roots of many types of pond weeds. In captivity, swans will eat corn and other grains provided. Wild swans have also adapted to field feeding, eating left over grains and vegetables that have been harvested by farmers.

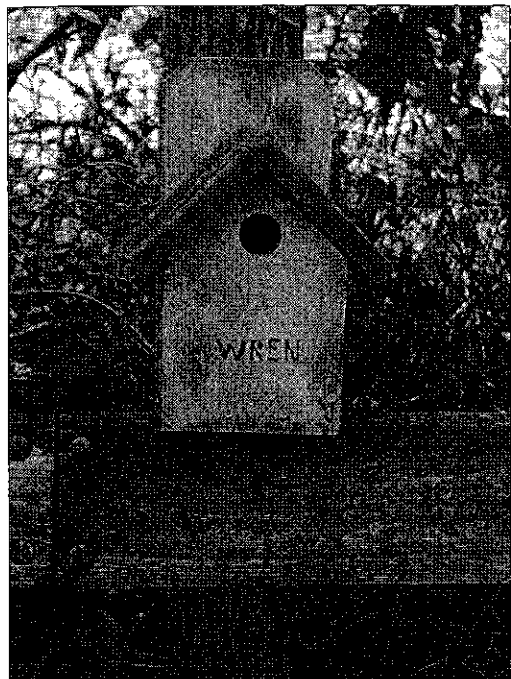
The trumpeter swan at Canoe Creek State Park was first seen there in early spring of this year. He stayed within the Canoe Creek watershed throughout the subsequent months, where he was observed at various ponds and wetlands, as well as flying over Scotch Valley and Turkey Valley.

This trumpeter swan was very tame and could be approached easily, often coming to the beach area of the park to visit with people.



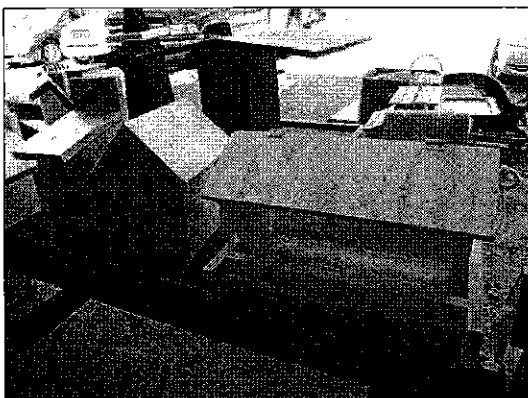
Feel free to post any sightings or observations of the swan or any other news on the JVAS listserv. Check www.jvas.org for information on how to participate in our listserv.

JVAS Member Tom Harvey is "For The Birds"



Be on the Lower Trail any morning for some birding, hiking, or biking and you'll likely encounter JVAS member Tom Harvey, one of the trail's "regulars". Tom Rides the length of the Lower Trail daily, weather permitting.

Tom's also been making bird houses and feeders for close to two decades and has placed his bird boxes throughout the JVAS area, including 50 along the 17-mile length of the Lower Trail. These can be seen on posts and trees along the trail, and many of them are labeled as to which species they are designed for. Most recently, Tom donated a dozen of his bird houses to the Huntingdon Tree Association for placement on the grounds of J.C. Blair Hospital.



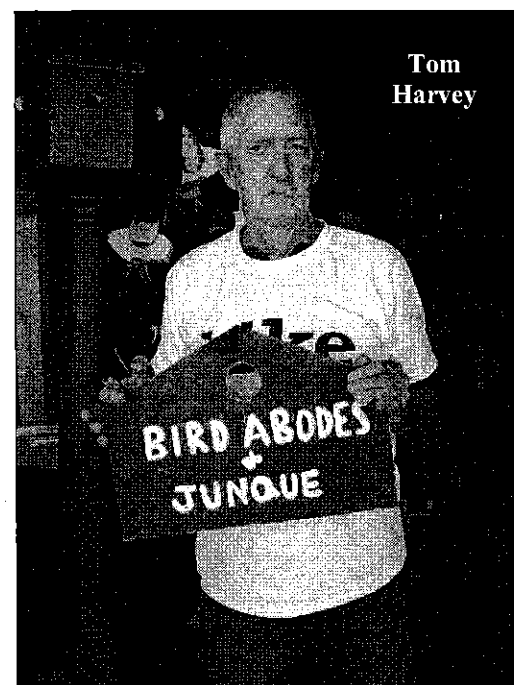
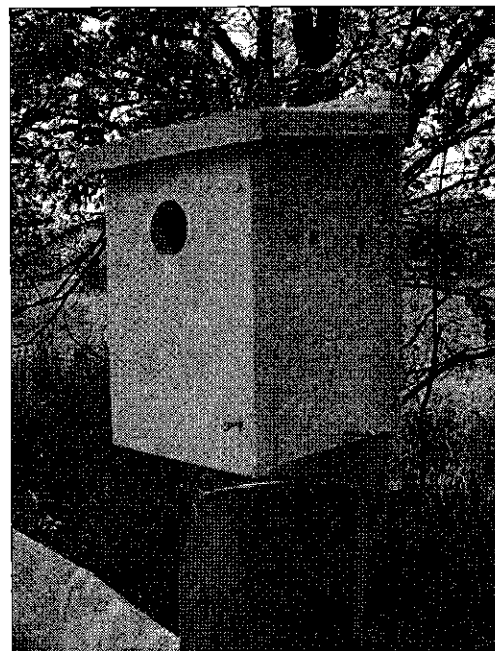
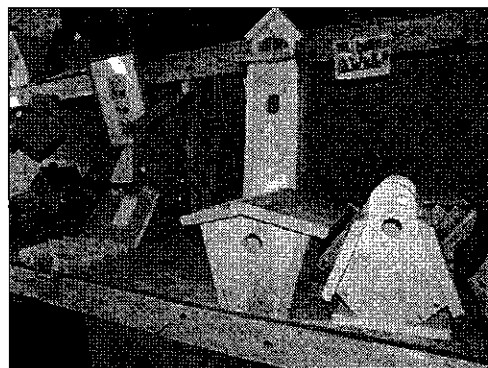
Tom makes about 150 bird houses each year, along with bird feeders and bat boxes built to Pennsylvania Game Commission standards. Tom also takes orders for custom-built bird boxes and feeders. Just let him know what you need, and Tom will make it for you.

If you are searching for a bird house, a feeder, or a bat box, then please check out the work of Tom Harvey. Tom's handiwork can be found at the westernmost booth at the Water Street Flea Market, and Tom is there most weekends between noon and 3pm. These make great gifts for the holidays!

The craftsmanship and prices of Tom's work can't be beat, and, to top it all off, Tom offers a 15% discount to JVAS members!



Tom Harvey
Woodworking
trv1@verizon.net



Tom
Harvey

November/December JVAS Field Trips

Sunday, November 21 — **Mid State Trail hike.** Join Deb Tencer for a hike on the portion of the Mid State Trail starting at Jo Hays Vista and continuing along the ridge to Pennsylvania Furnace Road. We will shuttle vehicles. The hike should take a few hours, and we can break on a couple of incredible vistas. Meet at Jo Hays Vista at 10 a.m. For more information, contact Deb at naturehikergal@gmail.com

Saturday, November 27 — **Post-Thanksgiving Hike on the Lower Trail.** Join Stan Kotala on a 6-mile hike from Williamsburg to Flowing Springs. This will be a shuttle hike, with most vehicles at the endpoint (Flowing Springs). Meet at the Flowing Springs Trailhead at noon. Hikers will be shuttled from there to Williamsburg and then hike to Flowing Springs. For more information, contact trip leader Dr. Stan Kotala at 814-946-8840 or at ccwiba@keyconn.net

Saturday, December 18 — **Annual JVAS Christmas Bird Count:** Spend the day in the field within the "Culp circle," in Sinking Valley, and afterward enjoy fellowship with the Hoyers' at the Mt. Charma Estate for a covered-dish supper and bird tally for the day. Contact CBC Compiler Steve Bonta at 684-1175 or at stevebonta@yahoo.com to advise him of the specific area within the circle you wish to bird. Please call Marge Hoyer at 684-7376 to coordinate dishes.

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JVAS November Program

November 16: Part 1 — "BioHaven® Floating Islands: Anthrogenic Wetlands and Their Use in Hydrologic Bioremediation Pertaining to Nutrients, Acid Mine Drainage, and Riparian Buffers"
Part 2 — "How to Set up Small Water Gardens and a Bog Garden in Your Backyard"

Colin Lennox, founder of EcoIslands LLC, will present a program on BioHaven® floating islands, which are hydroponic growth media made of recycled 2-liter soda bottles (high-density polyethylene) for the purpose of mimicking natural wetlands. Colin will show how these unique floating islands can be used to filter many types of pollutants in aquatic ecosystems. At the same time, the islands provide habitat for all sorts of plants and animals while reducing stream bank erosion. After Colin's presentation, JVAS members Mike and Laura Jackson will show what they did with the BioHaven floating island they had bought at the "silent auction" held at the JVAS banquet last spring. They also will show how they set up more ponds and a bog garden to diversify their backyard habitat.

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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Hollidaysburg, PA 16648



Wild Turkey

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