

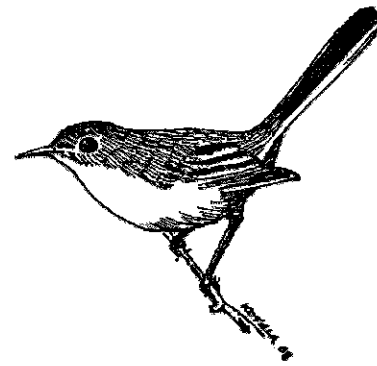
The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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www.jvas.org



JVAS Chapter-only Memberships due

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

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

Chapter-only membership is on a calendar-year basis, thus chapter-only members' dues for 2011 are due now. If you're a chapter-only member or would like to become one, then please fill out the membership form below.

Chapter-only member: _____ Individual: \$15 _____ Family: \$20 _____ Supporting: \$35

_____ Friend of JVAS: \$50 _____ Corporate: \$100

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

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail (optional) _____

Mail this form to

Juniata Valley Audubon

P.O. Box 148

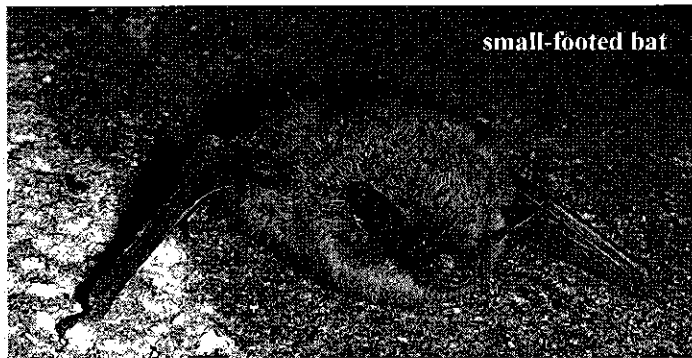
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

"Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life."

- Rachel Carson

Juniata Valley Audubon sues DEP to save Heller Caves Bat Hibernaculum, Habitat for Threatened Species

The DEP's failure to protect a hibernation site and associated habitat supporting the small-footed bat, a threatened and protected species under the Pennsylvania Game and Wildlife Code, has forced Juniata Valley Audubon to sue the DEP.



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.*"

The BDA and its defined supporting landscape are part of the proposed mine. The *Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory* map for Catharine Township clearly indicates that an area circumscribed by a ¼ mile radius from Heller Caves #4 and #5 is Core Habitat for the Heller Caves BDA. Impacts will include forest removal; noise, air, and water pollution; heavy truck and bulldozer traffic; washouts of the trail from runoff from the new heavy-duty roadway; forest fragmentation.

Significantly, the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) provided the DEP with maps indicating a TOTAL AVOIDANCE AREA surrounding Heller Caves 4 and 5 and extending to the Lower Trail and further to the Frankstown Branch

of the Juniata River. The DEP, however, issued the mining permit for an area within this TOTAL AVOIDANCE AREA. The DEP failed to protect the PA threatened small-footed bat despite the DEP being aware of the importance of the Heller Caves as a hibernaculum for this species and despite the PGC's designation of a TOTAL AVOIDANCE AREA between Heller Caves #4 and #5 and the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River.

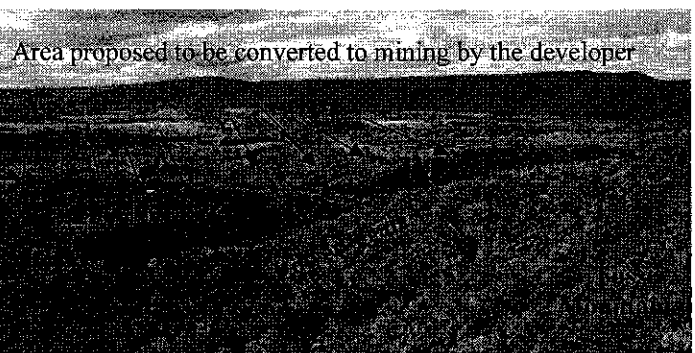
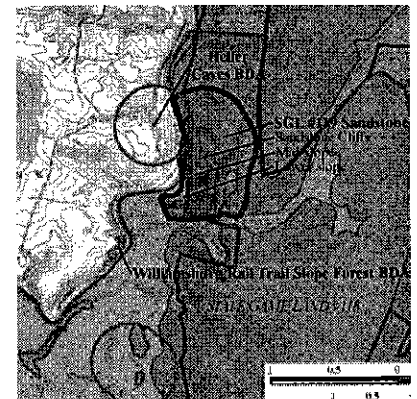
The DEP should have taken a precautionary approach, and denied the permit for mining in any part of the TOTAL AVOIDANCE AREA, especially in light of the fact that all the bat species using the hibernacula in the project area are under stress from White Nose Syndrome.

Furthermore, Heller Caves 1,2,3,7, 8 and 9 were not surveyed for hibernating bats, and rock rubble at the cliff base and crevices in the cliff face were not surveyed for hibernating bats. In all at least 100,000 square feet of suitable hibernating areas were not surveyed for hibernating bats.

All other options for addressing this problem have failed, and, as a result, Juniata Valley Audubon has been forced to take this step of suing the DEP to protect a Pennsylvania threatened species and its habitat.

**Heller Caves
Biological Diversity
Area, a Blair County
Natural Heritage
Area**

*From the
Blair County
Natural Heritage
Inventory*



JVAS Board Members Mike and Laura Jackson donate Conservation Easement to Preserve their Bedford County Paradise for Future Generations

JVAS board members Mike and Laura Jackson have donated a conservation easement on their Bedford County property to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between the conservancy and private landowners that limits future uses of the property in order to protect its conservation value while allowing the land to remain privately owned. The Jackson's land is connected to a large forested area that encompasses more than 9,500 acres, home to a multitude of native birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, plants and trees.

"This beautiful property, which is adjacent to State Game Lands 97, adds further protection to a vast forest that supports a stunning array of wildlife species," Michael Knoop, land protection specialist for the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, said in a news release. *"We are grateful to the Jacksons for taking this important step to ensure their land will always sustain these native plants and animals."*

Mike and Laura Jackson are both retired schoolteachers who love nature, traveling, and photography. Mike taught elementary science in Everett, PA and Laura was a high school biology and environmental science teacher in Bedford, PA. As Pennsylvania Forest Stewards, watershed monitors, breeding bird atlasers (for the second time), and organizers of Save Our Allegheny Ridges,

they donate many hours of conservation efforts, so that our natural world will be conserved for future generations.

They also have kept detailed records of all of the wildlife and plant species that they have identified there, including 117 bird species, 36 native mammal species and a multitude of native trees, shrubs and forest herbs.



In a statement, the Jacksons said it is easy to take for granted the open spaces in Bedford County because they are so plentiful, *"but we know that development pressures will continue to increase. We wanted to conserve our land so future generations could enjoy the forest and its wildlife."*

The Jacksons' property falls within a priority conservation area for WPC called the Central Valleys and Ridges region. Encompassing Pennsylvania's Potomac River tributaries, the Juniata River basin and the Nittany Valley, the region provides a significant amount of

the water that flows into the Chesapeake Bay. Since the 1970s, WPC has helped to conserve more than 20,000 acres of land in this region that have become additions to state forests, state game lands and state parks.

WPC has helped establish 10 state parks and has conserved nearly 229,000 acres of natural lands and waterways.

JVAS thanks its Corporate Sponsors

Jacksons Journeys
Mike and Laura Jackson
8621 Black Valley Road
Everett, PA 15537
814-652-9268
mjackson2@comcast.net

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January/February Field Trip

Sunday, February 20 — Sawmill Trail Hike at Blue Knob State Park.

This 3½-mile hike will be a great way to beat cabin fever! The trail is easy and very accessible because of cross-country skiers and snowmobiles clearing the way.

Meet at the Chappel's Field parking area at 11 a.m., weather permitting.

For more information, contact trip leader **Deb Tencer** at naturehikergal@gmail.com

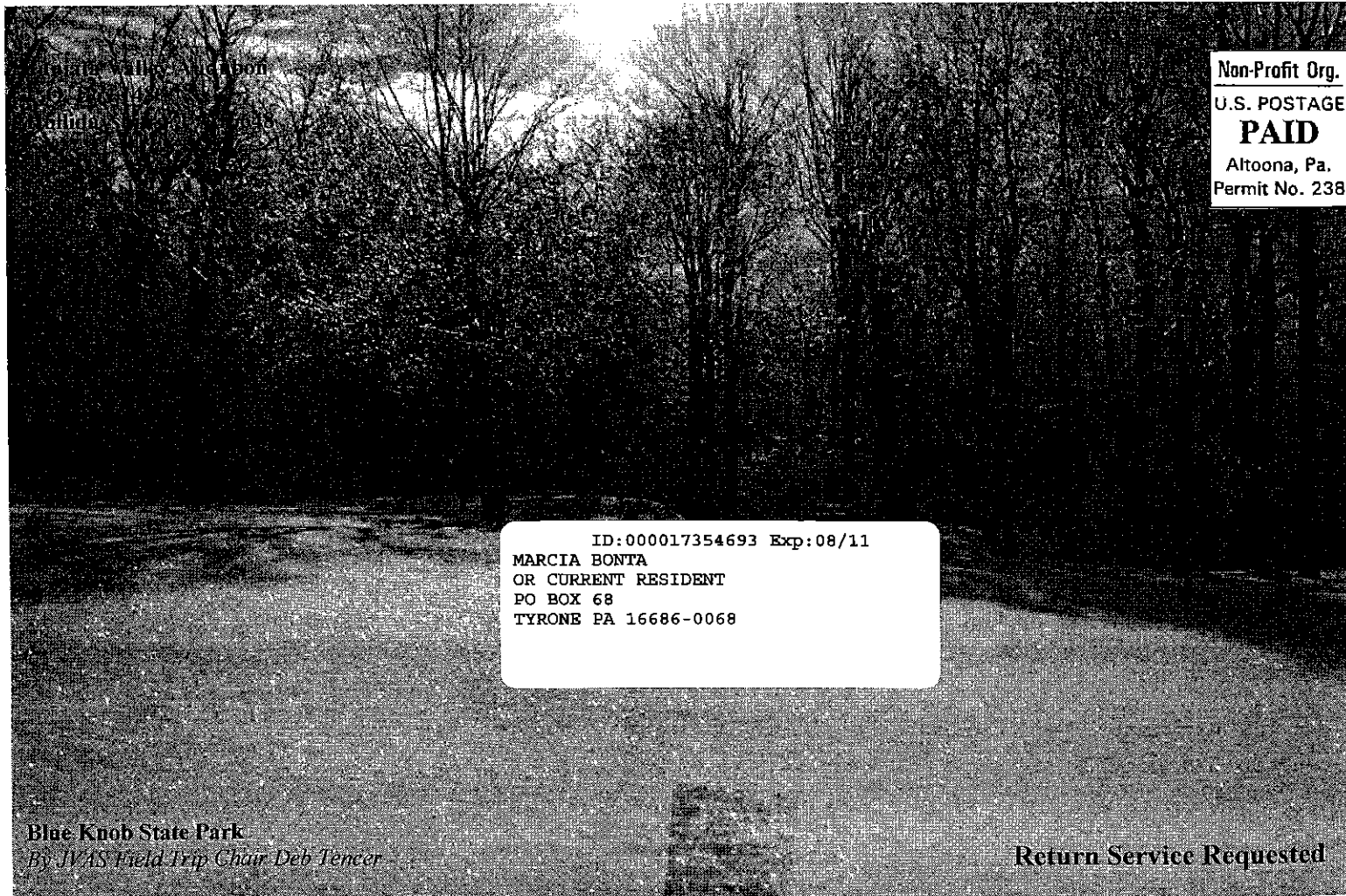
January/February Programs

January 18 — "JVAS Members' Showcase" - JVAS members are encouraged to bring any nature-related items that they wish to share: music, photographs, video, poetry, artwork, etc. Please contact Laura Jackson to let her know what you plan to contribute to the program.

February 15 — "Photographing Wildlife" - Rob Criswell is the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Southcentral Region director. In addition, Rob is a skilled photographer, a part-time outdoor writer, and a researcher. His program will include a variety of photographs that highlight the diversity of wildlife in Pennsylvania, along with tips and pointers on how to take better nature photographs. Nature enthusiasts and photographers of all ages will enjoy Rob's introduction to wildlife photography.

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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Blue Knob State Park
By JVAS Field Trip Chair Deb Tencer

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