

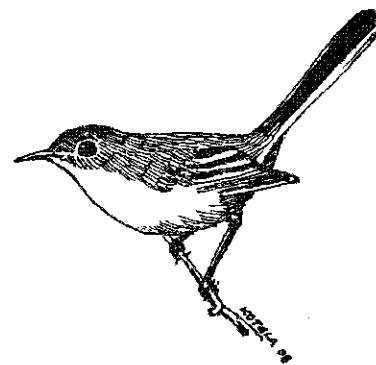
# The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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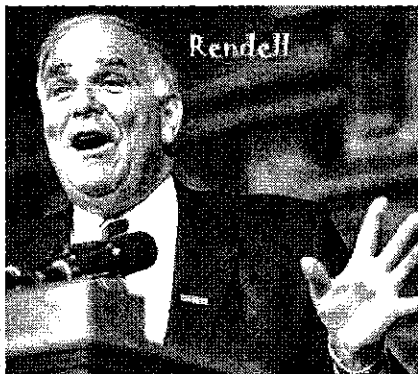
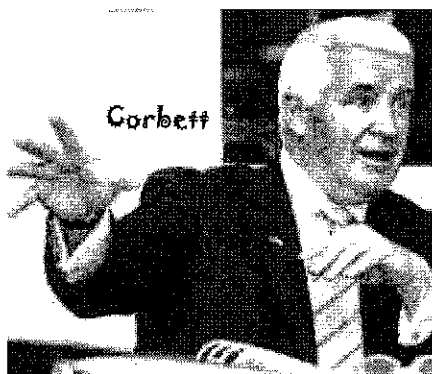
www.jvas.org



## Over Last 9 Years: \$1.5 Billion Cut From Environmental Protection Programs in Pennsylvania

A total of \$1.5 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 nine years.

Just hours after Gov. Corbett signed the FY 2011-12 state budget, the Department of Revenue announced the state collected \$785.5 million more in revenue than they estimated.



-- \$164.3 million in FY 2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12 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;

### Here are the highlights of the cuts and diversions--

-- \$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;

-- \$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;

-- \$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;

-- \$102.8 million cut from the DEP and DCNR General Fund budget in 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 FY 2010-11;

-- \$102.8 million cut continued from the FY 2010-11 DEP and DCNR General Fund budget in FY 2011-12 budget.

# Standing Stone Trail: 10 mile hike with 2 outstanding vistas!

By Gary Thornbloom

Standing Stone Trail from Butler Knob to Mapleton features dramatic views at both ends, one that shows you almost the entire northern section of the trail, and the second, with a constant cooling breeze, that looks northwest at ridge line after ridge line for as far as you can see.

Standing Stone Trail has been around since the 1980's as a 71 mile link between the Mid State Trail and the Tuscarora Trail. For day hiking, each section of the trail has unique focal points. This hike is on a mixture of private, State Forest, and mostly State Game lands. The hike is in Huntingdon County and if you choose to begin at 2300 feet in elevation and end at 600 feet then drop a shuttle vehicle at the community park in Mapleton, and drive to Butler Knob to begin the hike.

Getting to Butler Knob can be tricky: about 8.5 miles out of Mount Union on SR747 turn right onto White Road; after 0.2 miles turn right onto Jacks Tower Road; after 0.6 miles bear right and continue up the mountain; another 1.7 miles and there is a large parking area, or you can continue for 2.0 more miles to limited parking where Standing Stone Trail becomes a footpath and leaves the road you have been driving.

On the south or Butler Knob end, Standing Stone Trail is in Rothrock State Forest. You soon enter the first of several deer exclosure areas. Signs state that this is "Protecting Your New Forest." The number of seedlings inside is impressive, as well as the lush low bush blueberries.

Within the first 2 miles of hiking you come to the beginning of outstanding views. This also means you are climbing up and through a large boulder field, impressive in itself, but with increasingly magnificent views. Make certain you stop walking while taking in the views, and then go back to watching your step as you move across nothing but rocks!

As you make your way along this section look for blue blazes - you have been following orange blazes - that will take you to the Throne Room. Look for the blue blazes just as the trail drops steeply. In The Standing Stone Trail Guide - available online from [www.hike-sst.org](http://www.hike-sst.org), or from Appalachian Outdoors - Mike Sausser writes:

*...Throne Room Vista: I consider this the best vista on the trail. The main view looks north over the top of Jacks Mt. and the route just traveled. [we are traveling in the opposite direction, so*

*you are looking at what is to come] Ledge Quarry and the 1,000 Steps area can be seen. The southern tip of Stone Mt. can also be seen curving into Jacks Mt. From this vista you can see almost the whole northern section of the Link [now called Standing Stone] Trail.*

Once you leave Rothrock State Forest you will be hiking on private land, and then on State Game Lands. Much of this will be on unimproved roads and on roads the Game Commission uses to manage their land. The views on this section come as you make your way along and then up a gas line right of way.

The roads provide easy walking and in late June had numerous wild flowers and several species of butterflies. You will also walk by a medium sized catalpa tree that is loaded with two inch orchid like blossoms. On Game Land roads we also saw a grouse and her brood, and a turkey with her dozen or more poults. Both were near an area that had been planted for wildlife habitat.

The trail continues across the top of Jack Mountain.

Just before the trail makes a sharp turn to the left and drops down the side of the mountain, look for blue blazes marking the spur that takes you out to Windy Vista.

The trail guide says that the breeze here is constant, and as we stepped out of the still forest onto the top of the boulder field the promised cooling breeze was present. That and the seven buzzards circling below us kept our attention only briefly as the majesty of ridge after ridge led our eyes to the horizon.

The trail now drops 1200 feet in the next mile. Most hikers will welcome this downhill section. As you drop toward Scrub Run you will hear the sound of running water as several unnamed tributaries join the source of the Mapleton Reservoir. You began this hike with a drive through and then up the narrows of Old Woman Gap, and the hike winds down through the narrow confines of Scrub Run. The trail comes out onto Hill Street at the edge of Mapleton and the orange blazes continue into town, and back toward your vehicle.

This is a 10 mile hike with spectacular views, interesting habitat and habitat restoration, and one more reason to find yourself on the trail enjoying Pennsylvania's woodlands and mountains.





*In memoriam*  
**Francis Champion**



Juniata Valley Audubon extends deepest sympathies to the Champion and Kotala families on the tragic death of JVAS member Staff Sgt. Francis Champion III. Frank was the fiancée of former JVAS Gnatcatcher editor Helena Kotala.

Frank died as a result of a parachuting accident during his training as an Army National Guard Special Forces paratrooper. He was a much-decorated Staff Sergeant, receiving many military awards. A graduate of Hollidaysburg Area High School, Frank recently earned a degree in environmental studies from Penn State. He was a frequent participant in JVAS activities.

*"Do not stand at my grave and weep, I am not there,  
 I do not sleep. I am a thousand winds that blow; I  
 am the diamond glints on the snow. I am the  
 sunlight that ripened grain; I am the gentle autumn  
 rain. When you awake in the morning's hush, I am  
 the swift uplifting rush, of quiet birds in circled  
 flight; I am the soft star that shines at night.  
 Do not stand at my grave and cry, I am not there,  
 I did not die." -Irish prayer*



Frank at Mt. Logan  
 Natural Area



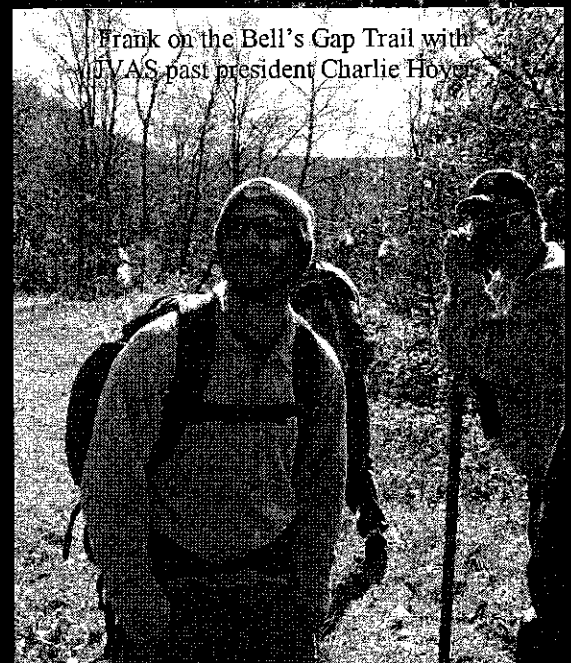
Helena  
 and  
 Frank



Frank on a JVAS hike on the Moore's  
 Hill Trail at Canoe Creek State Park



Frank on the Bell's Gap Trail with  
 JVAS past president Charlie Hoyer



# Scrub Oak Barrens Restoration Project on State Game Lands 267 along Skyline Drive near Altoona

By Altoona Mirror Staff Writer Bill Kibler

Published with permission from Bill Kibler and the Altoona Mirror, in which this article appeared on July 6, 2011

If you've driven Skyline Drive between the Buckhorn and Wopsononock Mountain recently, you might have wondered about the clear cutting, which has reduced some of the land to the appearance of moonscape.

Don't worry, officials say.

It's just the Pennsylvania Game Commission trying to restore the characteristic "scrub oak barrens" on 127 acres of the 1,000-acre game land, to create habitat and fodder - acorns - for wildlife.

Contract workers have been logging hardwood trees like red maple, black birch and sassafras that have begun to tower over the scrub oaks, depriving them of sunlight, according to Andy Hetrick, forester for the Game Commission's Southwest Region.

And they've been grinding up the remaining scrub oaks them-

selves with a "hydro ax" mulcher to promote regeneration, Hetrick said.

"It comes back thicker," he said, adding that the wildlife will need to leave temporarily.

"It's an excellent project," said Stan Kotala, conservation chair of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society.

The commission plans to come back every decade or so to remulch, to keep the barrens in peak condition, Hetrick said.

"You would lose it without active management," he said.

Scrub oak barrens are typical for mountaintops, where conditions are dry, because the soil is thin and porous, so rainwater just percolates through, Kotala said.

In pre-colonial times, fire from lightning or set by Native Americans helped create conditions favorable for barrens, Kotala said.

The Native Americans wanted the lush habitat that followed for berries and seeds to eat themselves and for habitat for the wildlife they hunted, he said.

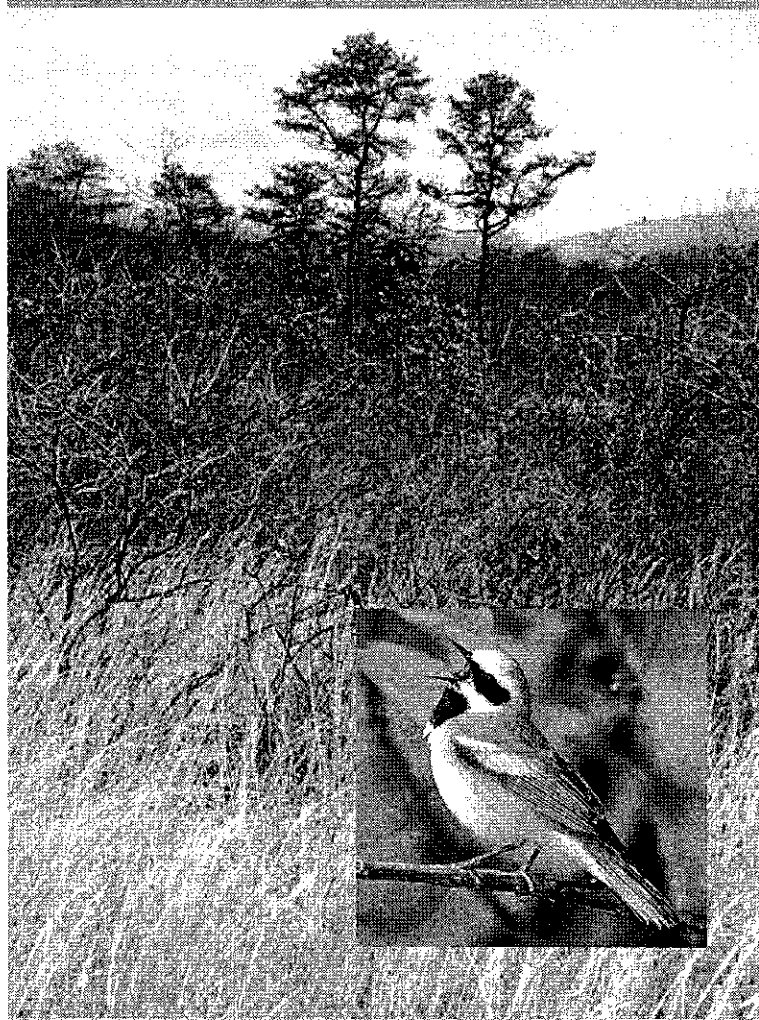
Later, extensive logging contributed to creation of such barrens.

Scrub oak comprised about 327,000 acres in central Pennsylvania in 1934, according to information in an email from Hetrick.

But Pennsylvania has been losing barrens acreage to development, the maturing of trees that produce unwanted shade, the reversion of farmland to forest and the suppression of most wild-fires, Kotala said.

What's left of the "critical and unique" habitat is mainly on "droughty" land that - despite suppression policies - wildfire burns periodically, Hetrick said.

*The golden-winged warbler breeds in open deciduous woodland, secondary growth, brushy pastures and bogs, apparently favoring a particular stage in woodland succession. When the habitat passes this stage, birds move on. All kinds of woodland and scrub are used during migration, and birds generally winter in secondary growth forest or forest edge with a good understory. The well-hidden nest is usually on or close to the ground, and breeding takes place in May and June.*





The Game Commission and other groups like the Nature Conservancy are trying to reverse the trend with management policies that can still include controlled burns, Kotala and Hetrick said.

The commission is actively managing Game Lands 267 along Skyline Drive for several bird species, including golden-winged warbler, the blue-winged warbler, the brown thrasher, the common night-hawk and the yellow-breasted chat. The "early succession" forest growth habitat also favors more common species that include ruffed grouse, cotton-tail rabbit, snowshoe hares and white-tailed deer, Hetrick said.

Habitat management is central to the Game Commission's mission, spokesman Jerry Feaser said.

The leading cause of wildlife decline around the time of the commission's founding in 1895 was habitat loss caused by unregulated timbering and mining, Feaser said.

"We understood from the get-go that if you do not have the habitat, you are not going to have the wildlife," he said.

The General Assembly mandated a spending minimum on habitat improvement through Act 138 of 2002, with a set-aside for each license sold, but the commission tends to exceed the requirement, Feaser said.

For fiscal 2009-10, the commission spent \$5.9 million - \$570,000 more than the mandated amount, he said.



*The prairie warbler uses various shrubby habitats, including regenerating forests, open fields, and Christmas-tree farms. The prairie warbler is found in scrubby fields and forests throughout the eastern and south-central United States, not on the prairies.*

That was about 8 percent of the commission's total budget that year.

The commission's approach is simple, Feaser said.

It looks at a piece of game lands knowing that wildlife needs "food, shelter, water and a place to live," he said.

The game lands itself provides the place, so the commission focuses on "whatever components are missing" - building wetlands or planting warm-season grasses or creating "thermal cover" or "herbaceous openings," or promoting favorable vegetation or removing invasives like "mile a minute," he said.

The commission grows many of the favorable species of vegetation at its Howard Nursery in Centre County, he said.



*The yellow-breasted chat uses dense second-growth, riparian thickets, and brush. Despite its bright yellow chest, loud song, and conspicuous display flights, the yellow-breasted chat is easily overlooked because of its skulking nature and the denseness of its brushy haunts.*

# SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER PROGRAMS

## Sept 20 Falconry

*Jody Wallace*

First, understand birds. Then understand BIRD EXTREME the falcon! Meet a real Saker falcon (a very large falcon native to Europe and Asia). Experience how birds of prey and people cooperate to hunt wild game. Audience members may volunteer to participate in a falconry hunt play.

## Oct. 18 Effects of Marcellus Shale Exploration and Development on Birds

*Dr. Margaret Brittingham*

Dr. Brittingham's presentation will cover landscape and habitat changes associated with Marcellus Shale exploration and development and how that may affect Pennsylvania birds and wildlife associated recreation. She will discuss some research recently completed on shallow wells and give an overview of a current research project that is looking at the effects of Marcellus shale exploration and development on forest songbirds. Baseline data is being collected to determine whether there are any detectable changes at this stage of development. Restoration needs, guidelines and opportunities will be discussed.

**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.

## Juniata Valley Audubon thanks its Corporate Sponsor

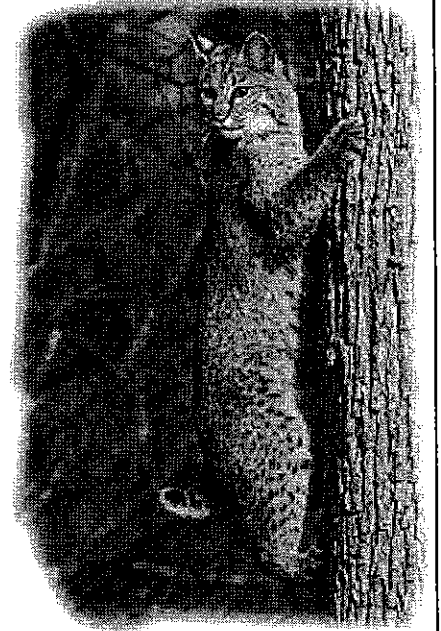
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# SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER FIELD TRIPS

**September 17, Saturday:** Come join Dennis Pagen for a **tree identification walk** at Leopold Park in the Eldorado section of Altoona off of Horseshoe Curve Road also known as Kittanning Trail. Meet at 11:00 in the parking area next to the ball field. This will be an easy stroll to see the incredible variety of trees practically in our own backyards. Contact Deb Tencer at [naturehikergal@gmail.com](mailto:naturehikergal@gmail.com)

**September 24, Saturday: State Game Land 198** - From Altoona, go west on Sugar Run Road to Tunnel Hill. At stop sign, turn right on Tunnel Hill Street. Continue thru town, turn right at the sign (on right) saying "George's Trailers" -- this is a gravel road. You will go past the George's Trailers business and then see the State Game Land parking lot. We will meet there at 10:00. For more info contact <http://facebook.com/rjb312> or Deb Tencer at [naturehikergal@gmail.com](mailto:naturehikergal@gmail.com)

**September 25, Sunday: State Game Land 147** - This 3-mile hike starts with visiting a new wetlands project and includes an easy forest walk on a trail that crosses Old Town Run in the West Loop area of Frankstown Township. Meet at the parking lot of the Canal Basin Park in Hollidaysburg at 10 a.m. From there we'll carpool to the end of Quiet Hollow Road. Weather permitting. For more information, contact Dave Hunter at [davehunter@atlanticbb.net](mailto:davehunter@atlanticbb.net).

**October 15, Saturday: Zen nature hike at Canoe Creek** - We get the most out of our observations in nature when we are fully aware of our surroundings and with our minds focused on the present moment. Learn to train your mind and your senses to be fully present so you can experience nature like you never have before. Meet at 1:30 at the Canoe Creek State Park Environ-

mental Education Center. Contact Rich Hanton at [rphdeer@aol.com](mailto:rphdeer@aol.com) or Deb Tencer at [naturehikergal@gmail.com](mailto:naturehikergal@gmail.com)

**October 22, Saturday: Summit to Muleshoe on the 6 to 10 Trail** hike. Please meet at 10:00 at the Summit Level visitor center back parking lot. Those that wish to shuttle can do so. The hike will head downhill. This trail can be very challenging. Long pants and sturdy shoes are recommended. Extremely wet conditions will force a re-schedule. Hiking down, rather than up, gives people the option to turn back if the trail is too steep. The upper part is a nice shorter hike with interesting flora. (There's also plenty to see at the Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site.) At Muleshoe, we will conclude the hike, but there is a short trail at the side of Hollidaysburg Reservoir which could be of interest. Ruby Becker will be leading this hike. For more info contact <http://facebook.com/rjb312> or Deb Tencer at [naturehikergal@gmail.com](mailto:naturehikergal@gmail.com)

**October 30, Sunday: Frank Campion Memorial Hike** - Helena Kotala will lead this 6-mile downhill hike on the Bell's Gap Rail Trail. This hike honors JVAS member Staff Sgt. Francis Campion who died in a military training accident this past summer, and who hiked with us on this trail last fall. An article about this trail can be read at <http://pennsylvania.sierraclub.org/moshannon/OTT/OTT10-03BellsGapTrail.htm>. A map of the trail is at <http://www.trailink.com/trail-maps/bells-gap-rail-trail.aspx#>. Meet at noon at the Bell's Gap Rail Trail Roots Trailhead. There will be a shuttle. Contact Helena Kotala at 215-3675 or [hdk5018@psu.edu](mailto:hdk5018@psu.edu)



JVAS members on Deb Tencer's Brush Mountain Preserve hike last May. This was the last JVAS hike that Special Forces Staff Sgt. Francis Campion (far right) attended prior to his tragic death in a military training accident less than two months later.



# join JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON!

Juniata Valley Audubon **membership** provides you with the following benefits:

Notification of Juniata Valley Audubon's exciting activities including nature programs, field trips and other events

Subscription to the bimonthly chapter newsletter, *The Gnatcatcher*

Opportunities to participate in conservation projects and environmental advocacy, and *have fun!*

Become a chapter-only member: \_\_\_\_\_ **Individual:** \$15 \_\_\_\_\_ **Family:** \$20 \_\_\_\_\_ **Supporting:** \$35

\_\_\_\_\_ **Friend of JVAS:** \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ **Corporate:** \$100

\_\_\_\_\_ **Life Membership:** \$500— All the benefits listed above for a once-in-a-lifetime fee.

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