



# The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

P.O. Box 42, Tyrone, Pennsylvania 16686

JVAS.org

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## Bats suffering 95% population decline denied Endangered Status in Pennsylvania

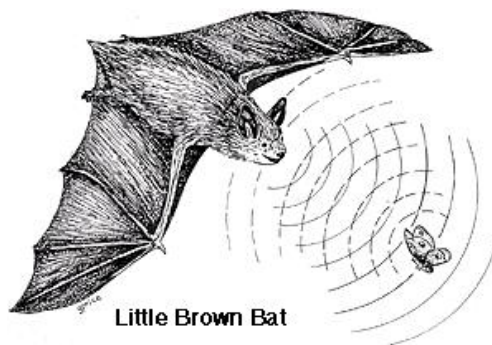
Game Commission bullied by mining, timber,  
development interests, and politicians

BY DR. STAN KOTALA

**T**hree bat species whose populations have declined by more than 95 percent over the past six years have been denied endangered species status in Pennsylvania.

After proposing listing as endangered the little brown bat, the northern long-eared bat, and the tri-colored bat in September, Pennsylvania Game Commission officials announced last month that the agency will not be moving forward to draft regulatory changes to place three species of bats on the state's endangered species list.

Pennsylvania Game Commission Executive Director Carl Roe noted that the agency received many public comments in support of listing the bats as an endangered species. "Through this process, we heard from various wildlife organizations and representatives from the timber, oil, coal, and gas industries, as well as legislators. At the present time, it is clear that more discussion,



research, and coordination need to be done on white nose syndrome and other outside factors that are impacting our bat populations, as well as how we can craft solutions that protect bats without threatening the industries that employ thousands of Pennsylvanians," Roe said.

As usual, industries, developers, and politicians claimed economic Armageddon if efforts were made to protect these three bat species from extinction. Again, sound science was trumped by political bullying.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission's public notice requesting comments regarding the proposed listing of these three bat species is at:

[www.pabulletin.com/secure/data/vol42/42-32/1555.html](http://www.pabulletin.com/secure/data/vol42/42-32/1555.html)

Juniata Valley Audubon's letter supporting the listing of these three bat species is at:

[www.jvas.org/pdf\\_files/pa\\_endangered\\_bats\\_SK.pdf](http://www.jvas.org/pdf_files/pa_endangered_bats_SK.pdf)

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is considering actions to protect the current population of three cave-dwelling bat species in the Commonwealth due to the outbreak and spread of white nose syndrome (WNS), a fungal disease affecting bats during hibernation. Massive mortalities of hibernating bats began in the 2009-2010 winter and have continued each winter. Species affected are the northern long-eared bat, the tri-colored bat (formerly known as the eastern pipistrelle), and the little brown bat. The tri-colored bat and the little browns also have been a component of bat mortalities associated with wind turbines.

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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

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The Juniata Valley Audubon Society (JVAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society and is dedicated to the conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the Earth's biological diversity. Juniata Valley Audubon accomplishes its mission through advocacy, science, land stewardship, and education — working directly with Audubon Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania state office of the National Audubon Society.

The JVAS is a tax-exempt, not-for-profit, educational organization as described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Gifts are deductible for income tax purposes (Tax ID # 25-1533496).

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## The sounds of silence

It's as if they all forgot about the record-breaking heat, droughts, floods, wildfires, and other extreme weather events over the last few months. September was the 331st straight month with above-average temperatures worldwide, and the 36th straight September with a global temperature above the 20th century average. Extreme weather has gotten more extreme, and more expensive, with the prominent insurers crediting it as the leading edge of global warming. Arctic sea ice the size of Canada and Texas combined melted away this summer. And scientists are warning that we've reached the tipping point on climate change.

But with all this evidence, not one word was uttered in any of the presidential and vice presidential debates on climate change. This was the first time since climate change was identified in the 1980s that the debates failed to discuss global warming. Even when the moderator in the last debate asked, "What do you believe is the greatest future threat to the national security of this country?" — an obvious opening for a longer, more fulsome response than simply identifying one part of the world or one particular group — neither Governor Mitt Romney nor President Barack Obama said a word about climate change. Instead, the people of the world were treated to silence.

Two years ago, Governor Romney spoke about global warming in his book, *No Apology*, saying he believed global warming was real and was at least in part caused by human activity. In the intervening two years, the Romney position has changed to denying climate change is occurring, pushing for more mining and drilling, attacking the EPA's clean air regulations, and calling for an end to all government investment in renewable energy.

President Obama calls climate change real, and has taken some action to mitigate global warming. Under his watch, the EPA has proposed restrictions on air pollution from coal-fired power plants. He's proposed new clean car standards. He's fighting to renew the tax credit American wind companies need to succeed. And he's funding other renewable energy research. But more needs to be done.

In 2012, it's unconscionable that the people running to lead our nation are failing to discuss one of the most dangerous problems our world is facing, let alone take comprehensive action.

As we look back on this year, we'll be stunned by the sounds of silence.

— Excerpted from "PennFuture Facts," Oct. 25, 2012

## Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania To be published in November

Twenty years after the first *Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania* was published (edited by Daniel W. Brauning, 1992), the *Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania* (edited by Andrew M. Wilson, Brauning, and Robert S. Mulvihill) brings our knowledge of the state's breeding bird populations up to date, documenting current distributions and changes in status for nearly 200 bird species. The resulting book, published by the Penn State University Press and available in November, includes a color photograph, and two or three maps for every nesting species.

The *Second Atlas* will make a beautiful coffee-table volume, but more than that will be a must-have reference on the state's nesting birds.

More than 2000 dedicated bird-watchers, including many Audubon members, contributed to the surveys of breeding birds, covering each of the state's 4,937 blocks during the period from 2004 to 2009. They reported more than 106,952 volunteer field hours and another 34,192 administrative hours.

The resulting data provide a clear picture of the current distribution of every breeding species and reveal the changes that have occurred since the first atlas. In addition to the volunteer effort, trained field survey crews carried out a rigorous, customized point-count bird survey protocol at more than 34,000 locations statewide, providing additional data on population size. These counts tabulated not just species, but individual birds, and in a manner that enabled for the first time ever, precise statistical estimation of the actual statewide populations for more than half of the 190 breeding species detected during the *Second Atlas*. In all, more than 1.5 million breeding bird observations were compiled and analyzed during the *Second Atlas*, providing an unprecedented snapshot of the bird life of Pennsylvania — perhaps even of any comparably sized region in the world.

The database equates to a median of seventy-two species per block (seventy-seven species per priority block), with a range of 24 to 126.

Participants reported a total of 218 species and 2 hybrids to the *Second Atlas* (of which 190 species were considered breeders during the *Second Atlas*) and given full species accounts, 187 of which were confirmed breeders. Included among these confirmed breeders are three that never had been documented to nest in Pennsylvania prior to the *Second Atlas*: merlin, great black-backed gull, and Eurasian collared-dove. All three species had been expanding in recent years.

The *Second Atlas* documents major range expansions in a number of species. Notable among these is the clay-colored sparrow, not confirmed breeding in the first atlas, and increasing over ninefold, from three block records in the first atlas to twenty-nine in the second. Impressive by sheer numbers, is the doubling of blocks documenting Canada goose, the largest increase in number of block records (1,816) of any breeding bird. Other species increasing more than 1,000 blocks were wild turkey, red-bellied woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, Carolina wren, and hooded warbler.

A number of species with established nesting histories during or since the first Atlas showed dramatic declines in block records. Most notable among these are summer tanager (−91%), black tern (−73%), common nighthawk (−71%), blue-winged teal (−68%), and northern bobwhite (−68%). The nighthawk and bobwhite previously had been widespread. Other striking declines include the ring-necked pheasant (−52%) and ruffed grouse (−33%), each declining by approximately 1,000 blocks. These and many other changes are documented and interpreted in accounts of their appropriate species by more than forty contributing authors of species accounts.

Point counts result in density maps and population estimates for about 100 species constitutes a new feature of the *Second Atlas*. The editors' analyses suggest that no fewer than twenty-three species achieve total population sizes of more than one million adult birds in Pennsylvania. The

three most abundant species — red-eyed vireo, chipping sparrow, and song sparrow — all have populations that are close to three million pairs (and no doubt exceed that number in some years), closely followed by American robin and gray catbird.

Many additional features, results, and insightful analyses are provided within the 616 pages of this full-color book. For each of the species receiving a full write-up, a beautiful photograph of the species illustrates the account. As many as three maps per species show in very fine detail the current distribution based on the *Second Atlas*, changes in distribution since the first *Atlas*, and for more than 100 species, detailed maps of abundance. In addition, a chart shows forty-year population trends.

Introductory chapters describe and discuss recent changes in climate and bird habitats within Pennsylvania; they provide information that was used by the species account authors to inform their detailed accounts and they will give readers the opportunity to further explore and reflect on important bird-environment relationships evident in the results of the *Second Atlas*. The chapter on bird conservation summarizes just some of the many reasons why the *Second Atlas* promises to be a vital tool for bird conservationists in Pennsylvania for many years to come. Accounts of past breeding species, along with a tabular summary of nesting phenology and habitat correlations, round out the *Second Atlas*, making it a definitive reference and a rich source of information for anyone interested in the nesting birds of Pennsylvania.

The *Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania* was subsidized by contributions from Audubon Pennsylvania chapters and the Pennsylvania Game Commission. An additional 20% discount offer is available now. See the order form enclosed in this newsletter. ❖

### JOIN AUDUBON

Become a member of Audubon and join a community of people who care about nature...

Please go on-line to [www.jvas.org/join.html](http://www.jvas.org/join.html) to view your options of Audubon membership.

## Audubon program for November

JVAS programs are presented on the third Tuesday of the month except for July, August, and December. Program meetings begin at 7 P.M. in the meeting room of the Bellwood-Antis Public Library, 526 Main St., Bellwood.

Directions: Take Interstate Rt. 99 to the Bellwood/Route 865 Exit (Exit 41). Follow Rt. 865 through the Sheetz/Martin intersection. Proceed about four blocks and turn right at the **BUSINESS DISTRICT** → sign. Turn left at the dead end and travel to the stop sign. Continue a short distance; the library will be on your right.

JVAS programs, designed for a general audience, are free and open to the public.

### “Cougars: What’s Real and What’s Not Real”

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20

Kerry Gyekis, a consulting forester and former Tioga County planner, is active in the Eastern Cougar Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Harman, West Virginia.

Although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had officially declared in 2011 that the eastern cougar is extinct, people continue to report sightings of cougars in eastern North America.

Kerry’s program will highlight cougar biology and history, reproduction, attacks, tracking, and a collection of cougar sightings in the East — some real, some questionable, and some forgeries.

#### The cougar’s other common names

The large, tawny, long-tailed cat native to the New World probably has more common names than any other animal. Mountain lion, puma, panther, painter, catamount, and catamountain are the best-known names in the United States, but several other names have been recorded across North and South America. All refer to the same species of cat, whose current scientific name is *Puma concolor*.

The multiplicity of common names probably arose from the extreme elusiveness of the cats, which made them very difficult to see and understand. Not until radio telemetry became available in the 1970s were wildlife researchers able to identify and track individual cougars to learn how they behaved.

## Audubon field trips — November and December

JVAS field trips are coordinated by board member Deb Tencer. Note that all three listed field trips are joint outings with the Moshannon Group of the Sierra Club. For more information about any field trip, phone Deb at 814-932-9183 or send her an e-mail at [naturehikergal@gmail.com](mailto:naturehikergal@gmail.com).

### Tussey Mountain hike

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4

Join us on a 6-mile shuttle hike on Tussey Mountain Trail beginning at Bear Meadows. We'll hike up Tussey Mountain and along the ridgeline, offering scenic views of the valley below. Wear sturdy shoes and bring lunch and water. Meet at the Bear Meadows Natural Area parking lot at 10 A.M. Trip leader: Helena Kotala, 814-880-0918, [hdkotala@gmail.com](mailto:hdkotala@gmail.com).

### Horseshoe Curve hike

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17

Deb Tencer will lead this hike to the highest point above Horseshoe Curve and then to the State Game Lands at Gallitzin. This four-hour hike is moderately strenuous. The view of Horseshoe Curve is incredible as you look directly down at it like a miniature train set. Meet at 11 A.M. at Horseshoe Curve, Altoona. We'll car pool from there. Pack a lunch and wear blaze orange. Deb Tencer, [naturehikergal@gmail.com](mailto:naturehikergal@gmail.com).

### Post-Thanksgiving hike on Lower Trail

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24

Meet at 1 P.M. at the Alfarata Trailhead. We'll carpool from Alfarata to the Mt. Etna Trailhead and then hike six miles on this rail trail along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River back to Alfarata. Trip leader: Alice Kotala, 814-946-8840.

## Audubon Christmas Bird Count

— Saturday, December 15 —

More than 50,000 observers participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest-running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas.

The JVAS has an assigned area for the bird count. It's the area within a 7½-mile radius circle centered on the village of Culp, in Sinking Valley. Phone CBC Compiler Steve Bonta at 684-1175 to advise him of the specific area within the circle you wish to count.

Counting procedure:

- Bird in your favorite spots in the JVAS CBC area and keep a total of each bird species you see or hear.
- Write the totals on the checklist. (Go on-line to [www.jvas.org/pdf\\_files/cbc\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.jvas.org/pdf_files/cbc_checklist.pdf) for a JVAS CBC checklist form in PDF format that you can print.)
- Bring the completed checklist to the follow-up dinner on the count day (dinner details below) or mail a copy to the JVAS CBC compiler by January 5, 2013.
- Feeder watchers -- Remember, don't total all of the same birds seen in a day; instead, count the highest number seen at any one time.

The CBC is now a free program. Audubon no longer charges the \$5 fee of field participants. To minimize the effects of the loss of fee income, however, *American Birds* no longer will be printed on paper and mailed to participants. Instead, Audubon will report all CBC results on-line.

After the count, you're welcome to come to Charlie & Marge Hoyer's home on Brush Mountain for a potluck dinner at 5:30 P.M. Please phone Marge in advance at 684-7376 to advise her what you'll bring to share for dinner and for directions.



JVAS THANKS ITS CORPORATE SPONSOR...

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