



# THE GNATCATCHER

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

VOL. XLV, NO. 2 — MARCH/APRIL 2013

Tuesday, April 16  Annual JVAS Spring Banquet

## “Ancient Forests”

Old-growth forests—forests that have never been logged—are places of great beauty, mystery and conservation value. Author, ecologist and environmental advocate **Dr. Joan Maloof** has traveled the nation visiting remnant tracts of old-growth forest. Her book, *Among the Ancients: Adventures in the Eastern Old-Growth Forests*, describes one old-growth forest in each of the twenty-six states east of the Mississippi River, as she attempts to answer such questions as: How many of these forests are left? Where are they? What types of birds and other wildlife depend on them for their survival?

Joan will go beyond sharing slides from many of her favorite forests and describe her vision of an Old-Growth Forest Network — a nation-wide attempt to reverse past destruction and reconnect average families with the beauty and biological abundance found only in the ancient forests. Joan will have some of her books for sale.

Folks may arrive as early as 5:15 to donate and/or bid on silent-auction items. The wait staff will be taking drink orders at 5:45, with dining to commence at 6:00. (All dinner checks will include 18% gratuity.)

JVAS Vice President Laura Jackson will conduct a “silent auction” to raise funds to be used in conservation efforts supported by the JVAS. Members are asked to bring new or gently used nature-related items to donate for the silent auction. Books, artwork, pottery, native plants — anything related to nature will be accepted. Bring your checkbook or cash to support this fund-raiser!

By Friday, April 12, please contact JVAS Hospitality Chair Marcia Bonta by phone at (814) 684-3113 or by email at [marciabonta@hotmail.com](mailto:marciabonta@hotmail.com) ~ to advise her of the total number of your party.

(We need to be able to tell Hoss's how many will attend so they will know how many wait staff to have on duty.)

Photo: Dr. Stan Kotala



Banquet  
room at Hoss's  
Steak and Sea House,  
170 Patchway Road, Dun-  
cansville (right off Old  
Rt. 220, next to  
Marzoni's)

## THE GNATCATCHER

VOL. XLV, NO. 2 — MARCH/APRIL 2013

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as a benefit for members of the...  
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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# CERULEAN BLUES

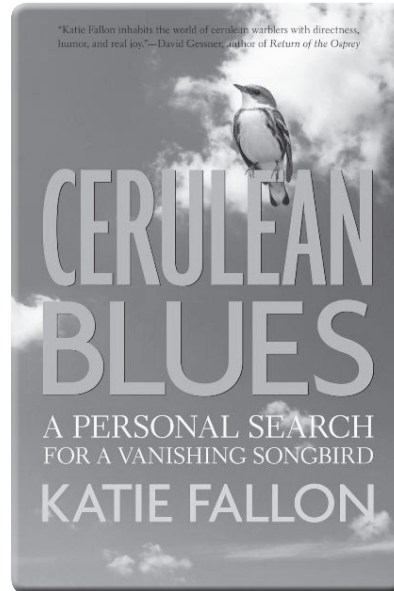
JVAS Tuesday  
evening program,  
MARCH 19 at 7 PM  
in the meeting room  
of the Bellwood-  
Antis Public Library,  
526 Main St.,  
Bellwood.

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

## A favorite

among birders, the  
tiny cerulean warbler is the fastest-  
declining Neotropical migratory  
songbird in the United States. Presenter  
Katie Fallon will discuss the cerulean  
warblers' breeding habitat, nesting  
behavior, wintering habitat, and the  
reasons for the species' plummeting  
population numbers. Come hear about  
the habits of this charismatic, elusive  
songbird — and learn what you can do  
to help save them.

Katie is the author of the book,  
*Cerulean Blues: A Personal Search for*



a *Vanishing Songbird*  
(Ruka Press, 2011).  
She recently was  
named a finalist  
for the Southern  
Environmental  
Law Center's  
Reed Award for  
Outstanding Writing  
on the Southern  
Environment. Katie  
has taught creative  
writing at West  
Virginia University  
and Virginia Tech, and  
she is a founder of the  
Avian Conservation

Center of Appalachia. Katie will have  
some of her books available for sale at  
the meeting.

Directions: Take Interstate Rt. 99 to the Bell-  
wood/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.

Note: The snack table this evening is potluck.  
Please feel free to bring something if you wish,  
however it is not required.

Visit us online at **JVAS.org**



**“Like” Juniata Valley Audubon Society  
on Facebook, and stay connected: you’ll  
receive our news notes in your feed.**



## Pennsylvania Bows to Industry, Won't Protect Bats Devastated by Fungal Disease

Officials at the Pennsylvania Game Commission have withdrawn a proposal to protect three bat species under the state endangered species law, despite catastrophic losses to bat populations from the newly emergent bat-killing disease known as white-nose syndrome. Business interests in the oil and gas, mining, timber, wind-energy, and other industries opposed state protection for the little brown bat, northern long-eared bat and tricolored bat on the grounds that new rules to help save bats might hinder their operations. All three bat species have declined by 98 percent or more in Pennsylvania in only four years.

"Every citizen ought to be outraged by this blatantly political decision," said Mollie Matteson, a bat

specialist with the Center for Biological Diversity. "These species, so critical to crop pest control, are on the brink of disappearing from Pennsylvania forever. If the state won't take action in such an obvious ecological crisis, no part of the state's environment is safe."

The Game Commission had not yet proposed any specific rules to protect the decimated bat populations; it quickly, indefinitely tabled its bat-listing effort in response to complaints from industry that the state's economy would be "crushed" by protection measures. The commission reported late last week that in addition to criticism from industry it had received many public comments *favoring* the listing proposal.

Since 2006, when white-nose syndrome was first discovered among

seven bat species have been affected by the disease, including the federally listed Indiana bat, which has declined in Pennsylvania by close to 96 percent. Winter surveys of bats in Pennsylvania found that overall, hibernating bats have declined by more than 99 percent since the onset of white-nose syndrome.

White-nose syndrome poses the greatest immediate threat to Pennsylvania's hibernating bats, but other threats include destruction of forested summer roosting habitat, water pollution, pesticides and industrial-scale wind energy. In particular, the tricolored bat and little brown bat are vulnerable to turbine collision and "barotrauma" — death by internal-organ rupture caused by sudden pressure changes near moving turbine blades.

The Center petitioned for federal endangered species listing of the northern long-eared bat and eastern small-footed bat in 2010, and last year the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued an initial positive response to the petition. The Center also formally

— *continued on page 8*



Photo: USFWS / Ann Froschauer

hibernating bats in upstate New York caves, the disease has killed nearly 7 million bats across 19 states and four Canadian provinces. Last winter biologists discovered white-nose syndrome in Missouri, marking the first time the disease had been confirmed west of the Mississippi River. So far

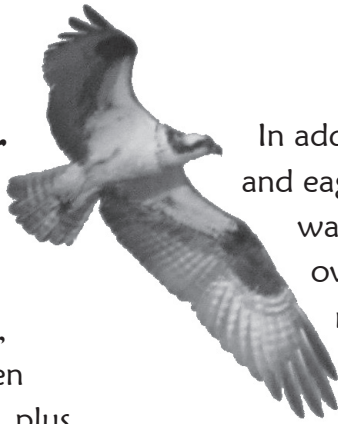
Cave illustration by Ruby J Becker  
after a photo by Rob Blatt

# WINTER RAPTOR SURVEY

by MARCIA BONTA

**We waited weeks for the perfect day** to do our Winter Raptor Survey in Sinking Valley. Since we were to avoid foggy, windy, rainy or snowy days between January 10 and February 10, plus I had some unexpected health issues that eliminated several excellent days, it was February 7 when we finally ventured off our mountain and into the valley at 9:10 a.m. On that day, it was mostly cloudy with a slight breeze, the average temperature was 18 degrees and the snow cover was a mere two inches.

Greg Grove started the Winter Raptor Survey in the winter of 2001 and we signed up to patrol Sinking Valley. We also designed our own route, which remains the same every year, covering 35 miles. That's a little on the short side of Grove's requirements of a minimum of 10 to 20 miles and a maximum of 75 to 100 miles. Since it is a road survey, he also wants folks to stick to back roads if possible which Sinking Valley has in abundance.



In addition to hawks and eagles, he also wants any shrikes, owls, and vultures recorded as well. Last winter, for the first time, there was

a report from all 67 counties, which may be why that was also the year when the highest number of bald eagles (190), Cooper's hawks (115), red-shouldered hawks (67), red-tailed hawks (3245), American kestrels (682), merlins (9), black vultures (994), turkey vultures (2804), and northern shrikes (10) were counted. Participants ran two hundred routes covering 11,745 miles. As part of his roundup of 2012 Winter Raptor Survey results in Pennsylvania Birds, Grove mentioned that northern harriers had been down the previous three years from their high of 133 in 2008 and had risen to 101 last winter. This winter he asked us to send any records of northern harriers to Laurie Goodrich at Hawk Mountain who is compiling information on wintering

harriers and short-eared owls.

Every year we've counted a harrier or two on one of the hunting preserve fields, and so we eagerly scanned that area, but this year we never saw a harrier. Most of the birds we did see were sitting in trees or, in the case of the three American kestrels, on telephone lines. Bruce drove very slowly, pulling over whenever I shouted "stop" as I scanned both sides of the road. Several times what I saw in the far distance, a dot in a tree, was a squirrel's nest, but often it was a red-tailed hawk (11 in all). Once a sharp-shinned hawk sat in a tree in one yard and a Cooper's hawk in another.

Coming down the last stretch of Sickle's Corner Back Road, I spotted a bird in a tree several hundred feet away across an Amish field.

"Probably another red-tail," I thought, but as I peered through my binoculars, I realized that it didn't look like a red-tail. Bruce couldn't even see the bird without his binoculars and marveled at my superior eyesight as he had throughout this count. The bird was faced





away from me, but it had a big head and across the back of it was a horizontal band of white. Could it be an immature bald eagle? Just as Bruce

had the scope set up, the bird took off, flapping wings that were white beneath, and those wings,

Bruce pointed out, were tipped up at the end. It had to be a bald eagle. It flew across the Kettle Road and into another tree on a rise beyond a smaller field. We eased back into the car, and Bruce drove to the road and parked on the side. Again we got out of the car and set up the scope. Through it we definitely identified the bird as a second year bald eagle. Once again that sighting was the highlight of our survey.

**The Winter Raptor Survey is a great excuse for getting out in the middle of the winter.**

Two years ago, alerted by a young Amish birder, I found a mature bald eagle sitting in a tree at the edge of another field, its white head gleaming in the sunlight. Bald eagles seem to favor Amish fields. On the other hand, most of the red-tails concentrate in trees at the edge of wide, fallow, "English" fields in the center of the valley.

The Winter Raptor Survey is a great excuse for getting out in the middle of the winter. For the first ten years, we mostly counted red-tails and kestrels, but now we have the chance of seeing a bald eagle, which adds a little excitement to what can be very slow work sometimes. Still, Grove is gathering a lot of interesting information about winter raptors that is of use to researchers, such as Laurie Goodrich.

Note: For the first time in several years, Blair County has a compiler for Pennsylvania Birds. When that excellent publication first started, I was compiler for several years. Both Charlie Hoyer and Stan Kotala also did it for a while. Now, if you have interesting or unusual bird sightings during the year,

you can send them to Nancy Butkovich, 550 Toftrees Avenue #248, State College, Pa. 16803, call her at 814-234-6086, or email her at njbutkovich@

verizon.net. She would like the date, species, numbers and location of your sightings. The seasons are a little different than the calendar's: spring is March, April, and May, summer is June and July, fall is August, September, October, and November and winter is December, January and February. She needs your reports for each season by the end of the month following each season: June, August, December and March.



# Federal Agency Slammed Over 'Secretive' Eagle-Wind Energy Policy Proposal



Photo: Bonita de Boer/Flickr/Creative Commons License

by Chris Clarke

*Originally appeared in KCET -TV's ReWire column, [kcet.org/rewire](http://kcet.org/rewire). Reprinted by permission of the author.*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is considering eliminating most public oversight of wind turbine impacts on protected bald and golden eagles by offering developers 30-year permits to kill eagles by accident, as opposed to the current 5-year permits. What's more, they're shaping the implementation of that proposed policy change in a series of private "stakeholders'" meetings to which the public is not invited.

That's the takeaway from a letter sent Tuesday by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), to the Department of the Interior. ABC is demanding Interior halt consideration of issuing 30-year eagle take permits until Sally Jewell, the incoming Interior Secretary, has a chance to examine the issue.

"The public places a high value on both Bald and Golden Eagles, two species that have inspired awe, pride, and patriotism in America's citizens for generations," said Darin Schroeder, ABC's Vice President of Conservation Advocacy. "The Bald Eagle is America's national symbol and was only removed from the endangered species list in 2007. Thus, this important and highly controversial decision should not be made without the full participation and careful consideration of the new Secretary of the Interior."

For Interior's part, that Department's

Press Secretary Jessica Kershaw told ReWire "We are in receipt of the [ABC] letter. The Eagle Tenure Rule remains under current review."

According to ABC, the existing system of five-year-long "take" permits would allow public and expert oversight of wind turbine impacts on eagles during the renewal process. Moving to a 30-year permit system would eliminate most opportunities for review; even if reviews were held at the end of each 30-year period, the level of public expertise available for those reviews would likely be much lower as participants in the previous review may well have retired or died in the three decades intervening.

Neither bald nor golden eagles enjoy protection under the Endangered Species Act, but since 2009 FWS has been authorized to issue take permits under the auspices of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA), and since that time wind developers have complained that following the provisions of that law hurts their ability to profit from erecting turbines in eagle habitat. As recently as 2009, FWS seemed not to be too sympathetic to wind developers' complaints. In that year, the agency pointed out that take

permits with "tenures" lasting longer than five years were "incompatible with preservation":

*"the rule limits permit tenure to five years or less because factors may change over a longer period of time such that a take authorized much earlier would later be incompatible with the preservation of the bald eagle or the golden eagle. Accordingly, we believe that five years is a long enough period within which a project proponent can identify when the proposed activity will result in take."*

What changed FWS's mind? No one's saying, though pressure from above is a safe bet. FWS is a sub-agency of the Interior Department, whose outgoing Secretary Ken Salazar reportedly clamped down hard on any of his fiefdoms that offered challenges to his overarching goal of developing as much renewable energy on public lands as the law, loosely interpreted, would allow. Salazar, whose pugnacity was the stuff of Internet jokes, is widely said to have issued gag orders to Interior agencies who might otherwise have legitimately objected to ill-sited, ill-thought-out renewable developments.

Whether that pressure would continue under the direction Interior Secretary nominee Sally Jewell is unknown.

Nonetheless, FWS seems to have taken



the Salazar-era directive to heart, even in situations it didn't expect to garner public attention. ABC's press release refers to a rough transcript obtained by the San Diego-based Desert Protective Council (DPC) of a November 2012 meeting at the headquarters of renewable energy developer RES Americas, attended by 21 people including representatives of wind companies and trade associations, agency staff from FWS and USGS, and large environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and Audubon Society.

That transcript records David Cottingham, Senior Advisor to the FWS' Director Dan Ashe, starting things out by observing that the 2009 eagle rule was being revised, and saying that the purpose of the meeting was to "discuss what can be done in the interim to enable wind energy projects to get permitted."

That is, of course, an inversion of FWS's stated mission, which reads "to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

The November meeting seems to have been a typical "stakeholder meeting," at which a few carefully selected representatives of environmental groups meet with agency staff and industry people. The green groups in attendance included the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Nature Conservancy, none of which are shown in the transcript as pointing out that FWS' mission is to protect eagles, not get wind projects expedited.

Instead, the bulk of the meeting as reported in the transcript concerned whether -- as participant Todd Katzner of West Virginia University

put it -- wind facilities already in existence that kill eagles could be considered "experiments in operational mitigation."

There was more discussion of how operating wind facilities might contribute data on mortality that we can expect from operating wind facilities, but there was also relatively undisguised discussion of how to



Dr. Todd Katzner holds a golden eagle trapped on Brush Mountain near Tyrone. Photo: Dave Bonta

manage public perception of the issue, saving FWS's face, while allowing wind development to proceed. As John Anderson of the trade group American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) put it;

*We know there are facilities that are taking eagles now, and we know of a few applicants that are expected to take eagles. We need to develop a plan that meets the intent of the law and allow the Service [FWS] to demonstrate that they are upholding BGEPA while we address the long-term eagle policy issue.*

That language is telling. AWEA isn't addressing the long-term impacts of their members' facilities on eagles, but rather the "long-term eagle policy

issue." And the group isn't assembled to help FWS enforce the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, but to *demonstrate that they're upholding it*. Abiding by the law isn't at issue: public relations is.

Nowhere in this meeting, nor apparently the others FWS has convened, was there an avenue for public comment. In fact, the public comment period on the eagle tenure rulemaking closed almost a year ago, in April 2012. Giving special privileges to a few parties to offer comments on pending rulemaking when the public comment period has already closed is certainly unfair to the 700 members of the public that followed the deadline rules for comment on the eagle issue. As noble as the intentions of the environmental groups may be, they do not represent the public in any formal way: they are neither elected nor appointed by any elected official.

The letter by ABC to the Interior Department makes this point in no uncertain terms:

*These meetings were held in response to a letter sent to the Secretary of the Interior last year, and they raise serious questions for the Fish and Wildlife Service related to the Federal Advisory Committee Act and other federal laws. Eagle take permits could affect the interests of many Americans and many industries, including the timber and rail industries, Indian tribes, and many more conservation and scientific organizations than have been allowed to participate in these invitation-only meetings.*

"All of these eagle meetings should have been open to the public. Eagles are too important to the American people for FWS to determine their fate behind closed doors," said ABC's Darin Schroeder.



## BATS from page 3

requested a status review of the little brown bat in 2010. The Service is reviewing all three species for possible federal listing, and will render a decision on the bats by the end of next year. Earlier this year the Center, along with the Juniata Valley Audubon Society and other local Pennsylvania conservation groups, won protection for a cave and important natural area in Blair County. The cave, which is inhabited by the state-protected eastern small-footed bat, was threatened by a proposal for a limestone quarry that would have destroyed the cave and most of the surrounding roosting and foraging habitat.

"The Game Commission bowed to vague claims by energy and timber industries that saving bats will hurt their bottom line. Meanwhile, farmers who depend on bats to keep insect crop pests in check are out of luck," said Matteson. "And while mosquito-borne illnesses are on the rise, the commission's turning a blind eye to the vital public-health services bats provide by eating mosquitoes and other bothersome insects."

The loss of bats is a potential economic, as well as biological, disaster. Scientists have estimated that insect-eating bats consume enough agricultural pests to be worth \$3.7 billion to \$53 billion annually to American farmers. In Pennsylvania alone, researchers estimate bats' pest-eating services are worth \$292 million a year to agriculture.

Released October 8, 2012 by the Center for Biological Diversity.

## JVAS Field Trips

### *Greensprings hike* **SUNDAY, MARCH 24**

*We travel a 7 mile loop over a broad saddle area on top of the Allegheny Front between the headwaters of both Tubb Run and Greensprings Run. Crystal clear waters, dozens of streams... this is coal country, but there's no AMD (acid mine drainage). Pass thru some of the tallest rhododendron groves in PA. Meet trip leader Ruby J. Becker at 10 AM in the Pizza Hut parking lot on Juniata Gap Road and E. 25th Street. Ruby, 515-6312 or rubyjb@atlanticbb.net.*

### *Spring trillium walk on the Lower Trail* **SATURDAY, APRIL 13**

*Join Deb Tencer for an easy walk to view the spring spectacular of trilliums and Dutchman's breeches. Meet at 11 AM in the Water Street Flea Market parking lot, We'll walk from there. Please join us for lunch afterward at a local eatery. Watch the Web page for any changes to the date of this walk due to the unpredictable time of wildflower blossoming. Deb, naturehikergal@gmail.com.*

### *Bird and wildflower walk in Plummer's Hollow* **SATURDAY, APRIL 20**

*Join Marcia and son Dave for a leisurely, 3-mile walk up Plummer's Hollow, where a diverse and aging forest supports a variety of native wildflowers, looking for early returning birds such as the Louisiana water thrush and the blue-headed vireo. Meet at 10 AM in the pull-off along Rt. 453 just east of the Plummer's Hollow Road bridge, and bring a packed lunch. If time permits, we'll check out the 17-year-old deer enclosure/wildflower sanctuary after lunch. Marcia, 684-3113.*

### *Raystown Lake hike* **SATURDAY, APRIL 27**

*Explore one of the trails at Raystown Lake, in Huntingdon County, on this 5-mile hike with trip leader Kristin Joivell. You will view the diversity of the forests, hillsides, and rocky ledges on this hike of moderate difficulty. Bring water and lunch. Meet at the Allegrippis Trail Head on Bakers Hollow Road at 11 AM. A few cars will need to be parked at the end point for transport back after the hike is over. Kristin, kristinjean@hotmail.com.*



## Newly Released Survey shows Strong Public Support for State Conservation Funding

A newly released statewide survey shows strong public support for state funding to preserve open space, create parks and trails, and protect waterways.

The survey, conducted between Oct. 1 and Nov. 4 by the Center for Survey Research at Penn State Harrisburg, shows overwhelming public support for continuing existing dedicated state funding for conservation, as well as increasing state funding to protect land, water and wildlife. The survey questions were commissioned by The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land.

*"The results of this survey send a clear message that conservation funding is of utmost importance to the vast majority of Pennsylvanians,"* said Andrew Heath, executive director

of the Pennsylvania Growing Greener Coalition. *"The Coalition is pleased to find such strong public support for our mission to continue and increase dedicated funding for programs that protect our natural resources and historic treasures."*

Overall, the survey found that more than 92 percent of the 608 Pennsylvanians surveyed think that state funds dedicated to preserving farmland and open space, providing parks and trails and protecting rivers and streams should continue to be used for these purposes.

In addition, the survey found that nearly 78 percent of respondents support increasing state funds to conserve and protect open space, clean water, natural areas, wildlife habitats,

parks, historic sites, forests and farms even if would cost the average household \$10 more annually. Further, these high levels of support are constant throughout every geographic region and every gender, ethnic, educational and economic demographic throughout the state.

*"In a difficult economic climate, it is remarkable that support for conservation funding enjoys such strong public support at every level. This clearly demonstrates that continued and increased conservation and recreation funding is in line with what Pennsylvanians value,"* said Heath.

For the full survey results visit:

<http://csr.hbg.psu.edu/PennStatePoll/MethodologyReportsandPressReleases/tabid/860/Default.aspx>



Brown Thrasher photo by  
Dr. Stan Kotala

## **JVAS** *Field Trips*

### *Visit to Rock City (Bilger's Rocks) SUNDAY, MARCH 10*

*Join JVAS at 10 AM for an easy hike around the rocks. These massive sandstone formations are known as Rock City. Members of the Bilger's Rocks group will be there to explain their mission and the history of the rocks. The location is 100 Bilger's Rocks Rd, Grampian, PA. Time permitting we will explore the stream below the rocks. They may have bluebird boxes for sale by the time we hike there. Dress for the weather. Trip leader Karen Croyle, [ponogup@yahoo.com](mailto:ponogup@yahoo.com).*

### *Waterfowl migration at Dunning Creek Wetlands SATURDAY, MARCH 16*

*Join Mike and Laura Jackson to view migrating waterfowl at Dunning Creek Wetlands, in Bedford County. Meet at the Apple Bin Restaurant on Rt. 56, just a few miles west of I-99 at 8 AM. Wear boots, as it will be wet, and be prepared for cold, windy conditions. The trip will last most of the morning. For more information, contact the Jacksons at [mljackson2@embarqmail.com](mailto:mljackson2@embarqmail.com).*

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