



# THE GNATCATCHER

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

VOL. XLV, NO. 3 — MAY/JUNE 2013

## Maxine Leckvarcik Memorial Picnic

TUESDAY, JUNE 18

◆ Pine Hill Picnic Area



Visit our Facebook page for detailed directions, timely updates and event photos!



Bring a covered dish and your own tableware for a 6PM covered-dish social at the Rothrock State Forest Pine Hill Picnic Area. Two picnic pavilions, picnic tables, grills, and toilet facilities are on the grounds. After we dine, we'll embark on a short nature walk. For more information, contact Hospitality Committee Chair Marcia Bonta at **684-3113**.



Pine Hill Picnic area is located in Rothrock State Forest, along Diamond Valley Road, northwest of Petersburg.

COORDINATES: 40°38'34"N 78°2'10"W

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Published bimonthly  
(except for July and August)  
as a benefit for members of the...  
JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

Ruby J. Becker, Editor  
P.O. Box 42  
Tyrone, PA 16686-0042

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).

## OFFICERS

President ♦ Dave Bonta  
686-7274  
bontasaurus@yahoo.com

Vice President & Programs Committee  
Chair ♦ Laura Jackson  
652-9268  
mljackson2@embarqmail.com

Secretary & Membership Committee  
Chair ♦ Dr. Alice Kotala  
946-8840  
ccwiba@keyconn.net

Treasurer ♦ George Mahon  
gsm815@hotmail.com

## COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Conservation Committee ♦ Dr. Stan Kotala  
946-8840 ~ ccwiba@keyconn.net

Wetlands Committee ♦ Vacant

Education Committee ♦ Ruby J. Becker  
rubyjb@atlanticbb.net

Field Trips Committee ♦ Deb Tencer  
932-9183 ~ naturehikergal@gmail.com

Publications & Publicity Committee ♦  
Vacant

Hospitality Committee ♦ Marcia Bonta  
684-3113 ~ marciabonta@hotmail.com

## DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

Warren Baker ~ 684-4549  
Mike Jackson ~ 652-9268  
mljackson2@embarqmail.com  
Elisabeth Kotala ~ 949-3663  
ccwiba@keyconn.net



## Global Pollinator Crisis

TUESDAY, MAY 21

*Dr. Christina Grozinger will tell how animal pollinators, like bees, butterflies, and birds, help nearly 90% of the world's flowering plants set seed and fruit. Three-quarters of our agricultural crops — particularly micronutrient-rich and economically important fruit, vegetable, and nut crops — benefit from pollinators. However, populations of managed and wild pollinators have been in decline worldwide. What are the causes and consequences of this decline, and what can we do about it? Christine has been the director of the Center for Pollinator Research at Penn State since 2009. She will highlight the research, extension, and outreach efforts of the Center that address answers for the troubling decline of pollinators.*

Juniata Valley Audubon programs are presented on the third Tuesday in September through June except for December. Unless otherwise specified, program meetings begin at 7 P.M. 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.*

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.



**“Like” Juniata Valley Audubon Society on Facebook, and stay connected with up-to-the-minute updates!**



# GLIMPSES OF NATURE

MANY OF US get up close and personal with nature through the medium of films, photos and DVDs. Clearly wildlife photographers spend umpteen hours patiently sitting in blinds swatting mosquitoes while waiting for the perfect shot. Most of us have jobs. We get our dose of nature through weekend hikes or short excursions into the primeval. But sometimes we too get lucky. For me, some of the most dramatic experiences of nature have come when I was on a casual hike or short visit into the woods and came upon a surprise scene. Usually these little gifts happen unexpectedly and last for a very short time, but they are nonetheless riveting when they occur. I call these experiences "Glimpses of Nature."

There are some special fleeting glimpses etched upon my mind. I'd like to share a few of the local ones with you.

► Several years ago a friend and I were hiking near Poe Paddy state park. We were in a deserted stretch of Penn's Creek when we saw a mass of dark bodies swimming in the river. At first, from the way they were cavorting we thought "otters," but as they got closer we saw they were minks. There were five little ones and two adults. As we stood stock-still they reached the bank and crawled out, heading right towards us. They passed by on the trail within two feet of us and scurried along to their den area, about thirty feet further along. The adults went into the holes that were among a rocky scree area,

but the kits kept up their play outside. We slowly walked to the den area and sat on a log about ten feet from them. The kits would dive down a tunnel, but resurface somewhere else to frolic a bit. We watched them until they went to ground and returned



By Dennis Pagen

no more. We couldn't believe our luck. I have returned to that spot several times, but have not seen hide nor fur since.

► Once when I was driving north on Rte. 26 I saw a fairly large bird fly across in front of my car about six feet off the ground. I could see it had a smaller bird in its talons. I immediately recognized the larger bird as a goshawk, a denizen of our woods whose chief prey is smaller birds. I have only seen one other goshawk other than on the migration watches, so I was happy to see this rapacious fellow. But the real drama was a smaller bird pursued just behind the goshawk. This smaller bird looked to be a sparrow, but it was hard to tell. I watched them fly across the fields until the demands of traffic refocused my attention. I spent the rest of that drive pondering

the pluck of that little sparrow; it's apparent loss of a cherished mate and the vicissitudes of prey and predator.

► There is a secret swimming hole on private land near Tussey Mtn. Ski area. I knew the landowner at the time and had no privacy concerns. I would take friends there to spend a wonderful summer day surrounded by woods and a small field next to the pond. On one occasion, as we came along the trail and exited the forest, we looked over to the field and saw a mound with a large hole in it. And there in front of the hole played three baby foxes. We froze and watched for a several minutes, but they soon detected our presence and dove for cover. I was amazed at our luck, which was made clear by the fact that I returned there often and never saw them again.

► There's another swimming hole near Marengo known as "the clay pits" that we used to frequent (do you detect a theme here?). Once when walking through the woods near the pond we saw five baby skunks playing in the forest duff. We went over to investigate and saw they were near their hole. Mamma wasn't around. They came up to us and sniffed and generally had a good time while we marveled at how cute a baby varmint can be. Soon we left them to their play, because who knew when a less welcoming adult would return?

► Hyner View sits along the Susquehanna River about 20 miles north of Lock Haven. In my opinion it is the most spectacular view in PA. You can see way up along the river and across the Allegheny plateau. One fall day we were standing at the top in the park while the wind came streaming up the hill. Along came two very big birds from the north. As they got closer I realized they were very big birds. They were, in fact, a pair of great blue herons and as they neared

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# Canoe Creek State Park volunteer honored for work with nesting birds

**Terry Brady,  
DCNR Deputy Press Secretary**

IN HIS MORE THAN 11 YEARS of volunteer service to Canoe Creek State Park, Luis Moore has walked a lot of miles of trail monitoring bird nesting boxes in the park, but he delights in looking back to a meeting with the man who encouraged him to take that very first step.

It was at a local chapter meeting of the National Audubon Society that Moore first met the late manager of Canoe Creek, Terry Wentz. Sign on as a volunteer monitoring park nesting boxes, the manager told him in so many words, and you'll never regret it. Plenty of fresh air and exercise; nature's daily diet of new sights and sounds; and a chance to offer a strong helping hand to the park's winged visitors—all cited in Wentz' friendly sales pitch to a prospective volunteer.

It was a message—and a service—Wentz knew well. So well that just five months after his death in 2010 the Canoe Creek manager of 24 years was honored with the naming of the Terry Wentz Environmental Education Center. The following year Wentz received the posthumous honor of being named the recipient of the 2011 Cavity-Nesting Monitor Award for his dedication to the park's nesting box trails that had fledged thousands of Eastern bluebirds and other cavity-nesters over the years.

Wentz was instrumental in erecting over 100 nesting boxes, soliciting and working with volunteers, and accumulating nesting data during that time. As a result, the park has a high



Monitoring a trail of cavity-nesting boxes at Canoe Creek State Park has become a labor of love for Luis Moore of Altoona.

fledgling success rate and a dedicated team for monitoring, including one volunteer who said yes to the manager's invitation and never looked back. Instead, he forged ahead.

Three years after his mentor died, a year after Mr. Wentz was honored for his cavity-nester work, Moore received the 2012 Cavity-Nesting Monitor Award. To this volunteer, an affable, always-smiling resident of Altoona, the award is a crowning achievement in a weekly labor of love:

"I continue doing it because it is just so enjoyable and relaxing, to get out and see the beauty of the park on a regular basis," said the 62-year-old Moore. "Sometimes it is hot, sometimes cold and wet, but every day is different."

Monitoring a trail of cavity-nesting boxes at Canoe Creek State Park has become a labor of love for Luis Moore of Altoona. Some days bring the joys of new birding gains; others, the disappointment of losses. And always, the surprises. Squatter field mice,

bats and squirrels are to be expected, Moore said. The hefty black snake was not.

"It was a really quiet day and as I approached a nesting box that I knew held bluebird hatchlings I heard nothing," Moore recalled. "I took off the top but it was dark in the bottom and I couldn't see anything so I reached in and put my hand right on the coils of a snake ... 'Yow!'"

Somehow the snake circumvented the predator guard on the nesting box pole, entered the box and dined on the entire brood. "And then it apparently was too fat to leave through the same hole," said the volunteer, who then facilitated the intruder's escape by dropping the side of the nesting box.

The cavity-nesting trail sometimes leads to these disappointments, Moore said, but the rewards are what make the effort worthwhile: a flash of russet breast, ever-flitting from perch to ground on a body of cobalt blue; a cheery, non-stop tune piped from atop a flowering dogwood. Treating the volunteer's senses every spring is that popular harbinger of the season, the Eastern bluebird, along with the tree swallow, wren and other cavity nesting birds.

Appreciate the bluebird and you have to appreciate

the work of volunteers across the state who have guided the beloved songbird onto the rebound trail. If you enjoy





seeing them around Canoe Creek, you can thank Moore, his wife, Cindy, and other monitors overseeing 102 nesting boxes.



Moore was chosen from more than 150 volunteers statewide and honored for “long-term dedication and enthusiasm” displayed almost 12 years while volunteering to monitor and help protect and propagate Eastern bluebirds and other cavity nesters as part of the Bureau of State Parks’ monitoring program.

About 20 nesting boxes on the state park grounds near Hollidaysburg, Blair County, are supervised by Moore, who says the number of bluebirds fledged along his trail is holding steady. Swallow and wren hatchings are increasing since he took over chores of erecting and repairing nesting boxes, cleaning them, and keeping track of

the occupants.

Employed as seasonal maintenance worker in the Rothrock State Forest District, Moore has emerged as the foundation of Canoe Creek’s network of cavity-nester boxes, said Heidi Mullendore, the park’s environmental education supervisor.

“Luis is one of those ‘behind the scenes’ people who do so much more than they are asked,” said Mullendore. “Luis not only has the longest, hardest trail with the most boxes, he faithfully monitors the birds and has for many years.

“He also is the ‘go to’ guy for box repairs and advice and is someone who never loses his sense of humor and bright smile. The ‘Luis Laugh’ can be heard a distance away and he never fails to share it.”

There’s something else Moore would like to share with others:

“I wish more people would come out and visit Canoe Creek State Park,” the volunteer said. “It truly is a beautiful park that should be enjoyed and appreciated by all.”

The Bureau of State Parks’ Cavity-Nesting Trail Program, celebrating its 34th anniversary this spring, now involves 50 of the 120 state parks across the state, according to Carly Hitzfeld, Natural Resource Program Specialist with the bureau.

The cavity-nesting program has

involved over 150 volunteers, ranging in age from high school students to some in their upper 80s. They check more than 1,400 nesting boxes across the state in individual park efforts that monitor from five to more than 175 nesting boxes.

Commitment in the monitoring program is not rare, Hitzfeld notes. More than 15 of the volunteers have been checking nesting boxes; cleaning and repairing them; jotting notes; and hiking trails for over 20 or more years.

“Thanks to our dedicated volunteers and staff, state parks fledged 2,215 Eastern bluebirds and 3,193 other cavity-nesting species during 2012,” Hitzfeld said. “Despite a late spring frost and a mid-summer heat wave, most parks still experienced some success. This is evident in the slight increase in fledgling numbers compared to 2011.

“Since the program’s beginning in 1980, volunteers have helped fledge over 54,000 Eastern bluebirds and 37,000 other cavity-nesting species.”

Data gleaned from state park observations is shared with the Pennsylvania Game Commission; North American Bluebird Society; the Bluebird Society of Pa.; and the Bureau of State Parks’ Resources Management and Planning Division.

For more details on the Cavity-Nesting Trail Program, contact Hitzfeld at (717) 783-3344.

### Glimpses from p. 3

the mountain, one of them snagged a thermal. The other heron came to join it and they circled up as efficiently as any hawk. I was amazed to see this, but in retrospect, they are built as well as any soaring bird with wide, efficient wings. Why not get a free ride? After

gaining about 600 feet the great birds left the thermal to continue south. I saw them catch another column of lift about a mile away. I wished them godspeed on their pleasurable journey bouncing from bubble to bubble along some of the northeast’s most beautiful scenic passages.

► I am not into mysticism, but I do believe in the confluence of coincidences. Every day there are thousands of events—big and little—that occur, so to occasionally encounter an event that seems supernatural is normal. The

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## JVAS Field Trips

### *Wild flower hike on Brush Mountain* **SATURDAY, JUNE 8**

Deb Tencer leads this 2-hour hike on The Nature Conservancy's Brush Mountain Woodlands, looking for wildflowers and mountain laurel. Some parts of the trail are rocky. Those wishing to avoid this section can loop back and meet group back at the cars. Meet at 11 A.M. at Panera Bread in the Logan Town Centre, Altoona. Deb, naturehikergal@gmail.com.

### *Peace Chapel walk* **SUNDAY, JUNE 16**

Fellow nature lover Brenda Palmer will lead a 2-hour nature walk on rolling hills through woods and meadows of the Peace Chapel, a 14-acre environmental landscape site within the 170-acre Baker-Henry Nature Preserve, located near the Juniata College campus. Meet in the Rite Aid Pharmacy parking lot at the corner of Rt. 22 and 4th St., in Huntingdon at 10 A.M. We'll carpool to the parking area. For more information contact Brenda at chefbren@verizon.net.

### Glimpses from p. 5

supernatural thing would be if there weren't occasional stark coincidences. One happened to me about five years ago on December 21, the shortest day of the year. I went running just as the sun was setting and a full moon was rising. On a section of road heading north, I saw my shadow from the feeble sun on one side and my shadow from the moon on the other. I began to ponder the possibility of moon thermals (the mind wanders on a long run). Of course, I knew that the weak light reflected by the moon isn't enough to warm the ground, but I still had fun imagining soaring at night with owls. Then I began to wonder if indeed owls even thermal (ride warm bubbles aloft in an upward spiral). They certainly had the flying equipment to do so as much as any hawk, but night thermals are much more rare than the daytime variety. In fact, the only time night thermals

occur is when cold air moves over warmer ground.

Soon the sun had set and all I had to guide my way was a platinum moon in a clear sky. A cold front had passed earlier in the day. Forty minutes later I ran up the hill leading to my house. As I crested the top a large, dark shadow swept over my head. I stopped and stood there panting as I watched a great horned owl tack into the northwest airflow, then deftly hook a warmer current and circle upward. He thermaled like a pro in the pale moonlight.

I knew that owl was a great horned because I had been hearing him and his mate for a couple of weeks. I don't know how many others have observed owls thermaling, but I can attest to the fact that at least one of them does, and it would be supernatural indeed if no others did. \* \*

To be continued in a future issue!

## OLD FRIENDS AND NEW

Marcia Bonta

"Oh no, it's snowing," I shouted to my husband Bruce. "Will anyone show up for our field trip?"

Eighteen people from as far away as Lewiston and New Jersey did despite bone-chilling temperatures and a brisk wind. Not all of them were properly dressed for the return of winter the third Saturday in April. Although it had been billed as a wildflower and bird walk up Plummer's Hollow, the only birds we heard were a Louisiana waterthrush and blue-headed vireo.

The birds were way behind schedule, but the wildflowers had soldiered on despite the cold. Those that usually bloom and are gone before the next expected species had remained. Thus we could show off round-leaved yellow violets, hepaticas, trailing arbutus, long-spurred violets, rue anemone, and purple trillium at the same time. We also pointed out innumerable leaves of native wildflowers yet to come—yellow mandarin, false Solomon's seal, Solomon's seal, Canada mayflower, foamflower, and many more.

Shrubs also made a showing especially spicebush which was blooming and lots of wild hydrangea which wasn't. They usually bloom in June. The rhododendron overhanging the road bank had been stripped of their leaves by the deer and I had discovered to my sorrow that the hillside of new rhododendrons far up the mountainside had been similarly stripped—hundreds of shrubs from three to five feet tall that had thrived for several years were now only naked stems.



Naturally, Dave and I spoke about deer damage and the threat of invasives to our forest flowers and shrubs. And after everyone ate their lunches inside our house, most folks chose to walk back down to their cars—those who had other appointments, those who were cold, and those who had physical problems.

But Mike and Laura Jackson, Alan and Terri Swann, and Barb Myers joined Dave and me for a tour of our three acre deer enclosure, a view from the spruce grove, and a look at our mountaintop vernal pond as well as the first spring beauty.

Inside the enclosure a porcupine sat atop a locust snag and ate multiflora rose leaves from a vine growing over the snag. That may have been the same porcupine I had observed two days in a row grazing on newly-emerged field forbs.

Next I pointed out a growing patch of striped wintergreen. It had started with one plant shortly after we put up the enclosure in March 2001 and

after a couple years the plant had disappeared. I was disappointed, but I kept my eye on the area. A few years later another plant appeared and then a second one. Last year there were four and this year six. I think it will finally survive.

I also wanted to show off my latest discovery of still another colony of downy rattlesnake plantain. The first one, of 40 plants, Bruce found the first year growing on decaying wood. Dave had found another plant outside the enclosure and fenced it from the deer. It too was growing on the decaying wood from a large stump.

I had found still another plant growing on the end of a decaying log two years ago. It had been joined by a second plant. But Terri Swann bent close to look at the entire log and pointed out a miniscule downy rattlesnake plantain emerging from the log. Then we all looked closer and found altogether four new plants growing the length of the log. Can I assume that this July-blooming orchid needs decaying wood to germinate?

In the meantime, Mary Paoli was photographing the round-leaved yellow violets on her way back down the mountain. That's when she discovered and photographed a new species for our property—golden saxifrage, also known as water carpet. How had we missed this all our lives? Following her directions I went down the next day and quickly located the plant growing in a small rivulet. Luckily, I had my hand lens with me because otherwise I would not have located the tiny yellow flowers growing at the end of the creeping branches. Once I knew what it looked like, I realized we had colonies in several different places on rocks in our stream.

It may have been cold that day, but we saw old friends and new, both humans and plants. And that's the way a field trip should be. A time to learn and a time to socialize with those who appreciate the natural world.



Eastern Fence Lizard, shot at Raystown in April  
by David Hunter

# Bald Eagles build nest adjacent to Lower Trail

by Dr. Stan Kotala

Blair County’s first bald eagle nest in more than half a century was constructed last winter on Tussey Mountain near Water Street by a bald eagle pair that has been frequenting the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River along the Lower Trail.

The recovery of the bald eagle is one of the great wildlife conservation stories in the history of both Pennsylvania and the nation. The Pennsylvania Game Commission currently classifies the bald eagle as a threatened species in Pennsylvania. They were removed from the federal endangered species list by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2007, because delisting goals had been achieved. In Pennsylvania, the number of bald eagle nests has increased from a half dozen two decades ago to more than 200 in 2012.

The Lower Trail’s bald eagle pair can be seen most frequently in the vicinity of Water Street, hunting for fish in the Frankstown Branch.



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