

# The Gnatcatcher

## Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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as a benefit for members of the...

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



### President's Message

## President's Message:

-Laura Jackson

It's a cold, blustery February evening, but I'm already thinking spring and all the great activities that are penciled on my calendar for those warmer days when the birds are singing nonstop and every day brings a new wildflower in bloom.

So, why don't you get out your calendar and reserve some dates for these special events?

**March 20 – 21, 2015 is the 2015 Private Forest Landowners Conference at the Blair County Convention Center in Altoona, PA.** There are almost 100 presentations during the two-day event and each one touches on an important aspect of "The Future of Penn's Woods." The conference is for forest/woodland owners, resource professionals, and all who care about our forests. Be sure to stop by the Audubon PA booth, if you attend. Just Google, "2015 private forest land owners conference" to see all the details and to register. The actual website is:

[www.cvent.com/events/2015-private-forest-landowners-conference/event-summary-2e2dde3bec364098b93cbc99c333467c.aspx](http://www.cvent.com/events/2015-private-forest-landowners-conference/event-summary-2e2dde3bec364098b93cbc99c333467c.aspx)

**April 10 – 11, 2015 is the Golden-winged Warbler Weekend at Penn State Altoona campus.**

**Please reserve your place by completing the enclosed special flyer and mailing it in as soon as possible. The only cost will be the dinner at Marzoni's on Friday night, which is optional.**

This event is sponsored by JVAS, Audubon PA, and Penn State-Altoona. The first presentation will be Friday afternoon, April 10, and will feature talks by two Golden-winged Warbler researchers, Ruth Bennett (Cornell Univ.) at 12 noon and D.J. McNeil (Indiana Univ.) at 2 P.M. in the Slep Fireside Lounge. Lunch will be provided. A bird walk will occur later in the afternoon, followed by dinner at Marzoni's in Pinecroft.

Saturday, April 11, will feature a workshop from 10 AM to 4 PM in Room 254 in Hawthorn, providing an opportunity for participants to get involved in Golden-winged Warbler conservation. Golden-winged Warbler biologists Ruth Bennett, D.J. McNeil, and Emily Bellush will give short presentations on various aspects of Golden-winged Warbler conservation programs that will be available for workshop participants to implement. The Juniata Valley Audubon Society, via the Honduran Conservation Coalition, has direct ties to conservationists and biologists in Honduras as well as to local landowners in Pennsylvania, so the workshop will be just the beginning of an ambitious effort to help the Golden-winged Warbler at both ends of its range by strengthening partnerships between conservationists, scientists, and local communities. Forest landowners, birders, students, and anyone interested in conservation are encouraged to attend the workshop. Lunch and snacks will be provided.

**Tuesday, April 21, 2015 is our Annual Banquet and Silent Auction at Hoss's Steak and Sea House in Duncansville, PA.** See more details in the newsletter article about the Annual Banquet. We hope you will join us for an enjoyable evening.

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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## JVAS SPRING BANQUET – RESERVE NOW

Call or email Marcia Bonta to make reservations for the April 21, 2015 JVAS Spring Banquet: 814-684-3113 or [marciabonta@hotmail.com](mailto:marciabonta@hotmail.com)

Reservations are due no later than Monday, April 13, 2015.

Please call or email Laura Jackson if you plan to donate items for the silent auction: 814-652-9268 or [mljackson2@embarqmail.com](mailto:mljackson2@embarqmail.com)

The banquet will be held at Hoss's Steak and Sea House at 110 Patchway Road, Duncansville, PA. There is no cost to attend the banquet, as each person orders from the menu.

Dinner starts at 6 PM, but come at 5:30 PM for the silent auction.

Did you know that Pennsylvania provides breeding habitat for the Golden-winged Warbler, one of the most endangered songbirds in North America?

Our banquet presentation will feature Dr. Jeff Larkin and graduate student D. J. McNeil, whose research efforts may save this beautiful Neotropical warbler from extinction.

Dr. Larkin is a professor at Indiana Univ. of Pennsylvania and a member of the American Bird Conservancy. Darin J. McNeil is a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. They will present, "Monitoring the response of Golden-winged Warbler Habitat Management."

The Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) is a Neotropical migrant that breeds in young forest habitats and is experiencing steep population declines throughout the Appalachian Mountains breeding range. One cause of population declines is loss of breeding habitat. They will give an update on the number of acres of young forest created and the key factors to their success and will share their findings from an ongoing study that is evaluating Golden-winged Warbler response to habitat management. In particular, they will share findings regarding territory density, nest success, and post-fledgling survival and habitat at study areas placed into four conservation practices: brush management, prescribed fire, prescribed grazing with brush management, and timber harvest.



-Photo by D.J. McNeil

*Golden-winged Warblers are one of our most beautiful birds, but they are in serious trouble. Attend the April 21 Spring Banquet to learn how researchers are trying to bring them back from the brink of extinction.*

## Our Field Trips in March and April:

### **Saturday, March 14: Dunning Creek Wetlands Birding Hike starts at 8:30 A.M.**

Meet at the Eat 2 Live Bistro on Rt. 56 (formerly Apple Bin) 1634 Quaker Valley Rd, New Paris, PA 15554 at 8:30 A.M. We will carpool a short distance to the wetlands. The hike will last about 3 hours, with a stop in the bird blind. Wear waterproof boots, bring binoculars, listen to the forecast, and dress accordingly. Trip Leaders: Mike and Laura Jackson 814-652-9268. Optional Lunch at Eat 2 Live Bistro. Menu is posted on Eat 2 Live Facebook page.

### **Sunday, March 29: Periglacial landscapes of central PA. Driving Tour starts at 8 A. M.**

All-day driving tour led by Dr. Mark Bonta on Sunday, March 29 that begins and ends at the I-99 park-and-ride lot in Tyrone, visiting several spots in the Nittany anticline and in Bald Eagle valley. Leave at 8 A. M. and return at dusk. Total number of miles driven per vehicle will be about 150 round-trip from Tyrone; short walks at some spots. **Contact Mark in advance** ([mab86@psu.edu](mailto:mab86@psu.edu)) to receive a packet containing field trip map, photos, and descriptions of features; he will also bring a few extra packets along on the trip. Bring picnic lunch and snacks.

**Description:** During the last million years, and as recently as 12,000 years ago, central Pennsylvania experienced periglacial climates as cold as those of present-day Greenland, thanks to nearby continental glaciers. Ancient landscape features associated with pervasive cold and intense cycles of freeze and thaw as well as rapid global warming, are ubiquitous in the valleys and hill slopes of the region. We will visit a representative sample of these features and discuss parallels with what is happening in the Arctic today. In addition to widespread felsenmeer and boulder trains, we will examine solifluction lobes, thermokarst gullies, debris fans, *grèzes litées*, and other geomorphological features. During much of the trip, we will parallel the presumed waterline of proglacial Lake Lesley, viewing and discussing evidence for and against a *jökulhlaup* (glacial lake outburst flood) down the Juniata some 750,000 years ago.

### **Sunday April 19: Lower Trail Annual Trillium Hike starts at 1 P.M.**

Enjoy an easy 2-mile walk on the Lower Trail to view the annual showing of thousands of Trilliums and Dutchman's Breeches, in addition to many other early spring wildflowers. Meet at 1:00 P.M. at the Water Street entrance of the Lower Trail, along Rt. 22.

Questions? Trip Leader: Deb Tencer [naturehikergal@gmail.com](mailto:naturehikergal@gmail.com)



*-Photo by Renae Poole*

*Golden-winged Warblers nest on the ground in young forest habitat. Both parents catch spiders, caterpillars, moths and other insects to feed the nestlings. The population of Golden-winged Warblers in the Appalachian Mountains may be down 98 percent. Landowners can help these birds recover - find out how by attending the April 10-11 Golden-winged Warbler Weekend and the April 21 Banquet.*

## SAVE TREES! SAVE FUNDS!

Please help us save JVAS funds for conservation projects. Email Laura Jackson ([MLJACKSON2@EMBARQMAIL.COM](mailto:MLJACKSON2@EMBARQMAIL.COM)) to sign up for a digital copy of The Gnatcatcher. You'll get *The Gnatcatcher* sooner and the photos will be in color. We pledge to keep your e-mail address confidential and we won't share it with other organizations or companies.

Online at [JVAS.org](http://JVAS.org)  
Or visit JVAS on Facebook



## Our Evening Program for March:

Our evening programs, designed for a general audience, are free and open to the public. We meet in the Bellwood-Antis Library at 526 Main Street, Bellwood, PA.

**Directions:** Take Interstate I-99 to the Bellwood/Route 865 Exit (Exit 41). Follow Rt. 865 through the Sheetz/Martin's intersection. Proceed about 4 blocks and turn right at the "Business District" sign, just before the railroad overpass. Turn left at the dead end and travel to the stop sign. Continue straight for a short distance; the library will be on your right.

### Mar 17, 2015: Golden-winged Warblers and Chronic Wasting Disease in Deer

*TALK: Part 1: Forest management along a utility right-of-way induces use by Golden-winged Warblers*

*Part 2: Chronic wasting disease: what is it, where is it, what does it mean for Pennsylvania?*

**SPEAKER:** Justin Vreeland is the regional Wildlife Management Supervisor for the South-Central region of the PA Game Commission.

From 2006-2009, the PA Game Commission conducted a 110-acre commercial timber sale in northern Huntingdon County on State Game Lands 322 where golden-winged warblers were known to use a power-line right-of-way. The first talk will explain how this bird has responded to that timber sale. (JVAS will lead a driving tour to SGL 322 on May 23 to see these beautiful, but secretive birds.)

Chronic wasting disease is an important disease of white-tailed deer that was first encountered in Pennsylvania in 2012. CWD has been found in captive and free-ranging populations in three areas in Pennsylvania, including Blair and Bedford counties. The second talk will explain what the disease is, what it does to deer and deer populations, and how the Pennsylvania Game Commission is responding to CWD.

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### *The JVAS Board Needs Your Help!!!*

We would love to have volunteers to fill the following positions:

- Director-at-Large: We have two openings.

The JVAS Board meets at 6:30 P.M. on the first Tuesday of February, April, August, October, and December.

***All members are welcome to attend!***

### **WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.**

Please send your newsletter submissions to Laura Jackson ([MLJACKSON2@EMBARQMAIL.COM](mailto:MLJACKSON2@EMBARQMAIL.COM)) by the first of February, April, August, October, and December, in order to be printed in the subsequent issue of *The Gnatcatcher*. Please submit conservation news, field trip reports, book reviews, poetry, or a nature article that you think will interest our members.



# Like a Bird

- Submitted by Karl Striedieck

Many of us can recall a childhood experience that had a profound effect on our lives and how it influenced our hobbies, people we've met, places we've travelled, professions we've undertaken, even locations where we chose to live. For me, living the good life atop Bald Eagle Ridge near State College, it was most of the above.

The event that lit the way to a life-long appreciation of raptors was a 1952 high school trip to Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, where the sight of hawks by the dozens floating by on fixed wings and Maurice Braun's "Hawks Aloft" stayed with me permanently. Too young to drive, my mother dropped me off at various watching sites such as Tussey Tower (formerly above the present PSU Ag Progress location) or Skytop (where I-99 crosses Bald Eagle Ridge) with my binoculars and notebook. I still have that notebook noting a golden eagle passing close by.

While other forms of aviation such as airline, fighter and light plane flying took front stage for a means of support, the dream of soaring with eagles was always with me, and in 1964 a couple of us organized the Nittany Soaring Club and began flying like the birds. A couple years later, as a way to increase the soaring experience, we moved to a beautiful location on top of Bald Eagle Ridge that featured enough space for a runway and hangar. The glider of choice was of modest soaring potential, but plenty good enough for joining up with my feathered heroes, and my log book notes numerous encounters with eagles of both types, but far fewer bald eagles until the recent recovery ten or so years ago.

Eagles, being at the top of the food chain and fearing naught, are rather unimpressed by a close approach of a glider, which permits a wonderful chance to "hold hands" with the king/queen of the skies. They cruise along at a speed close to the minimum possible for a glider, but by adroit stirring of the controls it is possible to join in a military-sort of echelon formation and look each other in the eye, only 30 feet away. What a high for the former earthbound raptor worshipper!

Another path to raptor appreciation is through the sport of falconry, which we support via three trapping blinds. Falconers from far and wide come here to obtain a bird for training, or just to enjoy the challenge and excitement of luring in a bird. Mostly, the surprised bird is a red tail, but we've taken a few peregrines, all the accipiters, and a couple of Merlins. Of course, Peregrine Falcons must be released, but it's a thrill to hold one for a photo op. And Trish Miller started her Golden Eagle migration research with a trapping station here.

Thanks to the teacher who organized that early experience, my life has been richly rewarded by the introduction to the world of raptors and their soaring flight.



Nate holds a Peregrine Falcon before releasing it back to the wild.

Nate Gray is the son of my former falconry apprentice Fran Gray. Nate took up the sport about three years ago and has made something of a name for himself as a speaker on the subject of falconry. Last spring he went all the way to Ridgeway to give a talk to schools. I attended one of his talks last year, that time to a collection of 2nd and 3rd graders. He was excellent.

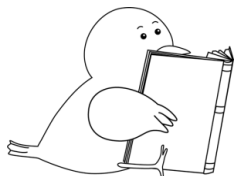
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## PROGRAM MEETINGS

Our monthly program meetings are free and open to everyone. Our usual location is the [Bellwood-Antis Public Library](#) and refreshments are provided. The programs last about an hour, following a brief sharing of conservation news, wildlife sightings and club business. Audience members with time constraints are able to slip out at any time, and late-comers are welcome as well.

# Off the Shelf

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We hope "Off The Shelf" will appear in every issue of *The Gnatcatcher*, but that will only happen if you send in your reviews of natural history books. We also welcome feedback. Email Laura Jackson to contribute a book review, or if you have a comment about a book that was reviewed. Please note that contributions for the next newsletter should be sent to Laura by **April 1, 2015**. Good reading!

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## **The Bees** by Laline Paull

Reviewed by Marcia Bonta

Before the bears came, we kept bees. That may be one reason why I enjoyed *The Bees* by Laline Paull. Still, I was suspicious initially of a novel with a sanitation worker bee named Flora 717 as the main character. Could I really care about her? But even though she is a member of the lowest caste in her orchard hive, she has the curiosity, courage and strength to rise above her station and ultimately save her hive.

Paull uses the latest in bee research as she spins her tale, for instance, her portrayal of male drones as lazy, bawdy, greedy, and eager to fly to a "distant Congregation...And one was chosen. Now all the rest gorge to restore their spirits," says supervising bee, Sister Cowslip. The chosen one to inseminate the Queen during her mating flight dies, although the rejected drones don't seem to realize this basic scientific fact.

Flora 717 moves up from sanitation to nursery to foraging and even has an audience with the Queen bee despite the jealousy of the high-ranking priestesses attending to her majesty. Foraging is especially difficult due to bad weather and pesticides sprayed on large farms growing major crops, forcing the remaining bees, once many fellow foragers start dying from the pesticides, to fly further to backyard gardens in a nearby town to collect pollen and honey. Flora 717, who is stronger than other foragers, flies for a longer time and a greater distance to bring in desperately needed stores.

Then comes "The Visitation...The honey and the smoke [as] an old man in a red dressing gown and bare feet...croons to the bees [and] sends them...into a smoke-dazed gyre...the air filled with the rich, golden fragrance of their stolen wealth..." That robbery (as the bees see it) and an especially hard winter, seem to spell

doom for the hive, but Flora 717 rises to the challenge in what the great Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood calls "[A] gripping Cinderella/Arthurian tale with lush Keatsian adjectives."

How Flora 717 saves her bee sisters I'll leave to readers to discover for themselves. And yes, I did grow fond of Flora 717 and cared about her fate.

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## **Trout Boomer** by Bill Anderson

Reviewed by Charlie Hoyer

Bill Anderson, president of the Little Juniata River Association (LJRA), has recently published *Trout Boomer*, a book of tales from his boyhood, his passion for fly-fishing for trout, and his love affair with the Little Juniata River. Bill also shares his intimate knowledge of the history, the watershed, and the fly hatches of the "j" (Little Juniata).

Winner of several conservation awards, including the 2011 JVAS Conservation Award, Bill's undying efforts in monitoring, preserving, and improving the "j" and its tributaries are well-known by fishing and boating enthusiasts.

Bill knows the "j" like no one else. He's waded, fished, and fallen into every part of it for nearly four decades! While *Trout Boomer* is a "must have" for any fly-fisherman who fishes, or plans to fish, the "j," it's much more than a "where to, how to" fishing book. Bill's book can be enjoyed by anyone with an interest in the river. You can purchase an autographed copy of *Trout Boomer* online at [www.troutboomer.com](http://www.troutboomer.com).

## The JVAS Christmas Bird Count was held on December 20, 2014

Steve Bonta, our Christmas Bird Count Coordinator, learned that he would receive a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Grant to Sri Lanka just weeks before the Christmas Bird Count. Fortunately for us, Steve was able to take part in the Christmas Bird Count before he left to document the Sri Lanka Gypsy Telugu, a dialect of the Telugu language. Steve was one of 20 volunteers – most of whom were JVAS members. Two volunteers were feeder watchers, but most of the group covered the area by car, on foot, and even on bicycle, putting in a total of 381 miles.

We covered the Count Circle, centered in Culp, on a cold winter day that was partly sunny – and that helped the bird activity pick up as the day went on. The day was in vast contrast to last year's cold and foggy weather. We observed a surprisingly diverse number of waterfowl, since there was open water at Canoe Lake, as well as at the rivers. 137 Canada Geese, 1 American Black Duck, 98 Mallards, 1 Green-winged Teal, 4 Buffleheads, 2 Common Goldeneyes, 8 Hooded Mergansers, 3 Ruddy Ducks, and 24 American Coots were counted. A disturbing sight was 12 – 15 dead American coots floating in Canoe Lake. They were reported to the park personnel and to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, but authorities could not locate them.



Photo by Mike Jackson

Observers found 38 Eastern Bluebirds during the CBC.

The open farm fields in Sinking Valley contributed large numbers of European Starlings (962), the most abundant species counted, as well as 239 Rock Pigeons, 11 Ring-necked Pheasants, and 228 House Sparrows. Observers saw 3 adult Bald Eagles and 1 immature Bald Eagle, as well as 4 Northern Harriers, 2 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 2 Cooper's Hawks, 38 Red-tailed Hawks, and 13 American Kestrels. We are waiting for verification on the single Merlin that was spotted by one observer.

Fortunately, the forested mountains yielded 2 Ruffed Grouse, 5 Wild Turkeys, 3 Eastern Screech Owls, 4 Great-horned Owls, 3 Barred Owls, 84 Black-capped Chickadees, 15 Pileated Woodpeckers, 70 White-breasted Nuthatch, and 2 Brown Creepers – always a challenge to find since they are so small and blend in so well.

The surprise for the day was the Eastern Phoebe – not a new species for the count, but a species rarely seen in late December.

A total of 66 species were reported, equaling 3,866 individuals. It was a good birding day, which ended with a celebration at Marzoni's. A good time was had by all!

## Think Spring!!!

Shaver's Creek Native Plant Festival is on Saturday, May 2, 2015. It's free and a great opportunity to buy native plants; talk to plant experts, enjoy a guided hike and participate in other special events. There are yummy local foods, too!

JVAS would like to have an Information Table at the event, so please contact Laura Jackson if you are willing to help staff the table. You can sign up to help for just an hour or so – or stay all day. The Festival is from 10 AM to 3 PM.

Go to [www.shaverscreek.org](http://www.shaverscreek.org) for more information.



Photo by Mike Jackson

Eastern red columbine are native flowers that attract hummingbirds.

## Wanted to Scan: Old Gnatcatchers from 1969 through 1994!

It's time to clean out the attic and dust off your old Gnatcatchers! JVAS Historian, Mike Jackson, is organizing the newsletters that have been "handed down" from past generations of JVAS historians and members.

He's decided to scan past Gnatcatchers, so they can be made available on the JVAS.org website as digital copies for everyone to enjoy and reminisce about the "good old times".

If you have any copies of "The Gnatcatcher" from 1967 - 1994 that you would be willing to donate or allow Mike to scan, please notify him at: [mljackson2@embargo.com](mailto:mljackson2@embargo.com), call him at 814-652-9268, or bring the copies to a JVAS meeting. Any loaned newsletters will be returned to you after the scanning is completed.



-Photo by Renae Poole

*This Golden-winged Warbler Fledgling is part of a remnant Appalachian population that has seen steep declines, but researchers and land owners are making a difference. Learn what you can do to help Golden-winged Warblers by attending the April 10-11 Golden-winged Warbler Weekend and the April 21 Banquet.*

**JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON**

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*Return Service Requested*