

The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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as a benefit for members of the...

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



www.JVAS.org

*President's
Message*

President's Message:

-Laura Jackson

Results from the 2017 Christmas Bird Count

This was the 49th year that Juniata Valley Audubon Society (JVAS), under the direction of National Audubon Society sponsored a Christmas Bird Count, centered on Culp, in Blair County. We hope to have even more birders participate in 2018 - the 50th Anniversary of JVAS and the Culp Christmas Bird Count. We usually do the count on a Saturday before Christmas. If you'd like to participate, please contact me at jacksonlaura73@gmail.com or call 814-652-9268. I will add your name to a call list and I'll contact you in November, 2018 to see if you are able to participate.

Volunteers from the early days would have been surprised to see that, in addition to binoculars, another valuable tool in use this year was the smart phone. Counters kept track of their movements on their phones and could also see the boundary of the count circle, thanks to a Google Map designed by JVAS Vice-President Mark Bonta and JVAS intern Matt Pettinato, a junior at Penn State Altoona. Counters were also able to communicate using WhatsApp, which allowed them to share sighting information with each other. Another App, eBird.org, allowed birders to determine exact distances traveled and enabled them to input sightings in a database used by scientists to understand long term trends in bird populations. For those without smart phones, pen and paper had to suffice.

Susan Braun and Debra Grim (truly early birds) began the count at 4:45 am, listening for owls. A total of 5 Eastern Screech Owls and 3 Great-horned Owls were heard by our counters.

The unfortunate death of hundreds of ash trees has benefitted a variety of woodpeckers. We counted 7 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, 36 Red-bellied Woodpeckers, 40 Downy Woodpeckers, 13 Hairy, and 12 Pileated. Surprisingly, only 4 Northern Flickers were found. The woodpecker, though, that we all keep looking for, but can't find, is the elusive Red-headed Woodpecker. Birders label birds that are always missed as "Nemesis Birds." Such is the case with the Red-headed Woodpecker. Seen in Sinking Valley around Fort Roberdeau in the summer, this uncommon woodpecker has never been seen on the Christmas Bird Count in Blair County. We hope Sinking Valley residents will contact us if they see one, no matter what the season. Please call me if you see one in Sinking Valley.

Several groups of birders spent a lot of time on foot, which is really the best way to document birds. John Carter's team of 4 spent much of the time walking. They estimate that they saw and heard about 80% more birds by walking a section of road, as compared to slowly driving that same section. Mark Nale explained, "For us, driving is a means to get to another spot where we can walk and bird. All of the birds that we saw while driving were few and far between. As a side benefit, we get that healthy exercise, too."

As John Carter pointed out, "By walking we were able to pick up species that wouldn't be as easy to get by car - Winter Wren, sparrows, Golden-crowned Kinglet, several waterfowl - Green winged Teal, American Black Ducks, Wood Duck."

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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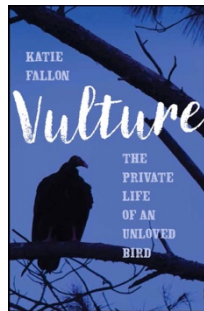
- ◆ Warren Baker
- ◆ Marcia Bonta
- ◆ Kristin Joivell

Why do people give up a busy Saturday before Christmas to bird? Mark Nale said, "A day of birding is filled with many special moments. We tallied a new species at almost every stop. I enjoyed showing the others (on my team) places that they have never been before, such as the big spring feeding the Sabbath Rest Wetlands."

Feeder watchers have a much easier time, spending most of the time indoors watching the bird feeders. One feeder watcher, Eric Skrivseth, decided to observe the whole day, "To see what sort of results I would get. Our experience with the feeder the last couple of years has been that there are some birds that are there multiple times each day and others that seem to make cameo appearances and we only see them once or twice that day or possibly that week, month or year. The creek that runs through Fort Roberdeau runs behind our house, and one behavior I saw during the bird count that surprised me is birds taking baths in very cold weather. On the day of the bird count it was crows. After the bird count, we saw about 10 robins taking baths in much colder weather. What would prompt a bird to decide that getting soaking wet in 20°F weather is a good idea?" If only a bird could talk...

What were the totals? Counters found 61 different species for a total count of 4,338 individual birds. Definitely better than last year!

Many thanks to the 31 participants: 12 feeder watchers and 19 field observers. Many of the counters gathered at The Dream for a tally dinner and to swap experiences when it got too dark to count birds. No doubt we are anticipating next year's count. Won't you join us?



Annual Spring Banquet
Tuesday, April 17, 2018
Speaker Katie Fallon, nature writer
Silent Auction 5:30 PM
Dinner 6 PM
Hoss's Steak & Sea House
110 Patch Way Rd. Duncansville, PA 16635.

Contact Catie Farr no later than 4/10/17 to reserve your seat.
Call Catie at 570-651-3839 or email [catiekg5059@gmail](mailto:catiekg5059@gmail.com)

Katie Fallon, author of *Cerulean Blues* (2011) and *Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird*, will discuss the life and times of the noble Turkey Vulture, including its feeding, nesting, and roosting habits, migratory behaviors, and common misconceptions. Vultures are often overlooked, underappreciated, and unloved, despite the vital role they play in maintaining healthy ecosystems. Worldwide, vultures are more likely to be threatened or endangered than any other group of raptor.



Juniata Valley Audubon Society Field Trips Winter - Spring 2018

Check our Facebook page for updates. If you are not on Facebook, join the JVAS Listserv. Find Directions at www.JVAS.org.

Contact field trip chair Susan Braun if you have questions:

braun3112@gmail.com (814)574-0795

Saturday, March 24: Birds of Huntingdon County 8am - 1pm

Birding trip in Huntingdon County for waterfowl and early migrants. This will be a driving birding trip. We will make several stops along the Juniata River and Lake Raystown as well as Old Crow Wetland. Bring something to eat and drink. Meet at Detwiler Memorial Field to carpool: 400 Standing Stone

Rd. Huntingdon, PA. <https://goo.gl/maps/ybUK5GZtetT2>

Trip Leader: Susan Braun braun3112@gmail.com (814)574-0795



Saturday, March 31: Bedford Co. Whitetail Wetlands Bird Walk 8:30am - 12 noon

Meet at the Eat 2 Live Bistro on Rt. 56 (which is now closed) at 1634 Quaker Valley Rd, New Paris, PA 15554 at 8:30 am. We will carpool a short distance to the wetlands. The hike will last about 3 hours. Wear waterproof boots, bring binoculars, listen to the forecast, and dress accordingly. Optional Lunch at Slick's Ivy Stone (8785 William Penn Rd., Osterburg). Call to confirm this trip, as we often must cancel due to icy conditions.

Trip Leaders: Mike and Laura Jackson 814-652-9268.

Sunday, April 8: An Evening at Scotia 4pm - 9pm



Birding trip to Scotia — State Game Lands 176. This trip will introduce JVAS members to some of the great places to bird in Scotia Game Lands. We'll take a break to have a picnic supper (bring your own) and then finish the evening looking and listening for woodcock.

With some luck we might even hear an owl.

Meet at Circleville Park, 3225 Circleville Road, Port Matilda, Centre County.

<https://goo.gl/maps/AjhfiRgNQ7q>

Trip Leader: Susan Braun braun3112@gmail.com (814)574-0795

Saturday, April 14: Shavers Creek Cabin Walk 1pm - 5pm

Jennifer Baldwin will lead a field trip on the trails near her cabin in northern Huntingdon County. We'll walk part of the Ironstone trail and finish at Jennifer's cabin for a potluck meal. Bring some goodies to share.

Meet at the parking area at intersection of Route 26 and Charter Oak Road. <https://goo.gl/maps/qi78stcsvLH2>

Trip Leader: Jennifer Baldwin

Contact: Susan Braun braun3112@gmail.com (814)574-0795

Sunday, April 15: Lower Trail Wildflower & Bird Walk 10am to 2pm

Joint trip with PA Native Plant Society (PNPS).

A walk on the flat Lower Trail along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River. It should be easy to see migrating warblers and other birds, and the slopes will be covered with red trillium and other spring ephemeral wildflowers. Bring lunch and water. Meet at Water Street Flea Market, Rt 22 & Rt 453, Alexandria, Huntingdon County.

<https://goo.gl/maps/h2ZcWa7LeDB2> Trip Leader: Debra Grim dsgrim02@gmail.com (814) 644-5285



Saturday, April 21: Woodward Cave Wildflower Walk 10am to 12pm Joint trip with PNPS.

The slopes above the cave entrance are adorned with a riot of spring ephemeral wildflowers. Meet at Woodward Cave, 148 Woodward Cave Dr., Woodward, PA 16882, Centre County. <https://goo.gl/maps/tHbHz6uoN5s>

Trip Leader: Debra Grim dsgrim02@gmail.com (814) 644-5285



We're Sorry.....The Free Family Birding Workshops originally scheduled for March 11, April 15, and May 6 are postponed until 2019 - we hope to get a grant to help fund some of the activities. More details next year!

Juniata Valley Audubon Society 3rd Tuesday Evening Program

Check our Facebook page for updates. If you are not on Facebook, join the JVAS Listserv. Directions to join the Listserv are found at www.JVAS.org.

Our evening programs are designed for a general audience; all programs are free and open to the public. **A free dinner starts at 6:30 PM, and the meeting starts at 7 PM.** 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.

Tuesday, March 20, 2018 Evening Program: Two projects supported by JVAS Funding "Wetland Conservation at the Northern Blair County Rec Center" by Angela Spagnoli and "What Can We Learn from Monitoring PA State Park Nest Boxes?" by Dr. Laura Palmer

Angie Spagnoli will discuss her wetland restoration project, that JVAS supported with Earth Week Birding Classic funds. She will talk about the progress of the project, who has assisted, and how she has been spending JVAS's grant. She will also discuss her plans for the Northern Blair County Rec Center's wetland.



Dr. Palmer will discuss her involvement with the Cavity-Nesting Trail Program run by the Pennsylvania State Parks. In addition to being a volunteer trail monitor, Dr. Palmer has begun to analyze approximately a decade's worth of data collected by state park volunteers. She will also talk about a recent pilot study aimed at measuring nest box temperatures during the Eastern Bluebird breeding season. This project was also supported by funding from the 1st Annual JVAS Earth Day Birding Classic.

A Blast from the Past: March/April 2018

by Mike Jackson, Historian

In the Jan/Feb Gnatcatcher, I sent out a plea for members to search their files for copies of any newsletters that we didn't have in our archives. I'm happy to report that Stan and Alice Kotala did just that! Not only did they dust off some old Gnatcatchers, but they discovered the **Holy Grail...Volume 1, Number 1**, printed in April 1969!

They unearthed 43 other Gnatcatchers, too. We now have a complete collection of newsletters from our early beginning in 1969 through 1974. We still need Gnatcatchers from 1977, most of 1978 and 1979, and all of 1980, 1981, 1982, and 1983. Please do some spring house cleaning and look for more Gnatcatchers. Many, many thanks to Stan and Alice for their great record keeping and donation of the newsletters to JVAS. Those Gnatcatchers will be scanned and included on the JVAS website and the original copies will be filed in a metal filing cabinet.

I'll end this note with a whimsical opening paragraph from our very first newsletter: April 1969, Vol. 1, No. 1

Birth of an Idea

"After several years of cerebral incubation in the cranium of John Orr a group is finally coalescing out of the primeval societal ooze into a functioning whole. Still unaware of what integral part we will play in the whole organism we are committed to a cause greater than ourselves, and no man should be without a cause greater than himself. Let us make sure no slight antibodies create a rejection of this new transplant." Very profound, indeed!

Special Events

Sunday, April 15 - Sunday, April 22, 2018 Earth Week Birding Classic



The 3rd annual Earth Week Birding Classic at Penn State Altoona will start at **12 noon on Sunday, April 15** and end at **12 noon on Sunday, April 22, 2018**. Teams will choose one 24-hour “day” to complete their count and must register their count time 24 hours in advance. Registration is free.

The goal is for teams in seven different categories to count as many species of birds as possible in the 24-hour-period during the week prior to Earth Day, April 22. This non-profit event is co-sponsored by the Environmental Studies program at Penn State Altoona and Juniata Valley Audubon Society (JVAS). **Pledges that team members garner will support bird conservation and education.** Teams of 3 or more (2 or more for Senior citizens and the Phoebes - a new family team category) will count birds in Blair and surrounding counties (Bedford, Huntingdon, Centre, Clearfield, Cambria), and prizes will be awarded during the closing ceremony at the Penn State Altoona campus immediately following the event. To register and for more information, please contact Catherine Farr at catiegk5059@gmail.com. More details will be posted at www.JVAS.org

Lower Trail Tree Planting - Your Help is Needed!

by Greg Williams



Pennsylvania Interfaith Power and Light (PA IPL) is leading a collection of people of multi and no faith who feel climate change is a moral issue by addressing the issue in a variety of ways, including habitat restoration. We have removed much of the privet, ailanthus, multiflora rose, bush honeysuckle and Japanese Knotweed in several areas of the Lower Trail. Central PA Rails to Trails and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation are purchasing over 400 bare root native trees and shrubs - over 10 different species - to plant in those same areas.

That's a lot of planting and we would love your help. We hope to start planting with the first batch of trees coming as early as March 19 and the last batch as late as May 15. The biggest push will be the week of April 20 - 29 around Earth Day when the trees from Chesapeake Bay foundation are due to arrive. Greg Williams, a JVAS new member and Board Member of PA IPL, will lead the charge. He'd be glad to coordinate one or several JVAS planting events- maybe 3 hours long- to match your schedule. He'd be glad to hear from anyone interested in knowing when he's planting - his cell is 215-242-0854 and his email is wacmbook@aol.com. He'd be delighted to get your email and add it to his list of volunteers who will get regular updates of planting times

Main Line Canal Greenway Meetings

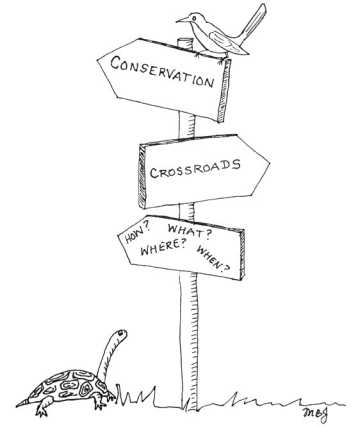
by Stan Kotala



The Allegheny Ridge Corporation, in coordination with the Huntingdon and Mifflin County Planning Commissions, is working with Campbell Thomas & Co. and Laird LA to prepare a Trail Feasibility Study for the Main Line Canal Greenway. An informal Trail Stakeholder Planning Workshop for the Main Line Canal Greenway was held on Tuesday, December 5th, 2017 in Huntingdon.

The project team presented a general overview of the study corridor between Alexandria, Huntingdon and Lewistown. The overview was followed by a stakeholder work session to gather input and ideas before commencing any design work. Several dozen participants, including JVAS members Drs. Stan and Alice Kotala, imparted their knowledge of the area and trail network, providing feedback to the design team regarding local resources. The consultant team will now put together more data about possible routes through the county for non-motorized traffic and anticipates having a public meeting sometime in the new year.

CONSERVATION CROSSROADS is a section of *The Gnatcatcher* that features environmental issues across a spectrum of local, national, and global concerns. Contact JVAS President Laura Jackson, if you know of an issue that deserves our attention and subsequent action. More information on these concerns is found at www.JVAS.org Click on the Conservation tab.



Updates:

1. Sunoco's Mariner East 2 Pipeline across Pennsylvania
2. Proposed Hawn's Bridge Peninsula Development in Lake Raystown
3. Industrial Wind Projects
4. Pumped Hydro Storage Projects

1. Sunoco's Mariner East Pipeline across Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania judges continue to recognize Sunoco as a public utility, granting them powers of eminent domain, so they continue their pipeline work across private lands and in townships that are helpless to stop them. On February 8, it was announced that DEP fined Sunoco \$12.6 million due to pollution and permit violations, but then DEP lifted the construction suspension. Sunoco has completed 93% of the main pipeline.

2. Proposed Hawn's Bridge Peninsula Development in Lake Raystown, Huntingdon County

JVAS supports the new group, "The Coalition to Protect Hawn's Peninsula." We urge JVAS members to attend the next meeting, which will be held on **Saturday, March 10 at 2:00 pm** at the Huntingdon Library (330 Penn St, Huntingdon, PA 16652) to organize objections to the proposed project on the peninsula. The US Army Corps of Engineers will be holding fact-finding meetings this coming spring. Check out the Coalition's FB page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/295642750929912/>

We can all do something right now: www.nab.usace.army.mil/Raystown-Master-Plan-Revision/ Use the form to express your concerns over any development on the peninsula. The Corps wants your comments.

3. Industrial Wind Projects

Hooray! The Petition to support the Pennsylvania Game Commission's decision to keep wind turbines out of State Game Lands #300 was a success! The Wind Company withdrew their plans to build a wind turbine project on SGL #300. JVAS thanks the 1,700+ who signed the petition.

4. Pumped Hydro Storage Projects

- A. What are these?** See the article in the Sept./October issue of *The Gnatcatcher* for background information.
- B.** The Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee held an Environmental Issues Forum on Monday, January 22 at noon in Harrisburg. In addition to politicians, aides, and industry reps, JVAS members Mike and Laura Jackson attended, along with a member of the Bedford Co. Planning Commission. Adam Rousselle, developer, gave a very cursory 15 min. overview of his company's plans to build 21 pumped hydro storage projects in Pennsylvania. He has obtained preliminary permits for feasibility studies and has to meet deadlines imposed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. We expressed our concerns regarding impacts to wildlife, watersheds, and forests on the Allegheny Front where 7 proposed projects are sited. Rousselle could not answer any technical questions, since he is not an engineer.
- C.** Since the January 22 meeting, **Shaffer Mountain (Bedford County), and Lookout Mountain (Somerset County) have been withdrawn, as well as a few others in eastern Pa. and in Maryland. This is great news!**
- D.** Both projects in Blair County are moving forward. The next update will be due in the spring, 2018.

Arsonist Raptors in Northern Australia
by John Carter

A group of central Pennsylvania birders will be part of a unique bird expedition to Northern Australia this May, supported in part by a generous donation for the Juniata Valley Audubon Society. We are a team of passionate birdwatchers--Brian Schmoke, Sean Herrmann, and John Carter. We each jumped at the opportunity to assist in documentation of fire-spreading raptors in Australia, along with team leaders – Australian ethno-ornithologist Robert Gosford, Penn State geographer Dr. Mark Bonta, and Erana Loveless, a fire ecologist from the University of Arizona.



Black Kites at bushfire in Queensland

We will be traveling to the Northern Territory for three weeks to work with an interdisciplinary team of fire rangers and scientists. Australian raptors know that bushfires yield a bounty of prey items fleeing the flames, and they fly great distances to take advantage of this resource. Among the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory and many of the region's fire rangers, it is known that some species of raptors will themselves set fires. The birds have been observed picking up burning material from a campfire or bushfire and dropping it into non-burning vegetation.

Our team's goal is to collect photo and video evidence of raptor behavior around controlled burns, in hopes of documenting the birds spreading fire. We will also develop several methodologies for data collection, such as assessing fire dynamics, the bird species observed around fires, what the raptors are eating, and more.

We will be video-streaming some of our field activities on Facebook to give people an idea of what it is like to get close to Black Kites, Whistling Kites, and Brown Falcons as they hunt for prey at controlled burns. We are being supplied with an array of audiovisual recording equipment and a drone to help capture these events. Nathan Ferguson, the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service commanding officer at Tennant Creek, and the Jawoyn Rangers, an Aboriginal land management corporation in Katherine, have invited us to try to obtain documentation of these behaviors. In savannas near both locations, we will test various methods for documenting raptor activity at active controlled burns set by local land managers to aid this research.

This project aligns with the Juniata Valley Audubon Society's mission and goals as our efforts will focus on expanding knowledge about these raptors and the effect of their behaviors on their natural ecosystem. JVAS will be credited in any press and academic publications forthcoming from this expedition, as we received a generous grant from JVAS. Our team will provide a program next year for the JVAS community about our research. We are grateful for the financial support that has been extended to us.

Feel free to follow our adventure on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/arsonistraptors/>.
Donations are needed: www.gofundme.com/arsonistraptors

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON
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**Support “our birds” on their wintering grounds by purchasing
organic shade coffee from Honduras.**

Cultivated by a small group of farmers in Maracala, Honduras, Lenca coffee is one of the best Arabica coffees in the world. Emilio Garcia and his family have been cultivating coffee since 1915. Now they partner with Sustainable Harvest Specialty Coffee Importers in Portland, Oregon so they can direct market their top quality, organic shade coffee in the U.S. JVAS is partnering with Emilio Garcia to help direct market his family’s coffee. Freshly brewed Lenca coffee will be available free of charge at our JVAS monthly meetings; it’s low caffeine and contains undertones of chocolate and cardamom.

You can purchase bags of green coffee or medium roast coffee. Green coffee is \$6.00 per 1-pound bag. A 1-pound bag of medium roast ground, or whole bean, is \$12. A 2-pound bag of medium roast ground, or whole bean, is \$22. Coffee will be served at monthly meetings and will be available for purchase.

You can also order directly from <https://lencafarms.com> - check out their new website!

New Logo...Same Great Taste....



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