

The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

Vol. L, No. 5 — November-December 2018

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as a benefit for members of the...

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



President's

Message

Our birding year is quickly coming to an end, but there is still the very important Christmas Bird Count just around the corner on December 15th, and a couple of other great field trips for birding in November. Check out our website for more information on the field trips and later in this newsletter for information on the Christmas Bird Count and the field trips.

Last year was the first year that Ethan and I participated in the count. We were in charge of birding the southwest side of the Altoona sector, so we were birding from about Kettle Street to Riggles Gap and from Highway 99 to the Riggles Gap Sportsman Road. For those of you that don't know Altoona very well, it is mostly the Juniata section of Altoona with a lot of back roads included.

When Ethan and I first saw where we would be birding we thought one, we would be able to do a lot of birding from the car, which is good because we were taking our one and half month old son with us, and two, we did not expect to see very many birds except Pigeons, Blackbirds and some Hawks. We were, however, very wrong. Ethan and I scoped out our birding area a week before the count. We noticed a long stretch of woods next to the train tracks with lots of bird activity, 8 ponds and wetland areas for potential waterfowl, and 10 or more great pull off areas next to private properties where we could bird.

When the Christmas Bird Count finally arrived, we were stoked. We knew our route and we had our plan laid out. We started around 5:45am with our slightly fussy baby in tow. It was a pretty cold day in the low thirties and it was pretty windy. We birded until 4:30 pm with short breaks for late breakfast and lunch. We did not see as many waterfowl as we would have liked, but we did see some. We saw, of course tons of Pigeons, Blackbirds and hawks, but we also saw tons of other birds on our list, too, and we were the only team to see a Pine Siskin. We found that little one on one of the pull offs to a private property on Riggles Gap Road.

After the birding was over, we met the other Christmas Bird Counters for dinner to go over our lists and talk about the day. Ethan and I and our little one had a really great time and we are excited to participate this year again in the same section. This year we will be able to walk more as our little one will be more than a year old and have an easier time bundling up in the cold weather. I encourage you to participate in the Christmas Bird Count this year in either the active birding sections or the feeder watching. You might surprise yourself with what you will find.

Cheers,
Catie Farr

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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CALLING ALL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTERS!



The JVAS Blair County

Christmas Bird Count (CBC),

centered at Culp, will be held on **Saturday, December 15, 2018** with a Tally Dinner to be held at **Schraff's Restaurant** starting at **5 pm**. The meal will be family style and will include baked chicken, roast beef, mashed potatoes, green beans, mixed veggies, salad, dinner roll, and dessert: all for just \$16.55, which includes tax and tip.

All are invited to attend – even if you aren't a counter. Schraff's is located at **421 Grandview Rd., Altoona, PA 16601**. Directions: Take Juniata Gap Road toward Penn State Altoona campus, but turn Right onto East Wopsononock Ave. before reaching the campus. Continue straight through Ivyside and Broadway intersections, where it becomes Grandview Road. Drive past Gwin Road on the Left, then turn Left at the Schraff's sign into Pennview Suites. Schraff's is at the far back right corner of the complex. Call Catie Farr if you need help with directions: 570-651-3839.

Send your check for \$16.55 payable to Laura Jackson no later than **Monday, Dec. 3**. Mail payment to Laura Jackson 8621 Black Valley Road, Everett, PA 15537.

We hope you will be a counter this year. Participation is free, but you must count within the established circle, which is located within 7.5 miles of Culp. If you live inside the circle, you could count birds at your feeder and on your property.

Counters will be assigned a section of the circle, so counts don't overlap. Register by calling or emailing Laura Jackson: 814-652-9268 or jacksonlaura73@gmail.com. You will receive a map, a species checklist, and pointers on any hotspots that might be in your part of the circle. Please try to contact Laura by December 10.

There are 3 other Christmas Bird Counts in our area that need participants:

Huntingdon Co. CBC is centered at Donation, Pa.

Contact compiler Deb Grove: 814-643-3295 or dsg4@psu.edu

Bedford Co. CBC is centered at Manns Choice, Pa. Contact compilers Mike & Laura Jackson: 814-652-9268 or jacksonlaura73@gmail.com

Raystown CBC: Contact compiler Greg Grove: gwg2@psu

Juniata Valley Audubon Society 3rd Tuesday Evening Programs

Check our Facebook page for updates.

Our evening programs are designed for a general audience; all programs are free and open to the public. **A free dinner, including shade organic coffee, starts at 6:00 PM, and the meeting starts at 6:45 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, Nov. 20, 2018

Laura Jackson: *Winter Bird Identification Workshop*

This interactive program is geared toward beginning and advanced birders of all ages, as well as bird lovers and bird feeder watchers. If you enjoy watching birds, then this program will help you learn the skills needed to identify many of the birds in your backyard. There will also be information shared on the annual Christmas Bird Count, which will be held on Saturday, Dec. 15. A handout on Winter Bird ID Tips will be available to all participants. Bird feeders and bird seed will be given away as door prizes.

Tuesday, Dec. 18, 2018

Night at the Movies: *Cathedral - The Fight to Save the Ancient Hemlocks of Cook Forest*

The 8,500-acre Cook Forest State Park's "Forest Cathedral" of towering white pines and hemlocks is a National Natural Landmark, but the ancient hemlocks are under threat from the hemlock wooly adelgid (HWA) - a deadly insect from Asia. This 22-min. film captures not only the scenic beauty of the forest, its wild inhabitants, and natural history, but also the process of saving the forest from the HWA and the important work being done by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry personnel.

We'll collect donations at the door - all proceeds go to Cook Forest State Park or the Cook Forest Friends for HWA treatment and education. Let's send a Christmas present to the hemlocks in Cook Forest.

In Memoriam

We lost one of our longtime members recently. Sadly, Charlie Hoyer passed away on September 13, 2018. Charlie was a member of National Audubon since 1968 and an active advocate for our chapter, Juniata Valley Audubon Society, for many years. He served as the newspaper editor for ten years, as well as chapter president and membership chair. He also served as a board member for Pennsylvania Audubon.

Charlie and his wife, Marge, also hosted many wonderful dinners on Christmas Bird Count day. They also enjoyed feeding the birds, so Charlie volunteered as one of the feeder watchers for Count Day.

The beautiful floral centerpieces that decorated the tables at our Spring Banquet were often donated by the Hoyers. I often think of Charlie and Marge when I see Martha Washington geraniums.



Dave Bonta (L), JVAS President at the time, presented Charlie Hoyer (R) with a special Service Award in April 2013.

Charlie was willing to take time to correct grammar, typos, and formatting for JVAS publications. We will miss his expertise and commitment to not only our chapter, but to conservation.

JVAS Field Trips Fall 2018

Field trip chair is Susan Braun: braun3112@gmail.com (814)574-0795
Check our Facebook page for updates or contact Susan.

Saturday, Nov 10: 9am - 1pm

Bald Eagle State Park Birding

Let's explore Bald Eagle State Park to look for migrating waterfowl, hawks and more. The 5,900-acre Bald Eagle State Park is in the broad Bald Eagle Valley in Centre County. It includes a lake below Bald Eagle Mountain which is surrounded by forests, fields and wetlands. We'll stop at several birdy places on our way to the park and within the park. We'll finish by driving to the dam and taking a short walk on an old road. Bring binoculars, drinks, and snacks. We'll stop in Howard afterwards for a bite to eat.

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

Meet at the gravel parking area behind McDonalds in Milesburg at 9am. <https://goo.gl/maps/gaPD5R4YaaC2>

Friday, November 23: 1pm to 4pm

Post-Thanksgiving Day Hike

Going shopping to find all those great Black Friday sales? Follow up your morning of shopping with an afternoon hike on the Lower Trail! After searching for great deals and bargains, you can search for plants going to seed for winter while listening to the sounds of the river. Meet in the Alfarata Station Trailhead parking lot on Main Street in Alexandria at 1pm. We'll carpool from Alfarata to the Mount Etna Trailhead and then hike approximately 5 leisurely miles on this rail trail along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River back to Alfarata. After the hike, we can gather at Paesano's for food and drink (but definitely not more turkey and pumpkin pie)! If you need more information or have questions, contact trip leader, Kristin Joivell, at 814-386-6267 or email kristinjean@hotmail.com.

Monday, December 31: 11am to 2pm

Last Day Resolution Hike

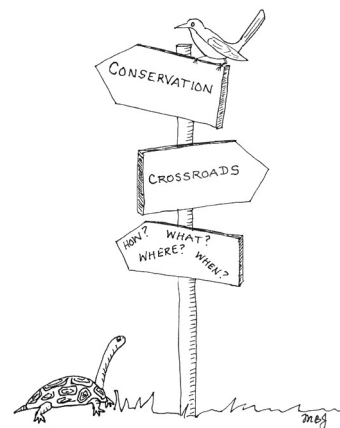
If your New Year's Resolution is to get outdoors, get started on it a day early! End your year at the Peace Chapel Trail System in Huntingdon as we hike approximately 3 to 4 leisurely miles together on the last day of 2018. As we hike, we can search for animal tracks in the snow (hopefully) and winter plants (definitely). Meet at Detwiler Field in Huntingdon at 11am. Bring a snack and drink for the hike, if you would like, and we can visit one of the local venues in nearby Huntingdon for hot chocolate (and food to warm up with) after the hike! If you need more information or have questions, contact trip leader, Kristin Joivell, at 814-386-6267 or at kristinjean@hotmail.com.

CONSERVATION CROSSROADS is a section of *The Gnatcatcher* that features environmental issues across a spectrum of local, national, and global concerns. Contact JVAS Vice-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.

1. Proposed Hawk's Bridge Peninsula Development in Lake Raystown, Huntingdon County. We are waiting to hear what the Army Corps develops as they update the Master Plan, which should be completed by fall of 2019.

2. Pumped Hydro Storage Projects (What are these? See *The Gnatcatcher* 9/10/17

issue at www.JVAS.org). There are two proposed projects are the Bacon Ridge project next to the Sandy Ridge Wind project and the Allegheny project near the Allegheny Ridge Wind project. Merchant Hydro asked FERC to approve the company's new name; but that approval would mean Merchant Hydro's preliminary permits would be withdrawn and the new company, Renewable Energy Aggregators, Inc., would have to initiate the entire application process. We are waiting to see what happens.



SOME GOOD NEWS:



3. The Partners in Neotropical Bird Conservation, a committee of JVAS, sent funds to a new bird club in Marcala, Honduras. We are pleased to report that they just held a Winter Bird Festival. Here's a translation of their FB page:

"Jilgueros Bird Club participated in the first Winter Festival in Marcala, La Paz on Friday, October 5, 2018. A booth displayed our bird conservation, protection, and education activities in Marcala and the surrounding Sierra

Lenca mountain region. Special guest Abiel Martinez from the Chlorophonias Bird Club of the Lake Yojoa region came to share his experiences. Thanks to everyone for coming out to see us!

We are especially grateful to the collaborators, colleagues, and institutions who supported us. @Marcala, La Paz, Honduras."

Note: Lenca Farms Coffee and JVAS were two of the supporters.



4. JVAS also donated funds to local birders (John Carter, Brian Schmoke, & Sean Herrmann) who volunteered to work with Dr. Mark Bonta on a groundbreaking study to gather data on raptors and fire in the Australian bush last May 2018. On Oct. 16, John, Brian, and Sean gave a fascinating account to JVAS members, detailing their trip experiences and their participation in the Firehawk Research project.

Prior research by Dr. Bonta (working with other researchers) confirmed that Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal people have observed "firehawks" (Black Kite, Whistling Kite, and Brown Falcon) spreading fire - picking up smoldering sticks from raging brushfires and dropping them to start new fires – in order to flush prey. (See NYTimes.com 2/2/18 article: "In Australia, Arsonists May Have Wings.") Last May's fieldwork sought to document the full range of foraging activities that raptors and other birds undertake at bush fires, as this has never been studied systematically before. The birders videotaped and photographed firehawks reacting to prescribed burns set by firefighters in the bush, though they did not manage to capture any fire-spreading events on camera. However, they did help accomplish other research team goals, such as developing a protocol to document raptor behavior, documenting many

bird species' behavior at the fire sites, and providing data on the numerous environmental and social factors that affected the fires.

Mark explained in an email:
"Our main goal was to be able to gather data on the entire spectrum of activities carried out by what we call the "fire-foraging guild" of species, as this had never been done before. Now that we have these data, we can elaborate a few hypotheses about when fire-spreading is likely to occur in order to help future researchers discover birds engaging in this tool-using behavior."



L to R: John Carter, Sean Herrmann, Brian Schmoke, Nathan Ferguson-TC Fire Chief, Erana Loveless, Mark Bonta



Arsonist Raptor crew with the Jawoyn Ranger Fire Brigade- Picture taken in Nitbarnjarn, Northern Territory

Mark concluded, "We are very satisfied to have carried out the first detailed, albeit brief, study of the avian fire-foraging guild and we hope that, once we publish our results, others can follow up and expand upon our work. Beyond fire-spreading and its role, basic questions about how birds tolerate heat and flames, how they choose what to forage, what roles the foraging plays in their diet, and dozens of other questions our team raised."



L: Black Kites flying low over Tennant Creek fire looking for prey
R: Black Kite weathered by hunting through the flames

A Flurry of Firsts - Mike Jackson, JVAS Historian

I was combing through past issues of the Gnatcatcher and discovered a number of **firsts**, which I thought I would share:

1st JVAS Gnatcatcher Vol. 1 No. 1 was published in April 1969. Issues were mimeographed from 1969 - August 1984. That was almost 50 years ago!

1st JVAS Officers were President John Orr, Vice-President Al Richardson, Secretary Gladys Glisson, and Treasurer Jack Hancock. They served from **1969 - 1972**.

1st JVAS Fieldtrip was to Kiwanis Camp, Fort Roberdeau, Sinking Valley on **Saturday April 26, 1969**.

1st JVAS evening meeting was on September 29, 1969. Charles Callison, executive VP of National Audubon presented the branch charter and spoke about contemporary National conservation issues.

1st JVAS Christmas Bird Count was on Sunday December 28, 1969. The tally dinner was held at Sinking Valley Grange Hall in Skelp. 32 species were tallied with 1,400 individual birds.

1st JVAS Earth Day Celebration took place on April 22, 1970. JVAS members worked with a group of students called S.O.A.P. (**S**tudents **O**rganized **A**gainst **P**ollution) and teachers at Altoona High School. They had all day assemblies with 17 speakers and evening programs for the public.

1st JVAS Seedling Sale was held in December 1971. Species available were ponderosa pine, Mugho pine, white pine, Douglas fir, Colorado blue spruce, **multiflora rose**, **autumn olive**, American redbud, flowering dogwood, pink dogwood, white birch, & Chinese chestnut.

1st JVAS Banquet was on May 30, 1972 at Chilcoat's. Alan Miller, Field Rep for Audubon in the Mid-Atlantic States Region was the guest speaker. The family style meal cost \$3.50 for adults and \$2.50 for children up to 11 yrs. of age.

1st JVAS Gnatcatcher that was photocopied was distributed in September 1984.

1st obtained JVAS 501 (c)(3) tax exempt status in January 1987.

1st JVAS "Member of the Year Award" was presented in May 1987 to Paula Ford, by President Marcia Bonta.

1st JVAS Recipient of the William Dutcher Award was presented to John Orr. John was also a charter member of JVAS, 1st President, Gnatcatcher editor, PA Audubon Council Representative, also 1983 President, and sponsored the Mill Run Petition.

After compiling all of these **firsts**, I'll have to think a **second** about what to research for our next **Gnatcatcher...**

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON

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KUDOS TO JVAS MEMBER GREG GROVE!

Greg is the recipient of the prestigious 2018 Earle Poole Award presented by the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology at their Annual Meeting in September 2018. Greg has made significant contributions to Pennsylvania's ornithology in numerous ways. Greg established the Stone Mountain Hawkwatch in 1991, and published the book, ***Birds of Central Pennsylvania***, with fellow birder Nick Bolgiano. In 2001, he started the Winter Raptor Survey in Pennsylvania and oversees 100 birders completing 200 survey routes. He is now editor-in-chief of ***Pennsylvania Birds***. You may remember that JVAS recognized Greg with the Conservation Award in 2017. He also participated in many birding studies with his wife Deb.



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 market their organic, shade coffee in the U.S. 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. Proceeds are used for bird conservation projects. You can order Honduran Marcala coffee directly from Ragged Edge: www.squareup.com/store/the-ragged-edge-roasting-co or purchase it at our monthly meetings.