

THE  
GNATCATCHER

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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Into Your Hand Are They Delivered

And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. -Genesis 9:2

Christmas Bird Count

This coming Sunday - December 28th - our group will conduct its first Christmas bird count. This outing will be a combination field trip/meeting. All interested members are urged to take part in the counting. A participation fee of \$1.00 is required for each member taking part; however, those who wish to get out just for chance to see some interesting - and perhaps some unusual birds - should feel free to take part, no fee necessary. The fee is needed from those who will be out most of the day to help defray some of the publishing expense of the Audubon Field Notes. This is certainly a good opportunity to learn more about our winter birds. Most people would be surprised to learn of the diversity of birdlife here in winter.

This will be a dawn to dusk enterprise ending in early evening with a covered dish dinner and a tallying of results at the Sinking Valley Grange Hall in Skelp. To get to Skelp from Kettle Street traverse the valley to Black's farm just past the Kiwanis entrance posts. Turn left there and proceed past the Sinking Valley Country Club on to Skelp. If coming from Bellwood leave that town going toward Tyrone turning off to the right just out of Bellwood; then proceed over Brush Mt. and down into Skelp. Even if unable to participate in the count, come out for a bite to eat or a cup of hot chocolate or coffee. This should prove to be the ideal spot to warm up, share our data and tally results. Most observers should be checking in there at 5:30 or so.

Meeting instructions: To take part in the count call John Hunter Orr at 943-5629, preferably in the evening but actually any time is suitable. Several small groups, each with a leader, will be formed as you call in. It will be possible to go out at varying times of the day; this can be worked out by phone. A few people will want to stay out all day but others will not. Also by phone give notice of what you might be able to bring for the dinner. Nothing fancy. Just simple fare. (For those who come real late - don't worry: there will be a special owl hike.) Someone will be present most of the day at the Grange hall to greet members and guests and coordinate trips.

Everyone is urged to dress warmly, to bring binoculars and possibly - a snack or lunch. There is a store in the valley - the Country Dairy Store - located at Sickle's Corner, where light lunches are served. The groups will comb all roads and byways possible in the given daylight hours. It begins to get light at 7:00 A.M. and is dark by 5:00 P.M. Much of the area naturally will be covered by car, driving slowly, stopping at promising places. Special spots have already been noted as worth visiting. Bird feeders with heavy activity should prove especially interesting. Those members living in the area should begin noting species at their feeders and possibly try drawing birds in with a variety of foods. The main effort on the 28th will be in Sinking Valley, however, the fifteen mile diameter circle takes in an area going to Bellwood, Tyrone, Spruce Creek (the bridge), Canoe Valley, parts of Scotch and Turkey Valleys, part of Greenwood and Elberta, just past the Kettle reservoir.

Last Sunday's snow might be followed by more all together making an interesting winter setting in which to place ourselves with the birds.

As was noted in last month's Gnatcatcher, the horned larks are one of the prime subjects of this count. Their number will be carefully reported as well as any characteristics seen by observing parties. These fascinating birds are little noted residents of Sinking Valley. After a snowfall they can be seen in small flocks eating seeds along cleared portions of roads. If there is no snow they tend to disperse and are harder to count. Sunday, December 14th, fifty of them were seen at five different spots in the valley. This, then, is one example of how snow can make the observation interesting. Heavy snows also tend to force birds in close to houses for food.

Although numbers of each species are to be recorded on the 28th, we are to list just the names of additional birds sighted during the two week period of December 20th to January 1st. Birds of interest noted so far within this period are: sparrow hawk, killdeer, mockingbird, robin and meadow lark.

The Altoona Mirror of Monday, December 22nd carried an article on the bird count. An appeal was made in this article for residents of the count area to help by calling in information. We have offered to identify birds for them - something of a field service. This help should be mutual among all of our own, so if you have a problem or have a good bird please call the above number. A follow-up with results of the count will be published later.

Let's try for a good turnout for this first count. Remember - all information pertaining to participation is to be had by calling your president before December 28th.

#### Lost Pin

A pin was found at our last meeting - November 25th - in the Childrens' Theater of the library. It is in the shape of a heart. Call 943-5629 if it is yours.

#### A Shared Feeding Station

If the birds ever perfect a method of recording their own history they will surely record the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Samuels of Juniata Gap. At the Samuels' home a feeding station has been in operation for forty-five years. That's a lot of sunflower seeds, and corn, and satisfied crows - but as Mr. Samuels can testify, that's also a lot of human satisfaction.

So far this year the birds have consumed one bushel of sunflower seeds, and will probably eat another before spring. Some birds like it so well there they have stayed on as winter feeders. Robins, catbirds, song sparrows, and pine siskins are still there. Perhaps the variety of food helps. Pokeberries, corn and other Samuels delicacies.

A partial record of his dependents follows: song sparrow, brown creeper, cardinals, white throats, tree sparrows, blue jays, one red-breasted nuthatch, pileated woodpecker, downy and hairy woodpeckers, a pair of mourning doves, evening grosbeaks, and so on.

Mr. Samuels extends an invitation to Audubon members or their friends to visit the feeder and share his discoveries.

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