

# The Gnatcatcher

## Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

Vol. LI, No. 1 —January-February 2019

Published bimonthly (except for July and August)

as a benefit for members of the...

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



## Christmas Bird Count 2018: A Dapper Day for Ducks

-Laura Jackson

The songbirds were hunkered down in the brush or hiding under evergreen branches trying to stay dry. Quick forays to bird feeders were infrequent; very few birds braved the rain pelting from gray and gloomy skies.

The Christmas Bird Counters felt kind of gloomy, too, but they had a job to do and they persevered through the rain that was almost constant throughout the day on Saturday, Dec. 15. The 119<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count Celebration was a quiet one as birders covered the count circle centered at Culp. Time for tales and other stories would be later, when most would gather around the dinner table to enjoy a meal, followed by the tally rally.

Because the cloud cover was so low, a surprising variety of waterfowl weathered the rain in a small blip of water surrounded by ice at Canoe Lake. Birders were thrilled to see 10 Common Goldeneyes hobnobbing with 6 Long-tailed Ducks, 11 Lesser Scaup, Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, and 4 Mallards. A Great-blue Heron lurked at the edge of the lake, as a muskrat nibbled on cattails. A foggy, soggy day prevailed as fog floated in and out above the ice.

Other areas of open water outside Canoe Creek State Park held more Mallards for a total of 208, as well as 393 Canada Geese, a single Gadwall, 2 American Black Ducks, 10 hybrid Mallards, 1 Northern Pintail, 2 Green-winged Teal, 1 Blue-winged Teal, and 2 Buffleheads.

The rain didn't seem to faze ring-necked pheasants (21) or wild turkeys (90), but raptors were mostly tree-bound: a total of 3 Cooper's Hawks, 1 Sharp-shinned Hawk, 8 Red-tailed Hawks, 9 American Kestrels, and 3 Bald Eagles. Sadly, the most common birds were non-native European Starlings (1,901), but at least the native Mourning Doves (170) outnumbered the feral Rock Pigeons (157). The mild temperatures meant that Eastern Bluebirds (32) and American Robins (20) were still around, as well as Carolina Wrens (24) and even 1 Eastern Towhee. A nice surprise was the sighting of 156 Horned Larks. The tally rally ended with a total species count of 62 – not bad for a chilly, rain-soaked day in December.

Many, many thanks to all the Counters: Warren Baker, Bruce & Marcia Bonta, Susan Braun, John & Lindera Carter, Todd Davis, Kurt & Carl Engstrom, Deb Escalet, Matt Greenstone, Debra Grim, Allen & Bobbie Gibboney, Phil Hall, Allison & Paul Hutchison, Mike & Laura Jackson, John Loncher, George Mahon, Margie McCloskey, Frank Nale, Mark Nale, John Orr, Mar Sension, and Eric & Margaret Skrivseth.

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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- ♦ Marcia Bonta
- ♦ Kristin Joivell

**At last, you can get a JVAS membership using a credit card!**

--Dave Bonta, website administrator



Juniata Valley Audubon Society is now 50 years old, so I guess it's understandable why we're not always an early adopter of the hot new trends. But more and more of our members, especially the younger ones, have been agitating for the ability to join and renew online with a credit card, so at long last we have complied. Go to <https://www.jvas.org> and click on "Join or Renew" in the top menu. Scroll down for the membership options.

Your security is paramount, so we've had an SSL certificate installed on our server (thanks, Nittany Web Works!) and we're using PayPal as our payment gateway. But you don't need a PayPal account, just a major credit or debit card.

We've tried to keep things as simple as possible, so instead of asking you to fill out a separate form, we will simply gather your email and postal address from PayPal, and will assume that you prefer to receive the paper edition of the Gnatcatcher unless you follow up with an email requesting otherwise.

The one big advantage of joining or renewing online, aside from the obvious convenience of saving on postage and avoiding the hassle of writing a check, is that you won't have to worry about forgetting to renew next year: it will automatically renew unless you cancel it. Better for you, better for us.

We assume that, as a member of JVAS, you'd like to receive occasional emails about club activities and conservation issues, but there will be opt-out links in those emails, so you can remove yourself from the list if it becomes too much. (We're planning a complete revamp of our email communications system very soon.) Please be assured, however, that we will not share your data with anyone else for any reason.

There are, of course, limits to our embrace of modernity: we have no plans to accept Bitcoin payments at this time. Sorry, nerds.

Ten Common Goldeneyes took flight through the fog over Canoe Lake, circled, then landed in the water as Christmas Bird Counters watched these striking birds on Dec. 15, 2018. Photo by Mike Jackson



## Juniata Valley Audubon Society 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 hot shade organic coffee, starts at 6:00 PM, followed by the meeting at 6:45 PM.** We meet in the Bellwood-Antis Library at 526 Main Street, Bellwood, PA. Please join us!

**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 a short distance; the library is on your right.

### Tuesday January 15, 2019: Members' Night



**A free dinner begins at 6 pm: Pasta Bar with Gluten Free and Vegetarian Options; Meatballs, Chicken, Salad; Brownies and Gluten Free Cheesecake; hot Shade Coffee and Juice.**

Our annual Member's Night, starting at 7 pm, is always a good time, with lots of socializing and an impressive assortment of slideshows, videos, wildlife art, nature poetry, nature crafts, and other by-products of our on-going fascination with the natural world. Contact Program Chair Laura Jackson ([jacksonlaura73@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonlaura73@gmail.com)) by Monday, Jan. 15, if you'd like to make a presentation, which should be no longer than 10 minutes. This dinner and program are free and open to the public.

### Tuesday February 19, 2019: Meet the Magnificent Marbled Salamander by David Hand

**A free dinner starts at 6 pm: Pork Chops, Rice, Veggies, Dinner Rolls, Banana Pudding, Caramel Baked Apples, hot Shade Coffee and Juice.**

David will present incredible still pictures and videos of the magnificent Marbled Salamander and its life cycle - a result of many hours in the field observing this amazing creature. He will show the Marbled Salamander's nest and eggs, embryo development, and larval growth through metamorphosis to juvenile salamander. Also included are photos of a rare leucistic Marbled Salamander from larva through metamorphosis.



**Is this a Marbled Salamander? Find out at our February 19 meeting**

**Tuesday March 19, 2019: Birding the Rio Grande Valley** by Susan Braun and Debra Grim

**A free dinner starts at 6 pm: Stuffed Cabbage Rolls, Rice, Veggies, Beans (Gluten Free and Vegetarian), Fruit Tart, homemade Frozen Yogurt, hot Shade Coffee and Juice.**

Susan Braun and Debra Grim will share highlights of their recent birding trip to the Rio Grande Valley. They will share photos and videos of birds, and describe the different National Wildlife Refuges, state parks and other natural areas they visited and highlight some of the flora and fauna.



**Tuesday April 16, 2019:  
JVAS SPRING BANQUET & 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration  
Jethro's from 5 pm – 9 pm at 417 Parkview Lane, Altoona, PA 16601**

We will celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of JVAS by honoring past officers and leaders, so come early for the special reception from 5 – 6 pm. A buffet dinner will be held at 6 pm, followed by a program by Andrew Mack.

**Menu:** Salad & rolls, Chicken, Vegetables, Baked Potatoes, Jethro Fries, Gnocchi & Meatballs. Non-Alcoholic Beverages included; Alcoholic drinks extra. Most options are Gluten free.

**The Buffet is \$20 per person. Mark your calendar - reserve by Monday, April 8. Make check payable to JVAS and mail to Laura Jackson, 8621 Black Valley Road, Everett, PA 15537 by Monday, April 8, or pay at the March 19 meeting.**

**The Birds of New Guinea and Conservation Lessons for Everyone** presented by Andrew Mack

Andrew Mack lived and studied in Papua New Guinea (PNG) most of 1987-2007. Last spring, we heard him give a fascinating account of his research on cassowaries. This year, Andrew will present an overview of the birds of New Guinea, with particular attention to endemic specialties like Birds of Paradise, Bowerbirds, Berrypeckers, Cassowaries, etc. He will talk about the scientific lessons learned from New Guinea and biologists who have worked there, from Alfred Russel Wallace to Ernst Mayr to E.O Wilson. Andrew will share conservation lessons he learned from working with the endemic birds and indigenous people whose cultures are intertwined with the natural world.

There will also be a **silent auction** throughout the evening. Nature-related items that are new or gently used will be available for bid. Bring your donations to the March 19 meeting or bring them to the Banquet.

**Tuesday May 21, 2019: Preventing Tick Bites and Tick-borne Diseases** by Amber Altiero, RN.

**A free dinner starts at 6 pm: Taco Bar, Rice, Beans, Veggies, Fruit and Cinnamon Chips and Dip, hot Shade Coffee and Juice.**



Originally funded by the PA Dept. of Health, Dare 2B Tick Aware uses the most current research available to help you prevent tick bites and how to get help if you do get Lyme Disease. PA leads the nation in new cases - don't be a statistic! Learn how to protect yourself and your family.



**Tuesday June 18, 2019: Maxine Leckvarcik Memorial Picnic 6 PM - 9 PM**  
**Canoe Creek State Park Pavilion #2 just off parking lot #6**

**Click here for a map:**

[http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr\\_004826.pdf](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_004826.pdf)

Our annual summer picnic has many eats and treats for all tastes and appetites! JVAS will provide roasted chicken for everyone. We hope everyone will bring a covered dish to share. Join us as we picnic together and celebrate another year of exploring and protecting nature in Central PA. After eating, we will have a nature walk from 7 to 8:15 PM. **Be sure to let Hospitality Chair Catie Farr know what you plan to bring. Call her at 570-651-3839 or email [catiekgk5059@gmail](mailto:catiekgk5059@gmail.com)** We will end the evening with an optional visit to the bat church around 8:30 PM to see Pennsylvania's only flying mammals - bats! These bats beat the odds of White-Nose Syndrome and their survival needs to be celebrated. We will stay until around 9:15 PM to see the bats.



***Cathedral: The Fight to Save the Ancient Hemlocks of Cook Forest***

Don't despair if you missed seeing the film in December, since we plan to offer another screening in March. Check future newsletters, the JVAS website, or the JVAS Facebook page for updates.



**National Audubon Climate Watch is January 15 – February 15, 2019**

Many thanks to Coordinator Deb Grove! **More details on page 9**

**The Great Backyard Bird Count is February 15 – February 18, 2019**

Bird watchers of all ages count birds to create a real-time snapshot of where birds are. Go to [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org) to sign up.

**More details on page 10**



## Earth Week Birding Classic Sunday April 21 – Sunday April 28



The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Earth Week Birding Classic will be held from April 21 to 28, 2019.

Registration is free. The goal is for teams in seven different categories to count as many species of birds as possible over a 24-hour period any time during the week beginning on

**April 21 at 12 noon and ending at 12 noon on April 28.** This non-profit event is

co-sponsored by the Environmental Studies program at Penn State Altoona and Juniata Valley Audubon Society. Pledges that team members garner will

support bird conservation and education in central Pennsylvania. Teams of 3 or more (2 or more for Senior citizens) will count birds in Blair and surrounding

counties, and prizes will be awarded during the closing ceremony at the Slep Center on the Penn State Altoona campus immediately following the event at 1 pm. **Registration deadline is April 14.** To

register and for more information, please contact Catie Farr at [catiegk5059@gmail.com](mailto:catiegk5059@gmail.com).



### Saturday May 4, 2019 Central Pennsylvania Native Plant Festival

Boal Mansion, 163A Boal Estate Drive, Boalsburg PA 16827

JVAS plans to have a display at this event - contact Laura Jackson if you'd like to help.

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### JVAS Field Trips Spring 2019

Field trip chair is Susan Braun: [braun3112@gmail.com](mailto:braun3112@gmail.com) (814)574-0795

Check our Facebook page for updates or contact Susan.

#### Saturday March 23: Chimney Rocks 1 pm – 4 pm

Join Susan Braun and Sharon Clewell to visit this outstanding geologic formation in Hollidaysburg. It is an outcrop of fingerlike spires of limestone. The hike is less than a mile and offers breathtaking views of the Juniata Valley and Hollidaysburg. Afterwards, we'll visit nearby NatureWorksPark, and then head to the Allegheny Creamery for something to eat.

Meet at the Chimney Rocks Park, Chimney Rocks Road, Hollidaysburg, PA

<https://goo.gl/maps/2Uhy2TCARbP2>

Contact Susan Braun [braun3112@gmail.com](mailto:braun3112@gmail.com) (814)574-0795 for information.

Did you know? Chimney Rocks Park is owned by Hollidaysburg Borough

#### Saturday March 30: Bedford Whitetail Wetlands Birding 8:30 am – 2 pm

Meet at the Eat 2 Live Bistro (which is now closed) on Rt. 56 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. Trip Leaders:

Mike and Laura Jackson 814-652-9268. Optional Lunch at Slick's Ivy Stone 8785 William Penn Rd.,

Osterburg. Call Mike and Laura to confirm this trip, as we often have to cancel due to icy conditions.

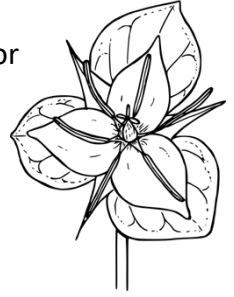


## JVAS Field Trips Spring 2019, continued

### Saturday April 13: Trillium Hike 9 am – 12 pm

Let's walk along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River on the Lower Trail to look for spring wildflowers. If our timing is right, the slopes will be covered with red trillium and other spring ephemeral wildflowers such as Dutchman's breeches and bloodroot in bloom along the trail as we walk for an easy 3 to 4 miles. Bring snacks and water to enjoy along the way. Meet at Water Street Flea Market, RT 22 & Rt 453, Alexandria, Huntingdon County.

Contact: Susan Braun [braun3112@gmail.com](mailto:braun3112@gmail.com) (814)574-0795 or Debra Grim [dsgrim02@gmail.com](mailto:dsgrim02@gmail.com) (814) 644-5285 for information.



### Saturday April 20: Birding the Bells Gap Rail Trail 8 am - 11 am

Join John Carter and Mark Nale on an early spring warbler search on the Bells Gap Trail while enjoying outstanding views of eastern ridges, the Tuckahoe Valley and Bellwood Reservoir. We will stroll 2 miles of the trail that consist of fresh crushed limestone surface in search of Worm-eating, Cerulean, Hooded Warblers and hopefully many more. Along with the rich railroad history, the trail includes several covered benches on which to rest and enjoy the scenery.

What to bring: binoculars, comfortable walking shoes, drink and snack. After the walk we can gather at Nunzio's Pizza & Italian Rest. (across from Bellwood Sheetz) for a bite and discuss our observations.

#### Meet at the Bell Gap Trailhead

Directions: Take Bellwood Exit 41 off of I-99. Follow PA-865 for 2.7 miles to Igou Road which will be on your right. Go .1 mile on Igou Road. Turn left into Bells Gap trailhead parking lot. The trailhead parking lot includes picnic tables, picnic pavilion, and a portable toilet.

Contact: Susan Braun [braun3112@gmail.com](mailto:braun3112@gmail.com) (814)574-0795 for information.

### Saturday April 27: Shaver's Creek Cabin Walk 1 pm – 5 pm

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 dinner.

Meet at the parking area at intersection of Route 26 and Charter Oak Road or park along Pine Swamp Road to walk to Jennifer's cabin. Trip Leader: Jennifer Baldwin <https://goo.gl/maps/qi78stcsvLH2>

Contact: Susan Braun [braun3112@gmail.com](mailto:braun3112@gmail.com) (814)574-0795 for information.

### Saturday May 11: Migration Walk - Bullit Run to Lower Green's Run 7:30 am - 11:30 am

Join Susan Braun for the PA Migration Count. We'll take a bird walk and count every bird we see or hear along a flat two mile walk from Bullit Run to Lower Green's Run in Bald Eagle State Park. Afterwards, we can head to the Kitchen Witch in Howard for a bite to eat.

Meet at the Lower Green's Run Parking lot in Bald Eagle State Park. We'll leave some cars there and shuttle to Bullit Run to begin our walk. <https://goo.gl/maps/zmj2n5Xn6Co>

Contact: Susan Braun [braun3112@gmail.com](mailto:braun3112@gmail.com) (814)574-0795 for information.



"WOW – so that's a Cerulean Warbler!"  
Birding is a lot more fun if you have  
binoculars and JVAS has some for you to  
use on field trips. Just ask!

## JVAS Field Trips Spring 2019, continued

### Saturday May 18: Canoe Creek State Park 9 am – 1 pm

We will walk the Limestone and Moore's Hill trails to admire wild phlox, trout lilies, yellow lady's-slippers, and other wonderful wildflowers. Bring lunch and water, be prepared for a hill climb and rocky trail. (You can also return along the Limestone trail without climbing the hill, and still see many flowers.) Meet at Canoe Creek State Park, Blair County. Enter from Turkey Valley Road, passing the park office, and park in the large parking lot near the lake. <https://goo.gl/maps/Y35pAJRTHhK2>  
Contact Susan Braun [braun3112@gmail.com](mailto:braun3112@gmail.com) (814)574-0795 or Debra Grim [dsgrim02@gmail.com](mailto:dsgrim02@gmail.com) (814) 644-5285 for information.

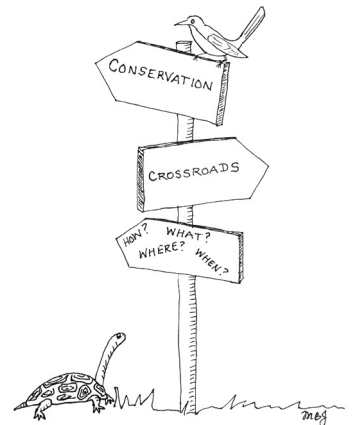
### Saturday May 25: Warbler Walk at Mountain Meadows, Bedford Co. 8 am – 11 am

Mike and Laura Jackson did a forest habitat project in the fall of 2014 for Golden-winged Warblers and other birds that need young forests for breeding habitat. Mike and Laura will lead us in search of Golden-winged, Kentucky, Hooded, and Cerulean Warblers, as well as Yellow-breasted Chat and other spring songsters. Bring lunch and water. Call 814-652-9268 or [jacksonlaura73@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonlaura73@gmail.com).

**Directions to 8621 Black Valley Road, Everett, PA:** From Bedford, take Rt. 30 E. to Everett, turn Right onto the West Bridge on W. 5<sup>th</sup> Ave., then take an immediate Right on Black Valley Road. Follow Black Valley Road for 2.5 miles. You will pass a bright red/white barn very close to the road on the Right. Continue for another half-mile until you see a gravel lane on the Right. There is a sign that says, "The Jacksons'" at the beginning of the lane. After turning Right onto the lane, continue up the mountain for 1/2 mile, staying straight, until you come to the Jacksons' house.

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**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](http://www.JVAS.org) Click on the Conservation tab.



#### 1. Proposed Bat & Bird Listing: Please email the Pa. Game Commission (PGC)

**before January 25, 2019.** Ask them to add these bats to the state's Endangered Species List: Northern Long-eared Bat, Little Brown Bat, and Tri-colored Bat.

Their populations have plummeted (97 - 99%) due to white-nose syndrome. The federally threatened Red Knot (which migrates through our state) should also be listed as a state threatened bird species. Public comments on the bat listings

should be emailed to: [batcomments@pa.gov](mailto:batcomments@pa.gov); comments on bird listings should be emailed to: [peregrinecomments@pa.gov](mailto:peregrinecomments@pa.gov). Both accounts accept email attachments. For more information: <http://paenvironmentdaily.blogspot.com/2018/11/game-commission-accepting-comments-on.html>

#### 2. The Nov. Progress Reports for the **Bacon Ridge** and the **Allegheny Pumped Storage Hydro Projects** on the Allegheny Front are overdue. FERC will cancel the preliminary permits if the reports are not submitted by Jan. 11, 2019. Let's hope these ill-conceived projects are cancelled.



## National Audubon Climate Watch Project –Coordinated by Deb Grove

Audubon has organized a new bird-related citizen science project called Climate Watch. Analysis of records dating back to the 60s show that North American birds fit in one of 3 categories in terms of predicted response to climate change: (1) expansion of range, (2) shift of range, and (3) contraction of range. The objective of the project is that “participation in Climate Watch provides Audubon scientists with data on the current distribution of target species that can be used to validate and refine our models for where these species’ ranges will shift under the effects of climate change.” They can then use the information to determine what kind of conservation decisions to make.

Therefore, people who love to watch birds are asked to help with this project. Pennsylvania participants can monitor one to three target species: Eastern Bluebirds, White-breasted Nuthatches and Red-breasted Nuthatches. Audubon has already set up squares in the state that individuals can claim and then count birds at various sites in that square. Participants are asked to survey their squares for the target species one time during the breeding season May 15 to June 15 and once between Jan 15 to Feb 15 for wintering birds.

The basic procedure is to use the map for your square and select sites where you will survey the bird or birds that you have chosen. If you have chosen Eastern Bluebird, you might choose open areas. Some sites may be good for both White-breasted Nuthatch and Bluebird. You can also choose more wooded habitat for your Nuthatch sites. You can either use a satellite view on the map to choose these sites or drive through the area. Do not just pick sites where you find the species because that may bias the sites. After you have selected your sites, you are ready to count in the designated time period.

During the survey weeks, you visit your sites one time during that period and count all birds, not just your target bird, that you see or hear during 5 minutes. You can count birds for longer but only report those in the first 5 minutes. The survey can require 2 to 4 hours to check all of your sites. The results are then entered in eBird and the eBird links sent to Climate Watch.

You don’t have to be an expert at identifying birds. However, a commitment of several years of participation is important in order to provide continuing data for this long-term project. I have provided a brief explanation in this article and there are more technical details that I won’t go into here. I have volunteered to be a coordinator for this project and you can contact me at [dsg4@psu.edu](mailto:dsg4@psu.edu) for more in-depth information. The Audubon site is <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/climate-watch>. This link shows the results of 7 Central PA participants from this past summer’s survey. <https://www.audubon.org/climate-watch-results>



### Audubon Pennsylvania – Bird Habitat Recognition Program Congratulations to Diane Hunter

Diane enrolled her Huntingdon Co. property in the Bird Habitat Recognition Program before winning a special award from JVAS. She won a certificate, \$25, and a free 2019 JVAS membership. We encourage everyone to enter the program at [www.jvas.org/category/conservation-news/bird-habitat-recognition-program/](http://www.jvas.org/category/conservation-news/bird-habitat-recognition-program/). If you join the Bird Habitat Recognition program and live in Bedford, Blair, Centre, or Cambria Counties, you could also qualify for the Special JVAS Award. Contact Laura Jackson for more details [jacksonlaura73@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonlaura73@gmail.com)

## The Great Backyard Bird Count by Marcia Bonta



The best thing about the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is that it's four days long. The worst thing about it is that it's in the middle of February. Even last February, when it was mostly unseasonably mild, it froze up during the GBBC.

I managed to get outside two of the four days and toted up 23 species. This included birds I counted on foot from opposite areas of our mountain as well as our feeder birds. But even though I had reasonably good weather, my species count remained in the low twenties as it has every year since the GBBC began back in 1998.

That's when this first online citizen-science project began. It was started by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society to provide a yearly snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds in North America. During that first year, they received 13,500 checklists from folks in the United States and Canada.

Last year they received 180,000 checklists from 100 countries in every continent but Antarctica from New Zealand to India. The total species count was 6,455, well over half the bird species in the world, and 28,843,208 individual birds.

Participants can count as little as 15 minutes on one or more days, tallying the numbers and species of birds that they see. But you don't need to count only your backyard birds as the name of this count seems to indicate. You can visit public lands, especially game lands in Blair County since we have only a few small parks, a state park, and no state forests. Or perhaps you have friends with rural properties who would welcome you on their land.

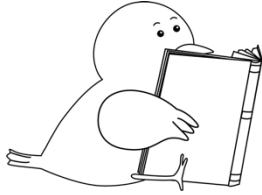
The 22nd GBBC runs from February 15 through February 18, 2019. To join in this free count, you need to register on their wonderful website [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org). They have excellent instructions on how to participate. "It's as easy as 1,2,3," they say, and I agree.

The website has bird identification help and an online bird guide you can use. All this and a photo contest too if you're so inclined, of the birds you see during your count.

The Breeding Bird Survey and Christmas Bird Count data show that since 1970, there has been an approximate two billion overall loss of birds from the North American breeding population alone, which is why it's important for as many people as possible help in this citizen-science effort. There aren't enough ornithologists in the world to do the counting that needs to be done to determine how many bird species are in trouble, where they are, and how they can be helped.

So, get outside and count those birds. Help the GBBC obtain "an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds" here in west central Pennsylvania.

## Off The Shelf



A Review of Peter Wohlleben's  
***The Hidden Life of Trees***  
submitted by Doug Mason

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 Jackson by **February 10, 2019**.

Warning: if you are not one already, reading this book could turn you into an official tree hugger. Wohlleben's work, subtitled "Discoveries from a Secret World," is based on insights gained from many years working as a forester managing a nature reserve near Hümmer in Germany's Eifel Mountains. This is an easy read that explores controversial ideas which imply that plants are far more alert, sophisticated, social, and intelligent than we generally suspect.

At times, one may almost feel like Wohlleben's old growth forest is located on the planet Pandora depicted in James Cameron's sci-fi series "Avatar." As in those films, trees are portrayed as having evolved to live in cooperative, interdependent relationships maintained by communication and a collective intelligence similar to a social insect colony. Crucial to this "Wood Wide Web" or "Forest Internet" are the creatures inhabiting the soil, particularly mycorrhizae filaments (mycelium) that act as "fungal fiber-optic cables." Via these networks, trees support their "children" and other neighboring plants, even sharing nutrients with those which are sick or struggling, and warning each other of impending dangers such as pest infestations or megafaunal browsing. Given short shrift, from this soil scientist's perspective, are other microorganisms involved in soil ecology. A teaspoon of soil can have a million bacteria alone. To his credit, Wohlleben devotes much of a chapter to small arthropods found in soil biomass such as beetle mites, springtails, and pseudoscorpions, and the role they play as "terrestrial plankton."

The author's conjecture is backed by numerous scientific studies that are referenced throughout his book. Wohlleben's main interest seems to be getting readers interested in the lives of trees, in the hope that they will defend forests from destructive logging and other threats, such as climate change. Wohlleben educates us about German silvicultural techniques such as Plenterwälder (selective cutting), where trees of different species, ages and sizes are mixed together so that seedlings can grow under their parents. He points out exemplary efforts in the USA, Japan and other countries to demonstrate the art/science of addressing "human need for forest products while creating a nurturing co-existence between the forest and human community." We learn, for example, that Switzerland's constitution reads, in part, that "account (is) to be taken of the dignity of creation when handling animals, plants and other organisms."

It may seem a stretch to assert that root tips acting as neurons make the root system the tree equivalent of a brain, but it is an accepted fact that this network is in charge of a tree's chemical activities. Roots absorb substances and bring them into the plant, while they deliver the products of photosynthesis to the tree's fungal partners. But can plants think? Do they learn? Are they intelligent? Even if a skeptical reader judges otherwise, you'll be left with a yearning to learn more about the plant kingdom, and perhaps feel drawn to wrap your arms around the nearest conifer or deciduous tree.

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