

# 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 by John Carter

Dear JVAS Community,

It was an early Autumn morning, and the sun was just peaking over the mountain top. I could hear the Red-winged blackbirds and Song Sparrows wake up the neighborhood. I was enjoying a fresh cup of shade grown Lenca Farms coffee, and that was when I heard the sound that makes all of us bird lovers just cringe. Yes, it was a loud thud against the window from an alluring Red-eyed Vireo.

With the white eyebrow stripe bordered above and below by blackish lines, this olive-green colored bird was certainly dazed but did not appear to have any other injuries such as a broken wing. I held the bird for a few minutes to see if it would come to and fly-off, but it seemed comfortable in my hands. I have read that birds can overheat in your hands, so I didn't want to hold this adult bird longer than necessary. I got a shoebox and softened the bottom with some cloth. After 15 minutes, I opened the box and the bird was clearly calm and alert, ready to take flight once again.

Sadly, in many of window strike cases, birds suffer serious injuries such as internal hemorrhages, concussions, or damage to their bills, wings, eyes, or skulls. Window collisions kill vast numbers of birds in the United States each year and is reported to be at least a billion birds per year.



(President's Message continued on page 5)

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## Juniata Valley Audubon Society Zoom Programs

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 Mid-Atlantic, the district 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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- ♦ Sharon Clewell
- ♦ Laura Palmer

The JVAS Board has decided that we want all of our members to stay safe during these Covid-19 uncertain times. Because we care about your health and safety, and because we want our members to feel connected, we are offering virtual meetings this winter and spring via **Zoom**.

Before joining a Zoom meeting on a computer or mobile device, you can download the **FREE** Zoom app from **the Download Center** (<https://zoom.us/download>). Otherwise, you will be prompted to download and install Zoom when you click a link to join.

**To join either one of these meetings, follow these instructions:  
Try to log in about 5 – 10 minutes before 7 pm.**

- To join by computer, use this link:

<https://psu.zoom.us/j/97418229426>

-Use this passcode: 123456

- To join from the Zoom app on a smartphone: enter this meeting ID:  
**974 1822 9426**

- To join by phone, call this number: +1 301 715 8592 (US Toll)

Enter the meeting ID followed by the pound sign.

**974 1822 9426#**

**MARCH Zoom Program: Tuesday, March 16 @ 7pm**

**“The Bird Way” by Jennifer Ackerman**

**APRIL Zoom Program: Tuesday, April 20 @ 7pm**

**“A Pictorial Tour of South African Fauna: Critically  
Endangered and Hanging on by Claw and Talon”  
by Don Bryant**

**MAY Zoom Program: Tuesday, May 18 @ 7pm**

**“What Can We Learn from Studying Diet in the  
American Kestrel?”  
by Dr. Allison Cornell**

**Chapter Membership is free in 2021, but donations are welcome:  
JVAS P.O. Box 1013 Altoona, PA 16603**

**If you'd like to join JVAS,  
go to <https://www.jvas.org/join-juniata-valley-audubon/>  
to complete the membership form.**



## JVAS Zoom Programs for March and April

See Zoom link and password on previous page

### **Zoom Program: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 @ 7pm** **“The Bird Way” by Jennifer Ackerman**

A multimedia presentation, this talk explores a kaleidoscope of fascinating behaviors in the bird world through the lens of five arenas of daily activity—communication, work, play, love, and parenting. It tells stories about some of the extraordinary ways that birds do these things and the secret, sophisticated intelligence underlying their behavior. And it explores the new discoveries that are overturning many of our old, conventional ideas about how birds live their lives, describes how science is making some of these astonishing discoveries, and shows the most stunning examples from each section of the book. The talk ranges from the tropical rainforests of eastern Australia and the remote woodlands of northern Japan, to the rolling hills of lower Austria and the islands of Alaska’s Kachemak Bay, and includes audio, video, and spectacular photos by professional photographers. See more details at [www.JVAS.org](http://www.JVAS.org)



### **Zoom Program: Tuesday, April 20, 2021 @ 7pm**

#### **“A Pictorial Tour of South African Fauna: Critically Endangered and Hanging on by Claw and Talon” by Don Bryant**



Juvenile Martial Eagle photographed by Don Bryant

There are 23 species of vultures, sixteen of which occur in the Old World. Twelve species occur in Africa and eight of these are at imminent risk of extinction! Collectively, vultures are worth billions of dollars for their clean-up activities and for the protection they provide to humans against deadly diseases. This presentation will be a pictorial survey of

southern Africa. Don will discuss the threats vultures are enduring and show photos of critically endangered eagles, as well as selected other birds of prey, and will finish off with some photos of charismatic megafauna—many of which are also threatened. Humans account for nearly all of these problems, and absent significant behavioral changes by humans, many of these highly valuable but threatened species will go extinct in our lifetime. See more details at [www.JVAS.org](http://www.JVAS.org)





We will email the Zoom links before each meeting if we have your email address.

If you aren't getting emails from JVAS, please send us your email address so we can communicate with you more effectively. We will not share your email.

**Email: [jvas771@gmail.com](mailto:jvas771@gmail.com)**

## **JVAS Field Trips**

All JVAS field trips have been cancelled due to Covid-19 concerns. We encourage you to get outside as much as you can, but please follow social distance guidelines, and wear a mask. Enjoy nature by yourself or with your family.

Or, you could participate in virtual field trips! There are 11 virtual trips recorded on the Audubon PA website: <https://pa.audubon.org/chapters-centers/virtual-field-trips>

Three of the trips were presented by JVAS members Laura Jackson, Debra Grim, and Sam Dietze.

We hope to resume field trips in 2021, so stay tuned.

We hope **YOU** will consider volunteering to be the new JVAS Field Trip Chair. The new chair will oversee the planning of field trips, as Covid-19 conditions allow. The JVAS officers and directors will be glad to help plan trips. We already have one planned for late summer, 2021. Plus, there are traditional places we like to visit every year, so you don't have reinvent the field trip list.

**Please contact President John Carter if you'd like to lead us in new and familiar directions in 2021.**



### **A Big Welcome to Denice Rodaniche the new JVAS Membership Chair**

Denice Rodaniche is an Altoona native. After twenty-seven years as an educator for the Dept. of Defense Schools in Panama, she and her husband returned to the area in 1999. She retired from educational consulting in 2014 and became more active in JVAS. She considers herself a novice birder, but is an ardent supporter of programs that seek to protect our environment. Thanks to a Members' Meeting several years ago, Denice was motivated to begin expanding her skill in watercolor nature and travel journaling. She looks forward to participating in and promoting JVAS!

## *President's Message, continued from page 1:*

Here are some strategies from the National Audubon website to help protect our bird friends from window strikes:

- **Make windows look like a barrier to birds, such as:**
  - Window decals may help, but they must be placed no more than 2-4 inches apart in order to be effective. Birds will try to fly through larger gaps. This means that on large windows, many closely spaced decals may be necessary to deter bird collisions.
  - Create temporary designs with window markers or tempera paints, soap, or hang ribbons on window exteriors. Again, designs or ribbons should be placed no more than 2-4 inches apart.
- **Install external screens or netting on windows.** When done effectively, external screens can break up reflections or can slow birds down before they hit the glass.
- **Close window drapes or blinds partially or completely whenever possible.** This is especially important at night when interior lights are in use.
- **Position feeders either directly on a window with suction cups or within 3 feet.**
- **Avoid placing plants near windows inside your home.**

### **How to Stop Killer Windows** by Laura Jackson

Mike and I have also found birds that were injured or killed by flying into a window. Most of the problems occurred outside our big kitchen window, in the back yard where we have bird feeders and a bubbling boulder to provide water for wildlife. The kitchen window reflects the forest that surrounds our backyard, so it's no wonder that birds fly into the glass. Birds don't realize that they see a reflection; they think they are flying into the forest.

One thing that does work is screening. Frank Haas, a well-known Pennsylvania birder, started the **Bird Screen Company**: <https://www.birdscreen.com>. His products do work, by providing a screen that deters most birds from hitting the windows. The screens are not flush with the window and have enough tension, so birds that do hit the screen bounce off without being injured. We bought enough screens to cover our kitchen window and thought we had the problem solved, until our backyard bears discovered the suction cups that attached the screens to the windows. For some reason, the bears delighted in removing the suction cups, rendering the screens useless.

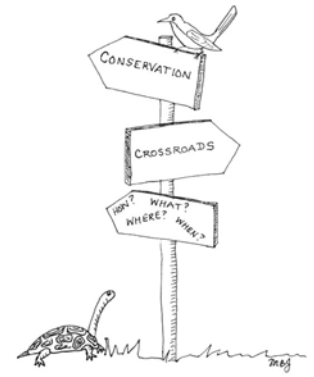
Still searching we found a product called **Bird Crash Preventer**:

<http://stores.santarosanational.com/index.php>. This setup has easy-to-install brackets that held up a curtain of fishing line spaced 4 in. apart and fastened to brackets below. The fishing line is very reflective, so birds avoid the "curtain." However, we found that small birds like American Goldfinches would fly between the fishing line and hit the window. Mike then strung more fishing line to make the gap just 2 inches apart. This helped, but a few birds still hit the window. Next, we bought black garden nylon netting sold in hardware stores used to cover fruit trees and shrubs. We strung this on top of the fishing line, attached it to the brackets, and pulled it taut. When birds hit the netting they just bounce off without being injured. Voila! Problem solved.

There are other solutions, too. Check out **Acopian Bird Savers** (Zen Wind Curtains):

<https://www.birdsavers.com>. You can purchase this solution, or make your own. This product has been scientifically shown to be effective. You can download the research papers from the website.

**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. Industrial Wind Project Proposed for Dunning/Evitt's Mountain in Bedford**

**County: CPV Kettle Wind Project.** Residents are contacting township supervisors, asking them to update the outdated wind ordinances in Bedford, South Woodbury, and East St. Clair Townships.

Read more: [www.jvas.org/category/conservation-news/wind-energy-development/](http://www.jvas.org/category/conservation-news/wind-energy-development/)

**2. Pumped Hydro Storage Projects: Last Listing!**

Although there are still preliminary permits listed for 20 pumped hydro storage projects in Pennsylvania, all of the projects proposed for our chapter area have been terminated. Consequently, we will no longer include Pumped Hydro Storage Project updates unless a new project is proposed for our area.

**3. Proposed Rutter's Gas/Convenience Store upslope from Old Crow Wetlands near Huntingdon, Pa.**

JVAS members have expressed their concerns and opposition to the Smithfield Township supervisors. PennDOT recently approved a new traffic light, so that's one less obstacle to the new store. The next step is for Rutter's to obtain a zoning variance for a 10,000 sq ft footprint. The limit is 8000 sq ft. A variance hearing has not been scheduled yet, but we encourage you to attend the monthly township meetings, held on the first Tuesday of each month, at 7:00 pm. The location is the township building in Smithfield, on the corner of 13th Street and Mt. Vernon Avenue, or 2 blocks south of Rt 26 (Pennsylvania Ave.).

**4. Proposed Rutter's Gas/Convenience Store upslope of Sandy Run Exceptional Value Wetlands along Sabbath Rest Road, beside the Days Inn & Suites by Wyndham in Pinecroft, Pa.**

The concerns for this Rutter's Store (with parking for 53 trucks) are similar to those in Huntingdon. Stormwater and any hydrocarbon pollution will flow into the wetlands along Sandy Run, classified as a High-Quality Coldwater Fishery. The Pa. Fish & Boat Commission classifies Sandy Run as a Class A Wild Trout stream with naturally reproducing wild trout, thus making it an Exceptional Value wetland. Rutter's plans to control pollution by installing a filtration system in an underground tank, which will require excavating 20 ft. into the limestone bedrock. Concerns over maintenance and monitoring will be shared with DEP. We are asking for a public hearing to address environmental concerns.

**Join Cornell's Birds of the World Club**

JVAS received a grant to join the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Birds of the World Club. That means we can offer each JVAS member a 15% discount for an annual subscription, which normally costs \$49.

Members can access extensive information and multimedia galleries for almost 11,000 bird species around the world. Birders, scientists, and students can obtain "the sharpest picture yet of the biology of the world's birdlife."

You can check out free bird previews to see what the Club offers: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/home>

Email Laura at [jacksonlaura73@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonlaura73@gmail.com) for the Club Coupon Code.



## **SPOTLIGHT ON SOLAR:**

### **A Residential Solar Installation Story/Interview with Stuart Echols by his wife, Ann Echols**

#### **Setting**

The year: 2019

The place: Port Matilda, PA, Halfmoon Township

The person: Stuart Echols

The project: Install a solar roof to power our house.

Unique factors: Our house and barn roofs face south/S-E. Direction is critical. We own the vacant lot next to our home which is classified as a separate residential lot. Thus, we configured the solar addition on this lot and it serves to sell to the grid. Our home, next door, remains on the grid as it has always been. West Penn Power nets the two together. We are making money on solar.

Ann: Stuart, who did you buy our solar cells from?

Stuart: Solarflexion out of California.

Ann: Why did you choose this company?

Stuart: They gave me the best price and they were the most helpful on the phone every time I called and asked questions.

Ann: How did you know how much solar power we needed?

Stuart: I took our West Penn Power utility bills and added 12 months of kwhr/mo. I divided this number by 12 to get a monthly average. I multiplied this monthly average by 1.2 (20% increase). This told me how much power I wanted to generate.

Ann: Can't you just use an online calculator?

Stuart: Yes, I used the online calculator to determine the number of panels to order to satisfy the amount of power I wanted. I also used it to determine how much square feet of roof space I needed. You can find these calculators that I used by searching google. Type in solar calculator PV Watts calculator.

Ann: After you figured out the roof size, what did you do?

Stuart: I designed a pole barn. I bid it out and RM Morgan gave me the best options. Ron was most responsive and willing to work with us.

Ann: As I recall, we chose our home based on the fact that it faced south/south-east. It is a plus that the way the barn could most easily fit on the lot next door was situated to favor a roof on the south side.

Stuart: Correct

Ann: Can you outline for me the process you went through and highlight some ups and downs?

Stuart: sure.

1. Select a system.
  - a. Two options exist: buying a great big inverted system (1 for all) or a system of micro-inverters (1 for each panel)
  - b. Micro-inverters are safer. They are safer because the DC is converted to AC at the panel and AC is safer to work with.
  - c. Micro-inverters are easier to monitor in terms of monitoring the entire system.
  - d. I chose micro-inverter and a controller manufacturer based on:
    - i. Simplicity of installation
    - ii. Online support
      1. Company selected: Enphase



Ann: I bet there are a LOT of brands out there! I bet they are changing all the time in terms of how they differentiate  
Stuart: Yep.

2. Designed the solar system wiring plan with the help of Solarflexion, Inc.
  - a. I did a lot of online research to teach myself.
  - b. The wires cannot be overloaded with power.
  - c. You have to figure out how much power each solar panel and inverter is producing. The product specifications can tell you this.
  - d. I found that about 10 panels + inverters per circuit was a good option. We ran 9. We have 10 circuits. Thus, we have 90 solar panels (90 micro-inverters).
3. Now figure out the breaker box. 10 circuits all go to one breaker or junction box.
  - a. All power joins together here and it is fed into the meter.
  - b. Need a 2-way meter that you have to buy from the power company. The RM Morgan pole-structure (which we call the barn) uses some power for lighting and outlets for tools, but mostly the barn sells power.
  - c. The meter is connected to the utility company and is transformed via a buried cable.
4. Once installed:
  - a. Set up the system for monitoring is done by entering the needed data including the serial number of each inverter, the configuration of the panel array, the consumption meter manufacturer, and the production meter info.
  - b. Can only setup on Enphase's website.
  - c. Enphase does the monitoring that you and I check online and track.
  - d. We use this system for our solar credits, too.
  - e. We trade our solar credits using SREC Trade.
  - f. Power production is monitored by West Penn Power. They have their own meter and they will not accept Enphase's information.
  - g. Add photographs online to show everything as well.
  - h. Below are some photographs that we loaded to Enphase's site. Note, in 2020, we build a second barn in front of the first barn.





### Tips on Racking and Mounting the panels.

- i. There are off-the-shelf systems for this.
  - j. Stuart designed his own system for panel installation.
    - i. He did this because he was not satisfied with the strength of off-the-shelf products.
    - ii. Off-the-shelf products were also not designed well for metal roofing.
    - iii. When used with metal roofing, off-the-shelf systems had the potential to leak.
  - k. Because he designed his own system, we had to get an engineer to certify it, even though it was over 4x stronger than the off-the-shelf offering. The engineer laughed, yet he still charged us.
  - l. Stuart built a mock-up showing how his system works. He gave it to a contractor and showed him concretely using this full-size mock-up how everything was to fit together and work. This is how he trained the installer.
  - m. We were required to hire a certified electrician to install it. The electrical permit could not be issued unless a certified electrician installed it.
  - n. Centre County Code Electrical Dept. had to inspect it.
  - o. This all had to be completed before we could connect to West Penn Power.
5. Biggest Challenge: PERMITTING!
- a. This is because we did not use an off-the-shelf residential system
    - i. First permit -- Building permit: Ag Building/Barn Halfmoon Township: Easy
    - ii. Second permit – structural permit for mounting the solar system because we designed the building to carry the additional load plus snow: Difficult
      - 1. Get an engineer to do a structural review of the trusses; trusses were uniquely designed
      - 2. Centre County Code wanted a structural engineer to certify the entire building. When we added the solar, they said the building had to meet residential or commercial structural standards and Ag standards were not sufficient. So, we got an engineer to certify ours and it worked.
    - iii. Third permit – Centre county Code Electrical Permit.
      - 1. This required a set of electrical drawings and calculations giving all the details for the electrical system. We have these drawings.
      - 2. Centre County Code wanted this to be approved by West Penn Power before they would approve it, so we simultaneously started permit #4.
    - iv. Fourth permit – West Penn Power Agreement to allow to connect to the transformer. This was the most difficult because we did not “fit” their form!
    - v. Fifth “permit” – West Penn Power “Interconnect Agreement”; an agreement that allows us to buy and sell power to West Penn Power.
  - b. Once all permits and agreements were approved, we could start construction.
6. After construction was completed and before the solar system was installed, we had to have a structural inspection. Once approved, solar could be installed.
7. Once solar installed, we had to have a solar electrical inspection, then we were allowed to formally request connection with West Penn Power.

NOTE: the process is NOT this complicated to add solar panels to a house. Our set up is separate and can be sold to anyone as a separate structure with income earning potential. It does not have to be sold with our house. We wanted this flexibility.

- 8. Save ALL receipts and copies of all documents. Save these. File IRS form 5695. We received a 30% tax deduction for 2019. We were able to count not simply the cost of the solar panels and installation, but also the cost of the barn structure that holds the solar. We did have a bid from Envinity for both a structure and solar installation and simply for solar installation. In both cases, we saved CONSIDERABLY. Our monthly electricity bill for our house varies between \$7.80 and \$10.50. That is about \$100 a year. The solar barn bill

9. Newly released: Biden is offering a 30% solar credit. <https://www.nextbigfuture.com/2021/02/biden-green-act-would-subsidize-tesla-ev-batteries-and-solar.html>

## JVAS MEMBERS' PAGE: Share your photos and bird experiences with us

Send photos and stories to Laura at [jacksonlaura73@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonlaura73@gmail.com)

### Hoary Redpoll: When a Rare Bird Comes to Call by Susan Braun

"It wears extra fluffy feathers and looks like it's been kissed by the hoarfrost from which it gets its name."  
From the Cornell Lab Bird of the Week, Jan 9

On Dec 29, 2020, I was feeling particularly glum. Normally, I travel over winter break, but I was staying home during the pandemic and didn't get to see my sons or my sisters. I've been spending a lot of time watching my own feeders, mostly looking at birds with odd color or feather patterns. But that afternoon I was on a phone call (to Audubon) and looked out my front window when I saw a rare bird. I hung up, snapped a photo and submitted an eBird checklist. I knew it was an irruptive year for winter finches, researchers were calling this year a "superflight," where species of boreal finch are irrupting, or moving southward in search of food. Little did I know that I would witness one of these birds, a Hoary Redpoll, in my own yard.

At first, I mis-identified this bird as a Common Redpoll. I've seen those several times before, including Centre County, but I'd only seen a Hoary once before in Ontario. I figured a Hoary would never show up in my yard. A sharp birder checked my photos in eBird and there was discussion about its ID. I called Alex Lameroux and asked him to help me verify the ID.



Redpolls are small finches about the size of a goldfinch. They have streaked sides, dark faces and stubby yellow bills. Redpoll references the bright red patch on its crown. Redpolls also have special pouches they use to store seeds where they can eat them in a sheltered place. But the Hoary Redpoll is paler and fluffier than the Common Redpoll and it has a smaller bill. It nests on the arctic and it is rare for them to move south into the US. The last one spotted in Centre County was in 2013 for less than two weeks. The Hoary at my house has been here for almost two months.

The question that comes up when a rare bird is sighted is if it should be made public. Some birds like rare owls can be harassed by photographers or a gyrfalcon could be at risk for being trapped by a falconer. Since my bird was on my porch feeder and could be seen from a public sidewalk, I kept my post public and it was made a Stakeout Hotspot in eBird. From that point on, this bird became a celebrity and I suppose I got my 15 minutes of birding fame. Hundreds of birders have visited my house for a chance to see this rare bird and, for many, it was a life bird. They came from all over Pennsylvania and several surrounding states including Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, Ohio and North Carolina. The furthest was someone from Chicago who was dropping his kid off at Penn State. Since I was home for winter break and for a week of remote teaching, I had the chance to go out and meet many of the visiting birders. During the pandemic when so many things were not normal, it was such a pleasure to have a chance to talk to many birding friends both local and from around the state and to meet birders whose names I recognized from listservs or eBird. At least two birders who had rare birds at their houses came and I could share mine. This has truly been a wonderful experience for me and I've been so happy that so many others were able to experience the joy of seeing this gorgeous bird.

But the story doesn't end here. On Feb 7, 2021, a Common Redpoll showed up and it would often be on the same feeder as the Hoary. While not as rare, it was still a treat and a new wave of birders have been visiting my house. Keep watching your feeders and your favorite birding spots, you never know what will surprise you.

**JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON**

PO BOX 1013  
ALTOONA, PA 16603

*Address Service Requested*



**Honduran Coffee for sale on-line**

**Emilio Garcia**, our partner who produces shade-grown coffee in Honduras, has expanded his coffee sales to include sustainably harvested, shade-grown coffee from other countries. You can order freshly roasted coffee (ground or whole bean) from **Lenca Coffee Roasters**: <https://lencacoffeeroasters.com>

Fair Trade shade-grown **decaf coffee** from Colombia is also available.

Emilio sells his green coffee beans through <https://lencafarms.com>

**Remember, shade-grown coffee is good for you and good for our birds!**

