

# The Gnatcatcher

## Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



[www.JVAS.org](http://www.JVAS.org)

### President's Message by John Carter

Dear JVAS Community,

Spring is here friends, with new birds passing through our yards, flowers of different varieties emerging from the ground, bees are buzzing, butterflies floating by, and the temperature is rising. You might be thinking to yourself, "What can I do to help support the birds even more?" And I would say, "Consider planting some Native Plants!"

According to Audubon, "In the United States, a native plant is defined as one that was naturally found in a particular area before European colonization. Native plants are the foundation of a region's biodiversity, providing essential food sources and shelter for birds, especially those threatened by the changing climate. Since native plants are adapted to local precipitation and soil conditions, they generally require less upkeep, therefore helping the environment and saving you time, water, and money."

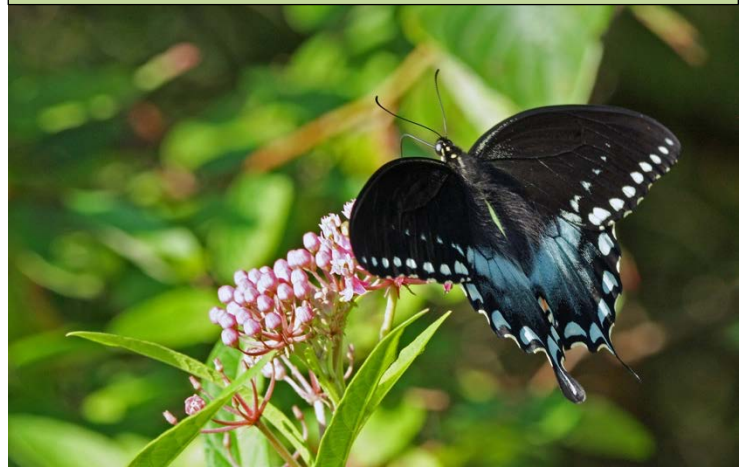
Plants that are native to the areas where you live have the greatest number of benefits. They support birds and other wildlife through many stages of their lifecycle. They provide food in the form of seeds, nectar, berries, and nuts. Native Plants play an important role in upholding insect types that are critical to the existence of nestlings and migrating birds. Native plants also contribute to healthier more resilient human communities by more sustainably adding shade, storing carbon, and absorbing stormwater to help reduce flooding and polluted run-off after storms than non-native plants.

One of my favorite native plants that I enjoy each year is the Black-Eyed-Susan. This is an herbaceous annual which grows 1 to 2 feet tall in full sun in moist to dry, well-drained soil. The daisy-like flowers are yellow with a brownish-purple center, and bloom on rough stalks from June to October. It attracts birds such as wood warblers, cardinals, grosbeaks and wrens for its seeds and pollinating insects for its nectar and is resistant to browsing by deer.

Here are some helpful resources from the National Audubon website to help understand Native Plants and improving your backyard habitat for wildlife:

- **DIY Garden Designs** – *want to build that successful garden space with helping the birds, check this out:* <https://pa.audubon.org/conservation/diy-garden-designs>
- **AUDUBON Native Plant Data Base** - *explore the best plants for birds in your area:* <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>
- **Bird-Friendly Habitat Recognition Program** - *garden with ecology in mind:* <https://pa.audubon.org/conservation/bird-friendly-habitat-recognition-program>

Spicebush Swallowtail nectaring on Swamp Milkweed



Thanks for continuing to help our birds and other wildlife!

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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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- ♦ Susan Braun
- ♦ 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 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 our May meeting, 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#**

MAY Zoom Program: Tuesday, May 18 @ 7pm

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

American kestrels, the smallest falcon in North America, eat a diverse diet of insects, mammals, and songbirds. They can reduce pests for farmers, particularly during the spring and summer breeding season when they provision food to their chicks. Both the male and female parent contribute to parental care, but do they contribute equally? What are the consequences of different diets on developing chicks, and what drives variation in diet between different nests? This talk will explore variation in diet in a generalist predator during the nestling period.

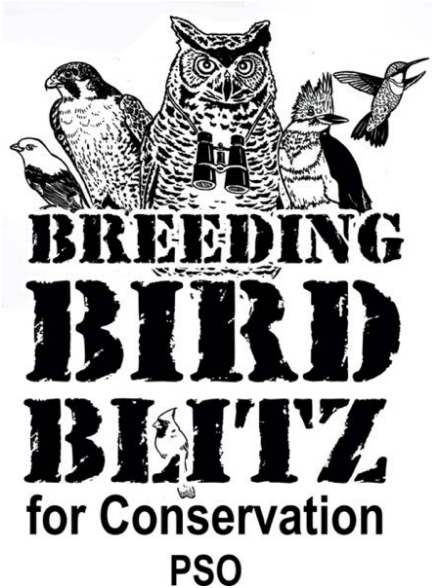


A BIG Welcome to Allison,  
who recently joined the  
Penn State Altoona faculty  
as Assistant Professor of Biology!



This is the last newsletter until next fall. Please send us your email address so we can keep in touch over the summer. We will not share your email.

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



### **Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation (B4C):**

**Friday June 18 – Monday June 21**

**Registration Deadline is Sunday June 13**

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) is turning the passion of Pennsylvanians for watching and counting birds into funding for bird conservation with the launch of the Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation (B4C). Teams of birders across the state will compete to identify as many species as possible on one day from **Friday, June 18 through Monday June 21, 2021**. Teams will garner donations to support three critical bird conservation projects. Bird-lovers of all ages and skill levels are invited to visit [www.breedingbirdblitz.org](http://www.breedingbirdblitz.org) to participate or make a donation.

Funds raised by the B4C will be split equally between Hawk Mountain, the Manada Conservancy, and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, which will use the funds to help Wood Thrush and/or Northern Harriers, this year's flagship bird species.

### **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.

We are planning some fall field trips, so watch for the list in the fall newsletter.

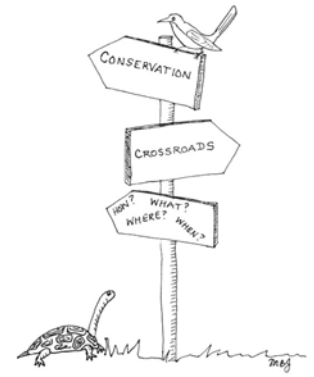
We hope **YOU** will consider volunteering to be the new JVAS Field Trip Chair. The new chair will oversee the planning of field trips, as Covid-19 conditions allow. The JVAS officers and directors will be glad to help plan trips. We already have one planned for late summer, 2021. Plus, there are traditional 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.**

**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.**

**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.** Preservation Pennsylvania has an article that highlights the historic and important ecological values that will be damaged if this project is constructed: <https://www.preservationpa.org/dutch-corner-under-threat-again/>  
**Action: Email the Bedford Township Supervisors and ask them to update the wind ordinance to protect the mountain: [BEDFORDTWP@GMAIL.COM](mailto:BEDFORDTWP@GMAIL.COM)**
2. **GREAT NEWS!! The US Army Corps released the Raystown Lake Master Plan Revision in mid-March,** which guides programs and development for the next 15 – 25 years. Hawn's Bridge is safe from development. The decision was based on ecological reasons, but it was also noted that significant public comments supported protection of this rare shale barrens habitat.
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. The next step is for Rutter's to obtain a zoning variance for a 10,000 sq ft footprint. The limit is 8,000 sq ft. A variance hearing is scheduled for April 29, 2021, so a JVAS Action Alert was sent, asking members to write to the township supervisors regarding habitat and water pollution concerns. An update will be sent via email after the meeting. We encourage you to attend the monthly township meetings, held on the first **Tuesday of each month, at 6:00 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 asked DEP 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.



## Will you get involved in the Bird-Friendly Habitat Recognition Program?

JVAS members have been hard at work helping to improve and revitalize this statewide Audubon program. We know that some chapter members are already part of this initiative and we hope many more will join. In the past, there was very little communication between the program members and their respective chapters, but that has changed. Although the Habitat Recognition sign is similar, there is a new application for those who haven't participated in the past.

We encourage you to do an inventory of your yard using the **application insert** in the newsletter. You can also apply online at <https://act.audubon.org/a/bird-friendly-habitat-recognition-program>



There will also be periodic updates from Audubon and from JVAS about this recognition program, if you check the box at the bottom of the application. Please consider doing so.

We'd also like to encourage schools, businesses, and organizations to join. Please share a copy of the application with any schools or other organizations that might have a pollinator garden or natural habitat on their property.

The \$25 fee is mainly to cover the cost of the yard sign and to support bird-friendly habitat projects.

Here's what the 9.5 in. by 13.5 in. sign looks like →

### Bird-Friendly Habitat



Audubon recognizes that this property provides healthy wildlife habitat that supports and protects birds, people, and the places we share.



Yes, it's a challenge to find native plants at nurseries in our part of Pennsylvania. But don't despair, Denice Rodaniche persuaded Martin's Garden Center near Tyrone to get involved in Audubon's Bird-friendly Blooms program. Read more on the next page about this new initiative. Thank you, Denice, for all your time and effort! The birds and bees thank you, too!

# Bird-Friendly Blooms & the Birdy Dozen

By Denice Rodaniche











Last year Audubon PA launched a program inviting garden centers and nurseries to make available for purchase native blooms that are more bird-friendly. The 12 native plants chosen each year are called the “Birdy Dozen.” The pandemic threw a monkey wrench into the effort last year. Only three centers were able to sign on. This year we are up to nine active locations, the newest one being **Martin’s Garden Center** located at 3278 Birmingham Pike, Tyrone, Pa. Other nurseries selling the Birdy Dozen native plants are listed at <https://pa.audubon.org/conservation/buy-local-bird-friendly-blooms>



Audubon

## The 2021 Birdy Dozen

Birds and insects need native plants! For many, native plants provide essential food they can't get from other types of plants. Have a positive impact on your local landscape by adding one or more to your garden this year. **The birds will thank you!**

Flowering Plants		
 Milkweed (Common, Swamp, Butterfly) (Asclepias spp.)	 Goldenrod (Solidago spp.)	 Foamflower (Tiarella cordifolia)
 Mountain Mint (Pycnanthemum muticum)	 Cardinal Flower (Lobelia cardinalis)	 Eastern Red Columbine (Aquilegia canadensis)
Shrubs		
 Lowbush Blueberry (Vaccinium angustifolium)	 Summersweet (Clethra alnifolia)	 Black Chokeberry (Aronia melanocarpa)
Trees		
 White Oak (Quercus alba)	 Flowering Dogwood (Cornus florida)	 Black Tupelo (Black Gum) (Nyssa sylvatica)

Learn more about Audubon's Bird-Friendly Communities, see the 2020 Birdy Dozen and discover how to register your property in our Bird-Friendly Habitat recognition program at [pa.audubon.org/bfc](https://pa.audubon.org/bfc).

For 2020 and 2021 the annual **Birdy Dozen** native plant list includes six flowering perennials, three shrubs, and three trees. Some examples are mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*), native milkweeds, common winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), and oaks (*Quercus spp.*). Nurseries must purchase only native straight species – no hybrids or cultivars. In the case of Martin’s, they have chosen to start with only the flowering perennial plants, combining both years’ listing.

There are many enticements for participation! Since they agreed to set up a native plant sale display, Martin’s will now receive a resource kit of a large banner, handouts, laminated posters, and rack cards explaining the benefits of providing critical habitat for birds, butterflies, bees, and other important insects. In addition, we will be planning a customer event with them, and doing other promotions. Their business is included on the *Buy Local Blooms* webpage of Audubon PA:

<https://pa.audubon.org/conservation/buy-local-bird-friendly-blooms>, as well as the

Native Plants Database:

<https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds>. We provided assistance in finding a wholesaler that suited their needs.

This truly is a win-win for the Bird-Friendly Blooms partner. When first approached with the proposal last fall, the owner of Martin’s said that they have many customers asking for natives. He admitted to not having any knowledge of how to begin. Aside from buying the plants, this all comes at no cost to them. Hopefully it will not only help their profit margin, but they will get to shine as an environmentally conscious business.

If any of our members would be willing to participate in the upcoming event (TBD), or to be on hand at Martin’s occasionally for Q&A, please contact Denice Rodaniche at [denicrod@outlook.com](mailto:denicrod@outlook.com)! Oh yes, please consider buying some native plants for your yard!



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 by **August 15, 2021**. Good reading!

### **NATURE'S BEST HOPE: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard**

By Douglas W. Tallamy

Review by Doug Mason

How refreshing to read an environmental book that, instead of focusing largely on doom and gloom, is downright optimistic. This read counters the loss of biodiversity from our world with a prescription that everyone of us can follow while unleashing the wonders of nature on our own properties.

The author, a University of Delaware entomologist, and his wife Cindy have demonstrated on their own 10 acres in Oxford, Pa, near Longwood Gardens, how choosing native plants has profoundly impacted the diversity of life in Tallamyland. Readers are invited to follow their example, regardless of property size or location, even if choosing just to plant a few natives.

The revolutionary idea put forth in the book is the concept of Homegrown National Park (HNP). Tallamy posits that if each American landowner made it a goal to convert half of the lawn to productive native plants, we could collectively restore ecosystem function to more than 20 million acres...HNP! By thusly restoring plant and animal communities, you will develop an intimate connection with them only footsteps from your door, 365 days a year. Tallamy has teamed with Michelle Alfandari to create a website as the tool to promote HNP and document its progress. Google [homegrownnationalpark.org](http://homegrownnationalpark.org) for details on how you can put your land on the map.

In chapter one, The Dreamers, Aldo Leopold's land ethic and proposal of setting aside large tracts in the Western USA sparks the notion of Homegrown National Park. E.O. Wilson next claims that emergency measures are required to stabilize the biosphere before the sixth great extinction, and that we must set aside half of planet Earth as a human-free natural reserve to preserve biodiversity. Tallamy argues from there that conservation approaches developed thus far are not inclusive enough to realize Leopold's and Wilson's dreams.

Chapter 2 discusses the national park system developed by U.S Congress in 1872 with the creation of Yellowstone National Park (the transformation of Cleveland's Cuyahoga River from industrial sludge and fire is our most recent national park). This commitment to wild places was motivated by philosophers like Henry David Thoreau, poets like Ralph Waldo Emerson, activists like John Muir, and politicians like Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot.

"Nature's Best Hope" has a different approach than Tallamy's essential "Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants." The latter is more of how-to for gardeners, while his more recent book addresses why...a call to arms for the environment. Both though are full of fascinating facts and explain important ecological concepts in a way any interested layperson can understand.

Before concluding and answering frequently asked questions, the author's new book ends with a chapter about what each of us can do to create HNP. Here are the 10 steps to get started, as described in Chapter 11:

- 1) Shrink the lawn
- 2) Remove invasive species
- 3) Plant keystone genera
- 4) Be generous with your plantings
- 5) Plant for specialist pollinators
- 6) Network with neighbors
- 7) Build a conservation hardscape
- 8) Create caterpillar pupation sites under your trees
- 9) Do not spray or fertilize
- 10) Educate your neighborhood civic association

Tallamy recognizes that HNP will be the most ambitious restoration initiative ever undertaken. But ecosystem function can be a goal that unites rather than divides us. We must replace our current "humans or nature" mentality with a new "humans and nature" mentality.



## Research Project: Native Plants Support More Prey Availability for Birds

By Angela A. Spagnoli

In early spring 2016, I received my first grant to begin my restoration project at the Northern Blair County Recreation Center (NBCRC) wetland. That grant came from money raised by the JVAS Earth Week Birding Classic. With that money, I bought supplies needed to invite PSU-Altoona students to the wetland to begin invasive plant removal. The following year, I began my master's project with permission to use the NBCRC wetland as the research site. My project changed from removing invasives to studying them: specifically, their ability to transfer energy to higher trophic levels and their capacity to provide prey availability for nesting songbirds.

The NBCRC wetland creation began in 1990 on the Martin Farm property to offset wetlands lost during the construction of Peterson Industrial Park in Tipton. It is a 15-acre vernal pool with 181 bird species spotted, 11 species of amphibians, and thousands of species of insects. Despite being a mitigated wetland, it has become highly functional, however, it has become overrun with both herbaceous and woody invasive plant species.

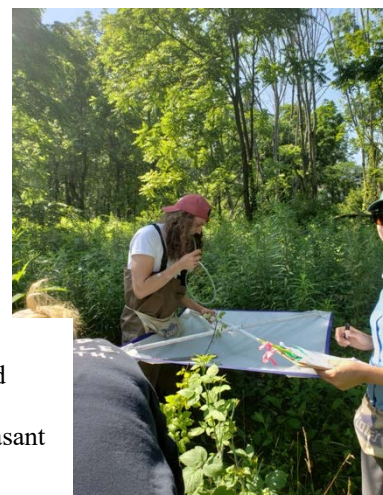
In order to compare native and introduced plants, locations in the study area were randomly generated, and a vegetation survey was conducted to determine the most abundant plants within the wetland. Fourteen species were selected (seven native, seven introduced) for two simultaneous studies: 1) Insect herbivory on native and introduced plants, 2) Insect abundance, size and richness on native and introduced plants. Two branches of similar appearance were selected, then one branch was randomly chosen to have a bird exclusion net placed over it, the other branch was left open. Nets were placed on branches at the start of bird breeding season to determine if bird foraging was a factor.

At the end of the season, visual estimation was used to determine percent herbivory, as the proportion of leaf area missing on each individual leaf from apparent insect feeding. A Mann Whitney U test was used to test for differences between native and introduced percent herbivory. Insects were also collected with beat sheeting, on the open and netted branches of each of the 420 individuals. Each insect was measured, identified to order, and counted. Ten leaves were removed from each of the open branches, dried and weighed. Leaf weight by gram was calculated and applied to each of the three variables (abundance, size, and richness) to correct for the density of each species' leaves. Mann Whitney U tests were conducted to determine a significant difference between each variable on open and netted branches and native and introduced plant species.

Native plants had significantly more herbivory than introduced plants ( $n=14$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Native plants did not have a higher abundance, larger size, or greater richness of insects than introduced plants ( $n=14$ ,  $p>0.01$ ). Based on these results, a regression test was conducted, and no correlation was found between herbivory and the three variables. Therefore, although insects use introduced plants for shelter, they do not support insect populations by providing them with a food source. There were, however, significantly more insects and species (of a larger size) on the netted branches ( $n=14$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), supporting the idea that the breeding birds were using insects as a food source in the wetland. These results support the hypotheses that introduced plants haven't been in this area long enough to evolve the adaptations needed to support local insect herbivore populations, thus decreasing prey availability for insectivorous bird species.

Plant-herbivore relationships play a crucial role in biodiversity and ecosystem functions, and these interactions affect the success of specific plants. Herbivores consume energy in plants, storing some in their bodies, and when eaten, release that energy to higher trophic levels. Native plants are paramount for the transference of energy through the food web. Consequently, the survival of all species depends on protecting our local ecosystems from plant invaders.

I will graduate this fall, (hopefully with a publication!) and will continue the invasive removal in the fall and native planting this spring at the wetland. If you are interested in helping, please email me at [angiespagnoli83@gmail.com](mailto:angiespagnoli83@gmail.com). Thank you for your interest in my research!



Left: Angie is knee deep in wetland research  
Above: An early spring view of the NBCRC wetland  
Right: Nick is collecting insects after beat sheeting  
The wetland is behind the Rec Center at 4080 E. Pleasant Vally Blvd., Altoona. Please stay on the trail.



## 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)

### Kudos to Michael for Winning the Highly Competitive Waterfowl Stamp Contest!

Local wildlife artist and illustrator Michael Kensinger, a Tyrone native, recently won the 2021 Pennsylvania Waterfowl Management Stamp Design contest held by the Pennsylvania Game Commission. The stamp and prints will soon be available for purchase in the next month or so via the artist, as well as the PA Game Commission website. His artwork featuring a pair of Wood Ducks in a Sycamore tree was inspired by the artist's recent encounters with this beautiful duck species at NBCRC's Wetlands and nature trail.



“My duck stamp painting was inspired by a pair of Wood Ducks that were fervently searching for a nesting site in early spring. Wood Ducks, and many other birds and animals rely on tree cavities for nesting sites. Unfortunately, big dead trees are becoming harder to find because many consider them hazardous or useless. They are far from useless. My guess is the Wood Ducks eventually moved on because I didn't see them again after a while. I knew I wanted this species to be my focus for conservation, and so I asked permission to hang some boxes in the wetland area.”

***2021 Pennsylvania Waterfowl Management Stamp and Conservation Print: "Sycamore Retreat" inspired by Michael's encounter with Wood Ducks behind NBCRC. This print and stamp will soon be available through the artist, as well as the Pennsylvania Game Commission website.***



Inspired by his win, Kensinger wanted to give back to the wetlands and the wildlife that inspires his artwork. And so, he created a Facebook fundraiser called “Condos for Critters” to raise enough money to hang a number of wildlife nesting boxes at the wetland area behind Northern Blair Rec Centre in Tipton.

“I raised \$1,025 and was able to purchase six Wood Duck boxes, 10 bluebird boxes, 1 large box for bats, 2 Flying Squirrel boxes, 2 bee blocks, 2 kestrel boxes and a Barred Owl nesting box— all made by Howard Nursery in Howard, PA through the PA Game Commission.”

“I feel so much gratitude to be able to make a difference in the lives of these animals, and to this wonderful ecosystem that I (and others)

treasure. None of this would've been possible without the help of my generous donors which afford me the chance to make a real difference here."

"I have other friends who love this area as much as I do. Birdwatchers, biologists, artists, and nature lovers of all backgrounds use the trail around the wetland. We picked up litter, and one friend made a small brush pile out of fallen sticks that is used by cottontail rabbits, red squirrels and small birds. My friend Angie Spagnoli studies the reptiles and amphibians of the wetland and is a driving force behind our next goal: to remove the invasive plant species that are choking out natives and replacing them with trees and plants indigenous to the area. Together, we can all make a difference."

When walking the trail, please give the nest boxes plenty of space. I respectfully ask others to not approach, touch, or look into the boxes as disturbances will have an adverse effect on the nest success rate. The boxes will be being monitored by a few select individuals and we are hoping for a spring and summer full of bird and wildlife activity.

### More Bird Experiences



Mike and Laura Jackson, who live south of Everett in Bedford County, enjoyed Evening Grosbeaks for about 2 weeks in late November 2020. They saw as many as 13 at one time. It appeared that the flock then flew southwest to a property containing many mature evergreens near Rainsburg, where they spent the winter. They were last seen in early April – no doubt heading to the boreal forests in Canada where they nest. The winter of 2021 was an irruptive year for many boreal birds. Populations exploded due to an increase in the spruce bud worm, so more nestlings survived and flew south to find food for the winter.

Laura Palmer was fortunate to see and photograph some unusual visitors to Pennsylvania:  
Left: A rare western bird, the Townsend's Solitaire, was seen in Caledonia State Park in Franklin County  
Right: Laura photographed the Common Redpoll at Prince Gallitzin State Park in Cambria County.  
The winter of 2020-21 was a good time to see Common and Hoary Redpolls.





## 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)

### Chasing Birds in 2020

By Susan Braun

Every year, I set a birding goal for myself. Sometimes it is to see a certain number of bird species in a county or sometimes it is to add life birds (a bird that you've seen for the first time). For 2020, I set a goal to get 300 different species in ebird for Pennsylvania. Not all would be life birds, some I've seen in other states and some would be birds that never made it into ebird.

I started 2020 with 284 species and I knew my work was cut out for me. My job as a teacher keeps me busy during the week, so chasing a bird that is not in Centre County can only be done on the weekends or the summer. Chasing birds in the eastern part of the state was even more enjoyable because I could meet up with my birding buddy Sarah.

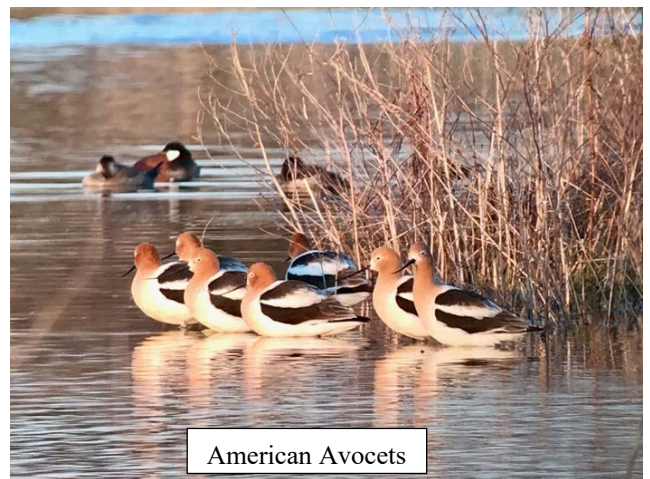


Lark Sparrow

My first new species, on Jan 4, was a Lark Sparrow in Lancaster. It was near a farm and someone had thoughtfully put out bird seed near a fence making finding the bird pretty easy. Bald Eagle State Park then had a Harlequin Duck in January. My next two birds were in Northampton County - a Gyrfalcon at a landfill and a Barrow's Goldeneye on the Delaware River. The gyrfalcon remains a hidden post in ebird because of its rarity and not wanting unsavory characters trying to trap the bird. Our new membership chair Denice Rodaniche and Debra Grim joined me on JVAS/PSO's field trip to Middle Creek in March allowing me to add Painted Bunting. This bird was viewable only by permission of the homeowner.

Then the Pandemic hit and for the next two 1/2 months, I did not travel out of Centre County. But this year was a wonderful year for interesting birds in our area. I was able to add American Avocet, Eared Grebe, Summer Tanager, Kentucky Warbler, Laughing Gull, Willet, Black-legged Kittiwake and in my own yard a Hoary Redpoll.

Once I began traveling outside of Centre County, there were a number of new birds to see. I saw a Mississippi Kite and Swainson's Warbler in Indiana Co, Sedge Wren in Juniata Co, White Ibis at Wildwood Lake Park, and Calliope and Allen's Hummingbirds at private residences. Two life birds I saw a week apart from each other in December were a Northern Wheatear and an extremely rare Tundra Bean Goose in Delaware County.



American Avocets

By the end of the year, I had a total of 305 Life birds in Pennsylvania. It is so much fun to see new birds, but a lot of the joy came from running into birding friends and sharing the wonder of birding in a year that was like no other.

What is my goal for 2021? I am trying to have a record of birds in eBird in all of the Pennsylvania Counties. So far I have 34 and I will admit, I've added no new counties so far this year. There have been so many great birds in Centre County so far this year I haven't wanted to leave! Good birding.



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