

The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



www.JVAS.org

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by John Carter

Dear JVAS Community,

I hope this message finds you and your family well as we start the New Year! According to the Chinese horoscope it is the year of the Rabbit, which is a symbol of longevity, peace, and prosperity.

During the 2022 calendar year, I was thrilled to lead the first Tuesday of the month Bird Walk on the Bells Gap Rail Trail. As with most JVAS Field Trips, the time together becomes more than just about seeing different birds. We investigated and observed other critters, plants (native vs. non-native), the weather patterns from month to month, and probably my favorite was hearing about events that are happening in our members' lives.

Each month seemed to bring something new and exciting to the walk. Here are a few encounters:

- In July the group was treated with watching an adult Worm-eating Warbler moving through the leaf litter searching for food. As we followed the bird with the insect in its beak, we saw it take the food to one of the fledglings and feed it.
- It is always neat to me to see what different birds we may observe on the trek back. During the October walk, about 100 yards from the parking lot, a gorgeous Magnolia Warbler and a Hairy Woodpecker were added to our count.



Photo of Magnolia Warbler by John Carter

We accumulated 75 different bird species for the year, here is a complete list of birds we saw: American Crow, American Goldfinch, American Redstart, American Robin, Bald Eagle, Baltimore Oriole, Barn Swallow, Belted Kingfisher, Black-and-white Warbler, Black-capped Chickadee, Black-throated Green Warbler, Blue Jay, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Broad-winged Hawk, Brown-headed Cowbird, Bufflehead, Canada Goose, Carolina Wren, Cedar Waxwing, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Chimney Swift, Chipping Sparrow, Common Grackle, Common Merganser, Common Raven, Common Yellowthroat, Cooper's Hawk, Dark-eyed Junco, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Towhee, Eastern Wood-Pewee, European Starling, Field Sparrow, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Gray Catbird, Great Blue Heron, Hairy Woodpecker, Hermit Thrush, Hooded Warbler, House Finch, House Sparrow,

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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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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE, continued from page 1

House Wren, Indigo Bunting, Killdeer, Magnolia Warbler, Mallard, Mourning Dove, Nashville Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Northern Flicker, Ovenbird, Pied-billed Grebe, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Red-eyed Vireo, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-winged Blackbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Scarlet Tanager, Song Sparrow, Tree Swallow, Tufted Titmouse, Turkey Vulture, White-breasted Nuthatch, White-throated Sparrow, Wood Thrush, Worm-eating Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Yellow-throated Vireo.

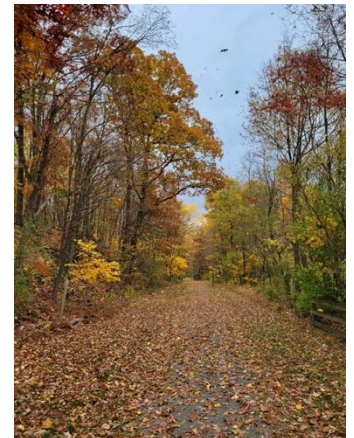
If you are interested in learning more about the history of the Bell’s Gap Rail Trail, check out this website: <http://rttcpa.org/bellsgap.shtml>.

Next year, the first Tuesday of the month Bird Walk will be held at the Bellwood Trolley Trail (see page 10). Thank you again for your valued membership, and we hope to have you join us on a field trip or one of our educational programs throughout the year.

Happy New Year JVAS Friends!



Top: Birders George Mahon, Allen and Bobbie Gibboney, Matt Greenstone, Sam Dietze, and John Carter Bottom L: Oxeye Daisy and Common St. Johnswort in bloom Bottom R: Autumn splendor on the Bell’s Gap Trail Photos by John Carter



JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY EVENING PROGRAMS

Tuesdays at 7 pm: January 17 and February 21 by ZOOM ONLY

Note: Follow these instructions for Zoom. Try to log in about 5 – 10 minutes before 7 pm.

- To join by computer, use this link:

<https://psu.zoom.us/j/97418229426> Passcode: 123456

- To join from the Zoom app on a smartphone: enter this meeting ID:

974 1822 9426 Passcode: 123456

- 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**

JANUARY PROGRAM: Tuesday, January 17, 2023 @ 7 pm via ZOOM



Presque Isle's Piping Plovers

Plovers, Terns and Shorebirds Galore: The 2022 Nesting Season at Presque Isle State Park

Join Erie Bird Observatory's **Mary Birdsong** as she shares the high and low lights of the 2022 nesting season at Gull Point, Presque Isle State Park. It was another extraordinary year with the first five-month season in the books--lasting from April 15 to September 15.

Discover what new milestones were reached, the continuing intrigue of a philandering male and the ultimate success of plover chicks fledged into the Great Lakes population. Birdsong will also include an update on the continuing attempt by Common Terns to successfully nest at Gull Point, and a few of the season's most notable migrant shorebirds.

Mary Birdsong is the Lead Shorebird Monitor for Erie Bird Observatory. She has been monitoring shorebirds, particularly Piping Plovers since 2015. She is also the Program Chair for Presque Isle Audubon, a freelance writer and artist. She shares her home with her husband Mike Plyler and two tabby cats and is the proud Busia to three granddaughters.

FEBRUARY PROGRAM: Tuesday, February 21, 2023 @ 7 pm via ZOOM only

Six Decades of Birds: What can bird banding tell us about the changing world?

Join Powdermill Nature Reserve's bird banding program manager, **Annie Lindsay**, to learn how songbird populations, behavior, and morphology are changing over time, and what has remained the same.

Annie Lindsay with the 800,000th bird banded at Powdermill: a Cedar Waxwing on Aug. 5, 2023.





The JVAS CBC (the Culp Count) was Saturday, December 17, 2022

It was a memorable day in many ways, so we are commemorating this year's CBC with accounts from a few participants. Enjoy!

Culp Circle Christmas Bird Count History by Mark Bonta, longtime CBC counter

December 28, 1969: 'Twas a clear day, low of 22, high of 31. Eight intrepid souls, led by the late John Orr, ventured into the woods and fields of Sinking Valley for the first ever Christmas Bird Count in the recently established Culp circle. After 24 hours of team effort, the counters tallied 32 species. That year was the 70th annual CBC nationwide; it would take the Culp count all the way to year #123, on December 17, 2022, to reach 72 species. Along the way, effort, species numbers, and weather have had their ups and downs, but enthusiasm has never flagged. In celebration of surpassing the long-sought 70-species goal, we present a brief history of the Culp Count.

My family, up in Plummer's Hollow, first got involved in CBC #79, in 1978. I was nine years old. Since then, I participate every year I am in town. In my family, it is safe to say, Christmas Bird Count is bigger than Christmas!

In those early years, the count supper, as we called it, was strictly potluck, at the old Sinking Valley Grange. Before the age of the Internet, we would straggle in oblivious to each other's finds. Indeed, half the fun was the unveiling of the best species during the tally after every count supper. If you had something good, you kept mum until then. Nowadays, via a Whatsapp group chat, we announce the top finds as we get them.

Back in the day, many frustrations resulted from lack of a good photograph. After all, it was going to take you quite a while to get the film developed, and telephoto lenses were scarce. Now, of course, we share photos instantly. And we have eBird. And Merlin. And so forth—but the spirit of the thing hasn't changed, even if potluck count suppers are long forgotten, and we meet in the private room of a local restaurant. We still swap war stories (of the birding variety) and do a read-out tally of every species. It does look like hi-tech has helped us get to 70 species, though. How else would we have known that this year's putative Yellow-rumped Warbler was actually, on closer examination of digital evidence, a Cape May Warbler? How else to keep track of who is getting what, and thus refocus and calibrate team efforts during the course of the day?

Effort—number of total hours logged by teams—doesn't necessarily correlate to number of species. In 1993, 138.5 hours were spent for a total of only 50 species. Compare that to 2012, where only six counters, the smallest group ever, spent 40 hours but got 58 species. The most counters, 45, were in 1983, but they only logged 56 species.

The weather of course is a huge factor. Birds that remain in central Pennsylvania in late December move around quite a lot: waterfowl, particularly. They have to, as their waterholes freeze over and they head to bigger lakes or rivers outside the count circle. What about holding it later, after Christmas? Wouldn't we get more winter species? This tactic has never worked for Culp. The first five counts were all after Christmas, but otherwise, only Jan 2, '93; Dec. 27, '97; and Jan. 3, '17 have been later; in none of these have species been higher. Mid-December works best!

Now for the suffering. One can reliably predict most of the species that will be gotten, but the weather conditions? Never! Our coldest count ever was December 16, 1989: a low of 0 and a high of only 14.

At the other end of the spectrum, just five years earlier, December 15, 1984, the low was 46 degrees and the high reached 66!

As for the birds themselves, over the years, Culp has gotten a total of 121 species on count day, and another three only on count week (the three days before and after). Some of these, like this year's Savannah Sparrow and Cape May Warbler, have been gotten only once. Others, like this year's Lapland Longspur and Golden Eagle, and many more, have been recorded only a handful of times. Then there are the frustrating misses: when the tallier reads out an expected species and no one raises their hand. No Red-breasted Nuthatches??? How can that be?!?!

At least, there are those old dependables, the ones you get on every count. We have 15 species in that category. If you live in the area, you probably won't be surprised to learn that the most common of these is the European Starling. It's had some low years, but never less than 100, and the most-ever of a single species was 2,160 in 2016.

Of course, there are a lot of other trends of interest. Ruffed Grouse, PA's state bird, used to be easy to locate, with a count high of 31 in 1988. A few are still in the area, but we haven't gotten any on count day since 2016. You can thank the West Nile Virus for that population crash. On the other side of things, we didn't get the first Bald Eagle until 2002, but now we get up to five every year. Raptors in general have remained stable or gone up in numbers, with the sad exception of the Northern Goshawk, which has vanished from the area and indeed from most of the state.

So what WAS this year's magic formula for hitting 72? I can honestly say we have schemed and plotted and scouted for several counts in the past. In the mid 2010s, I put together a Google Map of the count circle with every accessible road and birding spot highlighted and applied a technique I had seen in other count circles: drawing birding zones so that we could match teams to areas and avoid overlap and missed opportunities. Still, we couldn't top the record of 67 species set in back-to-back years ('07/'08). Then came all the bird identification tech and just the right combination of motivated (some would say obsessed) counters, just waiting for perfect weather conditions. Here are some choice snippets from the group chat:

John Carter, 4:53 AM: "Good morning and happy Culp CBC day! Hope you all have fun and see lots of birds! Thank you for being part of the count. On the board with a Screech Owl."

John again at 7:21 AM: "Grackle!"

Me at 7:30 AM: "5 male common mergs"

Michael Kensinger at 7:31 AM: "50 Red-winged Blackbirds"

And on it went. People hit the best spots in the morning, cognizant of looming snow showers in the afternoon, and a general lull in bird activity. At around 9:30 AM, we began to wonder about waterfowl.

John: "Any update from Canoe Lake, Jacksons? Hoping there is some open H₂O there." Nothing to report. But a few minutes later, **John** clocked in with a Green-winged Teal and **Laura Jackson** reported 3 Northern Pintails.

The adventure continued. **Michael Kensinger** at 10:01 AM: "100 Horned Larks being hunted by an immature Sharpie."

Carl Engstrom at 10:33 AM: "Good stuff – kestrels and Bald Eagle if those haven't been recorded yet."

At 10:55 AM, **John** reminded folks to keep their eyes on the sky in case of Golden Eagles; **Carl** delivered one at 12:36 PM. Sign of the times: a Red-headed Woodpecker returned after a 24-year absence (**Michael Kensinger** reported from Ft. Roberdeau).

At 11:39 AM, I messaged **John**: "Looks like we are headed for an all-time high. Easily break 70." This was after my Savannah Sparrow, hanging with some Northern Cardinals at the edge of our field. But the kicker, or so we thought, was **Carl's** 2:06 PM Lapland Longspur. After that, as it usually does,

numbers of new species dropped off and heavy snow showers kicked in. I had already walked eight miles and decided to scrap a final push for Ruffed Grouse in the thickest, thorniest, invasive thickets of Brush Mountain. No Barred Owl was to be found, no Red-breasted Nuthatch; no one had gotten a Merlin or a Rusty Blackbird, either: granted, not easy or common species, but when your totals are already high, as all birders know, you tend to get a little greedy. **John** announced he was headed to Sinking Valley in the fading light to make a try for a possible Short-eared Owl reported by **Michael Kensinger**, but no luck.

And then it was over. I joked that had the total been 69 species, folks were invited to scuffle through two miles of icy slush to make a try for the Plummer's Hollow Barred Owl. Owling, as it's called, is about the only option left if you want to make use of the 5 hours remaining in the count. But we stayed with Great-horned Owl and Eastern Screech-Owl and went home happy (some prepping for another CBC somewhere else the next day).

How many bird species were in the Culp Circle on December 17, 2022? The surprises weren't over yet. A Peregrine Falcon sailed over my head in Tyrone the next morning, hunting Rock Pigeons, but I doubt it had been there the day before. Nevertheless, it became a count week bird, or "cw." Though several feeder counters didn't turn in new species, Michael delivered the biggest surprise of the season when announced on the evening of the 18th that his team's Yellow-rumped Warbler was a Cape May Warbler, with a photo to back them up (see page 8). This was only the 9th-ever of this species for Pennsylvania in December and the second from central PA.

Excitement Along the Lower Trail by Angie Spagnoli, first-time CBC counter

I stood on the bank of the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River, surrounded by large sycamores and falling snowflakes. It was the second stop along the Lower Trail that afternoon. The weather was perfect for the Christmas Bird Count. I was scanning the cold, fast-moving river for waterfowl when I heard a faint squeak behind me. At first, I thought it was a woodpecker. They are frequent visitors of this particular habitat. I turned around, attempting to see what was grasping my attention, and there was a small brown puff. It was a winter wren! My eyes were fixated on this little beauty, and I watched it bounce up and down, changing directions in one swift movement. It continued to perform as it squeaked, not bothered or intimidated by my presence.



Winter Wren photo by Fyn Kynd

I felt my heart swell with gratitude, and as quickly as it appeared, it vanished in the distant brush. I turned to look at my partner, and we both smiled as we shared the excitement together. It was our first winter wren of the year.

MANY THANKS TO ALL THE 2022 CBC COUNTERS:

Marcia Bonta, Mark Bonta, John Carter, Michael David, Carl Engstrom, Kurt Engstrom, Allen Gibboney, Bobbie Gibboney, Joe Glass, Paul Hutchison, Laura Jackson, Mike Jackson, Michael Kensinger, John Loncher, George Mahon, Frank Nale, Lindera Nale, Mark Nale, Eric Oliver, Christine Singleton, Mary Singleton, Angie Spagnoli, and Nash Turley

Culp Circle Highlights Cape May Warbler and More...by Michael Kensinger, 2nd-time CBC counter

It's not often I smile when my alarm goes off, but birds have that power over me. And so, as my phone alarm jangled and vibrated on my nightstand, I didn't respond with my typical groan - but rather, a GRIN. After a thorough stretch, I hopped out of bed with unbridled enthusiasm as I prepared to head out for the 2022 Culp Christmas Bird Count. We were in charge of covering Sinking Valley.

Before I start rambling about our wonderful day, I'd like to state that the route Joe Glass, George Mahon, and I participate in is the route of the very first Culp Circle Christmas Bird Count, which was led by our late JVAS member John Orr – of whom George speaks fondly every time we bird together. I did not have the honor of knowing John, but I feel honored to keep the torch going with the route he started on December 28th, 1969. Fast forward to 53 years later, and there I was in a car with George and Joe, glassing fields for whatever we could find. Suffice it to say, we found more than just birds. We found growing friendships and a continuation of a tradition that to me has become as important as Christmas itself.

The first highlight of our trip was in the sheer number of Mourning Doves we encountered this year. In 8 hours of birding, we tallied 71 Mourning Doves – and there were likely some we overlooked.

Another grandiose encounter was a Red-headed Woodpecker which we encountered at the bird feeders at Fort Roberdeau's White Oak Hall. The handsome bird, which appeared to be transitioning into adult plumage, landed right in front of my face. A Red-headed Woodpecker hasn't been noted in the Culp CBC since 1998.

Enthralled with our finds, Joe, George, and I continued to tally birds – including 248 Horned Larks. Flocks of all sizes were whirling low over the freshly fertilized farmland (aka manure). During our observation of one such flock, an immature sharp-shinned hawk winged overhead, sending the larks into two groups. They were so swift of wing; the hawk didn't have a chance to home in on a single bird.

As we rolled on, we tallied plenty of the 'normal' birds as we came across them. As we talked, we drove by a tiny postage-stamp pond beside someone's house that had an abnormal number of waterfowl in it. Despite seeing a few domestic ducks, I noted wild Mallards and wanted a closer look. Pulling off the road, we all agreed to walk and backtrack to the pond where the ducks were. I was glad we did, for there in the center of the flock of mallards was a handsome Northern Pintail drake in all his splendor.

Another moment I won't forget was tallying 19 White-crowned Sparrows and 27 American Tree Sparrows. George Mahon knew well where these birds wintered in Sinking Valley, perhaps thanks in part to the late John Orr who knew the land so well. Many of these birds were flying back and forth from evergreens to the dried husks of grasses in a field. In that very same field, we were greeted by not one, not two, but THREE Northern Harriers – a lifer for Joe.

And, for the biggest highlight – we have a Cape May Warbler. A first ever in 53 years of Christmas bird Counts for the Culp Circle, and I believe only the ninth December record for this species in Pennsylvania. By now the Cape May Warbler is in the Bahamas and Central America. But this one was chasing other birds away from a bird feeder in the yard of an Amish family in 31-degree weather. Thankfully, Joe was there with his trusty camera – and it's a good thing.

You see, at first, we figured it was a Yellow-rumped Warbler, a species more likely than a Cape May at this time of year. I said to Joe, "Something isn't right for a yellow-rumped. The face seems light and I don't see enough yellow."

I digressed though and entered yellow-rumped into our tally. It wasn't until I arrived home later, that Carl Engstrom commented on how it appeared to be a Cape May. This was my initial gut response too, and so I cropped in the photo and zoomed in to discover it was indeed a Cape May Warbler! And now, I have the pleasure of filling out a rare bird report for the administrators of our CBC and submitting our photo to add to the permanent record and history of this terrific event. Oh yes, we also tallied a total of 46 species for our part of the circle – a new high bar to beat next year!



A few photos from Sinking Valley:
 Left top: American Tree Sparrow
 Left bottom: Cape May Warbler
 Middle: Red-headed Woodpecker
 Below: Northern Pintail and Mallards
 Photos by Joe Glass



The Dinner and Tally Rally at the U.S. Hotel and Tavern at the end of the CBC was a lot of fun and a chance to expound on the exciting day. L front: Laura Jackson, George Mahon, Joe Glass, & Nash Turley
 R front: Mike Jackson, John Carter, Michael Kensinger, Michael David, Paola Bonta, and Mark Bonta.
 Missing from the photo: Warren Baker, lifetime member of JVAS who joined us to celebrate his birthday!



WINTER FIELD TRIPS: BELLWOOD TROLLEY TRAIL



Birding the Bellwood Trolley Trail every first Tuesday of each month starting in **February**: 10-12 noon
Dates: 2/7, 3/7, 4/4, 5/2, 6/6, 7/4, 8/1, 9/5, 10/3, 11/7, 12/5/2023

Join John Carter on **Birding the Bellwood Trolley Trail** every first Tuesday of the month starting in **February** from 10 am-12pm. We will stroll a little over a mile of the trail that consists of fresh gravel surface. Let's track what different bird species we see each month, what different plants we encounter and have an enjoyable walk.

What to bring: binoculars, comfortable walking shoes, drink and snack as desired.

Directions The marker is placed at 40.5948442, -78.3401015. Driving through the Main Street in Bellwood, PA, after you pass the Hometown Market turn right onto Kerbaugh Rd and go through the single lane tunnel. The parking lot will be shortly after on the left next to a garage.

Here's a google link to those coordinates: <https://goo.gl/maps/EfGHL3W4LHMriNpPA>

Local Nurseries that sell Native Plants:

Martin's Garden Center

3278 Birmingham Pike
Tyrone, PA

814-669-5008

Maple Brook Nursery

380 Davis Rd.
Altoona, PA

814-944-8151

Chase Away the Winter Blahs by Laura Jackson

Email me if you have questions about native plants! Jacksonlaura73@gmail.com

This is the time of year when way too many garden catalogs arrive in our mailbox. I can't resist looking at each one – the photographs are gorgeous and help to brighten a dull winter day.

This is a great time to start planning your native plantings for the spring. I highly recommend calling **Ernst Conservation Seeds** to ask for a free catalog. There are photos of plants in the back of the catalog with lots of good information about each one. Just be aware that some are not native, so make sure you buy seeds native to your area. Ernst sells native plant seed mixes, as well as smaller seed packets of single species. Call: **800-873-3321** Online: Ernstseed.com Mon-Fri. 8 am – 5 pm Don't hesitate to ask for help - their customer service is excellent.

You'll need to wait for warmer weather if you want to buy plants, but start making your wish list now. Look over the plant photos in the back of the Ernst catalog to make your list. Or go to plantsforbirds.org to see what's native in your area.



Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is a gorgeous native that supports a lot of insects

“The Treeline: The Last Forest and the Future of Life on Earth”

by Ben Rawlence, 2022, St. Martin’s Press, NYC

Reviewed by Doug Mason, JVAS member and Sierra Club Moshannon Group Chair

The boreal forest (a.k.a. taiga) is the largest terrestrial biome - living system - on Earth and the subject of this book by Ben Rawlence. Containing a third of global trees, it (not the Amazon) is the major lung of the world. The Alaskan/Canadian boreal forest alone (northern Minnesota comprises its southernmost reach) is the largest intact forest on our planet (well over a million square miles).

My father was raised near International Falls, MN, and logged the boreal forest, mostly for the pulp mills (the state’s lumbering for board wood died at the beginning of the Great Depression). Dad loved these forests of spruce, fir, paper birch, aspen, pine and a half dozen other tree species, as well as the wolves, lynx, moose and other animals that lived there. Agriculture failed most years in the North Woods so timbering was an essential element of family survival. When he took me on a walk of one of the old Mason farmsteads, he broke off pieces of hardened sap from a pine trunk and we put them in our mouths. The awful taste of turpentine kept one’s mind off the bitter cold (often lower than -30 degrees Fahrenheit) as they chopped down trees manually before hauling them out of the forest by horse. For me, “Treeline” feels very personal...the boreal forest is in my blood.

Rawlence explains how in common usage the term “treeline” has come to mean a fixed line on a map, when in fact it is a transition zone, what scientists call the forest-tundra ecotone, in some cases hundreds of miles wide and in others a matter of feet. The concept of a treeline is also evidence of the very narrow time horizons of humans. The extent of the boreal forest is shaped by ice ages that have marked the Earth in 100,000 year pulses. However, now that climate change is causing planetary hyperventilation, the migration of the treeline is no longer a matter of inches per century; instead it is hundreds of feet every year. The treeline has shaped the possibilities of human existence, and by extension, set the terms for human culture.

Each chapter explores a different region of the boreal forest and emphasizes one species. The author traveled to Scotland (Scots pine), Norway (downy birch), Siberia (Dahurian larch), Alaska (white spruce/black spruce), Canada (balsam poplar) and Greenland (Greenland mountain ash). Rawlence gets into the heads of scientists and indigenous people on his journey. The latter point of view is particularly enlightening as he explains the worldviews of Celts (Scotland), Sami (Norway), Nganasan (Russia), Koyayukon (Alaska), Anishinaabe (Canada) and Greenland’s Inuit (Denmark). For example, there is the Sami concept of sufficiency, called birgejupmi: you only take what is necessary from Nature, never a surplus. It is the exact opposite of the modern idea of sustainability, which is based on the maximum surplus that can be extracted without destroying Nature’s capacity to sustain the resource. It is an important distinction.

Science does not give cause for a tale of optimism. Environmental degradation, specifically deforestation, as Jared Diamond notes in his book, “Collapse,” is central to the collapse of every human civilization that we know has taken place. Humans may still be able to temper the scale and severity of climate change, but we are powerless to stop it. Indeed, we may have crossed several tipping points already, such as methane release from thawing permafrost. The speed of the geological changes being witnessed is accelerating faster than models predicted. The planet you think you live on no longer exists.

There is a third story, a more positive reading of humans’ relationships with their habitat that holds the key to imagining a different future. Our opposable thumbs are a constant reminder that we evolved, and thrived, in trees. We will always be creatures of the forest. We have been the keystone species of the

Holocene — a geological force, certainly, and not an entirely negative one. We are all to a greater or lesser extent the victims of historical forces that have built structures of power over centuries based on a very blunt assessment of value. It is up to us to write a greener ending, and continued living in an era of rapid climate change does not allow for the luxury of misanthropy or false hope. We must, to paraphrase anthropologist Donna Hathaway, “stay with the trouble.” Despair is the first step toward repair. Hope lies in shared endeavor, in transformation, in meaningful work for the common good. Accepting that the status quo is irretrievable is also the door to action. Suddenly there is so much to do.

Systems change when there is a culture that demands it. The revolution begins with a walk in the woods. If we want to be part of the assemblage of species that coevolves to survive the coming upheaval then we need to revive that social entanglement with other living things. We all need to learn once again how to think like a forest.



Plummer’s Hollow 200 by Mark Bonta

Have you ever watched *The Big Year* movie? What if you wanted to do a big year but you didn’t want to run up huge bills or have a gigantic carbon footprint, and you needed to be home for dinner every day? Voila! 2023 is the **Plummer’s Hollow 200**, a Big Year-variant with the goal of detecting at least 200 species for the Plummer’s Hollow eBird hotspot (<https://ebird.org/pa/hotspot/L3330516>) between January 1 and December 31. I’ll be blogging about it daily at markbonta.substack.com and posting one or more eBird checklists a day, but it is not intended as a solo effort; any contributions to the hotspot are welcome!

I would never have attempted this in the past if only because the hotspot, which my family has been monitoring since 1971, didn’t even reach 200 species all-time until late 2021. Pending some species under review, it’s around 210 now. I expect it to grow by another dozen or more species in 2023. The secret to these numbers is a nocturnal flight call monitoring station I have been running off and on since 2020. The Plummer’s Hollow Nature Reserve straddles the Brush Mountain ridge, so in the right conditions, call detection of flyovers is excellent. We’ve already logged state-high records of several thrush species using this method. I am relying on it for waders, terns, and waterfowl (we have almost no wetlands).

Plummer’s Hollow also has great conditions for warblers, flycatchers, sparrows, and raptors (being a major migratory ridge), but it is still going to take tons of legwork in the 800-acre area, and almost no room for error. Fortunately, I have a balcony view of the Tyrone Gap which is the northern edge of the area, and we have roads and trails that access the rest of the best habitat.

Plummer’s Hollow has a Western Pennsylvania Conservancy easement which means that its mature second-growth hardwood forest will never be logged again. My goal in going all-out in 2023 is to round out the bird species data as part of a long-term biodiversity monitoring effort we have been undertaking in one form or another for many decades. We would like to include the public as much as possible in bird education and other activities, so please stay tuned for field trip notifications.

*Everyone is welcome to get involved in the **Plummer’s Hollow 200**! My email is markabonta@protonmail.com and my telephone is 814-600-8394. I can also be reached on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/mark.flaco.10>, where I’ll post links to my Substack.*



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>



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- A voice in the fight to protect birds and their habitats



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