

The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



www.JVAS.org

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Mark Bonta

Greetings! As a lifelong JVAS member and former vice-president, I could hardly say no when John Carter asked me to take over the rest of his term. I wish John the absolute best in his transition, and I would like to express my deep respect for the enthusiasm, energy, and unrelentingly positive spirit with which he infused our chapter during and after the pandemic. As Immediate Past President, John remains on the Board, and he will of course be an active participant in some of our events, particularly the Christmas Bird Count. We are forever grateful to John for finally getting us past the 70 species milestone!

While it's never too early to starting planning for our next CBC, of more immediate interest is the 7th Annual Earth Week Birding Classic, which (as I write this) will be kicking off in just a few days. This year, we hope to continue a stellar track record of raising over \$1,000 for local conservation and education. Best of luck to all the teams!

If you would like to give more to JVAS, please consider finding out how to join one of our many committees to help our multitasking members plan and coordinate the many field trips, educational events, conservation actions, and other activities in which our chapter is involved. There's always more to do!

In closing, as we get ready for a frenzied spring and summer, just a few words about myself. I live with my wife Paola in Tyrone, in a corner of the Plummer's Hollow eBird hotspot. I was raised here, up on Brush Mountain, and went to Tyrone Area schools for 12 years before leaving for Penn State and points beyond. I'm a geographer by profession and, of course, a life-long environmentalist, and I am pleased and excited to be back in Blair County. I write bird stuff at markbonta.substack.com and I usually respond within 24 hours to my email, markabonta@yahoo.com.



VP Laura Jackson thanks out-going JVAS President John Carter for his dedication to bird education and conservation.

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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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YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Time to Apply for a Sign to Show You Support Birds, Healthy Wildlife Habitats, and People!

Apply at: <https://pa.audubon.org/conservation/bird-friendly-habitat-recognition-program>

Bird-Friendly Habitat



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



Celebrate Earth Day Every Day Drink Shade-grown Coffee



Emilio Garcia, our partner who produces shade-grown coffee on his farm 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> Order the Honduran coffee if you want Emilio's single origin, direct trade coffee.

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!

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY EVENING PROGRAMS

Tuesday, May 16, 2023, at 7 pm: Members' Night (in-person only)

Bellwood-Antis Library, 526 Main St. Bellwood, Pa.

TACO NIGHT with gluten-free and vegan options

Free Meal compliments of Catie Farr starts at 6 pm



Member's Night is a chance to share your favorite nature-related projects: photos, writings, paintings, collections, videos, needlework, etc.

Please contact Laura Jackson if you'd like to bring a PowerPoint or Video to share – please limit this type of presentation to 10 minutes. Email Laura at jacksonlaura73@gmail.com by May 12.



Tuesday, June 20, 2023: Maxine Leckvarcik Memorial

Picnic 6 PM - 9 PM (Set-up starts at 5:30 pm)

at Canoe Creek St. Park Pavilion #2 just off parking lot #6

Click here for a map:

http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_004826.pdf

What to bring: Plate and utensils, covered dish, drink.

JVAS will provide smoked chicken.

Let Catie or Laura know what dish you plan to share.

Our annual summer picnic has many eats and treats for all tastes and appetites! Join us as we picnic together and celebrate another year of exploring and protecting nature in Central PA!

After eating, we will have a nature walk from 7 to 8:15 PM (optional).

We will end the evening with an optional visit to the bat church around 8:30 PM to see Pennsylvania's only flying mammals - bats! The bats exiting the church for their nightly feeding forays beat the odds of White-Nose Syndrome and their survival needs to be celebrated. Plan to stay until around 9:15 PM to see the bats.

Please RSVP BY Wednesday, June 14, so we have enough chicken for everyone.

Email Catie at catiegk5059@gmail.com or Laura at jacksonlaura73@gmail.com



DID YOU KNOW?

For every human on Earth, there are estimated to be about 2.5 million ants — or 20 quadrillion in total. [A new study](#) attempts to count the total number of ground-dwelling and tree-dwelling ants. The final figure is equal to 1 trillion times 20,000, and the insects' total mass exceeds that of all birds and mammals combined and makes up about a fifth of humans' total biomass.

JVAS FIELD TRIPS and EVENTS

Birding the Ray Amato Memorial Nature Trail behind the Northern Blair Rec Center

The Wood Ducks at the Ray Amato Memorial Nature Trail inspired Michael Kensinger to create this winning painting that was chosen as the 2021 PA Waterfowl Management Stamp Design by the PA Game Commission, "Sycamore Retreat." Congratulations, Michael!



Dates: The first Tuesday of each month: 5/2, 6/6, 7/4, 8/1, 9/5, 10/3, 11/7, 12/5/2023

Join George Mahon on Birding the **Ray Amato Memorial Nature Trail behind the Northern Blair Rec Center** every first Tuesday of the Month from 10 am-12pm. We will stroll a little over a mile of the trail and get a close look at the Little Juniata River. 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.

Address for Northern Blair Rec Center: 4080 E Pleasant Valley Blvd, Altoona, Pa.



www.panativeplantsociety.org/pnps-central-pennsylvania-native-plant-festival.html

Saturday, May 6, 2023: Pennsylvania Native Plant Festival and Sale 10 AM – 3 PM

Where: Millbrook Marsh Nature Center at 548 Puddintown Rd, State College, PA 16801

Celebrate the return of wildflowers, and the beginning of another gardening season at the Native Plant Festival and acquire some new additions to your garden! There'll be over 275 species of native plants for sale; educational resource tables where you can have native plant and gardening questions answered, informational tables, local prepared foods and shade-grown coffee for sale, and live music by folk rock Asbury Lane! Admission is free! So come on out, breathe the spring air, and see how easy it is to plant natives and support our pollinators and birds!

Special presentations in the barn:

11 AM: **Birds in my Garden** presented by Laura Jackson

1 PM: **Placing Invasive Plant Species in Ecological Context** by Norris Muth

JVAS FIELD TRIPS and EVENTS



Dreibelbus Birding Area Sign and Elevated Platform
-Photo by Mark Nale

Saturday, May 13, 2023: Dreibelbus and Soaring Eagle Wetlands Walk 8 AM – 10 AM

Where: Meet in the parking lot of Dreibelbus Birding Area at 145 Miles Hollow Road, Julian, PA.

Mark Nale, wildlife photographer and writer, will lead a tour of the Dreibelbus Birding Area and then we'll drive to the Soaring Eagle Wetland (1/2-mile away). These are easy walks on flat terrain with short trails and overlooks. A Porta Potty is available at Soaring Eagle. Both places are eBird hotspots, so we should see a lot of birds.

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

If you have any questions or need more information please contact trip leader, Mark Nale, at home prior to May 13: 814-692-5076. Morning of trip: call 814-571-6186, or email him at markangler@aol.com

*If inclement weather arrives, please contact Mark to verify that the walk is still scheduled.



L: Ask Audubon Days Table – a Native Plant Partnership
Juniata Valley Audubon Society and Martin's Garden Center

R: Foamflower (Tiarella) is a gorgeous shade-loving spring wildflower that rabbits usually ignore.



Saturday, May 13, and Saturday, May 27, 2023: Ask Audubon Days 10 AM – 2 PM

Martin's Garden Center (3278 Birmingham Pike, Tyrone, Pa.) is offering a wide selection of **native** wildflowers, shrubs, and trees (blue lobelia, turtlehead, serviceberry, various oaks, and much more!). The plants are available any day Martin's is open, but JVAS volunteers will be there on Saturday, May 13 and Saturday, May 27 to answer questions and to promote bird-friendly blooms. Look for the Bird-Friendly Blooms table near the main building from 10 AM to 2 PM.

JVAS FIELD TRIPS and EVENTS

Sunday, May 14, 2023: Mother's Day Bird Walk 9 AM - Noon

Where: Blair County Game Fish and Forestry 301 Riggles Gap Sportsmen Rd Altoona, PA 16601. Meet in the parking lot in front of the lodge.

Join wildlife artist, writer, and naturalist Michael Kensinger as we saunter around the wood lots, fields, and creek bottoms of Bellwood at the Blair County Game Fish and Forestry. We will explore a variety of bird habitats and tally bird species.

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

If you have any questions or need more information please contact trip leader, Michael Kensinger, at (814) 505-3410, or email him at MichaelKensinger@gmail.com.

*If inclement weather arrives this day, please contact Michael to verify the event is still taking place for the sake of safety.



Saturday, June 3, 2023: Woods Walk 9AM – 12 Noon

Where: Mike and Laura Jacksons Property (Bedford Co.). Located at 8621 Black Valley Road, Everett, PA.

Join Mike and Laura to leisurely explore a variety of bird habitats on their property, looking for birds, wildflowers, mushrooms, and more. Trails are rocky and are not level, so wear sturdy walking shoes.

What to bring: binoculars, sturdy hiking shoes, water, and lunch (if you'd like to have lunch on their porch after the walk).

Preliminary Results of the Earth Week Birding Classic (EWBC):

Teams searched various habitats in the JVAS Chapter area to count birds and observe birds, with most, if not all, of the data recorded in eBird. A total of 120 species were recorded last year, but this year we topped that with 123 species!

EWBC Organizer Catie Farr thanked each of the teams that participated: The Velociraptors, The Black Valley Buzzards, Stork Raven Mad, The Amigos, and The Bell Hollow Buteos.

The banquet and awards ceremony were held at the Slep Student Center at Penn State Altoona on Sunday, April 23. Catie and Ethan Farr catered a delicious meal.

Kudos to **The Bell Hollow Buteos** for the top number of species: **95**
Team leader Mark Nale and members Linderale Nale, Frank Nale, and Michael Kensinger recorded an impressive list of birds!



Teams also raised funds for bird conservation and education. The pledges are still pouring in, so we don't have the final figures for donations, but we'll announce the results in the fall newsletter and explain how the funds will be spent.



Some of the Earth Week Birding Classic Participants (L – R): Paola Jaramillo Calderon, Mark Bonta, Catie Farr, Mark Nale, Michael Kensinger, George Mahon, Laura Jackson, Mike Jackson

The JVAS Annual Banquet was held at the Bellwood Firehall on April 18, 2023



KUDOS TO GREG WILLIAMS for receiving the JVAS Conservation Award at our Annual Banquet on Tuesday, April 18, 2023. Greg is known as the “tree man,” for all of his efforts to plant native trees and restore natural habitats in central Pennsylvania. Greg even gave away free native trees at the banquet.

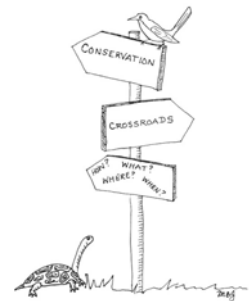
A successful Silent Auction was held after the banquet to raise funds for JVAS projects. Many thanks to all who donated or bid on items.



Thank you, Rob, for sharing this insightful and stimulating program at our Annual Banquet.

Rob Fergus presented a thought-provoking and mind-stretching program, “How Birds Made Us Human.” He discussed that many of the behaviors that we take to be inherently human—including walking upright, using tools, language, writing, music, dance, sewing, pottery, home building, and flight—were perfected by birds long before we became human. He shared history of humans and birds and how we may have become human by copying these behaviors from birds in our shared environment.

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 Click on the Conservation tab.



- ◆ **Old Crow Wetland DEP Hearing is Wednesday, May 3 at 6:30 PM** at Smithfield Fire Hall. Individuals and Conservation organizations testified against the project, including Juniata Valley Audubon Society.

It isn't too late to register with DEP to speak at the hearing, email John Repetz at jrepetz@pa.gov or call him at (717) 705-4904 by 4 pm Tuesday, May 2. Five minutes speaking time per person. **Please go to the Coalition to Save Old Crow Wetland (Huntingdon PA) Facebook page for updates.**

Please keep attending the Smithfield Township Supervisors Meetings on the first Tuesday of each month at 6 pm.

- ◆ **Sadly, DEP approved a permit for another Rutter's to be built at the Pinecroft (Sabbath Rest).** A JVAS member reported that construction has already started on that site., adjacent to an exceptional value wetland.
- ◆ **The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology has announced the 3rd Annual Breeding Bird Blitz for Conservation will be held Friday, June 9 – Monday, June 19, 2023 to raise funds for 3 partners: Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Foundation for Sustainable Forests (FSF), and South Middleton Township.**



Hawk Mountain will use funds to develop and train volunteers for the 3rd PA Bird Atlas, to be held across Pennsylvania in 2024. FSF will use their share of the funds to improve habitat for nesting songbirds in Erie County on lands they own and manage. South Middleton Twp, in Cumberland County, will improve breeding bird habitat for grassland and wetland birds (where Virginia Rails breed).

Want to join this statewide effort? Choose a team and sign up: www.breedingbirdblitz.org

Teams raise money that is evenly divided between the 3 partners described above. Deadline to enter is Wednesday, June. 7, 2023.

- ◆ **Consider encouraging your State House Rep. to co-sponsor or support [HB 137: Solar for Pennsylvania Schools](#).** The program will issue grants to school districts, intermediate units, career and technical schools, and community colleges to fund solar energy projects. Grants will cover the costs of the purchase and installation of equipment, permit fees, energy storage, utility interconnection, and any other costs approved by the Department of Community and Economic Development, which will administer the program.

Tundra Swan Rescue – Taking a Swan Dive for Conservation – by Michael Kensinger

As the new fieldtrip chair for JVAS, I scheduled several ‘pop-up’ field trip events for waterfowl watching at Canoe Creek State Park. These events took place in March, at the peak of the migration season for most ducks, geese, and swans. Because of the nature and brevity of waterfowl migration, it was critical that these events ‘pop-up’ when large numbers of waterfowl appeared on the lake. On the trips, a wide variety of waterfowl species were tallied, including Greater Scaup, Buffleheads, Redheads, Northern Pintail, Mallards, Canada Geese, Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, and Tundra Swans. In fact, there were around 34 Tundra Swans on the lake on the morning of March 11th for the field trip.

With so many good birds passing through, a second ‘pop-up’ watch was scheduled on March 15th – this time in the evening. We added several new species, including Ring-necked Ducks, Horned Grebes, Pied-billed Grebes, and Red-breasted Mergansers. However, it was during this trip I noticed the 34 Tundra Swans had dwindled to just three. By observing them closely, I noticed one of the swans was falling behind the bonded pair, and I also noticed this same bird was panting feverishly.

As a certified and permitted Wildlife CT (Capture & Transport), part of my duty is to recognize wildlife in need of help and do my best to accommodate their needs and bring them to a rehab. However, as the evening progressed, it became clear that while sick, the Tundra Swan was not sick enough to be captured unfortunately. When we packed up, I looked back over the lake with a broken heart knowing the beautiful bird was undoubtedly suffering. My personal evaluation was the swan was suffering from lead poisoning, something that deeply affects our waterfowl and raptors annually. Symptoms include disorientation, inability to fly or keep up, among others.

I called Robyn Graboski, my friend who is the owner and rehabilitator at Centre Wildlife Care. I warned her that we had a sick swan, but it wasn’t quite ready to be captured. This way they could prepare, and we could also have certified avian flu testers prepared. This is because all non-songbird species must be tested before being brought to Centre Wildlife Care for safety reasons.

The swan remained on my mind the rest of the week but being too busy to do any birding I messaged the former JVAS President (and some others) knowing they likely have birded the lake recently. I also made a Facebook post, urging people to tell me if they saw it. I wanted to verify whether the swan was still there. Sure enough, John Carter verified it was still there, located near the dam, now by itself.

Within a day or two of speaking with John, I was out in the yard with my husband taking care of our ducks and chickens, when my friend Angie Spagnoli texted me a photo of the Tundra Swan (see right). The photo was close-up of the swan laying in the vegetation of a shallow wetland. I immediately knew where this photo was taken, so Angie ‘dropped a pin’ for me to find the location by way of my iPhone map.

Upon arrival, my husband and I, garnishing protective gloves and a massive plastic storage container, noticed the swan had not moved and was exactly where Angie said it was. The poor bird had apparently attempted to catch up to its flock mates, flew off the dam, only to have to land below in the wetland area due to fatigue. And so, we got to work, having to chase the swan 40 yards in knee deep water, before it finally succumbed to a tangle of reeds and cattails where we promptly covered its head with a towel. Immediately, as if sensing we were there to help, the swan became calm.





We placed the beautiful bird in the storage container, (photo on left) and headed out on our journey some forty minutes away to get it tested for avian flu. Having tested negative, we were finally able to take the sick swan to Robyn at Centre Wildlife Care. There, the swan was tested for lead poisoning of which it had LETHAL amounts of lead enough to kill a swan.

Luckily, the swan has increased its energy and has become quite cantankerous. The team of volunteers at CWC are working tirelessly to feed and keep the bird on the road to recovery. Everyone is cautiously optimistic that it will one day be released.

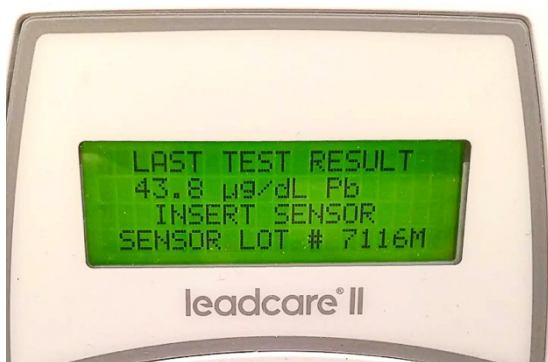
Lead poisoning requires a lot of work, time, and patience to cure. In addition, it is a long, painful death in birds that do not get treated.

Birds pick up lead sinkers, and ammunition in mud when foraging for gravel for their gizzards. Birds of prey consume the shot scavenging on unretrieved kills after hunting season. Already in 2023, CWC has had many birds admitted with lead poisoning. The only

way to curtail this is to expand the ban on lead for ALL hunting and fishing equipment. Currently, the law bans it for waterfowl hunting, but this is clearly not fixing the problem.

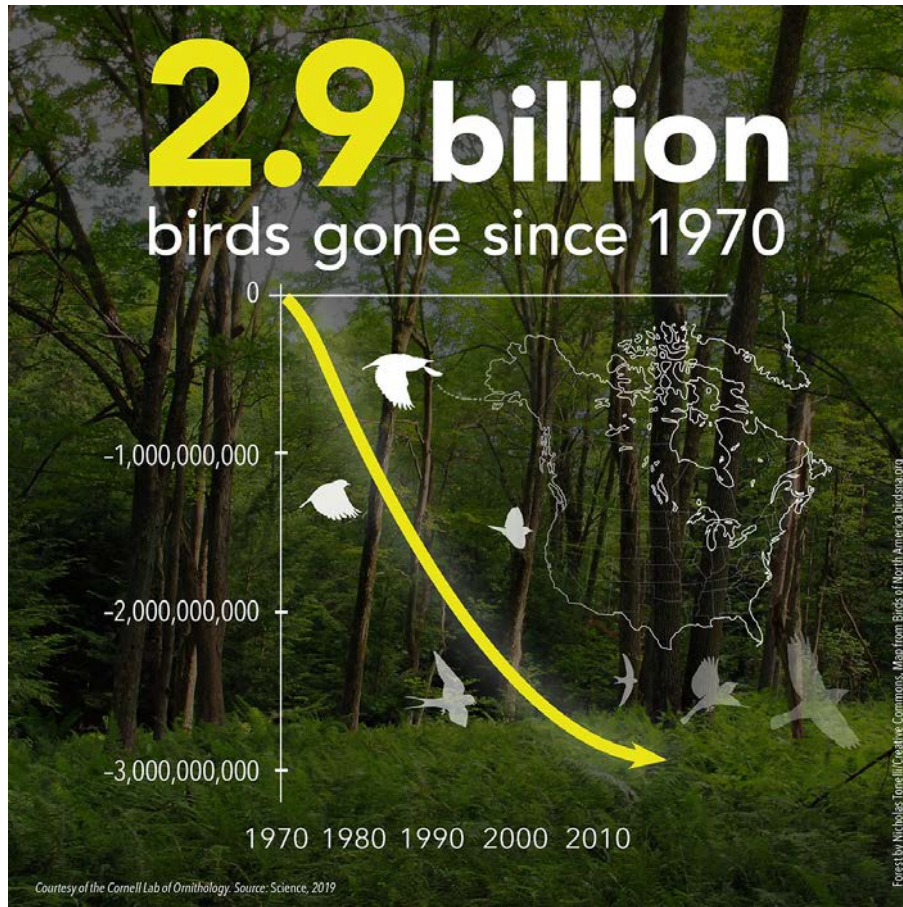
If you would like to support Centre Wildlife Care, and aid in the care of the Tundra Swan, and countless other wildlife in need, please make a donation to www.centrewildlifecare.org.

Editor's Additional Comments:



This is a photo of a blood lead tester used by Centre Wildlife Care (photo used with permission). Lead toxicity in raptors and waterfowl results in a number of symptoms (to name a few): weakness, inability to fly, and leg paralysis. Consequently, many birds suffer from emaciation, blindness, and seizures – a prolonged period of suffering that could be avoided if lead ammo is banned.

Unfortunately, many hunters, trappers, and anglers oppose a ban on lead ammo and fishing tackle, pitting the health of birds and other wildlife against the added cost of non-lead ammo. If you are a hunter or angler, please do your part to stop the widespread lead poisoning of our wildlife. Spend a few dollars more to make the environment safer to birds and other wildlife. Afterall, lead was banned in paint, toys, furniture, and gasoline because it's toxic to humans. Let's use non-lead ammo and fishing weights to protect wildlife from lead toxicity.



YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN JVAS HELPS US PROTECT BIRD HABITAT – A LEADING CAUSE OF BIRD LOSS

Become a JVAS Chapter-only member at one of the annual membership categories:

Check the appropriate box:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership, \$15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Friend of the JVAS, \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership, \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Membership, \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Membership, \$35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life Membership, \$500 |

Membership Year runs from January 1st to December 31st

Make your check payable to **JVAS**

Mail to: Juniata Valley Audubon Society
P. O. Box 1013
Altoona, PA 16603

Or join online at
www.jvas.org/join-juniata-valley-audubon/

Name _____
Address _____
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- ☐ **Yes, I will accept the digital copy of *The Gnatcatcher*.** ☐ **No, I prefer to receive a paper copy**