

The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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as a benefit for members of the

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



www.JVAS.org

PRESIDENT'S CORNER by Mark Bonta

Dear JVAS Community,

It is with a heavy heart that I acknowledge the deaths of hundreds of millions of my friends in 2023. I'm talking about the toll that buildings take on birds worldwide, each and every year.

This year, Chicago once again earned its moniker as the deadliest city for bird strikes. On the morning of October 5th, residents of the Windy City were awakened by the flight calls of millions of warblers and other migrants. Birders descended on the parks along Lake Michigan and recorded the amazing spectacle of hundreds of thousands of warblers threading their way through the wilderness of steel, glass, and concrete. For more details on what a fallout of this magnitude looks like, see Marky Mutchler's account and videos at ebird.org/checklist/S151504865.

While most of the birds were able to make it through, untold thousands did not, and accounts tell of their corpses littering the streets and sidewalks.



To quote Mutchler: "TURN YOUR LIGHTS OFF"

It can be hard to fathom the sheer magnitude of what is transpiring in the night sky above our communities. On certain nights, particularly in May, September, and October, tens of millions of birds are on the move. If they become bottled up by stagnant weather for a while, they may surge forward on the next north wind, as apparently happened in Chicago this year.

-Continued on page 2

This dead warbler (fall plumage) is a tragedy that could have been prevented if the homeowners had treated their kitchen storm door to prevent bird kills. **See page 11 for the backstory.**

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: PLEASE RENEW BEFORE 2024

President's Message.....Pages 1,2
Lenca Coffee.....Page 2
Evening Program.....Page 3
Field Trips.....Pages 4,5,9,10

Christmas Bird Count.....Page 6
Conservation Crossroads.....Pages 7,8
Creature Feature: Blackpoll.....Page 11
JVAS Chapter Membership.....Page 12



The Gnatcatcher Digital Version is in color and so much more attractive!
Send your email to jvas771@gmail.com if you'd like to see all the beautiful photos in color.



President's Message, continued

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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It's not just the tall buildings that represent danger to birds. It's also all the light we humans generate. And in the daytime, it's also the reflective glass panes that turn so many central business districts into giant funhouse mirror landscapes.

By night or by day, our iconic skylines are their killing fields.

To a lesser extent, these risks all exist in rural central Pennsylvania, in every mirror-like pane, every light left on needlessly at night, every churning turbine (I'll have more on this last bit in a future comment).

What can you do? Here's an Audubon.org article on some actions for your home or place of work: <https://www.audubon.org/news/help-birds-avoid-deadly-collision>. Here's another on the Lights Out movement: <https://www.audubon.org/news/lights-out-turn-birds>. As of this year, following action from local birders, State College has started turning its lights off during peak migration. Let's put some pressure on other local communities to follow suit!

Editor's Note: Buildings two or three stories high kill more birds than tall buildings. Your home could very well be a death-trap for birds. Even if birds hit your window and fly away, chances are the injury is fatal and birds will die soon after they hit the window.

What can you do? Add Acopian Bird Savers (aka Zen Curtains) or purchase Feather Friendly dots. You can make your own Acopian Bird Savers™ or buy a kit designed for your window:

<https://www.birdsavers.com>

The FeatherFriendly® dots are available:

<https://www.featherfriendly.com/residential-1>



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

will be HYBRID: in person and by Zoom

Follow these instructions, if joining by 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**

NOVEMBER PROGRAM: Tuesday, November 21, 2023 @ 7 pm via ZOOM and In Person at the Bellwood-Antis Library, 526 Main St. Bellwood, PA

6 PM: A free dinner catered by Catie Farr – THANK YOU, CATIE!!

7 PM: In-person meeting at the Bellwood-Antis Library, 526 Main St. Bellwood, PA

6 PM DINNER MENU: Pasta Bar! Salad, bread, meatballs, chicken, white and red sauce, with **gluten free** and **vegan** options. Dessert will be **gluten free** cheesecakes and pumpkin pie. Honduran shade-grown, organic hot coffee is also served.

7 PM: PROGRAM: At Home in the Middle of Nowhere: Insights from an Ecopoetry Practice – presented by Dave Bonta

Poet and photographer Dave Bonta has made a practice of writing as he walks, producing what he calls walking poems, and in the process cultivating a mindset that might be closer to pilgrimage than science. Re-visit familiar places through his serendipitous photos and the ideas they spark, from Plummer's Hollow, where he's lived since the age of five, to the Little Juniata Natural Area, Mt. Etna, Tytoona Cave, Bell's Gap, and more. Along the way, we'll be asked to consider how a simple walk in the woods can lead to new insights about the universe.

Dave Bonta, son of naturalist-writer Marcia Bonta, is best known as a multimedia poet and editor/publisher of a website devoted to poetry film. His books include *Failed State: Haibun* and *Ice Mountain: An Elegy*, which was a finalist in the 2017 Banff Mountain Book Competition.

In addition to ecopoetry, he's 11 years into a project to make erasure poems from every entry in the 17th-century *Diary of Samuel Pepys*. You can read most of his work for free on Via Negativa (www.ViaNegativa.us), the long-running literary blog that he shares with Virginia-based poet Luisa A. Igloria.



JVAS FALL 2023 FIELD TRIPS

Please contact Field Trip Chair Michael Kensinger if you have any suggestions for field trip locations or would like to lead a trip.



**FIRST TUESDAY of Each Month: 11/7, 12/5/2023
from 10 AM TO 12 PM**

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

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

Join George Mahon to bird the **Ray Amato Memorial Nature Trail behind the Northern Blair Rec Center** every first Tuesday of the month from 10 AM to 12 NOON. 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.

George Mahon (left), field trip leader, welcomed Debbie Decker and Connor Schmitt on the October bird walk.
Photo by Denice Rodaniche

SATURDAY, October 28, 2023: 9AM – NOON 3rd Halloween Weekend Nature Walk
Walk around Shawnee Lake in Shawnee State Park at 132 State Park Rd, Schellsburg, PA 15559

Click here for the map: www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks/FindAPark/ShawneeStatePark/pages/maps.aspx

Join Mike and Laura Jackson for a leisurely and fairly level 3.4-mile walk around Shawnee Lake.

We will meet at Picnic Area #2 Access parking lot near the boat rental to start the hike.

What to bring: binoculars, good walking shoes, water and snacks. Bring a lunch if you'd like to stay longer when the walk is over – you can keep your lunch in your vehicle until we return.

Contact trip leaders Mike and Laura Jackson if you have questions at 814-494-4439 or email jacksonlaura73@gmail.com



JVAS FALL 2023 FIELD TRIPS, continued

Eagle Watching at the Big Rockslide, Plummer's Hollow: between Nov. 7 – 12
Meet at 9 AM near Tyrone, Pa.
Watch ends at 4 PM, but you can leave early.

Brush Mountain is located along one of the best Golden Eagle migrant corridors in the East. Twenty or more can be seen on a good day. Join Mark Bonta for a day of scoping eagles and other late-season raptors, gulls, and waterfowl at Plummer's Hollow.



Image by patthana263 on Freepik

BY RESERVATION ONLY – DATE NOT FIXED. Contact Mark Bonta (markabonta@yahoo.com) to sign up. Specific directions will be shared when you contact Mark.

Logistics: One or more days will be announced for the Eagle Watch on November 6th, dependent wholly on weather (northerly winds are needed). Participants who have signed up will be notified.

Dress warmly with multiple layers. The watch is at an exposed location with heavy winds.

Bring: pads or small folding chairs to sit on boulders, raingear as necessary, food, drink, sturdy hiking shoes. Trail head to boulder site is a 30-minute hike (1 mile). Terrain at the watch site is boulders. Breaks can be taken at any time for lunch or to return to vehicles. No formal bathroom facilities are available at the watch location.

JVAS Field Trip Journal: Waterfowl Watches at Prince Gallitzin Marina

Photos and article by Michael Kensinger



Despite the threat of rain, several people attended my “Marina Meanderings” field trips at Prince Gallitzin State Park this fall. Members met at the Marina parking lot, and then we meandered to a nearby pavilion before wandering down the paved road that parallels the scenic lake. The two field trips were very much enjoyed by those in attendance and yielded many interesting birding experiences.

JVAS field trips (at least the ones led by me) are never just about the birds. Of course, the birds are the reason for the gathering, but when birds aren't as active, we have found so much interest in learning about the mushrooms, fungi, plants, and other wildlife of our region. We truly are lucky to call Pennsylvania home.

Continued on page 9

DECEMBER PROGRAM: CALLING ALL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTERS!

The JVAS CBC (the Culp Count) is Saturday, December 23, 2023



We need volunteers to scan the fields, skies, backyards, ponds, lakes – anywhere birds might be found.

If you live in the circle, you can be a **feeder watcher** and count your backyard birds, or you can be a **field observer** and cover a certain section of the count circle,

which is centered at Culp in Sinking Valley. We encourage counters to work in teams – the more eyes the better!

Sign up soon to be a counter!

Call or email Laura Jackson or Mark Bonta, Count Coordinators.

Laura: Phone: 814-494-4439 Email: jacksonlaura73@gmail.com

Mark: Phone: 814-600-8394 Email: markabonta@yahoo.com



The **Tally Rally** will be held at the **U.S. Hotel Tavern**, 401 S. Juniata St., Hollidaysburg, PA 16648. Each person pays for their own dinner.

We'll meet at **5:30 pm in the Gold Room**, order from the menu, and after we eat, we will do the bird species tally. Menu: <https://www.ushoteltavern.com/tavern-menu/>

You don't have to be a counter to join us, but let **Laura know by Saturday, Dec. 16** if you plan to attend since seating is limited.

Counters will be assigned a section of the circle so counts don't overlap. Let Mark or Laura know what section you'd like to cover.

Sections:

Northern Altoona

Bellwood

Tyrone-Tipton

Tyrone Treatment Plant

Brush Mountain (NE end)

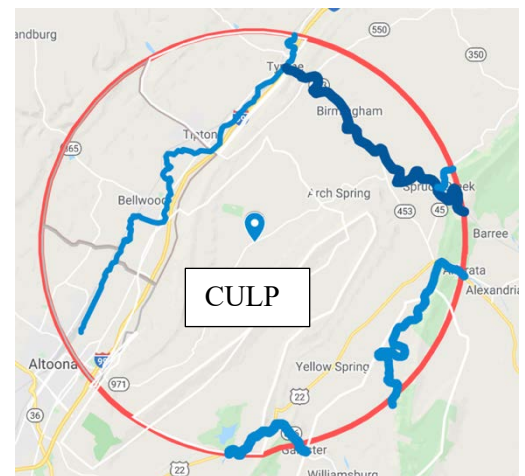
Sinking Valley

Canoe Creek State Park

Canoe Valley

State Game Lands

Juniata River Corridor



The Bedford Co. CBC is centered at Manns Choice, Pa. and will be held on Saturday, Dec. 30, 2023.

Contact compilers Mike & Laura Jackson: 814-494-4439 or jacksonlaura73@gmail.com if you are willing to help. The Tally Rally will be held at Hosses Steak and Seafood. 4308 Bus. 220, Bedford, PA, starting at 5 pm. Each person pays for their own dinner.

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 conservation concerns is found at www.JVAS.org then click on the Conservation tab.



1. Proposed Rutter's Gas/Convenience Store upslope from Old Crow Wetlands near Huntingdon, Pa. Rutters submitted their application to the Huntingdon Co. Conservation District, and it's being reviewed by DEP.



JVAS members have repeatedly expressed their concerns and opposition at Smithfield Township meetings. We encourage you to attend the monthly township meetings and express your concerns. Township meetings are 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.). Join the Coalition to Save Old Crow Wetland FB page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/271112655092285>

We are waiting to hear from DEP about the permit approval. If DEP does approve the permit, the Coalition is prepared to take action.

2. Hollidaysburg Borough ruins Blair County Natural Heritage Area at Chimney Rocks Park by Stan Kotala

Early this summer the Borough of Hollidaysburg hired a contractor to clearcut the forest below the Chimney Rocks in Chimney Rocks Park to enhance "the view". The Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory, a document which every municipality in our county has, designates this area as a Blair County Natural Heritage Area, an area of exceptional ecological significance.



Photo of clearcut October 18, 2023. Invasive species are already proliferating in the clearcut due to increased sunlight and the absence of competition from native plants.

Continued on page 8

Hollidaysburg Borough ruins Blair County Natural Heritage Area at Chimney Rocks Park, continued

This forest was so designated because of its calcareous sugar maple-basswood forest community and the unique limestone-loving forest plants in its understory. Furthermore, the Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory warns that “clearing the forest” would result in an explosion of alien invasive plants, especially tree-of-heaven, which is the host plant of the alien invasive spotted lanternfly. Yet, this is precisely the area that Hollidaysburg Borough chose to clearcut.

The area around the former quarry at Chimney Rocks is infested with Chinese privet, Japanese honeysuckle, Russian olive, and other alien invasive flora. These plants thrive in clearings, such as the new clearcut below Chimney Rocks. Removing the forest canopy greatly enhances the ability of alien invasive flora to take hold, as we've seen at countless other such sites. The maple-basswood forest that contained native trees and shrubs such as hackberry, hornbeam, and hickory will now be replaced by the aforementioned rapidly growing invasive exotic plants which will form an impenetrable mass, ruining the once-charming trail that ran below the rocks.

Attempting to control the spread of alien invasive flora into the clearcut would be not only very expensive, but also futile in this case because the rest of the park's understory consists almost exclusively of rapidly propagating alien invasive plants. The affected area and trail were the only parts of the park that were not infested with alien invasive flora and such plants were not likely to take hold there when the canopy was intact.

Furthermore, the clearcut was done without any public notice or input. The borough either is unaware of what resources are in its own park or chose to ignore or dismiss the affected area's status as a Blair County Natural Heritage Area. The Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory, a document commissioned by the Blair County Planning Commission and completed by professional ecologists, specifically warned against clearing this forest.

Hollidaysburg Borough officials blithely claimed that “it won't be long till the brown is replaced by new green growth”, but that new green growth won't be the native plants that merited this area as being a Blair County Natural Heritage Area. That new green growth will be alien invasive species that will form dense ugly walls. Another Blair County Natural Heritage Area is lost.

Editor's Note: We encourage you to become familiar with Natural Heritage Areas in your township and county.

According to the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program website, *“Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) are sites that have been identified as areas that support rare plants or animals, exemplary ecological communities, and Pennsylvania's native species biodiversity. PNHP inventories and reports the critical biological resources found within each NHA and throughout each county in Pennsylvania.”*

You can download a copy of your county's Natural Heritage Inventory at:

<https://www.naturalheritage.state.pa.us/inventories.aspx>

Why do we want native plants over non-native plants?

Research shows that native plants can help create a healthier environment, a healthier ecosystem, and support a higher diversity of animals – especially birds. Native plants can host many more types of insects than non-natives.



Dr. Tallamy found that native oaks can host over 550 different species of moths or butterflies—especially their larvae. Those caterpillars are vital food sources for birds, especially warblers and other songbirds. Non-native plants provide very little food for birds.

Waterfowl Watches at Prince Gallitzin Marina, continued

On our first field trip (September 9th), members were able to observe a Merlin (falcon) for the first time as it sat for nearly 15 minutes within view of the pavilion during a light rain. With our spotting scope locked-on, each member was able to see the bird up close until an immature bald eagle swooped in on the very same perch and offered a show of its own! Within moments, the rain had stopped, and we meandered down the paved road that runs along the lake, when I noticed a white seabird, with a deeply forked tail cutting across the water. Although it was difficult to ID at the distance, a few moments later it came slightly closer, enabling me to identify it as a Forster's Tern. It was a single bird – but with it, whirling over the deep blue water, a flock of Barn Swallows persisted with it.



As the day ensued, many other species of birds were tallied – 35 in total, as we walked back the lakeside trail that snaked between the park's beautiful cabins. As we made our way back, a Spotted Sandpiper alighted from the lake edge with pointed wingtips rhythmically propelling him just above the water. Not far in, we became enamored with the autumnal berries of Jack-in-the-pulpit that stood here and there like tiny cherries on a stick.

Of course, we had the usual suspects – an Eastern Phoebe, Cedar Waxwings and a group of American Goldfinches. We also noticed eight Double-crested Cormorants around a felled snag across the lake; some with wings outstretched in the sun, and others swimming in the water, diving for fish. While watching these talented fish-eaters, a Belted Kingfisher flew over, giving a loud staccato rattle to announce his presence.

On the way back to the parking lot, we stopped by one of the cabins where the canopy was dense with foliage and non-descript “chip” calls. Closer examination revealed a Yellow-throated Vireo, Cerulean Warbler, Hooded Warbler, a Palm Warbler, and a Blackburnian. Fall warblers, of course, being an extra challenge – we stood there and watched feverishly, until our necks ached. The birds were not just gleaning insects off the leaves, but some were enjoying what remained of some wild fox grapes that had grown high into the canopy of one of the trees.

Our second field trip here was on October the 7th. The wind was chilled, and it blew steadily off the lake. There were five of us that met in the lot, where both Osprey and Bald Eagle were putting on a show. At one point, an Osprey flew directly over our head, hovering, looking down as though we were a tasty perch. After a flock of around fifty-five Canada Geese flew over, the group and I headed over to the pavilion that overlooks part of the marina and noticed a Pied-billed Grebe diving and staying out of the choppy water. The marina docks had seemed to create a calmer refuge of water for the aquatic bird. The grebe was adorable and had some success on several occasions as he surfaced with what appeared to be a small green sunfish that he gulped down headfirst to avoid getting poked by the dorsal spines.

Bird activity was sporadic at this point in the field trip, aside from me getting outwitted by what I think was an American Pipit, and a flock of four American Wigeons flying in. The wigeons were identifiable primarily by the large white wing patches on the birds as they landed across the lake. Another group of ducks, completely unidentifiable due to distortion coming off the water, meandered around a distant mound of tree roots that had upturned at the water's edge.

Continued on page 10

Waterfowl Watches at Prince Gallitzin Marina, continued



Interestingly, the same old snag that yielded a Merlin and Bald Eagle in September, now was being used by an Osprey with a fresh fish catch. Having been smacked with a barrage of cold wind for too long, the sun was coming out and the group decided we should move down the road parallel to the lake to get closer. As we arrived, we observed the Osprey through the JVAS spotting scope and noticed the bird was not eating. Instead, he seemed focused on glancing around at us, and the horde of Crows that was being taunted by a Merlin. I couldn't help but wonder if it was the same Merlin we saw at this very location a month ago.

Zippering and cutting through the air like a knife, the Merlin had been flushed out of a large stand of pines by the Crows and Blue Jays – but seemed rather playful. At regular intervals he would swoop back into the group as if to say, “catch me if you can”! The Merlin would make another appearance down the road as we counted yellow-rumped warblers eating grapes. The incredible falcon cut through the brush, ignoring the warblers completely – who were apparently completely unaware they just had a merlin fly through the middle of the group.

Two Great Blue Herons, a small group of four Ruddy Ducks, and two Northern Shovelers ended the waterfowl tally as we all went back to the car having enjoyed a wonderful day of birding at Prince Gallitzin State Park.

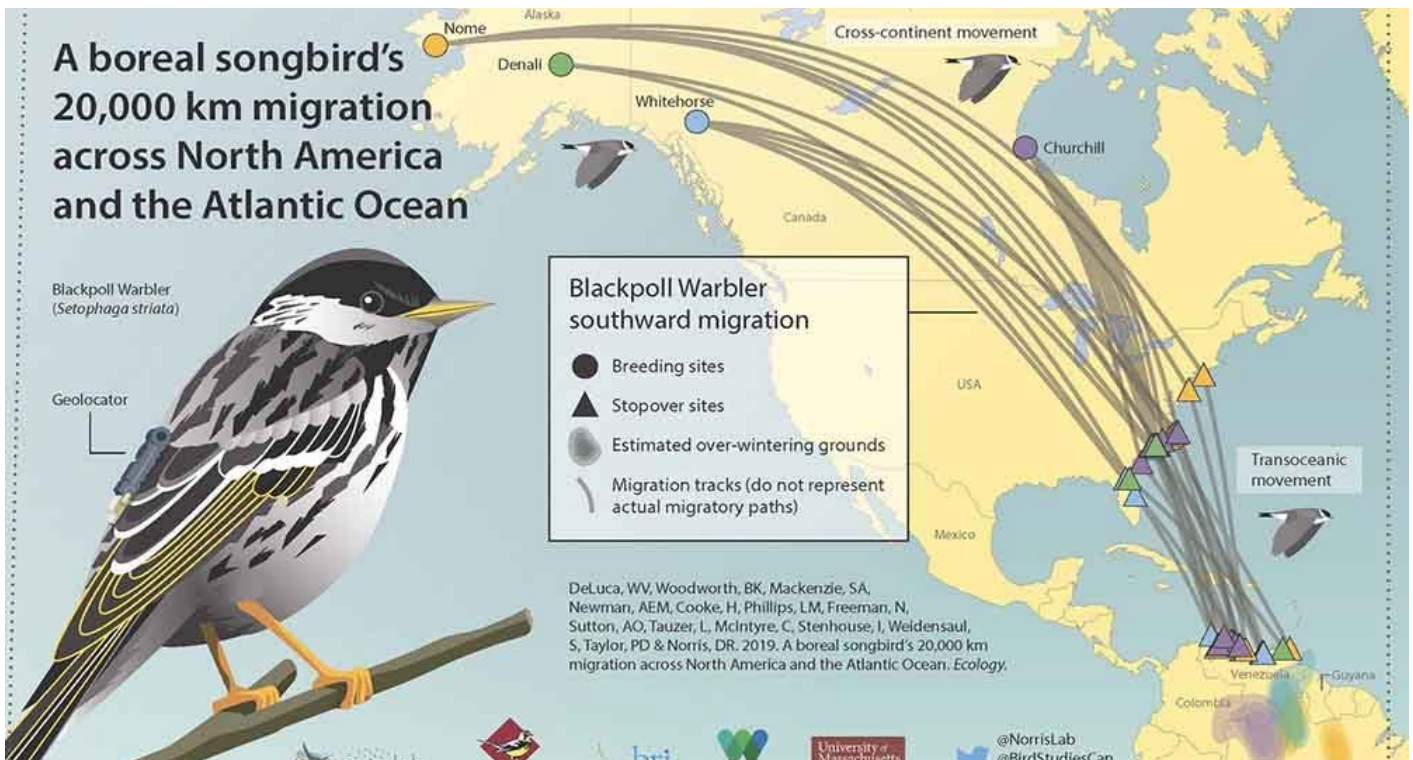


Immature milkweed bugs (a type of seed bug) on a milkweed pod

In addition to Monarch caterpillars and butterflies (middle), milkweed supports other insects:
Top L & R: milkweed beetle (native), tiger tussock moth caterpillar (native)
Bottom L & R: Adult milkweed bug (native), oleander aphids (non-native).



Creature Feature: Blackpoll Warbler by Laura Jackson



DeLuca et al deployed tiny geolocation devices with a 12-month battery life on male blackpoll warblers at four locations: Churchill, Manitoba; Whitehorse, Yukon Territory; Denali National Park and Nome, both in Alaska. *UMass Amherst / University of Guelph, published in Science News on March 19, 2019.*

The dead warbler shown on page 1 is a Blackpoll warbler in fall plumage. It flew into our kitchen storm door in mid-November a few years ago, so we covered the glass on the door with CollidEscape to prevent another tragedy. CollidEscape is like contact paper, but with tiny holes. First we measured the glass dimensions, then ordered enough to cover the glass from CollidEscape.org

The drawing above shows a Blackpoll Warbler in breeding plumage. Its black and white markings are similar to a Black-and-white Warbler, but notice the yellow feet. In the fall, the bright yellow feet are a field mark that help us identify blackpolls since they look so different from their breeding plumage.

While most Blackpoll Warblers breed in the boreal forests, there are records of a few Blackpoll Warblers nesting in spruce and hemlock forests in the northern part of Pennsylvania. Since it is so rare in Pennsylvania, it is listed as endangered – although there is no conservation plan to increase its numbers in the state.

We watch for Blackpoll Warblers feeding on insects when the wild black cherry trees bloom in the spring and we sometimes see blackpolls bathing on our bubbling boulder during fall migration. Their fall journey is truly remarkable!! They have one of the longest migration routes of any songbird. They must double their body weight (from around 12 grams to 24) in order to survive the flight over the ocean, which can take as long as 3 days! The Blackpoll Warblers that breed in Denali National Park fly nearly 1,800 miles to their wintering grounds in South America.

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON

PO BOX 1013
ALTOONA, PA 16603

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

Check the appropriate box:

- | | |
|--|--|
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Membership Year runs from January 1st to December 31st

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