

# The Gnatcatcher

## Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



### PRESIDENT’S CORNER by Mark Bonta

Dear JVAS Community,

#### WE ARE! (#47)

Of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania, Blair, at the core of our Audubon chapter’s area, is ranked 46 all-time in number of bird species recorded. We’ve logged 259 species so far, 38 above Sullivan County, Pennsylvania’s lowest, but 96 less than Lancaster County, number one in the state.

This year, I set out to see if it was possible to detect at least 200 species in a single eBird hotspot – in this case, Plummer’s Hollow, at the northern end of Blair County. I used every means at my disposal, including a nocturnal flight call recorder, and managed to count 202 species (pending continuing flight call analysis that may swell the total). One of the things I learned was that knowing how to detect birds (I call it “intercepting” them) is a large part of what we think of as “species richness.” Location, habitat quality and diversity, and observer effort are also critically important, but it’s amazing how many species are missed just because someone isn’t in the right place at the right time.



We probably missed Sandhill Crane, or Swallow-tailed Kite, or you-name-it this year because someone didn’t glance up at just the right moment in just the right location.



While I like to think that Plummer’s Hollow is special, I suspect that virtually every Pennsylvania natural area with varied habitat and a few hundred acres of woods and fields could turn up similar hotspot top-ten numbers on a yearly basis. The problem is how hard it is to detect some birds unless someone is onsite 24/7. I can’t imagine how many rarities escape notice on our many local ponds and lakes, or even muddy fields, for example. Often, waterfowl and waders land in the night, spend a few hours in the morning, and they’re off again. How many of these completely escape detection? How many of the rarities that non-birders see ever get noted or reported to birders?

#### WE ARE! (#20)

In 2023, Blair County cracked the top 20 in the state, in a five-way county tie of 223 species for the year. This is a substantially higher county rank than in the past and based on far less eBird checklists than the counties occupying one through 19.

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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

This 253-and-counting list is probably still dozens shy of the “true number” (total species present in the skies and/or on the ground at some point during the year) but is nevertheless a testament to the couple dozen casual and, well, *fanatical* birders who have focused more effort on Blair this year than ever before.

## NIGHT WATCH

Blair added six species to its all-time list in 2023. They were the **Painted Bunting** on April 22, photographed at a feeder near the Juniata Valley Church, and five nocturnal migrants over Plummer's Hollow: **Common Gallinule** (4/15); **Whimbrel** (5/22 and after); **Ruddy Turnstone** (5/27); **Short-billed Dowitcher** (7/1 and after); **Upland Sandpiper** (8/9). Now, there are naysayers who may doubt the importance of birds that fly over at night, but I think nocturnal migrants are equally as important as those that fly over during the day, such as raptors. Whether they land here or not, nest here or not—they are still within our territory. We don't own them, for sure, but we are their stewards as long as they are here. And whether we know it or not, they—particularly the night-flying ones—face some pretty large obstacles. Take the tens of thousands of **Swainson's Thrushes, Gray-cheeked Thrushes, Hermit Thrushes, and Veeries** that stream north in the spring and south in the fall. On certain September dawns, I sit in a field on top of Plummer's Hollow, awash in the overlapping peeps of thousands of thrushes as they descend to the forests all around to rest and feed for the day. One day, it occurred to me that, minutes earlier, they may have had to thread the massive wind towers of Sandy Ridge, directly to the north, as they exited the Appalachian Plateau airspace and entered the Ridge and Valley Province. (Or, perhaps, they've learned to avoid those obstacles?) I'm happy that we've kept much of our part of their flyway free of obstacles, and also that we entice them and hundreds of other species with ample opportunities to spend a day, a week, or a season.

To paraphrase the great Eddie Kendricks, **KEEP ON BIRDIN'!**



## 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

**JANUARY PROGRAM: Tuesday, January 16, 2024 @ 7 pm In-person Only**  
**At the Bellwood-Antis Library, 526 Main St. Bellwood, PA**



**6 pm Potluck Dinner:** Please bring a favorite dish to share. Catie will provide baked chicken.  
Cold drinks and hot shade-grown Honduran coffee will be available.

## **7 pm Program: Members' Night**

Our annual Members' Night is always a good time, with lots of socializing and an impressive assortment of slideshows, videos, wildlife art, nature poetry, nature crafts, and other by-products of our on-going fascination with the natural world. Email VP Laura Jackson ([jacksonlaura73@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonlaura73@gmail.com)) by Friday, Jan. 12, if you'd like to make a presentation, which should be no longer than 10 minutes.

**FEBRUARY PROGRAM: Tuesday, February 20, 2024 @ 7 pm Zoom and In-person**  
**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**

**In-person meeting at the Bellwood-Antis Library, 526 Main St., Bellwood, PA**

**6 pm Free Dinner:** mushroom bisque, tomato soup, and sandwiches, gluten free and vegan options. Dessert is strawberry pretzel salad and oatmeal cookies, gluten free options. Cold drinks and hot shade-grown Honduran coffee will be provided.



## **7 pm Program: "Orchid Fever" presented by Tom McCoy**

After Charles Darwin wrote 'On the Origin of Species', he became instantly famous, and could've chosen any subject matter he desired for his next book project. Any subject matter he desired ... and he chose orchids. In this presentation you'll learn what makes orchids botanically unique, and more importantly, the highly evolved role they play in ecology with a focus on their indelible link to fungi. We'll also learn about the nontrivial role they've played in our culture, and even learn about some of the ~35 species found in the mid-Atlantic. After listening to this presentation, you'll better understand why Darwin chose orchids, and why he chose very well indeed.

"Interesting Orchid Photos" by NC Orchid is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

Tom McCoy is an autodidact amateur naturalist with a keen focus on fungi, and current vice president of the Mycological Association of Washington DC. He has given numerous presentations on his beloved fifth kingdom, kingdom fungi, which led him to his current obsession with orchids. Orchids, all orchids, have a compulsory connection to fungi, and without this link, orchids would cease to exist.

**MARCH PROGRAM: Tuesday, March 19, 2024 @ 7 pm**  
**In-person Only at the Bellwood-Antis Library, 526 Main St. Bellwood, PA**



**6 pm Free Dinner: Menu in the next newsletter**

**7 pm Program: Walk on the Wild Side**

<https://centrewildlifecare.org>

We welcome back Robyn Graboski, manager of Centre Wildlife Care, for an up-close and personal encounter with wild animals that cannot be released to the wild. Robyn will bring her animal friends: Bruce Wayne the bat, Petunia the skunk, Artemis the Peregrine Falcon, and Orco, the Baltimore Oriole.



**APRIL SPRING BANQUET: Tuesday, April 16, 2024 at 6 pm**

*Mark Your Calendar!!!*

**Amber Weiwel**, coordinator of the Third Pennsylvania Bird Atlas, will explain how we can get involved in this huge citizen science project, which officially starts January 1, 2024, but any birder can join at any time during the 5-year effort.

**BANQUET RESERVATION IN NEXT NEWSLETTER**

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**JVAS WINTER 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: 2/6, 3/5, 4/2 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 birds and mammals 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.



The red squirrel and Carolina Wren show off some of the brighter colors of winter along the trail. Carolina wrens are bold birds and often sing in winter.

Photos by Mike Jackson



## JVAS WINTER 2023 FIELD TRIPS, continued



### **Sunday, JANUARY 14th 9 AM – NOON Fort Roberdeau Feeder Watch & Sketch**

Join us at White Oak Hall at Fort Roberdeau while we observe the feeders, socialize, and snack!

Where: White Oak Hall 383 Fort Roberdeau Road, Altoona, PA 16601

What to bring: binoculars, lunch, sketching supplies (if you want to draw) and a camera if you'd like to take photos of the birds through the glass. I will bring some extra pencils and paper if you don't have any. Wear comfortable and warm clothing.

We will tally bird species and see how many visit the feeders in three hours. Who knows? We may even see one of the Fort's resident Red-headed Woodpeckers, or something completely unexpected!! No hiking required. This event will be indoors.

For questions or concerns, or in case of inclement weather, please email JVAS Field Trip Chair Michael Kensinger, or call at (814) 505-3410 to verify the event has not been cancelled. We hope to see you there!

### **Sunday, FEBRUARY 18th 9 AM – NOON Ray Amato Trail Winter Walk**

Join us for a winter walk as we tally birds and check the nest box condition of the bluebird and wood duck boxes around Ray Amato Trail. Ray Amato offers a variety of great birding habitats, including shrub, brush pile, open forest, wetland and streamside habitat with the Little Juniata River. In addition, a nearby housing development attracts many types of birds that enjoy living near people.

Afterward, we will meet for an optional "pay for your own" lunch at Marzoni's, just a short drive up the road in Greenwood.

Where: Meet at the Northern Blair Recreation Center parking lot: 4080 E Pleasant Valley Blvd, Altoona, PA 16601



Winter Robin Photo by John Carter

What to bring: binoculars, comfortable hiking boots or shoes, and dress warmly as this event is outdoors and weather can be a factor. The trail is level, and easy to walk.

For questions or concerns, or in case of inclement weather the day of, please email JVAS Field Trip Chair Michael Kensinger, or call at (814) 505-3410 to verify the event has not been cancelled. We hope to see you there!

## JVAS FALL 2023 WINTER FIELD TRIPS, continued

**Saturday, March 2nd 9 AM – NOON**

**Little Juniata Natural Area**

Join us as we bird and saunter through the Little Juniata Natural Area with George Conrad at Barree in Huntingdon, County.

The area is known for its resident Bald Eagles, with one person reporting five at once!

The trail is regarded as “easy” in difficulty.

Here is a link for the location in Google Maps:

[https://maps.app.goo.gl/hd1xjxudH2Y8VLRM9?g\\_st=ic](https://maps.app.goo.gl/hd1xjxudH2Y8VLRM9?g_st=ic)

Directions for those who don't use GPS:

Take I-99 to Rt 453 east. Drive to Rt 22 east at Water Street and then bear left onto Main Street to Alexandria. Then take the first left, Barree Road, to the Village of Barree. Drive across the bridge over the Little Juniata River and turn onto the first left, Mountain Road. The Little Juniata Natural Area parking lot is at the very end of the road.

What to bring: warm and comfortable hiking clothes, binoculars, water, and anything you might want to bring on a hike. We will bird and saunter as we observe the work George has done clearing the trail for naturalists, birders, and anglers.

We will meet afterward for an optional lunch at Blue Gill's Bar and Grill in Alexandria @ 214 Main Street. Lunch is pay on your own.

For questions or concerns, or in case of inclement weather, please email JVAS Field Trip Chair Michael Kensinger, or call (814) 505-3410 to verify the event has not been cancelled. We hope to see you there!



### **CULP CIRCLE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT UPDATE**

We didn't find any penguins during the Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023, but it was almost a perfect day for finding other birds: cool temperatures, no wind, high thin clouds, and no ice or snow to limit waterfowl.

We don't have all the data yet, so watch for the summary in the next issue of *The Gnatcatcher*, but we want you to know that the counters did a fantastic job. Their dedication, combined with the good weather, resulted in possibly the highest bird count ever for the Culp Circle! Full details to come.

**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](http://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.

## Update from Claire Holzner ([holzner@fastmail.fm](mailto:holzner@fastmail.fm)), Coalition to Save Old Crow Wetland

Rutters has not yet received a permit from DEP to build a truck stop next to Old Crow Wetland in Huntingdon. It is likely that they will, and the coalition is raising funds to appeal a DEP stormwater permit. Our lawyer is working for us pro bono but we'll need to pay experts who will testify for us at an appeal with the Environmental Hearing Board, so we are raising money for a legal fund. See below for how to donate.

We have two avenues to stop this project: DEP and Smithfield township. On the first Tuesday of each month, members of the Coalition to Save Old Crow Wetland voice opposition to Rutters' plans at Smithfield township supervisors' meetings. We point out how Rutters' plans do not meet Smithfield township's ordinances. The next meeting will be on January 2, 2024 at 6:00 pm at 202 South 13th Street, Huntingdon, PA 16652. Any member of the public may attend and speak at these meetings.

Local media calls Rutters' project a "convenience store" because that is how it is labelled in DEP and township documents. Reporters claim they must use that term, but it is misleading because the project is a seven-acre truck stop, one of the largest in central Pennsylvania, open 24 hours a day. A large Rutters is being built in Blair county now and another is planned for Centre county.

Coalition members have spoken with the Maxatawny Community Coalition - Home ([savemaxatawny.org](http://savemaxatawny.org)) near Kutztown PA. Since a Rutters was recently built there, traffic congestion in the area has become worse. Residents are concerned about gambling machines and the sale of alcohol at the Rutters, as well as many warehouses now proposed for the area. A member of the Maxatawny group wrote:

"Even though Rutters calls themselves a convenience store, we consider them to be a truck stop due to the massive amount of parking they have for tractor trailers in the back parking lot and the amount of diesel gas pumps on the property. Trucks park overnight on the property which is against our ordinances and many of them are idling non-stop regardless of any laws against it. These types of facilities should be up on the Interstates and NOT in communities! - A.F.

## CONSERVATION CROSSROADS, Old Crow Update continued

Coalition members also attended a Non-Violent Direct Action Training session in December led by Michael Badges-Canning and Penn Garvin (NVDA training facilitators).

If you want to prevent traffic, pollution, and related problems in Huntingdon and to prevent harm coming to the beautiful Old Crow Wetland, please join the Coalition to Save Old Crow Wetland FB page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/271112655092285>

**To donate to the legal fund, send a check made out to Coalition to Save Old Crow Wetland to: Coalition to Save Old Crow Wetland, P.O. Box 7, Huntingdon PA 16652, or donate to [fundrazr.com/saveoldcrow](https://fundrazr.com/saveoldcrow)** Any donation would be much appreciated.

## 2. US Fish & Wildlife Proposal Aims to Shoot 500,000 Barred Owls

By Michael Kensinger



The Barred Owl is the owl I most frequently see here in central Pennsylvania. Ever since I was a young boy thumbing through Audubon field guides this bird has remained one of my favorites. Through the years, I've had many curious interactions with these elegant hunters. Hearing their comical calls, and even staring into their dark mysterious eyes on a few occasions has done plenty to inspire me as an artist.

Most of my interactions with Barred Owls are in wooded areas that contain streams, springs, or other wet habitats. They seem to have an affinity for catching frogs and snakes in addition to the typical rodent or small bird prey. Resilient and adaptable, these delightful birds of prey have caused quite a stir in the Pacific Northwest, where they are now out-competing endangered Northern Spotted Owls.

Due to diminishing Spotted Owl populations, US Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed a controversial plan to allow the harvesting of 500,000 Barred Owls over a 5-year period in the Pacific Northwest. This proposal aims to reduce the population of Barred Owls, a species that competes with the threatened Northern Spotted Owl for habitat and resources. Habitat and resources, one might add, that are rapidly shrinking through habitat loss. The goal is to help the Northern Spotted Owl recover and stabilize its population, while reducing the number of non-native Barred Owls in the region.

However, the proposal has sparked heated debates among conservationists, biologists, and bird enthusiasts. Critics argue that hunting Barred Owls won't effectively address the main threats facing Northern Spotted Owls, such as habitat loss and fragmentation. Additionally, they express concerns about the ethics and ecological impacts of large-scale hunting of a species that is not endangered.

Supporters of the proposal argue that reducing competition from Barred Owls can help alleviate some pressure on the Spotted Owl population, allowing for more effective conservation efforts. The decision remains under review, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service is considering public comments and scientific

## CONSERVATION CROSSROADS, Barred Owl Shooting continued

input before making a final decision. The outcome will have significant implications for owl conservation and ecosystem management in the Pacific Northwest.

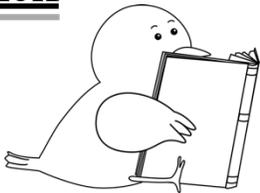
The Barred Owl is a native species in North America, but it has expanded its range westward in recent decades, including into the Pacific Northwest. This expansion is believed to have occurred naturally, driven by factors such as changes in forest habitats and food availability. The Barred Owl was first recorded in the Pacific Northwest in the early 1900s, but it was not until the 1950's that they began to establish breeding populations in the region. Today, they are considered an invasive species in some areas, competing with native owl species like the Spotted Owl which is already in decline from habitat loss and fragmentation.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is taking public comment on hunting Barred Owls in the Pacific Northwest as part of their draft environmental impact statement, which can be found on their website. The public comment period began on November 17 and ends on January 16. Information on how to submit comments and access the virtual meeting can be found on their website.

To submit your comments to the US Fish and Wildlife Service on this proposal, please visit <https://www.fws.gov/project/barred-owl-management>.

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### Off The Shelf



We hope "Off The Shelf" will appear in every issue of *The Gnatcatcher*, but that will only happen if you send in your reviews of natural history books. We also welcome feedback. Email Laura Jackson to contribute a book review, or if you have a comment about a book that was reviewed. Good reading!

### **WATER ALWAYS WINS: Thriving in an Age of Drought and Deluge, by Erica Gies, (2022), The University of Chicago Press, USA Review by Doug Mason**

Gies, a freelance writer and National Geographic Explorer, was the recipient of the Sierra Club's 2023 Rachel Carson Award, which honors sustained achievement by professional journalists and authors.

"Water Always Wins" introduces us to global innovators in what the author calls the Slow Water Movement, who start by asking a revolutionary question: what does water want? Slow Water approaches are bespoke: they work with local landscapes, climates, and cultures rather than try to control or change them. Slow Water seeks to call out the ways in which speeding water off the land causes problems.

Slow Water is also in the spirit of the land ethic articulated by forester-turned-conservationist Aldo Leopold, which calls for us to treat soil, water, plants, and animals with respect and to strengthen our relationship with them because they are part of our communities and we have a moral responsibility to them. Aldo's hydrologist son, Luna Leopold, expanded these ideas into a water ethic that calls for "a reverence for rivers."

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## **Creature Feature:** *Graceful Giants: American Flamingos Unveiled* by John Carter



A singular birding moment that I will forever hold close to my heart as a testament to life's beautiful surprises, was the day two American Flamingos became the birding spotlight for Franklin County, Pennsylvania.

On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, I escaped for a lunchtime bird outing in hopes of finding fall migrant shorebirds at local ponds. When approaching the country pond on Long Lane, little did I know that this would be the most unparalleled experience in my life of bird watching, as I discovered the first recorded American Flamingos in the state of PA.

Near the end of August 2023, Hurricane Idalia stirred across the Gulf of Mexico, pushing flocks of American Flamingos from the Caribbean into Florida and well beyond. American Flamingos started showing up in many other states in response to this tropical cyclone, creating a Flamingo mania.

I was as jittery as a caffeinated squirrel, and the enthusiasm bubbling over like a shaken soda can. As I stood alone along the farmland road admiring a once in a lifetime species discovery, I knew this was an unprecedented event that other bird and nature lovers would marvel over. Just as the flamingos flocked to this hidden oasis in the Cumberland Valley so would a mass of people near and far. The news spread like wildfire through the communication channels and fortunately the landowners were accommodating and gracious to welcoming people to take on the observation of these majestic splendors.

The birds had daily surveillance taking in accounts of behaviors and interactions, the state police would help manage the crowds of people so safety and respect would follow suit to help establish appropriate observation etiquette. Another extraordinary, mega rare visitor of a Brown Booby would flyover and be documented on September 14<sup>th</sup>.

As nature goes, not everything concludes with a happy ending. On September 11<sup>th</sup> the subadult flamingo was attacked by a resident common snapping turtle, causing a substantial injury to the leg. The bird was quickly and safely captured, and then transported by the PA Game Commission to the Raven Ridge Wildlife Center in Washington Boro, PA. The injured bird was making strides in its recovery, however, would perish in route to the next stage of its recovery.

The remaining adult flamingo would remain at Long Lane Pond for another 8 days giving opportunities for bird chasers, nature lovers and just curious individuals a chance to see a once in a lifetime bird opportunity in the wild. The adult flamingo departed the pond soaring the evening of September 19<sup>th</sup>.

It was such a joy to see the smiles and excitement of others taking in their encounter of the American Flamingos. I ventured to the pond seven different times and was beyond grateful to share my binoculars and spotting scope with outside visitors so they could have a close-up view.

For more information about American Flamingos:

- <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/american-flamingo>
- <https://abcbirds.org/bird/american-flamingo/>

## Water Always Wins, continued from page 9

A rights of nature movement is starting to infiltrate many legal systems. Dating back to the 1970s, it argues that nature has a fundamental right to exist. The Pennsylvania-based legal advocacy organization, the Community for Environmental Defense Legal Fund, uses this argument to assert a community's right to prevent a corporation from polluting its territory. Panama, Ecuador and Bolivia have enshrined rights of nature in their constitutions. In New Zealand, Whanganui River has won legal personhood. Same with the Ganges River in India and the Magpie River in Quebec. The Yurok Tribe in California has granted legal personhood to the Klamath River. Other communities around the world are also fighting for legal rights for their rivers, wetlands, and watersheds.

Water's true nature is to flex with the rhythms of the earth: the slow phases absorb floods, store water for droughts, and feed natural systems. Figuring out what water wants - and accommodating its desires within our human landscapes - is now a crucial survival strategy.

Ironically, we're making water extremes worse by trying to solve flooding and drought. Dubbed "gray infrastructure," by planners because they are often built with concrete, the water management systems we've built are causing myriad unintended consequences. Levees and seawalls, for example, protect one community but push higher water onto communities downstream or down coast. Levees also increase the scale of flood risk for the "protected" community by encouraging people to move into harm's way and by narrowing the floodplain, raising water levels. And by cutting off slow water from the land, they reduce storage underground, contributing to water scarcity.

In 2018, the United Nations published a strategic report called "Nature-Based Solutions for Water." Even the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers now has an "Engineering with Nature" initiative that blends in some greener solutions. These and other institutions are not calling for Slow Water to replace our engineered water systems; rather, they would augment them, creating a blend of engineered and natural solutions.

The book visits innovators deemed "water detectives" in the USA, Peru, Iraq, Kenya, the UK, Vietnam and India to demonstrate what is possible in various circumstances. Landscape designer Yu Kongjian is an international leader in the Slow Water movement and an early proponent of China's Sponge Cities initiative that seeks to make urban zones better able to absorb rainfall. Like many municipalities in China and elsewhere, Philadelphia routes stormwater through sewage treatment plants, which seemed like a good idea - giving stormwater an extra cleaning before returning it to the river - until urban sprawl led the systems to overflow during big storms, pushing untreated sewage into rivers. With its Green City/Clean Waters initiative, Philly is reclaiming land along the banks of local creeks and rivers as parks to absorb excessive rainfall and flood when necessary. There are numerous other ecologically minded people who practice being instituted by the City of Brotherly Love and as of June 2021, it had installed more than 3,000 green stormwater systems at more than 850 sites, reducing combined sewer overflow volume by more than 2 billion gallons annually.

Yet global society presses on with "progress." Ignoring systems theory, devaluing ecosystem services, and seeing ourselves as separate from the natural world and each other all breed fear and greed - a scarcity mindset. That leads us to make short-sighted development decisions in a futile attempt to control the environment and keep the good times rolling (for some).

Proponents of a movement called Deep Adaptation argue that climate chaos, followed by a societal breakdown, is inevitable. They are sounding that alarm not to incite panic but to inspire a conversation about what comes next. One facet of such radical acceptance is to admit that water always wins. That admission is not weakness. Instead, it's the foundation for strength because it opens us up to innovative solutions. We create our narrative, and we can change it. Letting go is what frees us to embrace what can be. We need to plan ahead, as necessity demands, with less sturm und drang. By shifting our relationship with water now, we can move toward something better with less upheaval.

The water detectives visited in this book are ahead of this curve. In championing Slow Water, they are advocating for a fundamental shift in how we think about ourselves, our systems, and our world. They endeavor to understand water and accept it for what it is instead of trying to shape it into what we wish it to be. In so doing, they build a partnership with water based on respect, meeting as equals.

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