

The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



www.JVAS.org

PRESIDENT'S CORNER by Michael Kensinger

Dear Friends of JVAS,



I am thrilled and honored to have been installed as the new President of the Juniata Valley Audubon Society. As a passionate advocate for wildlife conservation, I want you to know that I am motivated to lead our organization in making a positive impact in our community. Above all, I am excited to work with our dedicated members and volunteers to protect and preserve the natural beauty of our region for future generations. To do that, I also intend on bringing younger membership into the group to ensure JVAS longevity into the future.

As your President, I plan to increase our presence as an organization on social media to engage with a wider, more diverse community. I think regularly posting JVAS content online will attract a wider audience to our cause. By leveraging platforms like Facebook,

Instagram, and YouTube, we can share our mission, events, and conservation efforts with a broader (and at times, younger) audience. It is my belief that this will enable us to strengthen our group with a diverse, inclusive community of nature enthusiasts and conservationists.

I would like to also welcome my friends as newly elected Officers for JVAS.

As newly elected Vice President, we have **Catie Farr** - who is also our Hospitality Chair. Catie's dedication to bringing delicious meals to our JVAS meetings extends beyond what is expected. I've had in-depth conversations about how much happiness that brings her, which speaks of her character. I know I, as well as many other members, appreciate all of her efforts and bringing top-notch meals to our meetings. Catie is also responsible for the fun and exciting Earth Week Birding Classic, which we are working on together, to ensure growth for 2025.

Our Treasurer, with 17 years of service to JVAS, is **George Mahon**. George is on my team for the Christmas Bird Count, and I always enjoy spending time with him. We are lucky to have such a kind, and trustworthy person managing the books for JVAS.

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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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WHY PROMOTE SHADE-GROWN COFFEE?

It's simple – it's healthy for birds and for you!



Most coffee that you buy is **SUN COFFEE**– all native plants are destroyed, and the coffee shrubs are grown in big fields where they are sprayed with pesticides, and often irrigated and fertilized. Just like a corn field! Since the natural habitat has been destroyed there are very few insects to support birds. Most of the coffee sold in grocery stores is **SUN COFFEE** and is often poor quality.

SHADE-GROWN coffee farmers don't use pesticides and often create their own compost to naturally fertilize the coffee shrubs. Farmers plant their coffee shrubs on the forest floor, under the canopy of native trees. This means there are a lot of insects for birds to eat.

Researchers have found that many of our songbirds spend the winter in **SHADE-GROWN** coffee farms because they are able to find abundant insects to eat and abundant cover for protection.

Some JVAS members visited Emilio's coffee farm near Marcala, Honduras to verify that it is organic-practice, shade-grown coffee and we saw many species of songbirds on his farm. Emilio is now working toward getting **Bird-Friendly** certification for his coffee, which is the gold standard for quality and environmentally healthy coffee. We are proud to support Emilio and his efforts to produce healthy coffee and a healthy environment for birds, such as the (L to R) Black-and-White Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, and Kentucky Warbler.



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

MAY PROGRAM: Tuesday, May 21, 2024 @ 7 pm In-person Only
Join us at the Bellwood-Antis Library, 526 Main St. Bellwood, PA

6 PM DINNER: Taco Night! Chicken, steak, and pulled pork, gluten free, and vegan options.
Honduran shade-grown, organic hot coffee is also served.

7 PM PROGRAM: “Revelation, Rejection, & Redemption: An Art and Octopus Tale”

Join us to hear an inspiring redemption story and its connection to a JVAS member's path to nature journaling.



Denice Rodaniche's journey to watercolor journaling was a circuitous one. Marrying a still life artist and marine biologist in Panama cultivated her love of art, but career and family took priority. Denice will share the story of Arcadio Rodaniche's groundbreaking research of a little-known octopus and how recognition of his findings came just before his untimely death in 2016.



Nature journaling became Denice’s lifeline for dealing with grief by finding joy in the natural world around her.



JVAS PICNIC: Tuesday, June 18, 2024, Maxine Leckvarcik Memorial Picnic
6 PM - 8 PM (Set-up starts at 5:30 pm) 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.
Hospitality Chair, Catie Farr, will provide smoked chicken.

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 PM (optional).

We will end the evening with an optional visit to the bat church around 8 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.

Please RSVP BY Friday, June 14, so we have enough chicken for everyone.
Email Catie at catiegk5059@gmail.com. Let her know what dish you will bring.

JVAS FIELD TRIPS and Special Events Spring 2024

Greetings JVAS,

Please contact Field Trip Chair Michael Kensinger if you have any suggestions for field trip locations, questions about a trip, or would like to lead a trip, contact Michael at (814) 505-3410 or MichaelKensinger@gmail.com.

Below is a list of upcoming Field Trips we have planned. Bear in mind that from time to time, due to nature's unpredictability and variations in phenology, we also schedule "pop-up" field trips. We will do our best to email members any time these pop-up field trips occur, and they will also be listed on our Facebook page. Additionally, we plan to create some fun and exciting field trips into the summer to keep members engaged and excited! Visit our website JVAS.org or our Facebook page to stay up to date on these events. www.facebook.com/juniatavalleyaudubon

FIRST TUESDAY of May and June: May 7 and June 4 from 10 AM to 12 PM.



American Goldfinch
Photo by Laura Jackson

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.



JVAS RESERVOIR PARK WALK SATURDAY, April 27, 9 AM - NOON

ADDRESS: 901 W 15th Street, Tyrone, PA 16686

Join us at the parking lot beside the Tyrone Pool across the road from Reservoir Park in TYRONE for a fun saunter around the trails and loop of Reservoir Park in Tyrone in search of birds, wildlife, wildflowers, and fungi. The trail runs along streamside habitat, so we are hopeful for a myriad of species.

WHAT TO BRING: binoculars, comfortable walking shoes, drink, or snack if desired.

JVAS FIELD TRIPS and Special Events Spring 2024

PA NATIVE PLANT FESTIVAL AND SALE

SATURDAY, MAY 4, 2024, 10 AM – 3 PM

ADDRESS: Millbrook Marsh Nature Center
548 Puddintown Road
State College, PA 16801



Photo by
Laura Jackson

Join JVAS and other native plant enthusiasts at one of the largest native plant sales in central Pennsylvania.

Native shrubs, trees, and wildflowers are on sale that will attract beautiful butterflies like Eastern tiger swallowtail butterfly on the buttonbush flower, shown on the right. Admission is free! Vendors and plants for sale will be listed on the PA

Native Plant Society's webpage after April 1st, 2024: www.panativeplantsociety.org



Golden-winged Warbler
Photo by Mike Jackson

JVAS WARBLER WALK at the LOWER TRAIL

SATURDAY: MAY 11th, 2024, 9 AM – NOON

ADDRESS: 4598 William Penn Hwy, Alexandria, PA 16611

Join us at the LOWER TRAIL behind the Water Street Flea market for a morning meander to find and tally migrating warbler species, along with other birds. We will meet in the parking lot. Help us celebrate the Global Big Day 2024!!

WHAT TO BRING: Binoculars, comfortable hiking shoes, bug repellent, drink, and snack as desired.

JVAS MOTHER'S DAY WALK

SUNDAY, MAY 12, 2024, 9 AM – 12 PM

Address: Meet at parking lot of Blair County Game Fish and Forestry Association: 301 Riggles Gap Sportsmen Rd, Altoona, PA



WHAT TO BRING: binoculars, comfortable hiking shoes, bug repellent, drink, and snack as desired.

Join Michael Kensinger for a slow hike meandering through a variety of bird habitats to record and observe birds and wildlife on the trails of the Blair County Game Fish & Forestry Association. We will record our data into eBird as we explore and see what makes this a great birding location. The property consists of mossy streamside forested trails, views across open country power lines and fields, as well as mixed hardwood forests. There is also a small, stocked trout pond which attracts fish-eating birds.

If you have questions or need more information, contact JVAS Field Trip Chair Michael Kensinger at (814) 505-3410 or email him at MichaelKensinger@gmail.com. If inclement weather arrives this day, please contact Michael to verify that this event is still taking place for the sake of everyone's safety and well-being. Field Trip Chair reserves the right to cancel at the last minute should unexpected dangerous weather patterns occur. We hope to see you there!!!!

Grebe-a-geddon – January 16, 2024, Storm Causes Waterfowl Emergency by Michael Kensinger

On the morning of January 16, the phone at Centre Wildlife Care in Port Matilda was ringing off the hook, according to licensed rehabber Robyn Graboski. Graboski, who has been in wildlife rehabilitation for 35 years stated, “I’ve never seen anything like this before. My phone has been lit up all morning with calls about grounded grebes.”

Grebes are a family of water birds, so adapted to life on water that they cannot walk on land very well. With legs set far back on their bodies, near the rump of the bird, grebes dive for small prey items such as baitfish, amphibians, and crustaceans. While ducks have webbed feet, a grebe has lobed toes. Each digit on a grebe foot has a flap on either side for ultimate water propulsion. Even the nests of grebes are built on the water as floating rafts, another indication of just how critical open water is to the lifestyle of this unique bird. One downfall of their aqua-dynamic engineering is that they require a long runway of open water to take flight. This means grebes are helpless if somehow grounded. Unfortunately, on January 16th over twenty Horned Grebes were reported grounded unexpectedly across central Pennsylvania in Blair and Centre County.



Even in winter plumage, the Horned Grebe is a stunning bird to behold.

Reports also were coming in of several species of “diving” ducks being grounded including Ruddy Duck, Bufflehead, and Redhead Ducks. A Common Loon was also grounded and rescued. As with the grebes that had been grounded, these other birds are also helpless on land. In contrast, “dabbling” or “puddle” ducks such as Mallards and Wood Ducks have legs set further forward, allowing them to propel themselves straight upward from a sitting or standing position. This means these birds can easily take flight from land.

But why did this happen?

“Usually, we get reports of grounded grebes, loons, and diving ducks in the event of rain. But never in these numbers, and never in snow,” Robyn Graboski pointed out. “Those birds will sometimes land on wet roadways or parking lots, mistaking them for a body of water. But these particular birds were dropping into people’s back yards.” Such an observation seems to indicate that these birds had no choice but to come down immediately. “Many of the people who reported the birds to us, also reported they had ice crystals on their flight feathers,” Graboski commented.

It appears the culprit for the “fallout” was a jet stream of arctic air that froze moisture on the bird’s flight feathers during their nocturnal migration. Unable to remain airborne, a barrage of birds fell from the sky. This resulted in a few birds needing to be euthanized, with irreparable injuries. Luckily though, many of the birds were able to land with some level of grace and avoid injury. A team of certified and permitted volunteers stepped in to help those birds needing assistance. One rescuer who called Centre Wildlife Care explained how a Horned Grebe in Duncansville was actually plowed by a plow truck. Somehow, the bird was able to come out on top and avoid injury as it miraculously rode on the snow to the side of the roadway.

But why were these birds migrating south in January?

As it turns out, fluctuating weather patterns have a major impact on waterfowl movement, and these birds seem to have engaged in facultative migration. This means they move based on weather conditions and food availability. For example, Tundra Swans and many diving species are still being reported as migrating in January, while more typically associated with fall migration in November. It seems Horned Grebes, Common Loon, and various diving ducks in question had been holed up on Lake Erie later than usual, while weather and food remained favorable. The recent deep freeze appears to have forced those birds south, and it appears the ice-cold jet stream caught them off-guard.

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The birds that were evaluated and deemed uninjured were soon released at Lake Raystown where some open water revealed a myriad of grebes and diving ducks.

Disclaimer: Everyone involved with the capture and transport of these protected birds has completed a certification course and holds a permit with the Pennsylvania Game Commission to legally do so. As with all wildlife, many of these birds could inflict serious injury on a person. In the event you come across a wild animal in need, please contact the Pennsylvania Game Commission, Wildlife in Need PA, or your nearest licensed wildlife rehab.

President's Message, continued from page 1

I'm very excited about our newly elected Secretary **Conner Schmitt**. Conner is young, enthusiastic, and a new member to JVAS as of this year. Conner has stepped up to bat to fill in for field trips and is eager to help whenever needed. Having him officiated as Secretary is exciting, because I know he is reliable, and passionate about birding and bird conservation. Most recently Conner has joined me in the Louisiana Waterthrush Survey which we do to help Moshannon Creek Watershed Association to gain eligibility for various grants to fight acid mine drainage in this waterway. This survey requires a 4 AM rise, almost 80 minutes drive (round trip) and four miles of hiking to survey birds. And yet, Conner shows up on time, with a smile, ready to work.

As your Field Trip Chair, I have recognized that some of our members may have physical limitations that prevent them from attending field trips or hikes. When leading field trips, it always saddens me to hear someone can't participate despite wanting to enjoy nature. So, one of my goals is to remedy this situation so that people do not feel left out. And so, to ensure inclusivity, I plan to create videos and photo essays that will showcase our events, conservation efforts, local wildlife appearances, and share them online with members who want to be outdoors but cannot be. By bringing a summary of these events to your computer screen, everyone can experience and appreciate our wild Pennsylvania, regardless of physical abilities. As the new Publicity Chair, I have already begun this process on our Facebook page. If you enjoy simply reading about JVAS, and the outdoor experiences in our area, you can simply go to:

www.facebook.com/juniatavalleyaudubon



If you do not have a Facebook account, I do not believe you will be able to interact with the posts, but you should be able to scroll down our page and enjoy local photos, writing, events, and perhaps learn a thing or two along the way. I try to post new content daily, so feel free to enjoy it while enjoying your coffee or tea.

Once we begin making videos, we will upload them to YouTube, and they can simply be emailed to members and posted to the website for you all to view. In this scenario, there is no need to leave the comfort of your home to enjoy a bit of nature.

The future is bright for the Juniata Valley Audubon Society. In conclusion, I'd like to say this new position as President is not one I take lightly. My dedication to birds, wildlife, and their habitats will remain unwavering for the duration of my tenure for this amazing group. I look forward to building on the strong foundation our previous Presidents, board members, and long-time members have created as we move forward into this next phase.

May the road rise to meet our every step in this next chapter together.
Warm regards, Michael Kensinger

April 16, 2024: JVAS Annual Spring Banquet Overview

by Michael Kensinger

We would like to thank everyone who attended the 2024 JVAS Banquet on April 16th. Thank you to Hospitality Chair and new Vice President Catie Farr, as well as Laura and Mike Jackson for the work they put into organizing this event. We would also like to thank everyone who donated an item to our raffle. We ended up raising \$525, which is much more than in previous years. There was a myriad of unique items to bid on, including original artworks, crafts, games, foods, and even a bird-themed Lego set!

Amber Weiwei, organizer of the Third Pennsylvania Bird Atlas, was our banquet speaker. Amber presented ways in which we could all get involved with the next PA Breeding Bird Atlas and spoke a bit about a new Winter Bird Atlas that would be coming soon. Attendees were shown imagery and given instructions on the process involved with making accurate decisions on bird breeding behaviors and when to record them. Additionally, we were able to view range variations in a species such as the Carolina Wren, and how Pennsylvania's ground-breaking atlas has reflected the spread of Carolina Wrens since the first atlas in the late 80's.

If you would like to participate in the 5-year Atlas project to document breeding birds, check out the information on <https://www.hawkmountain.org/conservation-science/third-pa-bird-atlas>



Angie Spagnoli, JVAS Conservation Awardee (left) accepts her Conservation Certificate from out-going JVAS President Mark Bonta and Conservation Chair Laura Jackson (right).

As per tradition, we give a JVAS Conservation Award to a deserving person, decided on by our board. This year's awardee was Angie Spagnoli, who was nominated due to her tireless efforts to protect wetland habitats and the wildlife that call them home. While birds are an interest of Angie, her passion for amphibians, vernal pools, native wetland fauna and the like have earned her a reputation in our local community. She educates, inspires, and includes volunteers from a variety of backgrounds to get involved with hands-on activities such as tree plantings and invasive plant removal. Such activities do well to inspire new generations of conservationists and offer new perspectives for older generations who have not taken part in such activities before. It is important to note that such efforts are far from glamorous, but special people like Angie are willing to lead the charge.

In a world where many people are willing to talk about conservation, Angie 'walks the walk'. Where many people will share newsbytes on social media, Angie is out there in the mud and in the dirt working to make our planet a better place. As a woman of science, she serves also as the only woman on the board of Directors of the Little Juniata River Association. An advocate for protecting wild spaces, Spagnoli has helped lead the charge in the Coalition to Save old Crow Wetland. Currently, Angie is leading the charge as the battle ensues against Rutter's senseless development up against this vital Huntingdon habitat.

Angie's work resonates through many conservation groups including The Little Juniata River Association, The Coalition to Save Old Crow Wetland, Friends of Tipton Wetlands, and more. Aside from her talents as a scientist and conservationist, Angie involves people of all backgrounds in her projects spreading awareness of native habitats and ecosystems, and why we must protect them. Congratulations Angie! And thank you for all you have done and will continue to do!



Wetlands are important habitats for many creatures, including the spotted salamander (left) and the wood turtle (right).

Photos by Michael Kensinger

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON

PO BOX 1013
ALTOONA, PA 16603

Address Service Requested



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



**Point your phone's
camera at the QR code
above to join online!**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone No. _____ E-mail Address _____

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