

# The Gnatcatcher

## Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

Vol. LIX, No. 3 May - June 2025

Published bi-monthly (except for July and August)

as a benefit for members of the

JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



[www.JVAS.org](http://www.JVAS.org)

### President's Message

Dear friends and fellow defenders of wild places,



It's been a season of passion, perseverance, and purpose for all of us at the Juniata Valley Audubon Society. As your President, I feel more committed than ever to standing up for the birds, the forests, and the future we believe in.

But let's be honest—these are difficult times for conservation. We're facing deep cuts to environmental programs, reckless rollbacks of protections, and a massive increase in logging on our public lands. These decisions threaten the habitats we love and the wildlife we work so hard to protect.

This isn't just policy—it's personal. It's about our identity as Pennsylvanians, and our duty as stewards of the land.

That's why I've made it my mission to be a strong, clear voice for our community.

Recently, I had the honor of speaking at the "Hands Off" rally in Altoona, where I delivered a fiery conservation sermon to a crowd of 500–600 passionate advocates. I marched with them through the streets, united in purpose, determined to defend our public forests from exploitation. We are not just reacting—we are rising.

We are reminding everyone—from neighbors to lawmakers—that our forests are not for sale.

And I'm hopeful.

Hopeful because I see the fire in our members.

Hopeful because I see new generations picking up the torch.

Hopeful because together, we are powerful.

Let's keep marching. Keep speaking. Keep protecting.

The birds need us. The forests need us.

The future needs us.

In solidarity and hope,

Michael Kensinger, president

**DID YOU RENEW YET? See page 14 to renew for 2025**

President's Message.....Page 1  
Lenca Farms Coffee.....Page 2  
Evening Program.....Page 3  
Honduras Birding Tour.....Page 3  
Spring Banquet.....Pages 4-5

PA Native Plant Festival.....Page 6  
Field Trips.....Pages 7-9  
Earth Week Birding Classic Results...Page 10  
Conservation Crossroads Earth Day...Page 11  
Twilight Dancer.....Pages 12-14

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).

#### OFFICERS

**President,** Michael Kensinger

- ♦ 814-505-3410
- ♦ michaelkensinger@gmail.com

**Vice President,** Catie Farr

- ♦ 570-651-3839
- ♦ catiekgk5059@gmail.com

**Secretary,** Connor Schmitt

- ♦ 814-502-4204
- ♦ ceschmitts12@gmail.com

**Treasurer,** George Mahon

- ♦ 814-942-2658
- ♦ gsm815@hotmail.com

**Immediate Past President,** Mark Bonta

- ♦ 814-600-8394
- ♦ markabonta@yahoo.com

#### COMMITTEE CHAIRS

**Membership,** Denice Rodaniche

- ♦ 814-502-8431
- ♦ denicrod@outlook.com

**Conservation,** Laura Jackson

- ♦ 814-494-4439
- ♦ jacksonlaura73@gmail.com

**Partners in Neotropical Bird Conservation,**

- ♦ Laura Jackson

**Education,** Susan Braun

- ♦ 814-574-0795
- ♦ braun3112@gmail.com

**Field Trips,** Michael Kensinger

**Publications & Publicity,** Michael Kensinger

**Hospitality,** Catie Farr

**Historian,** Mike Jackson

- ♦ 814-494-3631
- ♦ mljackson2@icloud.com

**Website Administrator,** Dave Bonta

- ♦ 814-686-7274
- ♦ dave.bonta@yahoo.com

**The Gnatcatcher Editor,** Laura Jackson

#### DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

- ♦ Warren Baker
- ♦ Sharon Clewell
- ♦ Justin Merry



### Did it snow on Emilio's coffee shrubs in Honduras?

No, they are in flower, which only lasts a short time in April, but it really does look like snow!

Each year, an inspector (L) certifies the farm, warehouse, processing facility, and all aspects of coffee production.

**Congratulations to the Garcia Family: Emilio, brother Carlos and sister Doris, whose coffee farms in Honduras are now Smithsonian-certified Bird Friendly® and were just re-certified for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time. Their coffee is also certified organic and grown under the native tree canopy, providing food and a safe habitat for birds. The new label for the Smithsonian certified coffee is, “Los Robles,” which means, “The Oaks.” Emilio is the only farmer who is also certified as a roaster in the program.**

**SHADE-GROWN** coffee farmers like Emilio Garcia don't use pesticides and often create compost to naturally fertilize the coffee shrubs. Emilio plants his 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, feasting on insects and protected by native vegetation.

### Celebrate Earth Day Every Day - Drink Bird Friendly® Coffee

**Emilio Garcia**, our partner who produces bird friendly 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 Los Robles coffee if you want the single origin, direct trade coffee that is certified Bird Friendly®.

**Click on “Shop Now” to order the Los Robles coffee.**

Fair Trade shade-grown **decaf** coffee from Colombia is also available. Emilio sells his green coffee beans through <https://lencafarms.com>

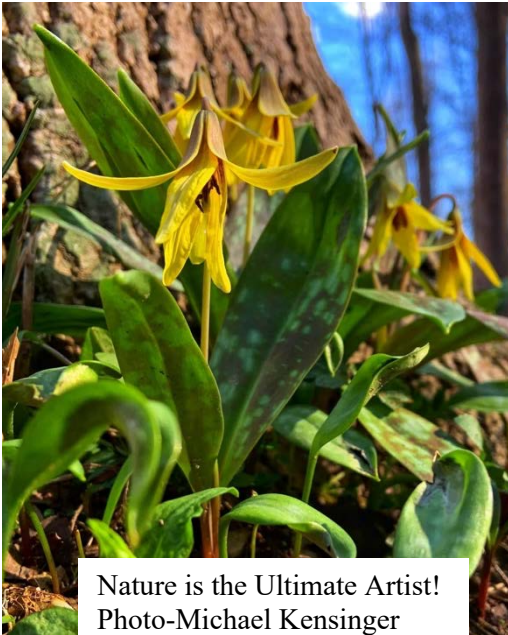
**Remember, shade-grown coffee is good for you and good for our birds!**



## JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY EVENING PROGRAMS

Join us at the Bellwood-Antis Library, 526 Main St. Bellwood, PA

**Artists' Night! 6 PM: Free Dinner 7 PM: Program**



Nature is the Ultimate Artist!  
Photo-Michael Kensinger

Join us on Tuesday, May 20th at the Bellwood-Antis Library for a special evening celebrating the intersection of art and nature. It's Artists' Night, and we invite attendees who are artists to bring along a nature-inspired creation or two to share and discuss with the group!

Come early at 6 PM to enjoy a free dinner, courtesy of our Hospitality Chair and Vice President Catie Farr. We'll be serving a bountiful Salad Bar featuring two kinds of mixed greens and a wide array of toppings, including chicken, steak, beans, and more. Vegan and gluten-free options will be available. Try some Los Robles coffee, too, but save room for ice cream for dessert!

The meeting itself will begin at 7 PM. Whether you're bringing artwork or simply coming to enjoy the evening, we'd love to see you there!

Consider participating in a **Honduras Birding Tour**, led by **Emilio Garcia** (our coffee farmer partner) and **David Hernandez** (longtime leader of the **Marcala Bird Club**). They have organized a wonderful 11-day trip to celebrate birds and coffee, scheduled from July 16 – 26, 2025. Click below to see all the details.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nZs5IucZgmv3BrrOLR2Fj1LoRtuThp8/view>

In 2016, JVAS Past President Mark Bonta led a similar trip to Honduras, so those of us who went on that



trip can attest that it's a fantastic opportunity to experience tropical birding, a UNESCO World Heritage Site (the Maya site of Copan), great coffee, and impressive scenery. We stayed at many of the locations that are part of this 2025 birding tour. We can vouch that the accommodations will be top-notch and the

food very delicious. This tour will have just eight participants, so it will be very personal, and travel will be quite comfortable.

Of course, the birding will be over the top exciting – especially if a **Resplendent Quetzal** cooperates (photo on right)!!



## Highlights of the JVAS Annual Spring Banquet

We enjoyed a delicious roast turkey meal prepared by the Evangelical Lutheran Church on April 15, while chatting with friends about birds, conservation, and all things nature.

### Highlights of the evening

- ❖ **JVAS Conservation Award to Claire Holzner for her tireless efforts to prevent construction of a Rutter's Truck Stop adjacent to Old Crow Wetland near Huntingdon, Pa.**

#### **President Michael Kensinger's presentation to Claire:**

*It is my honor today to present the 2025 Juniata Valley Audubon Society Award to someone whose passion, persistence, and deep love for the natural world have made a lasting impact on our community and our environment.*

*Claire Holzner, your leadership in the protection of Old Crow Wetland has been nothing short of extraordinary. Through your work founding and guiding the Coalition to Save Old Crow, you gave a voice to the wetland, its wildlife, and to the people who care about preserving these wild spaces for future generations.*

*While we, as a group, were not successful in stopping the development of the Rutter's gas station and truck stop adjacent to the wetland, your tireless efforts brought Old Crow into the public eye in a way that it never had been before. You organized, educated, advocated, and inspired. And that matters.*

*Because of you, hundreds more people now know the value of Old Crow Wetland—not just as a habitat for birds and other wildlife, but as a place of beauty, ecological importance, and peace. You turned a local issue into a regional conversation, and the ripples of your work will carry on well beyond this moment.*

*So today, with heartfelt gratitude, we present you with the 2025 JVAS Conservation Award, not only to thank you for your advocacy, but to recognize the resilience, determination, and hope you have given us all.*

*Even as bulldozers move forward, we will not turn away. We promise to continue visiting Old Crow Wetland—to walk its paths, to admire the herons, the warblers, the frogs, and the changing seasons. And we will remain vigilant. We will document what we see, we will continue to bear witness, and we will speak out when needed.*

*Claire, because of you, Old Crow is not forgotten. And it never will be. Thank you for your unwavering spirit. This fight has changed us—and we're not done yet! Congratulations.*



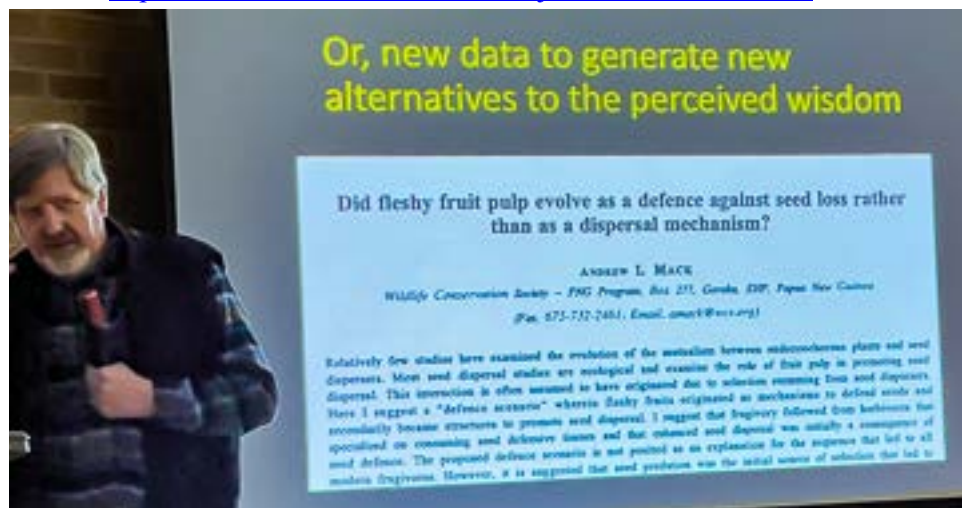
#### **JVAS Spring Banquet, continued**



- ❖ **Dr. Andrew Mack, Conservation Biologist and Ornithologist who studied cassowaries in Papua New Guinea for many years, gave a thought-provoking and fascinating account of, “Ornithology Over Fifty Years: A Retrospection and Lessons for the Future”**

Dr. Mack emphasized that the “old way of doing science,” i.e., collecting and preserving specimens in museums is not in favor now, but is providing invaluable sources of DNA for molecular genetic studies.

He also pointed out that long-held perceptions are often hard to debunk, since there is resistance in the scientific community to change. One example was his research on fleshy fruit. A hypothesis long held by scientists was that flowering plants developed fleshy fruit to make them more attractive to fruit-eaters since those animals would disperse the seeds. But what if fleshy fruit actually evolved to deter animals from eating the seeds, thus preventing seed loss? His research findings on this topic were rejected by several mainstream institutions...resistance to change...but finally published in the Indian Academy of Sciences. Here's the link to Dr. Mack's research: <https://www.ias.ac.in/article/fulltext/jbosc/025/01/0093-0097>



- ❖ The Silent Auction was a success – we raised \$467.00! Many thanks to the artists who contributed original creations and other donors who contributed items - and to the generous bidders who took those items home with them!
- ❖ **Mark your calendar for next year's Spring Banquet: Tuesday, April 21, 2026**



2025 Central Pennsylvania

# Native Plant Festival

*Lobelia Cardinalis*

Saturday, May 3, 10:00 am–3:00 pm  
at Millbrook Marsh Nature Center, State College, PA

*Celebrate spring with educational tables, programs, and a plant sale!*  
**Free Admission !**

**11:00 a.m.**

**Gardening for Birds: Creating a Healthy Food Web from the Bottom Up** with *Constanza Ehrenhaus, State College Bird Club & SC Bird Town PA Cmte & Amber Wiewel, PA Bird Atlas Coord., Hawk Mtn Sanctuary*



**1:00 p.m.**

**Beyond Bluegrass: Native PA Grasses in the Wild and at Home** with *Sarah Chamberlain, Assoc Prof/Curator, PAC Herbarium PSU, and author of Field Guide to Grasses of the Mid-Atlantic Region.*



**Resource Tables All Day!**

Have your questions about native plants, wildlife, and gardening answered!

*Live Music by The River Band!*

Good Day Café and Gather & Co Sustainable Catering!

**Plant Sale All Day!**

**Bring your wagon!**

Looking for something special?  
Contact vendors directly to pre-order/reserve a plant.  
See vendor list at  
[PANativePlantSociety.org](http://PANativePlantSociety.org).  
*(No purchases before 10 a.m. day of sale.)*



[www.PANativePlantSociety.org](http://www.PANativePlantSociety.org)

**Choose Native Plants for Pollinator and Bird-Friendly Gardens!**

## JVAS FIELD TRIPS Spring 2025

Greetings JVAS,

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 him at (814) 505-3410 or [MichaelKensinger@gmail.com](mailto:MichaelKensinger@gmail.com).

**\*In the event of inclement weather or dangerous conditions, Field Trip Chair Michael Kensinger reserves the right to cancel. Feel free to call or text Michael at (814) 505 – 3410 to check on the status of a field trip. You can also email Michael at [MichaelKensinger@gmail.com](mailto:MichaelKensinger@gmail.com)**

\*The Field Trip Chair also reserves the right to cancel any field trip last minute in the interest of safety of our participants. We encourage you to call or text if you are ever in doubt that a field trip is taking place.

***FIRST TUESDAY WALK: May 6, June 3, July 1, August 5 from 10 AM to NOON***  
**Birding the Ray Amato Memorial Trail behind the Northern Blair County Recreation Center**

**Address for Northern Blair County Rec Center (NBCRC): 4080 E Pleasant Valley Blvd, Altoona, Pa.**



Join JVAS Secretary Connor Schmitt to explore the nature trail that runs behind Northern Blair Recreational Center in Tipton, PA. Enjoy an easy-grade hike, where you will enjoy a variety of habitats including streamside (Little Juniata River), wetland (Robert P. Brooks Wetland), meadow, and forest. This location is always a great choice for birding due to the myriad habitat choices. Even the NBCRC's soccer field boasts Killdeer, Canada Geese, Eastern Bluebirds, and others that like a more open area.

**What to bring:** Please wear clothing suitable for weather conditions. Snack/drink. Binoculars if you have them. No dogs are permitted on the nature trail.

Recap from April's Walk: We had a total of 7 people, not a bad number considering the sudden cold front that came in. The participants were (L – R): Gary Miller, Denice Rodaniche, Frank Nale, Sarah Lada, Connor Schmitt, Arlene Lennox, and Justin Merry (not pictured). We saw a total of 30 species.

### **Highlights reported by Connor:**

- Rusty Blackbird. While I have seen them here before, I'm pretty sure this is the first time I've seen one here while leading the group.
- There was a massive group of American Robins (around 75) foraging in the soccer field.
- Two Fox Sparrows were singing back and forth. We got a good chance to hear them as the one kept singing as we walked by.
- The feeders Frank put up continue to draw in a plethora of birds. This has continued to provide a lot of excitement as birds like Purple Finches, which I used to never get on these walks, are now reliably seen.



## JVAS FIELD TRIPS Spring 2025

### Kristin Joivell's PA Master Naturalist Service Project 2025 Exploring Natural Areas—Second of Three Field Trips for JVAS

**Saturday, May 10, 2025: 1 PM – 4 PM**

**Exploring Rocky Ridge Natural Area led by Kristin Joivell**

**Meeting Place: Rocky Ridge Trail Head on Frew Road**

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/7mCpCstxxJfsYF856>



Photo from JVAS Trip in 2014

❖ A state forest natural area is a protected area in a Pennsylvania state forest that is managed to preserve its natural state. These areas are set aside to protect unique plants, animals, scenic beauty, geological, and historic features. They provide places to observe distinctive plant and animal communities and showcase outstanding examples of the state's forest communities. There are over 60 state forest natural areas in Pennsylvania!

❖ The Rocky Ridge Natural Area is in Huntingdon County, south of Martin Gap. These 150 acres of rich, mixed oak woodland support numerous wildflowers among exposures of Oriskany sandstone.

❖ On this 2 mile leisurely walk, participants can expect to observe spring

wildflowers in bloom among large sandstone boulders. The trail winds around and through rocks of all sizes with a short but steep uphill at the beginning of the route and a gradual downhill at the end of the route.

Come prepared with proper footwear, food, and water. Hiking poles are highly recommended.

- ❖ Contact PA Master Naturalist, Kristin Joivell, at [kristinjean@hotmail.com](mailto:kristinjean@hotmail.com) or (814) 386-6267 with any questions.

### **Sunday, May 11: 9 AM – NOON 4th Annual Mother's Day Walk at Blair County Game Fish and Forestry Assoc.**

**Address:** 301 Riggles Gap Sportsmen Rd., Altoona, PA

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 begin our birding at the parking area, recording our data into eBird as we explore and see what makes this a great birding location. We will look for birds around the different habitats on the property which 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 has attracted a variety of species of fish-eating birds. If you enjoy photography, feel free to bring a camera as we peruse the trails, which are stunning and peaceful, cloaked in moss along a native brook trout stream.



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

If you have any questions, please call/text Michael at (814) 505-3410 or email him @ [MichaelKensinger@gmail.com](mailto:MichaelKensinger@gmail.com).



## JVAS FIELD TRIPS Spring 2025



There's an elevated boardwalk in the wetlands.

### **Saturday, May 24, 2025, 8:30-10:00 am. NatureWorksPark Bird Walk**

Leader: Justin Merry, [justinmerry@gmail.com](mailto:justinmerry@gmail.com),  
814-932-5599. If you have any questions or need more  
information, contact the trip leader.

**Address:** 108 Bedford St, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648. Meet by the more southern parking area next to the red barn. We'll loop around the park from there.

You don't have to travel far to experience great birds and beautiful nature! Join us for a bird walk through NatureWorksPark in Hollidaysburg. This accessible park features a diversity of habitats in a small area: wetlands, stream edge, open lawn, and brush. We hope to see Baltimore and orchard orioles, warbling vireos, yellow warblers, common yellowthroats, gray catbirds, red-bellied woodpeckers, nesting barn swallows, red-winged blackbirds, all the common yard birds, and chances to encounter many other species. This is an easy walk of just over a half mile in total. The path itself is mostly flat and covered in gravel, though we will leave the main path to visit the stream (a slight grade). We will take our time, admiring the birds that we encounter as we go.

What to bring and wear: wear comfortable shoes, dress for the weather and bring water and a hat. Sunscreen and bug spray are recommended. There can be high grasses in some areas, so light, long pants tucked into socks to deter ticks is advised. Bring binoculars if you have them!

### **Kristin Joivell's PA Master Naturalist Service Project 2025 Exploring Natural Areas—Third of Three Field Trips for JVAS**



Photo from JVAS Trip in 2012

### **Sunday, June 1, 2025: 1 PM – 4 PM**

#### **Exploring Alan Seeger Natural Area Led by Kristin Joivell**

**Meet: Old Seeger Picnic Area Parking Lot on  
Seeger Road**

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/e38JtbzYCQCD9ixQ9>

❖ A state forest natural area is a protected area in a Pennsylvania state forest that is managed to preserve its natural state. These areas are set aside to protect unique plants, animals, scenic beauty, geological, and historic features. They provide places to observe distinctive plant and animal communities and showcase outstanding examples of the state's forest communities.

There are over 60 state forest natural areas in Pennsylvania!

- ❖ Named after a famous WWI poet, the Alan Seeger Natural Area includes 390 acres north of Greenwood Furnace State Park. The forest contains old growth hemlock, white pine, and yellow birch along with huge colonies of great rhododendron near Standing Stone Creek.
- ❖ On this 1-mile leisurely walk, participants can expect to observe an old growth forest ecosystem. Although very flat, the trail crosses the stream multiple times over bridges and can be a bit muddy in some locations. Come prepared with proper footwear, food, and water. Hiking poles are recommended.
- ❖ Contact PA Master Naturalist, Kristin Joivell, at [kristinjean@hotmail.com](mailto:kristinjean@hotmail.com) or (814) 386-6267 with any questions.

## Earth Week Birding Classic 2025 Results!

The Juniata Valley Audubon Society celebrated Earth Week with our annual Birding Classic, an exciting and inspiring event that brought together birders from across the region to support local bird conservation. Six enthusiastic teams took to the field in Blair County and surrounding areas, competing to spot as many bird species as possible within a 24-hour window.

Together, the teams tallied an impressive 111 species! The winning team, “The Wingnuts,” topped the charts with 96 species, including notable sightings of Sora, Virginia Rail, Greater Scaup, and the elusive Whip-poor-will—a true highlight of the day.

The day of birding concluded with a celebratory dinner at the U.S. Hotel Tavern in Hollidaysburg, where members gathered to share stories, tally final counts, and enjoy a delicious meal.

Half of the funds raised from this event will go directly toward local bird conservation projects supported by our chapter and the other half will go to the Penn State Altoona Sustainability Council.

To contribute, please visit our Juniata Valley Audubon Facebook page and donate via our fundraiser.  
<https://www.facebook.com/donate/642499058546960/1134437535389211/>

We will gratefully accept cash donations at our next meeting on Tuesday, May 20th, 2025, at 7:00 PM.

We wrapped up another successful Earth Week Birding Classic with a warm and lively final tally dinner. This year, we welcomed two brand new teams to the competition. Congratulations to our category winners: The **Wingnuts** took home the Ruffed Grouse title with 96 species, **Bell Hollow Buteos** soared to the top of the Towhee category with 90 species, **The Golden Eagles** claimed victory in the Coot category with 81 species, and **Bird is the Word** led the Phoebe category with 14 species. Fundraising

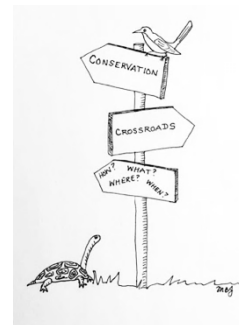
efforts are still underway, with all proceeds going to support local bird conservation and education. Thank you to everyone who participated and made this year’s Classic such a joyful celebration of birds and community!



Tally Dinner at U.S. Hotel Tavern: Clockwise, top right: Cassie, Alysha, & Addy Kachur; Denice Rodaniche; Justin Merry; Connor Schmitt; Mike & Laura Jackson; Myra & David Hess; Catie Farr, Earth Week Birding Classic Founder and Leader



**CONSERVATION CROSSROADS** is a section of *The Gnatcatcher* that features environmental issues across a spectrum of local, national, and global concerns. Contact Conservation Chair 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.



## **EARTH DAY: April 22, 1970      By Laura Jackson**

Do you remember the first Earth Day? I was a junior at Juniata College, but we didn't give much thought to Earth Day – there was something far more serious going on: the Vietnam War.

In May 1970, 4 million students went on strike across the country, shutting down classes at hundreds of colleges, universities, and high schools and demanding an end to the Vietnam War. Juniata College temporarily closed, and students were sent home.

***On the first Earth Day in 1970, there was no Environmental Protection Agency, no Clean Water Act, and no Endangered Species Act. Our rivers were also catching on fire, landfills were overflowing with toxic gases, and our skies were blanketed with deadly smog. People demanded change, and our leaders took action.***

Fifty-five years later, Trump is waging an all-out attack on the protections in place and now college students are rebelling again, as protests occur all around the country. I can't help but wonder if some of those college students who protested 55 years ago, are now demonstrating peacefully across the country, protesting the "Trump/Musk" presidency and all the environmental harm they are causing. The multi-generational protests ARE making a difference. Young and old have to work together!!

On Saturday, April 19, many of the protests were part of a "day of action" organized by the **50501 Movement**, which brands itself as a decentralized network. The name stands for 50 protests in 50 states and one movement — referring to the [group's first nationwide protest](#) at state capitols.

**In addition to making our voices heard at rallies, we can support environmental groups with donations, and we can let our elected officials know we oppose the lawless takings of protected lands, waters, and forests for development.**

**Here are just a few of the environmental lawsuits against the Trump administration:**

*Suing to stop offshore drilling to every coastline in America.*

*Suing to restore references to climate change Trump removed from government websites.*

*Suing to stop the Trump administration's attempts to meddle in states' environmental policies.*

*Taking the administration to court for freezing federal grants that were earmarked by Congress to benefit farmers and communities*

**More legal action will be taken soon to stop these nefarious actions by the Trump administration:**

*Trump proposed a rule that would eliminate habitat protections for endangered species.*

*Trump issued executive orders to prop up coal plants.*

*Trump signed a proclamation to expand commercial fishing in a California previously protected national monument home to endangered marine species*

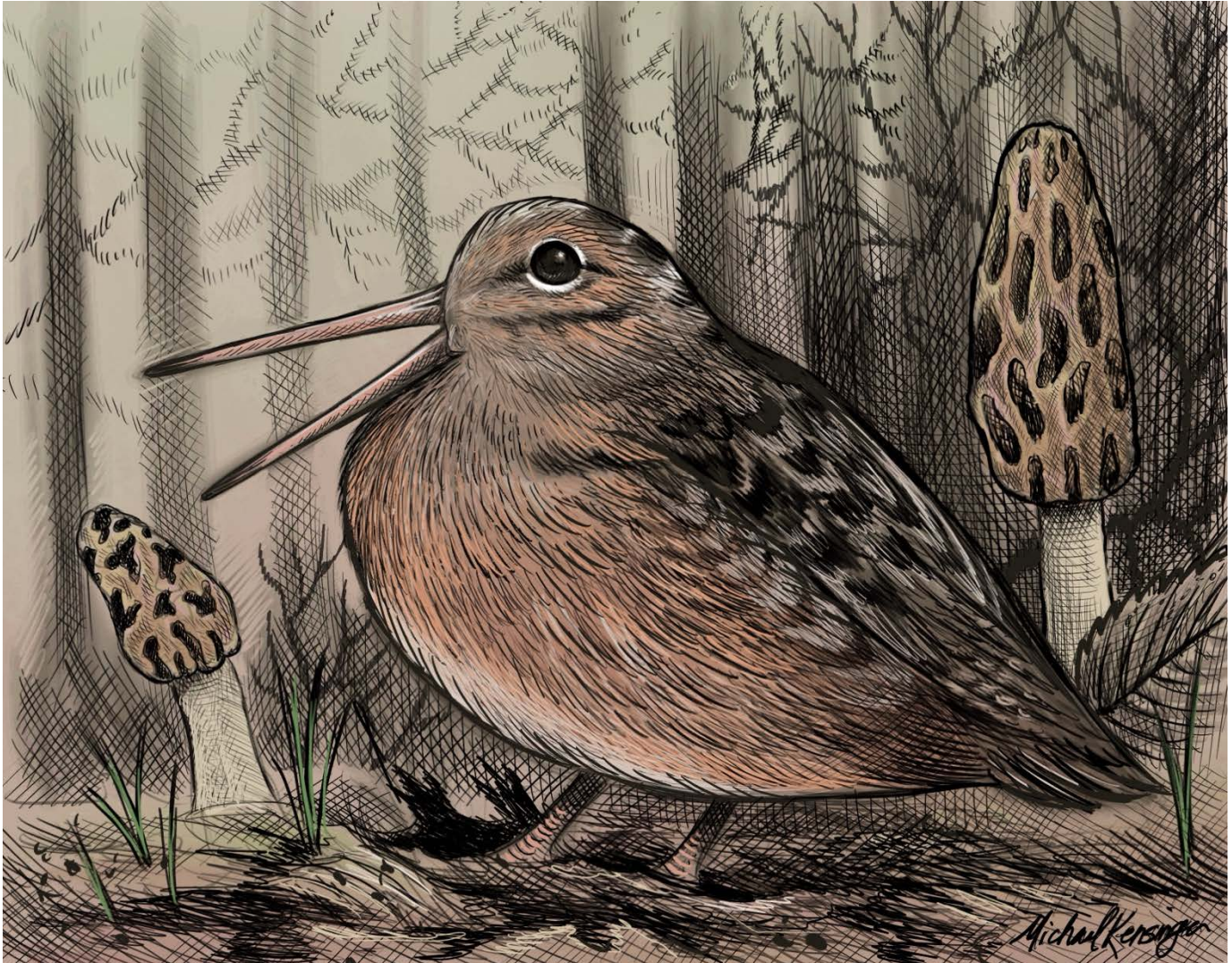
**Want to support a national group that isn't afraid to sue the Trump Administration?** Consider donating to EarthJustice, Environmental Defense Fund, American Bird Conservancy, National Audubon, Sierra Club, and/or Center for Biological Diversity.

**Your support will help to protect what we hold most dear.**

## Twilight Dancer: Pennsylvania's Enigmatic American Woodcock

By Michael Kensinger

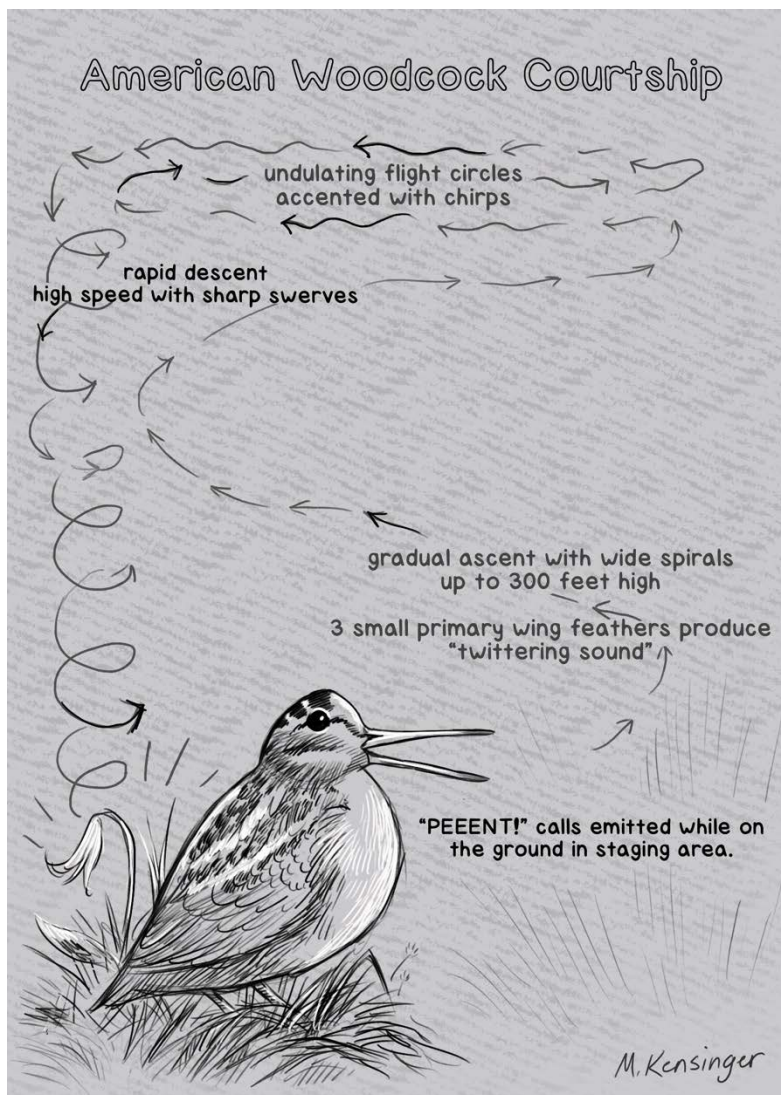
Living a rather secretive life in the damp forests and fields of Pennsylvania is one of the state's most intriguing and elusive birds: the American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*). With plumage that blends effortlessly into the brown and gray leaf litter of the forest floor, and a courtship display that begs to be witnessed, the woodcock is a species of significant ecological and conservation interest here in our beautiful commonwealth.



Colloquially known as the “timberdoodle,” “bog sucker,” or “night partridge,” the American Woodcock is often referred to as “the shorebird that long abandoned the shore.” Instead of patrolling coastlines, this chunky worm-lover makes its home in the damp, early-successional forests and fields of eastern North America—defying conventional expectations of what a shorebird should be. Rather than chasing the surf, woodcocks probe soft mud with their flexible-tipped bills, aided by large eyes set far back on their heads. With nearly 360-degree vision, they can continue scanning for danger even as they clasp worms—without even opening their bills in the soil.

As they forage, woodcocks shift their weight in a rhythmic, dance-like motion, perfected over time to coax nightcrawlers into revealing themselves in the slurry soil. I lovingly refer to this behavior as the “timberdoodle tango.”





One of the most celebrated aspects of the American Woodcock is its spectacular courtship display, often called the “sky dance.” Each spring, from late March through May, male woodcocks perform elaborate aerial displays to attract females. Early morning or late evening walks in appropriate habitats—especially around wetlands—often reward patient observers with this breathtaking show.

At dusk, males emerge into open fields and begin their performance with a series of nasal, buzzing “peent” calls. After several repetitions, the bird launches into the air in a spiraling ascent, sometimes reaching heights of 300 feet. As he climbs, wind rushing through his specialized primary feathers creates a musical, twittering sound. After hovering briefly at the peak of his flight, the male plummets back to the ground in a zigzagging descent, punctuated by soft, liquid chirps. Upon landing, he resumes his “peenting,” repeating the display many times throughout the evening. This dramatic ritual is one of the most enchanting natural events in Pennsylvania’s woodlands and grasslands—and a critical opportunity for birdwatchers and conservationists to monitor woodcock populations.

The American Woodcock is found throughout Pennsylvania, particularly in areas with young forests, old fields, and moist thickets. It thrives in early successional habitats—those regenerating after disturbances like logging, fire, or natural clearing events. These areas provide the dense cover needed for nesting and brood-rearing, as well as soft, rich soil for foraging.

Unfortunately, such habitats are becoming increasingly scarce. Many of Pennsylvania’s forests have matured beyond the early successional stage, while agricultural and urban development have further reduced suitable woodcock territory. This habitat loss has contributed to long-term declines in woodcock populations, making targeted conservation efforts essential.

Over the past several decades, American Woodcock numbers have steadily declined across their range, with habitat loss cited as the primary cause. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, woodcock populations have dropped by approximately 1% per year since the 1960s.

In Pennsylvania, conservation organizations and state agencies are working to address this issue. The Pennsylvania Game Commission, in partnership with the Ruffed Grouse Society and local land trusts, has implemented habitat management initiatives designed to benefit woodcock and other species that rely on young forests.

Birdwatchers, hunters, and conservationists all have a role to play in protecting the American Woodcock. By supporting habitat restoration projects, participating in citizen science initiatives like the eBird database, and advocating for policies that promote sustainable land management, individuals can contribute to the species' long-term survival.

One of the most memorable ways to support woodcock conservation is to witness the sky dance firsthand. The Juniata Valley Audubon Society—and many other chapters and organizations—hosts guided woodcock walks each spring, offering opportunities to observe this remarkable display while raising awareness about the bird's conservation needs. We're fortunate in our region to have many areas that provide suitable habitat for this incredible species.

For those who love Pennsylvania's wildlife, protecting the American Woodcock is not just about saving a single bird—it's about maintaining the health and diversity of our forests, fields, and wetlands. Countless other species benefit when we protect woodcock habitat. The challenge is real, but with continued effort, the sky dance can remain a cherished sign of spring for generations to come.

---

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

### **Check the appropriate box:**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership, \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Friend of the JVAS, \$55    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership, \$25     | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Membership, \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Membership, \$40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life Membership, \$500      |

**Membership Year runs from January 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>**

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 \_\_\_\_\_