

The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



www.JVAS.org

PRESIDENT'S CORNER and photos by Michael Kensinger

Dear Friends of Juniata Valley Audubon Society,



As the warmth of summer fades, the Juniata Valley has been transformed into a kaleidoscope of autumn colors. The migrating birds that visited our region to reproduce have begun their journey south, while year-round residents prepare for the changing seasons. This transition invites us to reflect on the beauty and resilience of nature. This also marks the perfect time of year to get out and see new species as we are in the direct pathway of birds only “passing through.” While fleeting, there is seldom a more exciting time to bird (in my opinion) than the spring and autumn migration periods.

Black-throated Green Warbler during fall migration at Prince Gallitzin in late September

As we look ahead to winter, mark your calendars for our annual Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 21st! This beloved tradition brings us together, fostering camaraderie and citizen science, topped with a festive “Tally Dinner” which will take place at 6 PM at the US Hotel Tavern’s “Gold Room” on the day of the count. This annual event has become one of my favorite holiday traditions, as we unite over a lovely meal to discuss exciting finds for the day. Last year, JVAS bested our previous year’s record by tallying 81 species! Rare bird highlights included Saw-whet Owl, Short-eared Owl, Double-crested Cormorant (which required a rare bird report), Eastern Meadowlark, 2 Merlin, and the American Pipit! Can we top 81 species this year? Well, you never know! But with your help, we just might! One target species in particular we are hoping to find within our circle is the Ruffed Grouse.

If you are eager to start a team of your own, or perhaps join a participating team, please reach out to us and we will direct you to our coordinator, former JVAS President Mark Bonta. Your participation helps contribute valuable data to the National Audubon Society's longest-running community science project. See more details about the Culp Christmas Bird Count on page 4.

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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).

OFFICERS

- President**, Michael Kensinger
♦ 814-505-3410
♦ michaelkensinger@gmail.com
- Vice President**, Catie Farr
♦ 570-651-3839
♦ catiegk5059@gmail.com
- Secretary**, Connor Schmitt
♦ 570-651-3839
♦ cschmitts12@gmail.com
- Treasurer**, George Mahon
♦ 814-942-2658
♦ gsm815@hotmail.com
- Immediate Past President**, Mark Bonta
♦ 814-600-8343
♦ 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

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 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 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 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 PROGRAM

NOVEMBER PROGRAM: Tuesday, November 19, 2024 @ 7 pm
Join us at the Bellwood-Antis Library, 526 Main St. Bellwood, PA

6 PM FREE DINNER: Pasta bar, salad, rolls, carrot cake and cookies. Gluten free and vegan options. Honduran shade-grown, organic hot coffee is also served.

7 PM PROGRAM: “Meet the Marvelous Marbled Salamander” with David Hand

Schuylkill nature photographer, David Hand, will present incredible still pictures and videos of the magnificent Marbled Salamander and its life cycle. David has devoted many years to finding and examining salamander nests and eggs. He has documented every stage of the salamander's development from embryo to adult. His article on the subject appeared in an issue of Reptile Magazine. Sit back, relax, and visit the watery, wonderful world of this interesting species.



Eastern Screech Owl

PRESIDENT’S CORNER by Michael Kensinger, continued

As winter approaches, please remember to prioritize bird health at your feeders. Regular cleaning prevents the spread of disease among our feathered friends. Take a few minutes each week to scrub and refill feeders, ensuring a safe haven for birds seeking sustenance. For several years, conjunctivitis has spread through the House Finch population, putting other species at risk. I personally observed this disease not only in House Finches, but also in American Goldfinch. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, so let’s look ahead and put some more effort in cleaning feeders this year.

This season let's extend an invitation to friends, family, and neighbors to join our JVAS community. It has done my heart so much good to see new members joining, and to see new people joining our board and making what we do possible. Without you, our supporters and volunteers, there would be no JVAS. Share your passion for birding and conservation and encourage others to explore the natural wonders of our region. Together, we'll continue to promote environmental stewardship, education, and advocacy.

To engage with a wider and often younger audience, I have created an JVAS account on the social media platform INSTAGRAM, which focuses heavily on photos and short descriptions. Used a lot more by younger birders, you can simply have them scan the QR CODE with their smartphone or, follow @JuniataValleyAudubonSociety on Instagram as I attempt to reach new audiences as our Publicity Chair.



@JUNIATAVALLEYAUDUBONSOCIETY

As we embrace the crisp air, vibrant foliage, and birding opportunities, let's make this season one to remember!

DECEMBER PROGRAM: CALLING ALL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTERS!

The JVAS CBC (the Culp Count) is Saturday, December 21, 2024



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

If you live in the circle (see map below), you can be a **feeder watcher** and count your backyard birds, and/or you can be a **field observer** and cover a certain section of the count circle by car/on foot. We encourage counters to work in teams – the more eyes the better!

Sign up soon to be a counter!

Call, text, 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



Please note that we have a Whatsapp chat group for logistics planning, pre-Count scouting, and posting field updates on Count Day. As the days goes on, we rely on real-time reports to keep morale up and to help people

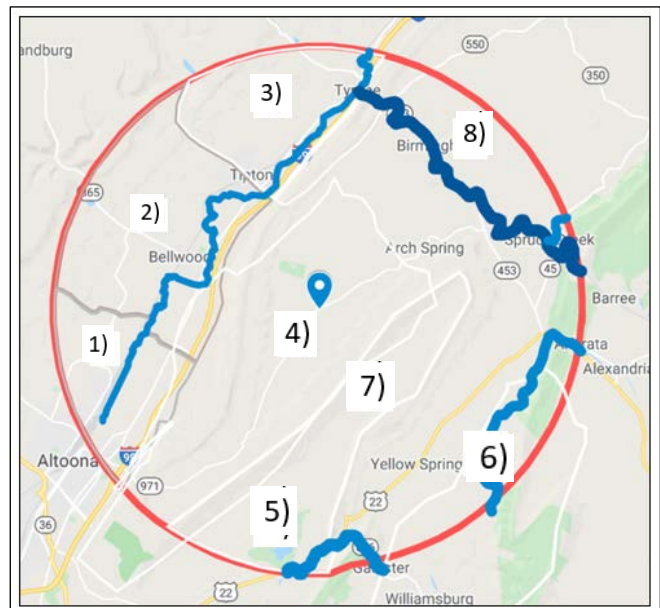
figure out what missing species to focus on or where else in the Circle they might be needed. If you want to form a part of this community, please contact John Carter (carter0206@aol.com, 814-933-7426).

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 **6 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 Monday, Dec. 16** if you plan to attend because seating is limited.

Counters are assigned a section or sub-section of the circle so that counts don't overlap. Please let Mark or Laura know what section you'd like to cover, and if you are interested in joining a team.

Sections:

- 1) Northern Altoona/Juniata
- 2) Bellwood
- 3) Tyrone to Tipton
- 4) Sinking Valley
- 5) Canoe Creek SP
- 6) Canoe Valley/Lower Trail
- 7) State Game Lands 166
- 8) Little J. R. below Tyrone/Eden Hill



The Bedford Co. CBC is centered at Manns Choice, Pa. and will be held on Saturday, Dec. 28, 2024.

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 Hoss's Steak and Seafood. 4308 Bus. 220, Bedford, PA, starting at 5:30 pm. Each person pays for their own dinner.

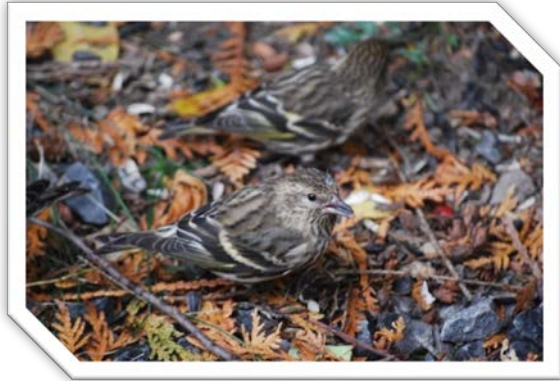
JVAS FIELD TRIPS Fall 2024

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.

***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**

FIRST TUESDAY WALK: Sept. 3, Oct. 1, Nov. 5, and Dec. 3 from 10 AM to NOON **Birding the Ray Amato Memorial Nature Trail** **behind the Northern Blair Rec Center (NBCRC)**



Pine Siskins – Michael Kensinger

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

Join JVAS Secretary Connor Schmitt to peruse 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 of 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 permitted on the nature trail.

November 2, 2024 - 9 AM – NOON Canoe Creek State Park Waterfowl Watch

205 Canoe Creek Rd, Hollidaysburg, PA. Meet in parking lot beside pavilion #2 (below Terry Wentz Educational Center). Michael Kensinger, leader.

Join us for a morning of birding at Canoe Creek State Park, focusing on waterfowl and other wintering species. November is an excellent time to observe migrating waterfowl:

- Ducks (Mallard, Scaup, American Goldeneye, Northern Pintail)
- Geese (Canada, Snow)
- Tundra Swans - Mergansers (Hooded, Common, and Red-breasted)
- Rarities and hybrids!

We'll explore the park's wetlands, lakes, and streams via the walking trails and observation areas.



Expect: - Moderate walking (approximately 2-3 miles) - Scenic views of the surrounding landscape - Opportunities to spot other wildlife, such as deer and bald eagles! - Guidance from experienced birders

Bring: - Binoculars - Field guide - Waterproof gear (in case of rain) - Comfortable walking shoes
- Water and snacks

JVAS FIELD TRIPS FALL 2024

***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**

Dry Hollow Walk Sunday, Nov. 3, 2024, from 11 – 1 pm

The walk will be led by Jim Julian, Mark Potter (DCNR - Bureau of Forestry), and Angie Spagnoli, (DCNR – Aquatic Resource Systems Specialist).

Directions: Take exit 48 (Tyrone) off I-99 toward PA-453. Take the ramp to Water Street/PA-453. Keep left to continue on PA-550 N. After 7.1 miles, turn right onto Dungarvin Road. After 1.6 miles, turn left onto Dry Hollow Camp Lane. Drive through the gate and park next to the hunting lodge.



Enjoy a walk through one of Rothrock State Forest's newest additions, Dry Hollow. Acquired by Clearwater Conservancy, then transferred to DCNR in 2021, this 1,200-acre parcel is reminiscent of its neighboring habitat - the Scotia Barrens State Game Lands 176. DCNR staff will lead you on a guided tour highlighting the important juxtaposition of vernal pool, forest, and early successional habitats. The historical land use of this property (under the Dry Hollow Hunting Club) offers a diverse look into land management decisions that influence the deer, gamebirds, and amphibians that make Dry Hollow their home.

Celebrating Fall – Article and photos by Mike and Laura Jackson

The first hint of fall comes as a whisper on the wind. The hot, humid days of summer are gone, that horrible stickiness that makes working outside so much harder, is a distant memory. Yes, we still have warm days, but the air is cooler and dryer.

We know fall is coming when we see the drab fall warblers moving through, accompanied by brown Indigo Buntings, and dull yellow Scarlet Tanagers. We're sad to say goodbye to ruby-throated hummingbirds, too, but at the same time, we're excited to see our winter friends return: Yellow-bellied



Last year, we said, “Goodbye,” to the last hummingbird on October 9th.

Sapsuckers, Dark-eyed Juncos, White-throated Sparrows, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Purple Finches, and the flirty kinglets: Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned. These fall arrivals increase the feeding activity in our backyard, joining year-long residents like Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, American Goldfinch, Northern Cardinals, and White-breasted Nuthatch. What a flurry of activity!!

We spend more time birdwatching from our kitchen table in the fall and winter – scanning feeders, shrubs, and trees – and hoping to still see some others that tend to linger, like Gray Catbirds and Eastern Towhees.

In early fall, the air is filled with singing once again, not as joyous as in spring, but beautiful none-the-less. Song sparrows resume their jumbled melodies while hidden in the asters, and the clear sounds of, “Old Canada, Canada, Canada,” waft through the air from the skilled White-throated Sparrows – a more subdued song now that breeding season is over.



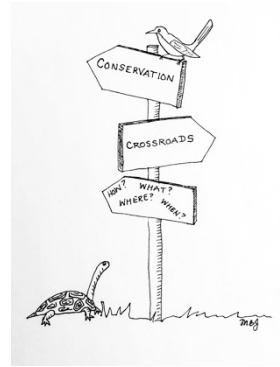
Unlike many other songbirds, White-throated Sparrows sing their sweet songs all year.



The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, which haunts the ancient apple tree near our house, shares its mournful “crying baby” call while kinglets flit and flirt among the redbuds, hickories, and walnut trees. Sometimes the Ruby-Crowned Kinglet bursts into a very quiet bubbling melody, but more often we hear them softly scolding as they search the bark and dying leaves for insects and spiders. Not to be outdone, Purple Finches sing in the dogwood trees, in between snacking on red dogwood fruit. Their melodious song is so sweet to the ear that it's hard to know if they regret leaving their breeding grounds to the north, but we're glad they came south for the winter.

Male Purple finch lack the brown streaking on their breast and sides that are found on House Finches.

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 then click on the Conservation tab.



1. Proposed Rutter’s Gas/Convenience Store upslope from Old Crow Wetland near Huntingdon, Pa. DEP approved Rutter’s application, and we expect Smithfield Township to approve their application at the township level sometime this fall.



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.).

Please consider joining the Coalition to Save Old Crow Wetland FB page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/271112655092285>

Coalition leaders - who are also JVAS members - appealed DEP’s permit approval to the Environmental Hearing Board and hired noted Environmental Law Attorney Ken Kristl to represent us. In August, several members testified before Rutter’s and DEP attorneys: Coalition President Clair Holzner, Coalition member and JVAS Conservation Chair Laura Jackson, Coalition Vice President Greg Grove, and Coalition member Gary Miller all testified under oath regarding their concerns about potential pollution issues if Rutter’s is allowed to construct their truck stop adjacent to Old Crow Wetland. The next step in the appeal process will be to hire several experts to testify before the Environmental Hearing Board. Expert testimony is expensive so donations to the Coalition are critical in order to continue the appeal.

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

2. Hooray! On Wednesday, April 24, 2024, President Biden signed into law: H.R. 4389, the “Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act of 2023,” which reauthorizes and amends the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation.

“We have lost three billion birds in North America alone since 1970, and to stem the tide of further devastating losses of migratory birds, we need to invest in protecting their habitats across the Western Hemisphere,” said Felice Stadler, vice president of government affairs, National Audubon Society. “The Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act is a straightforward and cost-effective way for the United States to build partnerships throughout the hemisphere to protect birds wherever they fly. We are excited to see bipartisan support for enhancing this important program and look forward to working to advance this legislation.”

Since 2002, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act program has provided nearly \$75 million to support 628 projects in 36 countries. These projects have positively affected approximately 5 million acres of bird habitat and spurred partnerships on multiple levels contributing an additional \$286 million.





In Memoriam: Paula Ford

Environmental Advocate and longtime JVAS member

On September 1, 2024, the JVAS family lost an environmental hero, birder, and a wonderful woman who exemplified love for our home, the Earth, and the creatures that live on Earth.

Paula worked to raise awareness of environmental issues and encouraged people to take action to protect the environment. She was the JVAS Conservation Chair for many years, as well as serving on the Pennsylvania Audubon Council under Walt Pomeroy.

Paula helped bring attention to environmental issues and mobilized people to take action. She encouraged recycling, reducing and reusing. She hated to waste paper!

Although a powerhouse on her own when it came to protecting the environment, she worked with others to achieve conservation victories, such as stopping the strip mine proposed for Mill Run back in the early 1980's. Juniata Valley Audubon Society, spearheaded by Paula, worked with Trout Unlimited, League of Women Voters, and other non-profits to stop the project. Paula also traveled to Washington, D.C. to lobby for environmental protection on a number of issues.

Please recognize Paula's environmental legacy by donating in her honor to the Bellwood-Antis Public Library, 526 Main St., Bellwood, PA 16617. Earmark your donation to the children's native plant garden that will be planted in Paula's memory.



Whispers in the Underbrush: An Encounter with Gary the Grouse

By Michael Kensinger

As outdoor writers, we often make connections with readers and supporters who understand our deep interest in nature. On at least two occasions, being a friend of wildlife, and being friends with those who are friends with wildlife has earned me the honor and privilege of getting "up close and personal" to our state bird, the Ruffed Grouse. In this case, it was my friend Tim who invited me along to take some photos of this extraordinary bird. Before we continue, let me establish that this



encounter was nothing short of remarkable, leaving me with a deeper appreciation for these incredible birds and a lesson in their fascinating behavior.

“Gary”, as the property owners had named him, approached our location at their residence not long after arriving one beautiful October morning. Enticed by the puttering motor of an ATV that emulated (in his mind) the territorial drumming of a competitor, out of the thicket came “Gary”, his feathers rustling in the autumn breeze. The landowners offered a few blueberries to Gary’s delight, but, as I soon learned, his friendly demeanor belied a more complex motive: territorial aggression. My encounter with Gary was a rare privilege. For a few magical moments, we shared a connection, his bright, inquisitive eyes locked onto mine. Yet, I remained mindful of his boundaries, respecting his space and avoiding sudden movements. And for awhile, I sat up against the base of an old tree, while I watched Gary forage peacefully and preen his feathers on an adjacent log. I used this opportunity to take plenty of photographs for my articles, and also to use as references for future artwork I plan to do.

As we moved on up the trail through the forest, Gary followed us. Intermittently, he would stop and forage. Despite his “tameness” being considered “aggression,” I couldn’t help but think Gary was somewhat enjoying the experience as he visited the local property owner nearly daily for two years to beg for blueberries and preen on the railing of their back porch. Likewise, Gary would lose interest in trying to deter us from the area, and rest, watching us and often letting us know of a hawk’s presence before we could even pick up on it ourselves. Gary sought cover twice, once because of a Red-tailed Hawk and another time because of a Cooper’s Hawk. He used cover and our presence as protection from the predators, and at one point alerted (then quickly calmed) as a whitetail buck passed on an old road above us.



The Ruffed Grouse population has faced significant challenges, particularly from West Nile Disease. The current strongholds of the Ruffed Grouse seem to be in northern counties, in higher elevation. However, recent data suggests a glimmer of resilience to the virus, with some populations stabilizing. We hope that this incredible bird will make a full recovery to what it once was. It used

to be fairly commonplace to be startled by Ruffed Grouse bursting into flight during my woodland walks, but in many of these locations they seem to have vanished.

Experiencing Gary's wild beauty up close underscored the importance of conservation efforts with this bird moving forward. Habitat preservation, responsible land management, and disease monitoring are crucial for protecting these magnificent birds. Hunters who have been able to harvest Ruffed Grouse have played a critical role in the Pennsylvania Game Commission's study of this species and the effects of this disease, providing DNA crucial for learning more about how these birds are being affected. One study suggests certain populations have developed a resistance to WNV, which should keep us hopeful. That said, we must push forward to ensure the future of this bird by:

- Promoting sustainable forestry practices
- Preserving habitat diversity and preferred habitats
- Reporting sightings to local birding groups, and if possible, Pennsylvania Game Commission
- Staying informed about West Nile Disease research

Not wanting to stress Gary, Tim and I returned to the land owner's back porch and enjoyed a nice lunch in the October breeze. After about 30 minutes, low and behold, Gary showed up and began begging for blueberries. Once full, he alighted the banister where he rested, staring down across the yard into the forest, and preened his feathers. It was clear that, while some of his behavior is linked to "aggression", Gary had come to realize we were no real threat, and had no real interest in taking over his territory. He seemed quite content in our presence.

As Tim and I had a long drive home, we bid farewell to Gary, and I realized our encounter was more than just a chance meeting – it was a reminder of the intricate relationships within ecosystems and our role in preserving them. Liz, one of the gracious landowners who had allowed us to come take some photographs, leaned down to Gary as we opened our car doors and said "Say goodbye to your friends, Gary." And with a turn of his head he glanced at us, and flew down off the porch to glide back down into the thickets from whence he came.

Thank you, Gary! And best wishes for a long and prosperous life!



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, \$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 1st to December 31st

Make your check payable to **JVAS**

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone No. _____ E-mail Address _____



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

Watch for an email with a link to the digital newsletter.