

Valley Views

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President's Note

By Suzanne Offutt, PVAS President

Now that July 1 has arrived, I begin my second term serving at the helm of PVAS. Many of you won't remember that first term since it came about shortly after the chapter's formation in the early 80s. I followed Jean Neely, then Bill Hartgroves as President of this fledgling chapter. At the time, I embraced this opportunity to share with others my enthusiasm for the outdoors and my passion for work on environmental issues. I had already attempted to establish a "bottle bill" in West Virginia, worked on roadside cleanups, stalked the local legislators to establish recycling centers in our communities, started beekeeping, kept a backyard compost pile, and tried a hand at apple orcharding using Integrated Pest Management. But I got my biggest chance at a major activism opportunity working in Canaan Valley.

I found out that Canaan Valley wasn't just the golf course that my father liked to visit. Understand that, as a child growing up in central WV, my family tended to visit distant family members in various coal camps, poor relatives who needed a hand, and graveyards of dead relatives. However, when I controlled my own travel itinerary, I discovered new parts of WV that were more than just place names by taking up backpacking and hiking. Exploring newly named Wilderness areas, my husband and I tramped around the Monogahela National Forest, Cranberry Glades, Dolly Sods, Blackwater Canyon, and Bear Rocks. We developed special favorites like Judy Spring and the Seneca Trail of Waterfalls, the Cacapon River, Smoke Hole, and the Trough. But nothing captured my attention like Canaan Valley.

Traveling through Canaan Valley and stopping in a gas station to try to find dry food after yet another rainy backpack trip, I picked up a photocopied sheet from the Highlands Conservancy with information about the development of the Davis Power Project. Slated to bring jobs and prosperity to Tucker County, the project would have been a pumped storage facility to pump water out of the valley floor in the nighttime and then dump it through turbines to produce daytime peaking power in East Coast cities. However, the result of the power producing aspect of the project was not going to be the pristine lake surrounded by lakeside cottages pictured by many a Tucker County future entrepreneur, but rather wide mudflats on the floor of the highest alpine valley in the eastern U.S.

That little gas station stop, and that little rag of a hand-printed flyer, began a nearly 20 year journey of lobbying, attending

meetings, designing and selling T-shirts, writing letters, flying in helicopters, and testifying about the incredibly valuable resource that was Canaan Valley. As a wetlands complex and uniquely biodiverse resource in our state, Canaan Valley's highest and best use was as preserved land. After a protracted journey, in 1993 Congress declared Canaan Valley the 500th National Wildlife Refuge, and the first in West Virginia. Many, many individuals, Senator Robert C. Byrd, local citizens, state and federal agencies, and statewide environmental organizations worked for this designation.

I tell you this story of the past to reintroduce myself and to look to the future for the Potomac Valley Audubon Society. Two takeaways from the story are that I am passionate about being in and sharing the natural world with others, and that I am tenacious. I hope to continue to share these traits with PVAS in my next two years as its President.

Looking back over more than 30 years, I see that the need for having experiences in the natural world is even greater than in previous years. One can hardly pick up a self-help book without reading that you should be practicing mindfulness and, preferably, in the out-of-doors in order to have even a chance at good mental health. I hope to share in maintaining PVAS's face as a presence in our counties for providing natural world experiences for children and adults, opportunities to re-create ourselves as a part of the balance of nature, and lands that are preserved and managed for all. I hope to continue to sustain PVAS's essential mission in our communities.

Among my life lessons learned, I include that in order to care passionately about something, it helps to have had positive experiences with it. I challenge each of you to share your knowledge as a field trip leader, go on some of the richly diverse field trips offered, or create new opportunities for outings if you are inspired with some new ideas. I encourage your participation in our monthly programs, public education efforts, and fund-raising events. I am challenging myself and the chapter to speak for environmental and conservation issues by responding to action alerts from the chapter and from the national office. Not since the days before the Wilderness Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and other landmark environmental legislation have we faced such dire threats to so many of our national treasures and clean resources. There is much to do, much to see, and much to enjoy. I look forward to my time as President of the Potomac Valley Audubon Society for 2018-2020.

Potomac Valley Audubon Society is people dedicated to preserving, restoring, and enjoying the natural world through education and action.

Yellow-breasted Chat

Icteria virens

By Wil Hershberger

Hoots, screams, toots, chattering, and whistles are often the first signs that a Yellow-breasted Chat is in the area. These large, charismatic birds were once thought to be warblers; some thought that they were more closely related to tanagers. It is now known (through DNA sequencing and analysis) that Yellow-breasted Chats are more closely related to blackbirds. However, they are unique enough to garner their own family – the *Icteriidae*.

Yellow-breasted Chats are birds of secondary successional habitats such as open, weedy, brushy fields, open woodland edges, and regenerating burnt areas. The breeding range of this species extends from northern Florida to northern Pennsylvania; then west into southern Saskatchewan, eastern Washington and Oregon; and most of California and the southern tier states.

Once males return to the breeding grounds and establish a territory, the females show up, select a nest site, and begin building the nest themselves. Nests are typically low, in large patches of dense vegetation, making these nests extremely hard to find. Over much of their range, chats are apparently single-brooded; very few confirmed reports of second broods exist. Females lay 3-5 creamy-white eggs that are marked with reddish-brown spots over the entire surface, with a slight clustering at the large end. Females alone incubate the eggs for about 12 days, at which time the young hatch. Nestlings are fed by both parents for approximately 9 days, after which the young fledge.

Male Yellow-breasted Chats sing an amazing array of sounds to compose their songs, which are like no other North American bird's songs (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/107382>). There are reports of mimicry being used by chats, but since chats are songbirds and therefore learn their songs from other males of the species, the incorporation of other bird songs or song elements could be a consequence of a learning tradition. Each male can have a repertoire of up to 62 songs. Songs in Yellow-breasted Chats are defined as a single sound type, either given alone or as a series of repeated, identical sound types. Males will also sing at night, often all night long, during the breeding season. Some of these nocturnal singing bouts can be rather impressive with songs being sung at a rate of over 200 songs/minute.



During the breeding season, male Yellow-breasted Chats will also perform a flight display, mostly in the presence of a female or during territorial battles. This flight display is something to see and hear. Males will often launch from a high, exposed perch and fly in an undulating flight with their legs dangling below their bodies, using exaggerated wing strokes that allow the wings to clap together over or under the body. Throughout this display, they sing a series of whistles and other chips and calls (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/100816>) (at 1:03 into the recording).

We are very fortunate to have Yellow-breasted Chats at Cool Spring Preserve. There are at least three, and perhaps four, territorial males in this gem of Jefferson County. As stated earlier, they require somewhat early secondary successional habitats for nesting. Their nesting requirement for large patches of the habitat type restricts where they can nest. The western portion of the preserve and the land to the west of Cool Spring are ideal for the needs of this species.

The population of Yellow-breasted Chats in West Virginia is declining significantly, most likely due to a lack of suitable nesting sites as a result of reforestation of abandoned lands. A lot of work is being done by non-governmental and government organizations to create appropriate habitat within the state for species that require these special conditions (another example would be the Golden-winged Warbler).

I hope that you'll make a trip to Cool Spring Preserve to watch and listen to these amazing Yellow-breasted Chats. Perhaps you'll even see and hear a flight display. You'll find them from late-April through August along the west border of the preserve and just a few yards south of the gazebo. Be sure to stay on the paths, as nests can be quickly abandoned if disturbed. Males stop singing in mid-to-late July.



Yellow-breasted Chat photos © Wil Hershberger

PVAS Events

Singing Insects, Butterfly Research & More! PVAS Celebrates the Treasures of Late Summer

With the tremendously successful WV Master Naturalist Annual Conference behind them, the Potomac Valley Master Naturalists look ahead to a full schedule of fall classes and an October gathering at Yankauer Nature Preserve. The Master Naturalist class of 2018 has three more months of scheduled classes at Cool Spring Preserve, Leetown Science Center, and Cacapon Nature Center. Those students who attend the full 62 hours of classroom and field instruction and 30 volunteer hours will earn their certification at the close of the year. Others will have an additional three years to complete all areas of study and volunteer work in order to earn their Master Naturalist certification.

PVAS is offering many opportunities in the next two months to enjoy and learn about the treasures of late summer and early fall, and many of these also provide education training hours for Master Naturalist recertification.

In August and September alone, PVAS is offering five Natural History workshops geared towards Master Naturalists and the general public alike. From the Citizen Science Butterfly Research workshop to Art Inspired by Nature - Art to Earth: An Ecopsychology Workshop, there is something for everyone. Register for one or all workshops, as we are sure they will not disappoint. A full listing of Natural History workshops can be found at <http://www.potomacaudubon.org/naturalhistorycal>.

PVAS is excited to welcome ecologist Jim Cummins to Morgan County on Wednesday evening, September 19, to present his fascinating program "When Trees Were Old – Humans and Environmental Change in the Potomac Watershed." See <http://www.potomacaudubon.org/event-2891751> for further details. As a reminder to all Master Naturalists, you will earn an hour towards recertification training by attending this and all PVAS Monthly Programs.

August and September are full of opportunities to learn about our amazing local birds, insects, monarchs, and moths!

For a listing of scheduled bird walks, visit <http://www.potomacaudubon.org/birdcal>. One exciting addition to our bird walks is Beth Poole's regularly scheduled Third Wednesday Bird Walk at beautiful Cool Spring Preserve.

If you are interested in learning about how to tag monarchs, Monarch Discovery Days will feature two opportunities to learn about and tag monarchs. Join tagging events at either the Historic Claymont Mansion or Briggs Animal Adoption Center. Or you can join in the 4th annual summer butterfly count at Antietam Battlefield.

Wil Hershberger is once again leading his ever-popular Singing Insects Walk. Those who attended last year's walk were treated to an exciting find of a Long-spurred Meadow Katydid, which was a new species of katydid for Jefferson County. Read about his amazing discovery here: <http://www.potomacaudubon.org/Resources/Documents/vvoct17.pdf>. What new insects will await the group this year? Sign up and find out.

PVAS is continually adding exciting opportunities to our ever-growing events calendar. Please be sure to check <http://www.potomacaudubon.org/calendar> often for the latest listings.

Volunteer Spotlight

Have You Met Lynne Wiseman?

Lynne Wiseman is one of those amazing past presidents of PVAS who continue to give and give and give. She is a regular bird walk leader, an instructor for Birding 101, and a regular participant in Birdathon and other bird counts.

Lynne has also served on the Master Naturalist Coordinating Committee and was an active organizer of the 2018 Master Naturalist State Conference.

All of our PVAS volunteers are great! If you know someone who deserves a shout out, please contact Kristin at Kristin@PotomacAudubon.org.



PVAS Events

Staff Changes Afoot

The shift from summer to late summer is bringing with it some shifts in staffing as well. Emily Noel and Garrett Wren, our AmeriCorps volunteers, wrap up their time with us this month. They have been extraordinarily busy between school programs and summer camp. Kimberly Baldwin, our Program Director, has also left PVAS this summer. We will miss all of them and wish them the best in their next adventures.

PVAS will be seeking two new AmeriCorps members to teach our youth programs in the next year; see article below for more information. We'll also be seeking a Program Administrator to help us schedule programs; manage our donor and member database, communications, and website; and coordinate/track volunteers. The position description, with details, will be posted on the website very soon.

We have never had administrative staff before, so this is a big shift for PVAS - but a timely one as our organization continues to grow and expand our many important programs. We look forward to introducing you to a new member of the team in the next issue of *Valley Views*.

AmeriCorps Changes Offer Two New Positions

For the last several years, PVAS has been partnering with LifeBridge AmeriCorps, which has provided us with AmeriCorps volunteers to implement our youth programs, from school programs to summer camp. The priorities of the LifeBridge program have changed, however, so PVAS has been seeking a new AmeriCorps partner in the state.

We are extremely pleased to announce our new AmeriCorps partner, High Rocks, whose mission is to educate, empower, and inspire young people in West Virginia. The missions of High Rocks and PVAS are well aligned, and we are very happy to partner with them. It is AmeriCorps that allows PVAS to provide thousands of children in our service area with affordable programs.

We are recruiting for two new AmeriCorps positions that will start September 17, 2018. The positions will consist of teaching school programs, scout programs, spring break programs, and summer camp, as well as assisting with the nature center at Cool Spring.

The position description and details are on our website. If you know someone who would like to gain training and experience in teaching, please send them our way.

A New Website for PVAS

In early August, PVAS will be rolling out its new website.

Last winter PVAS partnered with The Downstream Project to develop the new website, which will be fully integrated with a new database. Why a new website? To make program registration, membership transactions, on-line donations, and communications seamless and efficient. This is one of many ways that we plan to serve our members and volunteers even better in the future.

Keep an eye out for our new website at the same url: www.potomacaudubon.org.



Rodney Dever of the WV Native Plant Society led a botany walk to observe woodland plants in their unique cliff habitat on Saturday, July 14, at Big Slackwater, along the Potomac River, C&O Canal Park, in Maryland.

Camp Programs

Summer Camp a Record-Breaking Success

By Amy Moore, Camp Director and Cool Spring Manager

This summer was PVAS's 16th year of Audubon Discovery Camp. With our two camp directors, seven camp counselors and 23 junior counselors, we hosted 350 campers for seven straight weeks of camp, at two PVAS Preserves (Cool Spring and Yankauer). This was our largest camp attendance ever! (In comparison, we had 245 campers in 2017.)

Here are some camp highlights:

Campers at Cool Spring enjoyed multiple sightings of our resident Barred Owl, which was discovered one day with a squirrel in its talons. One day of camp, we had a rainy downpour that soon formed a stream in the grass behind the Cool Spring Nature Center. Campers and staff took off their shoes and had a blast splashing, jumping, sliding, and dancing in the puddles. Every week, it was a given that exploring Bull Skin Run would be a camp highlight. The muck at the bottom of the creek swallowed at least 20 shoes, but I am pleased to announce that almost all of them were rescued.

Building forts is always the favorite camp activity at Yankauer. Each week, using old cedar tree branches and freshly-cut Autumn Olive and Ailanthus branches, campers unleashed their creativity, and created a team fort. One camper even said to his counselor, "Next week I'm coming to Fort Camp!" (We don't have a fort camp... but maybe we should!)

At Amazing Animals

Camp, raptors were brought to Cool Spring camp by Belinda Burwell of Wildlife Veterinary Care, and to Yankauer camp by Trego Mountain Nature Center. Campers got an up-close encounter with some beautiful native birds of prey.

At our Outdoor Adventure Camps, middle school-aged campers practiced archery with instructor Werner Barz, Outdoor Skills Course Leader at NCTC. The Cool Spring Outdoor Adventure Campers visited FLOC Outdoor Education Center on the Blue Ridge Mountain (in Harpers Ferry), where they completed a high ropes course, went canoeing on the Shenandoah River, and had an overnight camp-out. Our Yankauer Outdoor Adventurers biked on the C&O Canal and went caving at Whittings Neck



Caves near Yankauer.

For our Nature Art Camps, artists and PVAS volunteers Susan Brookreson and Gretchen Meadows instructed campers on how to create nature mandalas and gourd bowls, respectively. PVAS volunteers Georgia Jepson and Bill Ashforth brought an array of percussion instruments to camp and led the campers in a nature-inspired drum circle.

For Native Ways Camp, campers learned about the native people who lived in West Virginia hundreds of years ago. Master Naturalist Deborah Rochefort taught campers how native people used natural resources from the land, then helped campers make their own leather pouches and woven baskets out of grasses and vines.

The summer ended with our Wee Naturalist Camp, where pre-schoolers and their parent(s) attended camp and explored nature together, while learning about the wildlife that live on our preserves.

In sum, we had a fantastic summer, and I can't thank all of the volunteers and staff enough for all of their dedication and hard work. If you have any skills that you would like to share with campers next summer, please let me know in the coming months. We love having guest instructors at camp.



Notes from the Preserves

In the Preserves

The end of summer marks the beginning of woody invasive plant management season. While we don't recommend herbicides as a general rule, or for widespread application, they can play a role in some circumstances. The best time to control woody invasives using herbicide is when the plants begin to senesce. Senescence in plants occurs when the leaves begin to deteriorate, and all the accumulated sugars are sent to the root systems for winter storage. By waiting to apply herbicide during senescence, the herbicide is taken to the roots, where the whole plant can be destroyed. In the preserves, we will be using specific and direct herbicide application by cutting down the invasive and then using a dabber to put herbicide on the stump.

There will be a workday at each preserve during the month of August. Check the Month-at-a-Glance calendar or the PVAS website for the dates, and be sure to register for the workdays so KC knows how many people to anticipate.

In September, the Cool Spring, Yankauer and Stauffer's Marsh workdays will all fall on September 11, as a part of the United Way Day of Caring. There are several projects planned for each preserve, and volunteers of all skill levels are invited to participate. The Eidolon workday will be held later in the month. See the Month-at-a-Glance calendar or the PVAS website for more details.

We have several specific needs in the preserves, and hope you can help:

First, Steve Hartmann is looking for small mountain laurel plants to create a screen protecting Stauffer's Marsh from the road. These plants can be dug out of your backyard. Second, Cool Spring Preserve still has three garden beds that need adoption and love. This is a great opportunity to earn your Master Naturalist volunteer hours on your own time and schedule. Third, KC could use a small chainsaw and a leaf blower for land management. If you have one you are willing to donate, please contact her at Katelyn@potomacaudubon.org.

Kudos to Stauffer's Marsh Volunteers

This year Stauffer's Marsh was featured in the "Prescribed Fire 101" class during the West Virginia Master Naturalist annual statewide conference.

One week prior to the conference, heavy rains led to damaging flooding at Stauffer's Marsh. The end of the Marsh Trail was completely washed out, and all the vegetation was matted down, blocking the trail. The back bridge was lifted out of the ground and propped up by a displaced telephone pole.

Volunteer land manager, Steve Hartmann, made a plea for help during the annual picnic to get Stauffer's Marsh back in shape in time to impress Master Naturalists from all over the state. With less than 24 hours notice, half a dozen generous volunteers turned out to help. Two days later, six more volunteers came out for a second workday. With the help of all of these awesome volunteers, the trails were cleared, the telephone pole was returned to its rightful place, and the bridge was repaired!



Keeping up with the care of PVAS's preserves is no easy task, especially when Mother Nature delivers extreme storms. PVAS wants to send out a special thank you to Steve and all of the volunteers who acted on such short notice to restore Stauffer's Marsh.

Shepherd University Day of Service

On Wednesday, August 22, Shepherd University will be sending student volunteers to Yankauer Nature Preserve for their annual Day of Service. These volunteers will be helping with invasive species management, trail maintenance and pollinator garden care.

PVAS volunteers are welcome to help land manager, KC, share this special preserve with new, young and eager volunteers! Lunch will be provided. Register at www.potomacaudubon.org.

Notes from the Preserves

Care for Our Preserves during the United Way Day of Caring

PVAS will be participating in the 24th annual United Way Day of Caring on Tuesday, September 11. This year, we will conduct projects on three of our nature preserves, and at a local park with which PVAS is partnering.

At **Yankauer**, we are looking to mulch our outdoor classroom, repair our trails and benches, improve the drainage around the building, and do general maintenance. Expertise is needed for the drainage system design, and mulch donations are being accepted.

The big **Cool Spring** project will be to paint the interior of our building. Paint and painting supplies are requested. Additionally, we are looking for a special group of volunteers to build stairs from our parking lot leading to the back deck. We also want to work on the rain gardens, and are inviting everyone to share native species from their home gardens. There will also be work along the trails including installing new trail signs.

The main focus at **Stauffer's Marsh** will be on planting trees along the marsh to create a buffer from the road. We are seeking donations of native evergreen trees and shrubs, including mountain laurel. There will be other general preserve maintenance projects as well.

Flowing Springs Park, an up-and-coming public park in Ranson, will be conducting autumn olive removal. Chainsaw operators and herbicide applicators are needed.

Lunch will be provided at all locations. Keep an eye on our website for more details and to register for specific projects.



Potomac Valley Master Naturalists

Master Naturalist Annual Conference - By the Numbers

1 fun and informative weekend, June 15-17, at Cacapon Resort State Park, which was an ideal and beautiful location for the 2018 annual statewide conference

2 members of the planning committee (Paul Breitenbach and Lynne Wiseman) specially thanked by committee chair Clark Dixon for their oversight of scheduling and logistics

3 reenactments of famous historical conservation figures: Thomas Jefferson, Sacagawea, and John J. Audubon

5 new officers elected for the state Master Naturalist committee, including Clark Dixon as vice president

8 trips scheduled to off-site locations to learn about natural history

20 opportunities to get education credits toward recertification, with class topics ranging from native bees to indigenous peoples of WV to stream sampling methods

52 members of the Potomac Valley chapter in attendance, many of whom volunteered throughout the weekend

109 registrants from across the state - a new record!



Conference photo courtesy of Master Naturalist Dave Pennock. For more images see: <https://pennockphotos.smugmug.com/Master-Naturalist-Conference-2018/t-58N2S2s>

Don't miss out on next year's conference, which will be held at Pipestem Resort State Park, June 7-9. For more information about joining the Master Naturalist program, see <http://www.potomacaudubon.org/masternat>.

Conservation

Top 5: Singing Insect Species Coming into Song in Late Summer

By Wil Hershberger

The months of July and August see a rapid increase in the numbers of individuals and species of singing insects that are performing in and around our homes. Here are a few to listen for:



Striped Ground Cricket (*left*) – a small black cricket of lawns and fields which sings a series of metallic chirps at about two chirps per second (<http://songsofinsects.com/crickets/striped-ground-cricket>).

Allard's Ground Cricket (*right*) – a small black cricket of lawns and forest edges that sings a bright, silvery trill with chirps given at a rate too fast to count (<http://songsofinsects.com/crickets/allards-ground-cricket>).



During the middle of July, you might notice a lack of field crickets singing. This is the transition period from the **Spring Field** to the **Fall Field Cricket** (*left*). Both species sound very similar and are found in similar habitats (<http://songsofinsects.com/crickets/spring-and-fall-field-crickets>).

Towards the end of July, the tree crickets become a prominent component of the summer orchestra. Seemingly everywhere, **Davis's Tree Crickets** (*right*) are found in trees, often well above our reach. Their plaintive, mellow tone adds a wonderful backdrop for summer evenings in the yard (<http://songsofinsects.com/crickets/daviss-tree-cricket>).



One of the first and most conspicuous of our meadow katydids is the **Common Meadow Katydid** (*left*). This green and brown grasshopper-like insect can be found in areas where the grass is left to grow to seed. They sing day and night, sounding a lot like a lawn sprinkler (<http://songsofinsects.com/katydids/Common-Meadow-Katydid>).

I hope that you'll get out and enjoy the symphony of summer with these amazing fiddlers of the fields.

Photos © Wil Hershberger

Nature Notes: Ticked Off

Just when we thought the tick problem in West Virginia couldn't get any worse, sadly, we were wrong.

In addition to our plethora of awful native ticks, we now have the invasive long-horned tick or bush tick (*Haemaphysalis longicornis*). This tick was first found in the U.S. last November in New Jersey. It overwintered and reappeared in April. Since then, it has been found in Arkansas, Virginia and West Virginia. With it comes new tick-borne diseases that affect both humans and livestock. The really scary part to this story, however, is that this tick essentially clones itself. Our native species typically exhibit sexual reproduction but may occasionally reproduce via parthenogenesis. The invasive long-horned tick appears to be exclusively parthenogenic, meaning the females don't need anything from the males to reproduce. Of the 1,000 ticks removed from the first U.S. infected sheep, only one was a male. This reproduction method takes approximately 6 months, while our native ticks require an average of 2 years to complete reproduction. These invaders attack their hosts by the masses and can eventually exsanguinate them.

Here's the good news: currently, there have been no reported cases of long-horned ticks biting humans in the U.S. However, they are not picky eaters, so human bites are possible. Here are a few tips to keep you from getting "ticked off" by ticks this year:

- **Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and closed-toe shoes while outside,**
- **Treat your clothing with permethrin or another repellent,**
- **Throw your clothes in the dryer as soon as you get home,**
- **Perform regular tick checks throughout the day.**



Commonsource: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9059723>

Conservation

Raise the Roost Is Live

We have big news: the Raise the Roost campaign to build a chimney swift tower in Shepherdstown is well under way. The fundraiser was launched in early June on the PVAS website, and on Facebook via Give Lively.

Shepherdstown Street Fest kicked off the campaign by selecting PVAS to be one of the recipients of the Street Fest proceeds. We also had a booth at Street Fest where we unveiled our official Raise the Roost decals (logo courtesy of Monica Larson). These snazzy decals are available for a donation of \$10 or more.

Raise the Roost was a semi-finalist for the Shepherd University Foundation WISH grant; we were, however, ultimately not selected to receive funding this year. We are nevertheless stepping up our fundraising efforts because these special birds need our help!

In case you missed it, here is a 'swift' recap of the chimney swift tower project.

In 2016, 1,500 Chimney Swifts, a near-threatened species, were recorded roosting in the Sara Cree Hall chimney on Shepherd University's campus. The following spring, this chimney, the largest roost in the state of West Virginia, was deconstructed, resulting in migratory habitat loss for these swifts. Members of the community reached out to PVAS and asked us to do something to mitigate this habitat loss. From there, the Raise the Roost campaign was born.

Since then, a new tower location has been identified on Shepherd University's campus. This site has received endorsement from WV DNR Ornithologist Richard Bailey. The soil has been tested, and design plans are finalized. Now we just need to secure funds and build the tower.

To learn more about chimney swifts and see our tower plans visit www.potomacaudubon.org/chimneyswifts. And make sure to "like" the Potomac Valley Audubon Society page on Facebook and then share the Raise the Roost fundraiser with all of your friends.



Grassland Birds Initiative Expands Again

Since launching the Grassland Birds Initiative (GBI) in 2015, PVAS has formed agreements with 11 property owners to restore and preserve 263 acres of grassland bird nesting habitat. During the spring of 2018, two new properties joined GBI.

John Allen of Alquip, LLC set aside 30 acres of open field just outside Shepherdstown. Anne Small, also of Shepherdstown, has reserved 20 acres of hayfield on Stonebrake Farm. As GBI members they have agreed not to use any pesticides, including herbicides, and are reducing their mowing practices to allow grassland birds to have an undisturbed and successful nesting season. Both landowners are proudly displaying Grassland Bird Preserve signs, and have committed to sharing their knowledge of ecological land use practices with others.

Many grassland bird populations have declined by 80% in the last 50 years. Some species have disappeared entirely from our area.

These GBI properties are critical for maintaining the grassland birds we have left and will hopefully help the populations to rebuild. Grasslands also benefit numerous pollinators and small mammals.

If you would like to learn more about GBI or enroll your property, contact KC at Katelyn@potomacaudubon.org!



Landowners John Allen and Anne Small with PVAS President Suzanne Offutt, Director Kristin Alexander, and Land/Conservation Manager KC Walters. Photo © Wil Hershberger

Advocacy

The Environmental Disaster of Mountaintop Removal Mining

By Neal Barkus, Panhandle Progressive

Coal has contributed substantially to the development of civilization over the last 250 years. The steam engine was designed and first used to pump out flooded coalmines. The railroad was first commercially used to move coal from mines to towns and to river transportation. Coal powered the industrial revolution in England and the United States. Burning coal, however, produces the greenhouse gases chiefly responsible for global warming. It also produces noxious particles that cause heart and lung disease, and many deaths. And in West Virginia, the search for cheap coal has led to mountaintop removal mining, a practice with an entire catalogue of harmful environmental effects.

Only by flying over Southern West Virginia can one completely grasp the scale on which mountaintop removal mining has been used. Aesthetically we will never be the same, despite all the promises of restoration by mining companies. But lost beauty is a relatively minor issue with mountaintop removal mining.



Mountaintop removal involves clearcutting the extant forest, burning it and then pushing the debris into the adjacent stream valleys. Following this the top layer of rock is blasted away, and this rubble too is pushed into the stream valley along with the topsoil. The coal being harvested is typically thin seam, which means that it is quickly exhausted and a new round of blasting is conducted until the next seam down is reached. Sometimes this process removes 800 feet of mountain.

The scientific evidence of the harm done to human health by mountaintop removal with valley fills is plentiful. The website of the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition contains a bibliography of studies on the topic (ohvec.org/mountaintop-removal-articles/health/). Additional research documents extensive environmental damage.

For example, in January 2010, the magazine *Science* published an article detailing environmental damage, written and researched by twelve scientists, including one from WVU. They found that forests are destroyed and headwater streams are lost. Downstream biodiversity and water quality suffer. As mountain streams emerge from valley fills, they are saturated with sulfate, calcium, magnesium, and other harmful ions. This effect persists even after mine-site reclamation.

During the last ice age, the central and southern Appalachians became a refuge for northern plant and animal species. When the ice retreated, many stayed, rendering these mountains richly biodiverse. The World Wildlife Fund says this area is a “biodiversity hotspot.” Mountaintop removal mining wipes out wide swaths of the temperate mesophytic forests in central Appalachia. These have an unusually diverse tree flora with as many as 30 tree species at a single site. Underneath the forest there is a rich growth of ferns, fungi, herbaceous plants, shrubs and small trees, as well as areas of glade and cranberry bog.

Wildlife also suffers. Whole habitats for such disparate species as bears, birds, and crayfish are destroyed. The effect on birds alone is dramatic. There is a decrease in forest interior bird populations, such as the Wood Thrush, and stream-dependent species, such as the Louisiana Water Thrush. In their place, grassland and edge-tolerant species increase.

The Endangered Species Act normally requires the Fish and Wildlife Service to review any federally administered action that could adversely affect endangered or threatened species. But in 1996 FWS issued an opinion waiving this review for coal mining because the effects of mining are already regulated under the Surface Mine Control and Reclamation Act. However, in practice under the SMCRA, mine operators hire government-approved consultants to produce surveys of wildlife that are far less rigorous than desired.

One environmentalist from the Center for Biological Diversity in Portland, Oregon, remarked that this special review process for coal mining results in environmental destruction that simply would not occur elsewhere.

I have read longer biological opinions for road repairs on the Mount Hood National Forest than for the 1996 FWS biological opinion that proclaims to address all species impacts from all coal mining activities. In Oregon, you would never get permission to blow up the top third of a mountain - it just wouldn't happen.

Environmental groups have resorted to lawsuits to force the FWS to do its job under the Endangered Species Act. In the last five years, these groups have sued to protect the northern long-eared bat, a species already under pressure from a disease called the white nose syndrome. They also sued FWS to protect the Big Sandy crayfish, which has lost up to 70 percent of its range because of water pollution from mountaintop removal mining. It is nearly gone from West Virginia and has lost close to half of its range in Kentucky

continued next page

Advocacy

Mountaintop Removal, continued from previous page

and Virginia.

As with most things these days, this struggle is all about money. Regulation of the mining industry raises its costs and reduces its profits. The question is whether we will have the political will to shift the costs of mountaintop removal mining onto those who profit from it. Will mining companies be required to include in their profit and loss analysis the costs of environmental degradation and cleanup that they have previously externalized? Or will poor communities around the mining sites, and ultimately the entire state of West Virginia, be forced bear these costs?

In a 2011 study published in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, the authors investigated cost accounting for the full life cycle of coal, including coal mined by mountaintop removal:

We estimate that the life cycle effects of coal and the waste stream generated are costing the U.S. public a third to over one-half of a trillion dollars annually. Many of these so-called externalities are, moreover, cumulative. Accounting for the damages conservatively doubles to triples the price of electricity from coal per kWh generated, making wind, solar, and other forms of non-fossil fuel power generation, along with investments in efficiency and electricity conservation methods, economically competitive.

If mining companies had to pay even a fraction of these additional costs, it is most likely that mountaintop removal mining would become uneconomical, and would cease. This is perhaps what fuels the fierce opposition to regulation of this practice by the mining industry.

That opposition played out recently in connection with a modest regulation of the industry by the Obama Administration called the Stream Protection Rule. This Rule did not prohibit mountaintop removal mining, but rather would have required a buffer zone between mountain streams and mine sites and would have protected drinking water in accordance with modern technology. But predictably the mining industry unleashed a barrage of false and exaggerated claims of harm to the industry.

The National Mining Association estimated that over 52,000 miners in central Appalachia could lose their jobs, and Congressman Alex Mooney (WV 2nd) repeated these wildly exaggerated claims. Congress required the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement to estimate the proposed Rule's impact on all employment, not just on coal jobs. It concluded that there would be a net annual increase in overall employment when new jobs related to compliance with the Rule were taken into account.

Nevertheless, the Stream Protection Rule was killed early in the Trump Administration, one of the first casualties of its effort to undo anything the Obama Administration had done. The Trump Administration and their coal industry supporters have grasped the fundamental truth about the regulation of mountaintop removal mining. Trees and birds and streams don't vote. Only people do.

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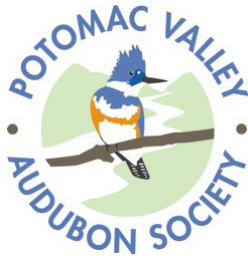
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The Potomac Valley Audubon Society meets at 7:00 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May. Programs are free and open to the public. For additional information about PVAS or its programs and activities, please contact any of the board members listed here or see <http://www.potomacaudubon.org>. PVAS serves the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia and neighboring Washington County, Maryland.

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PVAS Board meetings take place the first Thursday of every other month (September through June). Meetings are open to all PVAS members. Please contact the President or Vice President if you would like to attend.

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