

## March Meeting: Birding and Photography in Diego, CA

San



San Diego, California is one of the southern most cities in the state, close to the border of Mexico. The San Diego River, the Tijuana River, bays, beautiful beaches, and the Pacific Ocean give the area a wide range of habitats. These water-rich areas, along with the forested areas and nearby deserts yield a variety of bird life. Come join Terry Neumyer as he shares these diverse habitats and birding experiences with Appalachian Audubon.

Through a photographic journey you will see places like the Mission Trails Regional Park, with its wealth of birds. One of Terry's treks uncovered a strange warbler-like song, which sparked an investigation. On locating the warbler, it turned out to be a Common Yellowthroat singing a strange version of "witchity witchity witch". There was no mnemonic (a phrase or song made up when you hear a bird call) to describe the song he was singing, but Terry did get photographs of him singing his strange version. Bet he has difficulty getting a girlfriend unless he learns to sing a more Common Yellowthroat version of his song!

Cuyamaca State Park campground also produced some birding surprises. For instance, one day a camper came running out to greet Terry. The man turned out to be Javier Hernandez, a local birder and conservationist. He invited Terry along in his search for White-headed Woodpeckers in the State Park. Did they find any? Join us to find out!

**Come join us for this exciting  
and intriguing photographic  
adventure on Thursday,  
March 15th at 7:30 p.m.**

*(for location and directions, see page 2)*

## Whooping Crane Tragedy

An unfortunate event occurred in central Florida on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007; terrible tornadoes killed 20 people. Additionally, it was believed that 18 young endangered Whooping Cranes also perished in the storm. These Whooping Cranes were part of a project sponsored by the nonprofit organization Operation Migration Group, which is a member of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership. The cranes are reared in Wisconsin and then they follow an ultralight aircraft on a migration route to Florida. Through this project 81 birds had been reintroduced into Florida. After this storm the population was thought to have been reduced to 63.



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## Living Gardens

by Lorrie

Preston

Each March since we installed our backyard water garden, I excitedly anticipate the arrival of the first male eastern American toad (*Bufo americanus americanus*). On one of the first mild, rainy evenings of early spring, he'll announce his arrival with a shrill trill so loud we can even hear it indoors. I stop whatever I'm doing and listen again just to be sure....and yes! There it is! The toads are back! Spring is here!

That first night, the lone male may call out in a solitary voice. But if the mild weather continues, the following nights he will be joined by more and more toads, both males and females. They all come out of their hiding places and come to the pond. Our pond is right next to our screen porch, so we turn on the outside lights and watch them arrive. Toads hop in from all directions... hop...hop...splash! In the pond they go, the males all trilling to attract a mate. The trills last for about 30 seconds, stop for a few seconds, then resume, with each male trilling in a slightly different tone, creating quite a chorus.

Appalachian Audubon monthly (Sept-May) programs normally take place on the 3rd Thursday of each month in Christ Presbyterian Church, 421 Deerfield Road, in the Allendale neighborhood of Camp Hill, at 7:30 p.m. Exceptions are announced in this newsletter, as are field trips and other activities.

**PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.**

Directions: Take New Cumberland exit off I-83; cross Carlisle Road. Turn left onto Allendale Way; take first left at Deerfield Road (from the south, take New Cumberland exit, turn left onto Carlisle Road, left onto Cedar Cliff Road, left on Allendale Way, then left onto Deerfield Road) to the church.



## Whooping Crane Tragedy *(continued from front page)*



The Whooping Cranes were being held in an enclosure in the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge near Crystal River, Florida.

Once the storm rolled in, workers could not reach the birds, and the tide overtook them. Project workers assumed the worst—that all 18 cranes were lost.

The Whooping Crane is the tallest bird in North America. It was near extinct by the early 1940s, with roughly twenty left. There are now two populations of this majestic bird in the US – one flock of 200 birds that migrate from Canada to the Texas gulf coast, and this non-migratory flock in Florida. The loss of these birds is especially traumatic because for the first time in six years, an entire flock of young cranes reared in Wisconsin made the trip to Florida without a single fatality from predators or accidents. Other Whooping Cranes wintering in the area may have been impacted by the storm as well, but no one can be totally sure.

There is a ray of light to this story, however. One of the young cranes that was suspected to have been killed by the storm was found alive. Project biologists picked up the crane's radio signal the day after the storm and later located the bird in an area inhabited by three cranes from the previous year's flock. The survival of this crane gives hope to the survival of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, and of the species itself.

The tragic loss of the other 17 cranes emphasizes the importance of this eastern flock in complimenting the population as a whole. It points out that storms and other unavoidable occurrences, such as an oil or chemical spill, could wipe out the current population of one of these Whooping Crane flocks. These endangered birds need our financial help to survive.

**Please call Carl Juris at 717-564-1479 to learn how you can donate to this worthy cause.**

### Upcoming AAS Field Trips

#### **Ned Smith Center Waterfowl Survey – Sunday, March 11 – 8 am to 1 pm**

Join Scott Bill of the Game Commission for this family-friendly birding experience. The basics of waterfowl identification will be taught, and scopes and refreshments will be provided. For details contact Pete Fox at 583-2639 (before 9 PM) or [pfox@raiderweb.org](mailto:pfox@raiderweb.org).



#### **Spring Wildflowers at Shenk's Ferry – Saturday, April 21**

This is a great spot for wildflowers. Target species include Trilliums and Virginia Bluebells. For trip details contact Walter Koerber at 938-9618.



#### **Warbler Walks: Saturday and Sunday, May 5th and 6th**

Early morning trips to Stony Creek Valley and Carlisle Springs are scheduled. More information to follow in the April issue of *Kingfisher Courier*.

#### **John Heinz Wildlife Refuge at Tincum – Saturday, May 19 – 7 am**

Please note that the date has been changed for this program (originally scheduled for April 28). Tincum has great habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and a variety of songbirds. Contact trip leader Al Mercik at 657-8548 for more information.

# Living Gardens

*Continued from page 2...*

The sound is made by breathing air in through their nostrils, inflating a bubble-like throat sac, then releasing the air through the larynx. The vocal sac amplifies the sound, so it can be heard from a long distance.

The females are about 20 percent larger than the males and have a light colored throat, opposed to the males' dark throat. At the height of mating season, male toads will trill day and night, and we can have as many as 12 pairs of toads at a time laying and fertilizing eggs in our 14' by 16' pond. Each female can lay from 2,000 to 20,000 eggs, which she secures around plant stems.

Within several days, the jelly-like eggs hatch into tiny tadpoles which use their tails for swimming and gills for breathing. The tadpoles rest on the bottom of the pond at night, but during the day they form large schools at the pond's edge, protecting themselves from predators and gathering warmth from the sun. The tadpoles eat algae, bacteria and dead organisms. Only a small percentage of them will make it to adulthood. They are preyed upon by fish, frogs, insect larvae and more. The lucky ones develop into miniature toads in 5 to 10 weeks. During their metamorphosis, their tails disappear and legs emerge. Their gills are replaced by lungs. Now they are ready to live their adult life on land, returning to backyard ponds, vernal pools, or puddles only to reproduce.

When the little toads leave the pond, they are about as big as a pencil eraser. Dozens of them hide in the plants around the perimeter of the pond. They are beneficial residents in the garden, as they consume insects, larvae, spiders, earthworms, snails, slugs, centipedes and millipedes. They raise themselves up on all four legs and stalk their prey.

by Lorrie Pre-

As the toads grow, they expand their territory. The eastern American toad is adaptable and can live in suburban yards, gardens, city parks, farmland, woods, and meadows. They will spend their days resting in leaf litter or in damp soil under logs, rocks or other hiding places where they back into little burrows they create with their hind legs. Their dry warty skin is usually brown or gray in color, but they can adapt some coloration to their environment, sometimes assuming rusty red, yellow, or green tints. They are most active on damp or rainy nights, often positioning themselves near outside lights where they can catch an easy meal of flying insects. It takes 2 to 3 years for toads to reach breeding age, and they can live for 10 years in the wild. Captive toads have been known to live over 35 years.

Behind his eyes, a toad has two large kidney-shaped bumps, which are the parotid glands. When distressed, these secrete a powerful steroid that can affect a predator's heart and blood pressure. In addition, their warty skin secretes bad tasting toxins which can irritate mucous membranes and cause most predators to avoid them, so wash your hands after handling them. Despite rumors to the contrary, toads do not cause warts on hands.

When cold weather arrives in September or October, toads will bury themselves in the soil in a protected crevice or an abandoned tunnel of a mammal, and hibernate until one warm, rainy, early spring night, when they hear that first male trilling.

To learn more about the plight of toads and frogs and amphibian population decline, and assist scientists in protecting them, visit Frogwatch USA, at [www.frogwatch.org](http://www.frogwatch.org).





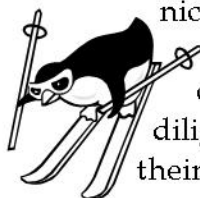
## Winter Birding in Juniata County

by Ramsay Koury

On February 10th, thirty-six birders braved frigid conditions in search of wintering field birds in Juniata County. This trip was organized by Pete Fox and ably led by Aden Troyer and Chad Kauffman—two of Juniata County's premier birders. The group met at Fort Hunter where they saw Black Vultures, a Golden-crowned Kinglet and a Yellow-rumped Warbler, right in the parking lot! The group then journeyed to Oakland Mills to go to the Lost Creek Shoe Shop, which is owned and operated by Aden Troyer. The shop is an excellent place to purchase footwear and optics (both binoculars and telescopes), as there is a large selection. The Lost Creek Shoe Shop is a great spot to try out and compare these optics, as there are usually interesting birds right around the shop. For instance, White-crowned Sparrows were seen and heard singing in the parking lot.



Aden and Chad then led the group around many back roads of rural Juniata County. Mid-winter is a very tough time for birding, and the group struggled to find many birds. They did see dozens of Red-tailed Hawks, a dozen Kestrels, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk. A couple of people even thought they got a fleeting glimpse of a Rough-legged Hawk, which was very uncooperative for the rest of the group. The group found Wilson's Snipe and Killdeer at a small open stream - a nice reminder that spring is actually coming! The highlight of the day was viewing a roosting Long-eared Owl. This was on private property, and the group was very careful not to disturb the bird. They spent the last hour of daylight searching diligently for Short-eared Owls, but these birds have unfortunately not appeared at their normal wintering territory this year.



**The birds, fun and fellowship were a nice way to spend this cold, winter afternoon!  
Please be sure to join us for future AAS field trips and share in the experience.**



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March 2007

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### **MOVING? TAKING AN EXTENDED VACATION?**

To receive AAS mailings when away on long vacations or after moving, PLEASE contact our AAS chapter Membership chair (see p.2) with your address change. This saves us money while keeping you current with our activities. Giving a change of address form to the US Post Office (USPS) **will NOT help**; our USPS addresses are handled by National Audubon. We incur a \$.39 charge per item for each piece of incorrectly addressed, returned mail.

Please help us help you!