

Feathers

Another Memorable Winter for Local Birding

by John Hershey

This past winter has been a very harsh one with some record low temperatures and high snowfall amounts. But for enthusiastic birders, the local birding was exceptional, helping to make the season a little more enjoyable and to pass the time until spring. Every winter in our area brings a list of regular avian visitors from the vast Canadian boreal region and the Arctic. In addition, there are always a smaller number of visitors who are not so regular each winter but show up sporadically over the years. Many finches, for example, are well-known for entering our area only in "irruption years" when their favored cone crops in the Canadian forest are poor. It is these unusual or more sporadic visitors, I think, that make winter birding especially memorable and exciting.

The star of this past winter's unusual avian visitors, in my opinion, was the PINE SISKIN. Over the last 8 years that I've been birding I have never seen a PINE SISKIN in my yard or in regular visits to Vischer Ferry Preserve, and have

only rarely seen them anywhere else in our 11-county area. But this past winter has been different. Beginning in October 2008 I started reading reports on the HMBC-sponsored HMBirds website about PINE SISKINS, primarily at home feeders. Almost everyone seemed to be reporting them with some people boasting of up to 50 in their backyard. I did not even have a bird feeder, but out of jealousy I was forced to buy a sock filled with nyger seed, put it up in the back yard, and wait to see what would happen. After 9 days of waiting, I heard a rising "Zrreeet" outside the window. I took a look and, sure enough, it was my first PINE SISKIN on the sock! Within a week or so after this, the sock and my backyard were filled with these little finches. I never imagined I'd ever see the day when a bird which was unknown in my yard suddenly became, by far, the most common one of all! The Siskins also became regular visitors at Vischer Ferry Preserve, feeding on alder cones near the river. These finches look a lot like AMERICAN GOLDFINCHES in winter plumage and can easily be mistaken for them at a distance. Closer up they are a



White-winged Crossbill: by Ken Harper,
Albany Rural Cemetery, 2/09

bit different, in that they are heavily brown-striped on top and bottom. Most finch species have more brightly-colored males and plainer females; but both male and female Siskins look much the same – overall rather plain, fitting the proverbial birding description of a "little brown job". To be sure the males do have some subtle differences, with yellow stripes on the tail, on one wing bar, and patches on the wings in flight, though it often is hard to see this extra yellow.

– Continued on Page 21



Pine Siskin: by Ken Harper, Ballston Lake, 2/09

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President's Corner



It is mid-March as I write this, and winter is showing signs of giving over to spring. Yesterday, I was out with the informal Thursday birding group on a trip north along the Hudson River and into the grassland area of Northumberland. The ice has almost completely left the river, but winter ducks such as mergansers and goldeneye hang on. We also saw early spring migrants such as mergansers and goldeneye hang on. We also saw early spring migrants such as mergansers and goldeneye hang on. We were treated to two big surprises. The first was a single greater white-fronted goose amidst a large flock of Canada geese on the river at Fort Miller, while the second was a chance encounter with a flock of bohemian waxwings in a tree along a roadside in Northumberland. BOWAs are uncommon in New York, and very uncommon this far south. The waxwing treat was topped off by the appearance of a few cedar waxwings in our yard today. Get out there and bird! They're starting to sing.

Chris and I spent three weeks recently on a truly amazing birding trip to Northern India. The culture is unlike anything most of us are used to, and we will be along time before we forget the sights we saw. These include 320 species of birds, close encounters with wild tigers and leopards, and the Taj Mahal. Having now experienced the drivers and roads of India, I will never complain about the Rexford Bridge again. I plan to write articles for Feathers and to prepare one or more talks for the Club's program series.

I am also reaching the end of my two year stint as Club President. I want to sincerely thank everyone, volunteers all and too numerous to mention in this small space that helped me keep the Club doing what it does so well: promote birding and environmental awareness in the Capital District.

Finally, don't forget to send in your membership renewals. The form was included in the last issue of Feathers.

— Bernie Grossman 

HMBC Contact Information

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HMBC Board Meetings

HMBC Board meetings are open to all Club members. Meetings are held at Five Rivers Center or other local venues at 7:00 PM, usually on the second Monday of odd-numbered months.

Newsletter Contributions Desired

- Have anything you think other birders would be interested in?
- Have a favorite birding spot you want to share?
- Are there any stories or photos that would inspire others?

Share them with the HMBC membership by submitting them to the addresses below:

Please send all *electronic* submissions *via e-mail* to: Chris Grossman at bgrossman@nycap.rr.com

Send **all** paper submissions to:

Chris Grossman

7 Nott Rd.

Rexford, NY 12148

Troy Christmas Bird Count

Nineteen birders in seven field parties took part in the 109th Christmas Bird Count, held on Saturday, January 3, 2009. The Troy CBC has been held every year since the winter of 1949-50. A composite total of 142 species have been tallied on count days over the history of this count.

Weather in the period before the count was cold, which closed up open water and drove waterfowl south. Lakes and ponds were mostly frozen while rivers and streams were mostly open. The Tomhannock Reservoir was completely iced over and populated by ice fishermen. On count day, the weather was clear and seasonable with temperatures ranging from 25 to 30 degrees, but there was a brisk northwest wind which gusted to 25 mph. Six to eight inches of snow covered the ground.

A total of 71 species were found, with two more added during the three days before and after count day. This ties the third-highest total for this count, proving that the participants put out their best effort!

Notable waterfowl species found were: RING NECKED DUCK, GREATER SCAUP, LESSER SCAUP, LONG TAILED DUCK (2nd time in the last ten years), BUFFLEHEAD (3rd time in 10 years), HOODED MERGANSER, and RED BREASTED MERGANSER (4th time in ten years).

Notable "land" species were: BALD EAGLE (with some 20 birds reported, though some were surely double counted - I settled on a total of 13), NORTHERN GOSHAWK, PEREGRINE FALCON,

GLAUCOUS GULL, EASTERN SCREECH OWL, GREAT HORNED OWL, SHORT EARED OWL (1st occurrence since 1991), FISH CROW, COMMON RAVEN, HERMIT THRUSH, SWAMP SPARROW, SNOW BUNTING (4th time in 10 years), PURPLE FINCH (3rd time in 10 years), COMMON REDPOLL, AND PINE SISKIN (3rd time in 10 years).

It was a woodpecker extravaganza with record highs for RED BELLIED WOODPECKER (24), YELLOW BELLIED SAPSUCKER (11, obliterating the previous high of 4 - amazing for a species that has only been recorded on six counts prior to this one!), and NORTHERN FLICKER (28). There were also new record highs for GREATER SCAUP (3), COOPER'S HAWK (10), RED TAILED HAWK (126), SHORT EARED OWL (3, ties old record), CAROLINA WREN (13), and EASTERN BLUEBIRD (116). We just missed record highs for WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (by 4) and PINE SISKIN (by 2).

There were very low numbers of CANADA GOOSE, gulls, NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD, and HOUSE FINCH, with single individuals reported for RUFFED GROUSE, NORTHERN HARRIER, AMERICAN KESTREL, EASTERN SCREECH OWL, BELTED KINGFISHER, and BROWN CREEPER. However this year marks the return of RUFFED GROUSE and NORTHERN HARRIER to the list after two years and one year, respectively. Owls were largely silent, even with increased effort this year compared to other years.

Significant misses included SNOW GOOSE, GREAT BLUE HERON, and ICELAND GULL.

Lastly, a MONK PARAKEET had been observed for the several weeks before the count occasionally visiting a feeder in Waterford. It was seen on the Wednesday before the count and Tuesday following the count. A PIED-BILLED GREBE was seen at Stillwater on the Sunday following the count.

Description of the Sectors

Sector A - Tomhannock Reservoir and surrounding area north and east.

Sector B - Town of Schaghticoke, from the Hudson River on the west to the Tomhannock on the east.

Sector C - Village of Schaghticoke, north of Mechanicville, southern part of the Village of Stillwater This includes confluence of Hoosic and Hudson Rivers.

Sector D - Albany County portion of the count circle, including Colonie, Cohoes, Green Island, and Peebles Island State Park.

Sector E - Halfmoon, Waterford, Mechanicville. This is from Hudson River on the east to Route 236 on the west.

Sector F - Town of Brunswick and the City of Troy.

Sector G - Clifton Park and Halfmoon, bordered by Route 236 on the east. This includes the eastern portion of Vischer Ferry Nature and Historic Preserve.

Tabulation of the species observed follows on ages 12-13.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Total
CANADA GOOSE		16	95		106	1		218
AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	2		2	30	49	29		112
MALLARD	14	27	80	99	95	51		366
BLACK/MALLARD HYBRID			1					1
RING-NECKED DUCK			10					10
GREATER SCAUP			3					3
LESSER SCAUP					1			1
LONG-TAILED DUCK			1					1
BUFFLEHEAD			1					1
COMMON GOLDENEYE		5	56	60	14			135
HOODED MERGANSER			21		2			23
COMMON MERGANSER		16	37	35	97	3	6	194
RED-BREASTED MERGANSER					1			1
RUFFED GROUSE							1	1
WILD TURKEY		9	1			80		90
PIED-BILLED GREBE			CW					
BALD EAGLE*	1	2	3	2	4		1	13
NORTHERN HARRIER		1						1
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK		1	1		1			3
COOPER'S HAWK	4		2			2	2	10
NORTHERN GOSHAWK				1	1			2
RED-TAILED HAWK	25	14	11	30	8	21	17	126
ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK				1	2		1	4
AMERICAN KESTREL			1					1
PEREGRINE FALCON				2		1		3
RING-BILLED GULL		5	4	14	42	57	28	150
HERRING GULL			2	272	20	2	54	350
GLAUCOUS GULL				2			1	3
GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL		1	2	106	19	1	93	222
ROCK PIGEON	69	67	101	360	68	205	77	947
MOURNING DOVE	86	105	22	28	20	31	248	540
MONK PARAKEET					CW			0
EASTERN SCREECH-OWL		1						1
GREAT HORNED OWL		2						2
SHORT-EARED OWL							3	3
BELTED KINGFISHER					1			1
RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER	6	9	2	3		3	5	25
YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER	2	4		2	1	2		11
DOWNY WOODPECKER	19	22	3	22	5	18	10	99
HAIRY WOODPECKER	1	9	2	4	1	1	1	19
NORTHERN FLICKER	5	5	6	3	1	5	3	28
PILEATED WOODPECKER	3	1	3					7
BLUE JAY	36	40	20	9	15	27	32	179
AMERICAN CROW	1301	1365	108	285	90	1400	104	4653
FISH CROW		1			4			5

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Total
COMMON RAVEN		1						1
HORNED LARK			43		1	60		104
BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE	142	170	24	64	13	113	43	569
TUFTED TITMOUSE	22	38	7	36	6	13	5	127
RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH	1	1						2
WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH	22	25	3	12	4	13	5	84
BROWN CREEPER	1							1
CAROLINA WREN	2	3	2	3	1	2		13
GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET	2			2		1		5
EASTERN BLUEBIRD	40	16	17		4	24	15	116
HERMIT THRUSH		1						1
AMERICAN ROBIN	13	180	25	86	30	6	8	348
NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD	2				1	1		4
EUROPEAN STARLING	340	683	120	1879	85	395	166	3668
CEDAR WAXWING	1					25		26
AMERICAN TREE SPARROW	23	53	19	5	5	21		126
SONG SPARROW	7	15	5	8	2	1	1	39
SWAMP SPARROW					1			1
WHITE-THROATED SPARROW	47	63	9	24	8	34	8	193
DARK-EYED JUNCO	129	110	30	26	25	47	15	382
SNOW BUNTING	4							4
NORTHERN CARDINAL	15	23	5	14	15	26	18	116
BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD				1		62		63
PURPLE FINCH						3		3
HOUSE FINCH	29	5	5	4	4	17	12	76
COMMON REDPOLL	12							12
PINE SISKIN	18	1	62			5	1	87
AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	27	69	14	5	8	55	25	203
HOUSE SPARROW	14	74	15	133	24	56	35	351
Total Birds	2487	3259	1006	3672	905	2917	1044	15290
Total Species	38	43	45 + 1	38	44 + 1	42	33	71 + 2 CW

CW = Count Week. Species seen within the period three days before to three days following the count, but not on count day.

* Bald Eagles - 5 adults, 8 immatures. BALD EAGLE numbers do not match those reported by each individual party. Some eagles were seen by two or three parties. I used my professional judgment to make the final determination.

Bold = record number or tied record for the count

Group A: Alison Van Keuren, Brad Walker, Tray Biasioli. 6:10 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. (8 hours, 54 miles by car. Also : hour, 7 miles owling.)

Group B: Larry Alden, Steve Chorvas. 5:25 a.m. - 4:55 p.m. (2 hour, 2 mile on foot; 92 hours, 75 miles by car. Also 12 hours, 13 miles owling.)

Group C: Rich Guthrie, Hannah Bewsher. 7:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (1 hour, 12 miles on foot; 82 hours, 55 miles by car.)

Group D: Sue Adair, George Steele, David Martin, Sandy Martin. 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. (42 hours, 4 miles on foot; 42 hours, 30 miles by car.)

Group E: Bill Lee, Jaime Taft. 7:15 a.m. - 4:45 p.m. (32 hours, 2 miles on foot; 6 hours, 60 miles by car.)

Group F: Norton Miller, Jeremy Kirchman, Joel Ralston. 6:20 a.m. - 6:45 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. - 4:50 p.m. (1 hour, 3 miles on foot; 8: hours, 72 miles by car. Also 2 hour, 3 miles owling.)

Group G: Joan Cipriani, Peggy Rudis, Peg Clement. 7:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. and 4:45 p.m. - 5:15 p.m. (: hour, 1 mile on foot, 83 hours, 73 miles by car. Also 2 hour, 0 miles owling.)

— Larry Alden, Compiler 

Cape May, New Jersey

Friday, September 19, 2008 – Sunday, September 21, 2009

Introduction

Cape May sits at the southern tip of New Jersey, separated from the state of Delaware by a little over 11 miles of open water. Migrating birds, as well as dragonflies and butterflies, are effectively funneled into denser concentrations as the state of New Jersey narrows southward. At Cape May Point, migrants are confronted by an open expanse of water; the Atlantic Ocean to the east and south and the Delaware Bay to the west. Here, they pause to rest up before they continue their journeys south. Thankfully, Cape May is full of the diverse habitats necessary to support these annual visitors.

Friday, September 19th

We began our day at sun-up at Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area. One might say that the songbird migration was unimpressive, but the groups' fascination and enthusiasm led us to be highly impressed by what we did see. While warbler variety was low, we got great looks at a few including good numbers of NORTHERN PARULA, BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER and AMERICAN REDSTART. Other warblers included TENNESSEE, MAGNOLIA, BLACK-THROATED BLUE and PALM WARBLERS. VIREOS included WHITE-EYED, RED-EYED and PHILADELPHIA, the Philadelphia a lifebird for many on the trip.

Throughout the time we were at Higbee Beach, we had loose groups and individual NORTHERN FLICKERS and BLUE JAYS flying over, occasionally harassed by COOPERS AND SHARP-SHINNED HAWKS and MERLINS. BROWN THRASHERS were common along the pathways and the small pond offered SOLITARY SANDPIPER and Northern Cricket Frogs.

From Higbee Beach we made our way to the Cape May Meadows, seeing our first BLACK VULTURES of the trip on the way. The Meadows gave us looks at Herons, Egrets and GLOSSY IBIS as well as a variety of waterfowl and terns. The beach at the meadows turned up a number of gulls including BONAPARTE'S and LESSER BLACK-BACKED.

Next stop was Cape May Point State Park where we took time to watch the migrating raptors from the platform that overlooks the Bunker Pond. Numerous OSPREY, SHARP-SHINNED and COOPER'S HAWKS, AMERICAN

KESTRELS and MERLINS, as well as a PEREGRINE FALCON flew over while below us in the pond were both YELLOWLEGS, and WESTERN and SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPERS.

A leisurely walk along the inside of the dunes took us to some of the new ponds in the park. PALM WARBLERS were abundant in the grasses and along the fences. Near one of the ponds we spied a small bird flying up to a fence post with noticeable white flashing in the tail. A quick look with the bins confirmed this bird to be a NORTHERN WHEATEAR, a species that normally migrates overseas to the old world and only very rarely shows up in North America south of its breeding grounds. The discovery of this bird generated considerable interest and, within 45 minutes or so, the Hawk Watch emptied out as birders hustled down the path to see this rare bird. The HMBC group was not only privileged to have found this wonderful bird but was also lucky to see the spectacle of scores of birders flocking to its presence.

Additionally, the day yielded numerous butterflies, dragonflies and other living things. We ended the night with a well deserved dinner at the Lobster House.

Saturday, September 20th

Day 2 began much like day 1, with a start at Higbee Beach. Most of the same birds were present, including more very cooperative PHILADELPHIA VIREOS. We then headed back to Cape May Point State Park where participants wandered about on their own or in small groups. We were able to add LITTLE BLUE HERON and GADWALL to the trip list and participant Ellen Penrick had an opportunity to observe all three mimic thrushes at the same time at a bend in the boardwalk that makes its way through the marsh.

Following this, we headed north to Malibu Beach Wildlife Management Area where a colony of BLACK SKIMMERS were to be found. Even as we pulled into the parking area, Skimmers were visible flying about. Over head we had a flock of several thousand TREE SWALLOWS. On a nearby telephone wire, we found our first BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE. As we walked down the beach toward the Skimmer colony, we paused occasionally to look at horseshoe and numerous other unidentified crabs (we have our homework cut out for us), starfish and other aquatic creatures, including a small 18 inch shark that a fisherman had

caught. We each took turns holding the beautiful little fish, later identified as a Dusky Smooth-hound, before releasing it back into the water.

We found PIPING PLOVERS, CASPIAN TERNS and AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHERS before heading to another parking area, where we were able to get close up views of the thousands of BLACK SKIMMERS roosting on the beach, skimming the surf and flying overhead. Departing from Malibu, we had 2 more sites to visit; a quick stop at Stone Harbor to look for a few more shorebirds and terns followed by a visit to Nummy's Island to look for Night-Herons.

At Stone Harbor we added RUDDY TURNSTONE to our list as well as several more PIPING PLOVERS. It was good to see the PIPING PLOVERS as we had not seen them on any of the club's previous trips, always arriving just after their departure. After quickly scanning the shorebirds, gulls and terns and scoping the Atlantic for loons and possible seabirds, we left for Nummy's Island to get the best use of the waning daylight.

Nummy's Island is well known as a roosting place for herons and egrets, especially Night-Herons. The island is a few acres of Atlantic White Cedar that stand out in the middle of the vast salt marshes between barrier islands and the New Jersey mainland not far from Atlantic City. Fortunately, a causeway passes over the island and offers ample space for parking. This night, the island had fewer herons than usual. We would normally expect to see a few more "day" herons (though Debra Johnson did see CATTLE EGRET on the way up the parkway) but this evening there were only Night-Herons and the odd SNOWY or GREAT EGRET in the distance among the salt marshes. Careful scrutiny revealed numerous BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERONS perched in the trees, some of them just a few feet from the road. Among the many juvenile birds, we were able to identify a YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON as the last of the day's light left us.

Sunday, September 21st

As the last day of our trip began, the participants split up, heading in different directions as each had their own obligations to attend to. So it was only the trip leaders who made it to Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge, "The Brig", about 45 miles north of Cape May. A beautiful sunny day it was, as we

made our way along the driving route, after having found a number of butterflies and our second species of Praying Mantis at the visitor's center.

The impoundments along the drive had their usual huge numbers of herons, shorebirds, terns and gulls as well as a number of NORTHERN HARRIERS patrolling the marshes. In addition to many species already seen, we added AMERICAN AVOCET, DUNLIN and STILT SANDPIPER to the trip list.

Thus ended another fine trip to Cape May. As usual, it was remarkable less because of the birds than because of the enthusiasm and great nature of the participants. We look forward to our next trip there in 2009.

Species Lists -

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT, GREAT BLUE HERON, GREAT EGRET, LITTLE BLUE HERON, SNOWY EGRET, CATTLE EGRET, BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON, YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON, GLOSSY IBIS, MUTE SWAN, CANADA GOOSE, AMERICAN WIGEON, GADWALL, GREEN-WINGED TEAL, MALLARD, AMERICAN BLACK DUCK, NORTHERN PINTAIL, BLUE-WINGED TEAL, NORTHERN SHOVELER, HOODED Merganser, BLACK VULTURE, TURKEY VULTURE, OSPREY, BALD EAGLE, NORTHERN HARRIER, SHARP-SHINNED HAWK, COOPER'S HAWK, RED-TAILED HAWK, AMERICAN KESTREL, MERLIN, PEREGRINE FALCON, AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER, AMERICAN AVOCET, BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER, SEMIPALMATED PLOVER, KILLDEER, PIPING PLOVER, SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER, GREATER YELLOWLEGS, LESSER YELLOWLEGS, SOLITARY SANDPIPER, SPOTTED SANDPIPER, RUDDY TURNSTONE, SANDERLING, SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER, WESTERN SANDPIPER, LEAST SANDPIPER, DUNLIN, STILT SANDPIPER, RING-BILLED GULL, GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL, LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL, AMERICAN HERRING GULL, BONAPARTE'S GULL, LAUGHING GULL, CASPIAN TERN, ROYAL TERN, COMMON TERN, FORSTER'S TERN, BLACK SKIMMER, ROCK DOVE, MOURNING DOVE, COMMON Nighthawk, RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD, BELTED KINGFISHER, RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER, NORTHERN FLICKER, EASTERN PHOEBE, GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER, TREE SWALLOW, RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET, CEDAR WAXWING, CAROLINA WREN, HOUSE WREN, GRAY CATBIRD, NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD, BROWN THRASHER, SWAINSON'S THRUSH, AMERICAN

ROBIN, BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, CAROLINA CHICKADEE, TUFTED TITMOUSE, RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH, BLUE JAY, AMERICAN CROW, FISH CROW, EUROPEAN STARLING, WHITE-EYED VIREO, PHILADELPHIA VIREO, RED-EYED VIREO, TENNESSEE WARBLER, NASHVILLE WARBLER, NORTHERN PARULA, YELLOW WARBLER, MAGNOLIA WARBLER, CAPE MAY WARBLER, BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER, PALM WARBLER, BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER, AMERICAN REDSTART, LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH, COMMON YELLOWTHROAT, EASTERN TOWHEE, SAVANNAH SPARROW, NORTHERN CARDINAL, ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK, INDIGO BUNTING, BOBOLINK, RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD, COMMON GRACKLE, BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE, HOUSE FINCH, AMERICAN GOLDFINCH, HOUSE SPARROW

— *Gerry Colborn, Tim Colborn, James Colborn*

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center

Saturday, January 31, 2009

There has, to recent recollection, never been a "birding by snowshoe" outing offered in the capital region, but, judging by the thoroughly enthusiastic response to HMBC's January 31 outing at Five Rivers, the bird club has identified an obvious public need that merits serious study. The concept, thought up on a whim by Donna Zimmerman, was to get birders out into otherwise inaccessible areas where few have gone before, a shamelessly derivative spin-off in the spirit of Julie Hart's "Searching for Bicknell's in the Dark at 4000' on top of Slide Mountain" and Greg Recer's "Birding the Yucatan by Parasail". Extreme birding, you might say.

To everyone's astonishment, 30 gamers actually signed up, ranging from first-time-ever snowshoers to seasonally-affected aviphiles. Truth be told, so many people birding by snowshoe together can be, at best, only as profitable as, say, birding by freight train. And the recent snow-to-rain double play, which capped the landscape in a caramelized crust, made locomotion especially noisy, scaring away what few timid birds there were, and drowning out those of stouter character, which were even fewer. Mortified trip leaders John Kent, Scott Stoner and Craig Thompson were relegated to pointing out long-abandoned bird nests, assorted animal tracks and the usual litany of "shoul'da been here yesterday" lamentations.

Those recorded were the typical old reliables: RED-TAILED HAWK, MOURNING DOVE, DOWNY WOODPECKER, BLUE JAY, AMERICAN CROW, BLACK CAPPED CHICKADEE, TUFTED TITMOUSE, WHITE BREASTED NUTHATCH, AMERICAN ROBIN, and NORTHERN CARDINAL - and only one or two birds of each at that! Only 2 other species were represented by more than three birds: a grouping of 15 HOUSE SPARROWS perched strategically near a bird feeder (counted as "field birds" merely out of total desperation), and a fleeting fly-by of 20 CEDAR WAXWINGS, bringing the day's meager field total to 12 species, maybe 50 birds in all!

Musing over hot chocolate afterwards about the outing's overall profitability, it was agreed that, if you want to see a lot of birds in winter, it is best done from the warm couch at the window nearest your bird-feeding station. And if you do venture afield, to paraphrase an old angler's joke, you've gotta quit thinking so much about seeing birds, and think more about birding.

— *Craig Thompson*

Waterfowl of the Hudson River South *Sunday, March 1, 2009*

Only two BALD EAGLES this year, an adult and an immature, both perched in Stockport across the river from Four Mile Point, in the bitter cold, a "set back" in the changing seasons, as Rich Guthrie termed the weather to the red-faced shivering participants numbering about 15. Gary Goodness found the first two BUFFLEHEADS at Dutchman's Landing in Catskill; at Four Mile Point in Athens Tom Phillips found the only RING-NECKED DUCK and what turned out to be an AMERICAN WIGEON after some scope study. We stopped the caravan south of Coxsackie to briefly watch a nice male NORTHERN HARRIER cruising over a field. Four COMMON GOLDENEYES jumped up and quickly departed as we walked out to the river at Catskill Point. Newcomers to birding, Bonnie and David Montgomery, enjoyed Gary's etymological tale of the big-headed Bufflehead name derived from the big-headed American Bison.

— *Bill Cook* 

Upcoming HMBC Programs

HMBC's Annual Literary Night

Monday, April 6, 2009

7:00 p.m. at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Please join us at the Colonie Town Library on Monday, April 6, 7 p.m., for HMBC's Annual Literary Night. Participants are invited to share their favorite nature writings, either poetry or prose at this annual reading. The readings can be either original or published works. If you would like to come as a non-reading listener, that's fine too. Feel free to bring dessert to share, as well!

HMBC's Annual Banquet and Meeting

Wednesday April 22, 2009

Club members will receive a special mailing in March with details of the dinner.

Our Planet's Birding Extremes: Antarctica to the Arctic Circle

Don and Donna Traver.

From Andean Condors in Southern Chile's fabled national park, Torres del Paine to an Emperor Penguin colony on Snow Hill Island in Antarctic and then north to Spitsbergen above the Arctic Circle with stops along the way in the tropics, the British Isles and Siberia this program will provide an overview of places and habitats that the adventure traveler may consider visiting to observe the diverse wildlife of our planet.

Many HMBC members will recall that Don and Donna Traver have recently completed a quest to see at least one species from each Family of birds in the world. They have been our Club's guests at a number of programs over the past half dozen years, recounting their birding adventures from all parts of the globe!

Don and Donna both graduated from SUNY Cortland 1959 as Physical Education Majors, and both obtained Masters Degrees from SUNY Brockport. Donna was a Physical Education teacher in Pittsford Central Schools for 31 years, while Don taught Science and coached wrestling coach in Webster. They have been avid birders for many years and active in local clubs; Donna is Past President of Rochester Birding Association and Don is Past President of Genesee Ornithological Society.

Together, Donna and Don have seen over 700 species of North American birds and over 5,000 species in the world. They started their bird families quest in 1994 needing 35 more of the world's 204 families (Clements pre-2008 taxonomy). This endeavor was completed in August 2006 in Sierra Leone, West Africa. Recently, they have worked with the Town of Webster in preserving vital migratory bird habitat near Lake Ontario on newly acquired Open Space Lands.

Come and enjoy a great meal and stay to hear Donna and Don recount their birding adventures from Antarctica to the Arctic Circle!

Birding in East Australia from Tasmania to Cairns

Don Morton

Monday, May 4, 2009

7:00 p.m. at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Australia is truly a beautiful country with unique birds and animals that are seen no place else on earth. Ann & Don Morton toured Eastern Australia in November 2007 and saw many of these new and interesting species from Fairy-wrens to Megapods including Frogmouths, Lorikeets, Cockatoos & the first bird Don ever met that frightened him. They were also able to observe many of Australia's unique mammals from egg laying to marsupial in their natural settings. The people were very friendly and helpful and the food was wonderful.

Don, a retired physician, and long-time member of the Bird Club, has been interested in birds and photography since High School but had not had the opportunity to do much "birding" until recent years. Ann, a retired nurse enjoys the outdoors, the hiking and natural beauty that is involved in birding. Over the past 15 years Don has made up for "lost time" and he and Ann have traveled to Ireland, Argentina, The Galapagos, Panama, Trinidad, Mexico, Costa Rica, Alaska and throughout the United States and consider Australia one of the more exciting of their birding adventures.

Please join us this evening for a photo tour of the birds, mammals and scenery of East Australia.

Upcoming HMBC Programs — *continued*

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Adirondack Fauna and Flora

Warren Greene

Monday June 1, 2009

7:00 p.m. at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Renowned photographer Warren Greene returns once again to share some of his best shots of the Adirondacks, including birds, butterflies, moths, plants, and scenics. This slide (not digital) presentation provides a true and unenhanced representation of the natural world in all its beauty.

Warren Greene is a native of Gloversville, who has worked for the Fulton County Probation Dept. since 1976 and been its Director since 1988. Warren bought his first camera in 1976 in order to document nature the way he had appreciated it his entire life. Although probably most known for his bird photography, Warren enjoys all aspects of nature photography, currently shoots with a Leica R8 camera and a lenses including a 400 f4 lens with a 1.4 converter. Although he modestly describes photography as a personal hobby, Warren has been published extensively in various books, magazines, and other venues over the years. 

Upcoming Audubon Programs

Unless otherwise specified, programs are held at:

William K. Sanford Colonie Town Library

629 Albany-Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

2nd Thursday of every month, September - June, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Adirondack Issues

David H. Gibson

Thursday, March 12, 2009; 7 p.m.

Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks Center, Schenectady

The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks (AFPA) is the first organization devoted exclusively to advocacy for the globally significant Adirondack Park. Founded in 1901, AFPA remains today the wellspring for citizen advocacy for the Adirondacks and is dedicated to sustaining ecological integrity and mutual well being of the natural and human communities of the Park. The two go very much hand in hand!

Join AFPA Executive Director and long time Audubon Society of the Capital Region Board member Dave Gibson for a brief tour of the AFPA Center and Adirondack Research Library. Then we'll gather in the vaunted "conservation living room", where the late Adirondack wilderness leader Paul Schaefer often rallied the troops, as Dave presents an overview of critical Adirondack issues sure to "peak" your interest.

The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks offices are at 897 St. David's Lane, Schenectady. Call AFPA at 518 -377-1452 for directions or more information.

Natural History of Owls

Kitty Rusch

Thursday, April 30, 2009; 7 p.m.

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Delmar

Come join the fun as DEC's Kitty Rusch presents an overview of the natural history of owls, featuring an appearance by a live barred owl. Weather permitting, the indoor presentation will be followed by a short outdoor owl prowl to known haunts. Bring a flashlight.

Kitty Rusch is an Environmental Educator at NYS DEC's Five Rivers EEC, where 7 owl species have been found.

Refreshments will be served. As always, we encourage you to bring your friends and family.

For more information or directions, contact Greg Rucinski at the Colonie Library at 458-9274. 

Bird Feeder Care Very Important

Terry Sprague, from Prince Edward County, Ontario, is the host of the NatureStuff website. Reprinted with the author's permission.

Wednesday, March 04, 2009

For many bird enthusiasts, winter bird feeding will soon come to an end. Others may continue feeding right through the spring, summer and fall months. And there is certainly nothing wrong with that. Some of our best patronage and most colorful birds arrive with summer feeding.

At the very least, those who continue feeding will need to alter their feeding arrangement somewhat, removing large platform feeders to thwart the dominance by unwanted guests, and perhaps even removing self feeders and replacing these with feeders more attuned to the needs of goldfinches, house finches and others that might drop in for a bite to eat.

So what happens to the feeders that are removed? Generally, they are simply emptied and placed into storage until next winter rolls around. Like nesting boxes that are removed and thoroughly cleaned each fall, bird feeders, too, should receive a good cleaning and disinfecting before being placed into storage.

Bird feeder cleanliness continues to be emphasized in bird feeding workshops and manuals. When bird feed becomes damp from rains and thawing snow, the rotting feed becomes a breeding ground for bacteria. The spread of conjunctivitis among local

house finch populations has been attributed, in part, to overcrowding at bird feeders and the spread of this contagious eye infection due to unsanitary conditions.

A new disease which turned up at one Trenton area feeder one winter was also attributed to conditions at feeders which often become unsanitary during periods of mild, wet weather. In this particular case, mourning doves were found with unsightly lesions about their faces. The disease was believed to have been Trichomoniasis which is characterized by lesions in the upper digestive region, particularly in the mouth, esophagus, and crop of infected birds. The general symptoms include laboured breathing, weakness, and emaciation. The disease is caused by a flagellated protozoan *Trichomonas gallinae*. Mourning doves and common pigeons are the common carriers, but it has also been reported in wild raptors in the United States. The respondent added that it was always a good policy to avoid feeding methods that attract large numbers of birds to a small area to deter transmission. Also, especially with Trichomoniasis, bird baths and water dishes should be cleaned regularly. Another, involving salmonella was present this winter in some wintering redpolls due to their high numbers and bacteria present at unsanitary bird feeders.

Keeping the bird feeding station clean is an important part of any bird feeding program. It is especially important, now that March has arrived as warm weather and spring

rains will breed disease. Because birds congregate in large numbers at feeders, there is increased potential for transfer of disease from one bird to another. Although disease problems are seldom observed at most feeding stations, it is still a good idea to prevent problems before they occur.

Before returning the winter bird feeders to their summer storage, I always make it a practice to take a common paint scraper and remove any congealed or dried food matter from the feeder, and briskly whisk all this from the structure. An air compressor, or the exhaust connection from some vacuum cleaners will work very well too in ensuring that all foreign matter has been removed.

As an added precautionary measure, I also use a stiff scrub brush and disinfect my feeders with a solution of one part household bleach to nine parts water. Rinse well and allow the feeders to dry thoroughly before placing into storage.

It is also a good idea to maintain this schedule right through the summer in a continuing effort to remove wet and compacted seed, since wet food can quickly develop moulds which will prove fatal to your guests. It is also suggested that spilled seeds and hulls should be raked occasionally from beneath the feeder so they don't become mouldy or interfere with grass or flower growth.

— Terry Sprague 

Please visit Terry Sprague's NatureStuff website at <http://naturestuff.net>

Huyck Preserve Warbler Workshop - Volunteers Needed

The Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve and Biological Research Station in Rensselaerville will conduct a Warbler Workshop, to be held on two consecutive Saturday mornings, May 16th and 23rd, from 7 a.m. – 11 a.m. Enthusiastic birders with an interest in teaching are needed to serve as volunteer instructors.

For those interested in attending the workshop, warblers have presented field identification challenges to birders of all experience levels. Join renowned field observer Chad Witko in the field at the

peak of migration, where the greatest diversity of warblers will be sought out and their identification in the field will be broken down into a simple and easy to understand approach. And did we mention that flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, and tanagers will also be around?

Chad Witko has conducted bird research and environmental education efforts across the country for the National Audubon Society, PRBO Conservation Science, and the New Jersey Audubon Society.

Pre-registration is required. The cost is \$90 for the two day course.

Also upcoming sometime in June, the Huyck Preserve will host a Bird Festival for the general public. This is a great event with a variety of programs and exhibits for the whole family. Check the Huyck Preserve website at <http://www.huyckpreserve.org> for further details.

Contact the Huyck Preserve staff by e-mail: info@huyckpreserve.org or phone: (518) 797-3440. 

I've only been birding for a few years but I'm really hooked. Sure, I enjoy all the usual activities:

- Fresh air
- Exercise
- Traveling to new places and meeting nice people
- Frustrating the squirrels on the backyard feeders
- Becoming the slightly smug "expert" among family, friends and co-workers. Who among us doesn't like to correct folks when they say "I saw a 'seagull' in the Price Chopper parking lot?"
- And, of course, the fun and challenge of finding birds and making a positive ID.

In addition, there are other activities you can indulge in as fun birding perks:

- Statistics – I'm hooked on listing and can spend hours pouring over stats on birds I've seen in different places and seasons. (I think eBird is the best tool for this.)
- Optics – this is another area that can be consuming, but I found it fun to do research and talk to people before I purchased my binoculars and scope.
- Photography – Many folks seem to be able to stick their digital camera lens up against the eye-piece of their scope or even binocs and take remarkably good pictures. I've never been able to do this but it is another fun thing to tinker around with, especially if you like gadgets.
- Field Guides – As a member of the publishing industry, I know how much work goes into a book, and how much passion goes into a really good book.

Speaking of books, here is the point of this article: I think birders are big readers and enjoy a good book that has something to do with their hobby. So here is a listing of my favorite birding books, in no particular order other than the order in which I read them:

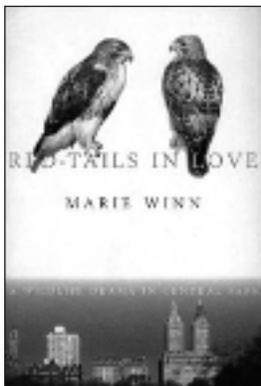


The Grail Bird, Tim Gallagher – This one is written by Editor-in-Chief of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's journal Living Bird and details the complexities of trying to prove a bird extinct or not...

In this case, the subject is the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker. Lots of slopping around in the swamps and bayous of Arkansas and Louisiana with sophisticated equipment toted by dedicated researchers who meet some interesting characters along the way, and eventually the woodpecker in question... Or did they? (See also *In Search of the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker*, by Jerome Jackson.)

Red-tails in Love, Marie Winn –

A charming little book detailing the love life of Pale Male and his various mates who struggle (and succeed more often than not) to pro-create in NYC's Central Park. Winn is a good writer and introduces us to many cool parts of Central Park which has a dedicated hardcore birding community that consistently turns up a surprisingly diverse bird list for such an urban setting. I think this book was written in the mid-1990s but Pale Male and Lola are still going strong as documented on a most interesting and (sometimes controversial) website: www.palemale.com. Think what you will of this blogger's politics, but his photos are simply stunning. And the fact that he has been posting new photos of the hawks and other denizens of the Park every day for years is amazing. As I write this in mid-March of 2009, it looks like the first eggs have been laid, so Pale Male and Lola are well on their way to raising another family.



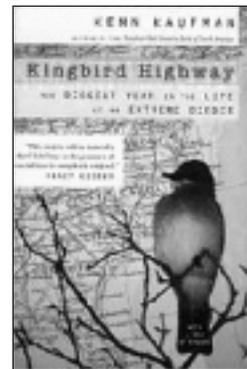
A Season at the Point, Jack Connor –

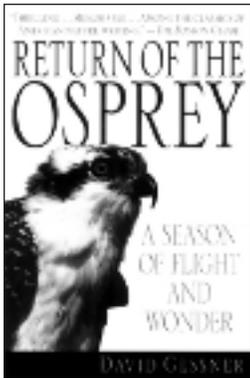
Written in the early 1990s this one is ostensibly about hawk counting during fall migration at the famed birding Mecca and migrant trap, Cape May, NJ. Meet future superstars like Pete Dunne, Clay Sutton, and others as they push themselves (and their eyes) to the limit during marathon days, weeks, and months trying to outdo each other by spotting and counting every hawk that passes over the state park at the southern tip of NJ. Conner also breaks away from the hawk watch platform to explore other famed areas such as Higbee's Beach, the Beanery, Hidden Valley, the Concrete Ship, etc., and does a great job of explaining why Cape May is such a hot spot. This book inspired me to visit Cape May in October of 2008 and it was a thrill to experience all these places and especially to stand on the platform during the peak of migration.



Kingbird Highway, Kenn Kaufman –

This was the first book I ever read about a Big Year. Since his sojourn in the 1970s, Kaufman has become one of the most popular birders, authors, and naturalists of our time. His story about hitch-hiking around the country, hippy-style, as a 16-year-old, while trying to see as many birds as possible in one calendar year is a classic... Especially when you consider how cheaply he was able to do it. Compared to folks in subsequent books, that are considerably better-heeled, Kaufman's bird-per-dollar ratio is mind-blowing.





Return of the Osprey,
David Gessner – Interesting story about how Ospreys and other birds of prey have made a comeback after the rough times of the DDT era. It is set on Cape

Cod and Gessner works in lots of other interesting sidebars.

The Big Year,

Mark Obmascik

Basically traces three very different men who “compete” during a Big Year in 1998. The author, a journalist, keeps you guessing the whole way and you don’t find out who the “winner” is until the very end.



The Big Twitch,

Sean Dooley –

See above, but set in Australia. The author is a likeable bloke and the birds, with such odd-sounding names, are fun to learn about. (I think the only places

our life lists intersect are Canada Goose and Mallard.) Be sure to have a map handy if your Aussie geography is a sketchy as mine and be prepared to be amazed at how many miles this guy drives to twitch and sometimes dip.



To See Every Bird on Earth, Dan Koeppel –

Written by the son of famous big lister Dr. Richard Koeppel, this book shows you what can be accomplished when money is no object. But it is also an interesting father/son study that illustrates how obsessive listing can affect a family. (It also introduced me to Queen of all Listers Phoebe Snetsinger, but I have not been able to find her book, Birding on Borrowed Time. Too bad since it sounds fascinating...

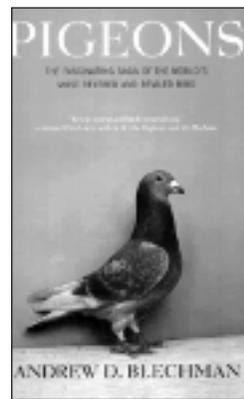
Diagnosed with terminal melanoma in 1981, she took up big listing and amassed an amazing life list of over 8,500 species in the next two decades, only to die while on a birding trip in Madagascar in 1999, when the van she was riding in overturned, killing her instantly.)



Pigeons,

Andrew Blechman –

The author takes a pretty drab bird and makes it interesting. (Not sure if he took heat for not naming the book Rock Dove.) From the coops and homing clubs of Brooklyn, NY to the shooting

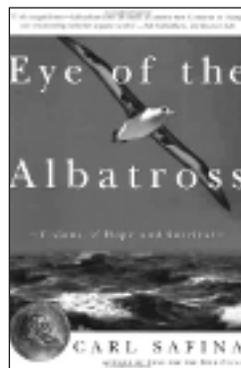


clubs and mayhem of rural PA, you’ll never look at these familiar guys the same way.

Eye of the Albatross,

Carl Safina –

Set mostly in the remotest parts of the Pacific Ocean, the author paints a fascinating picture, detailing in sweeping dimensions, how these birds



can survive at sea for most of their lives without ever setting foot on land, except to breed. The mind-numbing distances the parents cover to catch food to feed their single chick, and how long those young, defenseless birds must wait between meals, will have you shaking your head.

Of a Feather,

Scott Weidensaul –

Subtitled A Brief History of American Birding, the author tries to explain why birders are birders... Not an easy task. From shotgun naturalists, egg

collectors, society matrons, and the oft misunderstood J.J. Audubon, we get a good history of birding in the early days of the country. But it is the publication in 1934 of Roger Tory Peterson’s A Field Guide to the Birds that launches the modern era of birding that most of us are familiar with.



Rare Bird: Pursuing the Mystery of the Marbled Murrelet, Marie Mudd Ruth –

The painstakingly researched tale of a quirky little sea bird of the Pacific Northwest that actually nests in mature stands



of old-growth forests which are rapidly being lost to logging. “Discovered” in 1778 by Captain Cook, the birds’ unusual nests on mossy branches went undetected until 1974, when a tree trimmer almost stepped on a chick 148 feet up in a Douglas fir!

Well, if you made it this far you’ve proved my point... birders are interested in good books about their hobby. Feel free to send in your favorites to future editions of *Feathers*.



White-winged Crossbill: by Curt Morgan, Albany Rural Cemetery, 2/09

Besides the PINE SISKIN, another irruptive finch that made its way to our local area this past winter was the WHITE WINGED CROSSBILL. At first WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS were reported mostly at higher elevations such as Partridge Run Wildlife Management Area in Albany County, Fox Hill Rd. in Saratoga County, Harrisburg Rd. in southern Warren County, near Lapland Lake in Warren County, and in the towns of Nassau and Chatham. Occasionally, they were detected by sharp birders just flying overhead in a variety of places in the area. I read a report in mid-February on the HMBirds website by a local birder who found these birds at Albany Rural Cemetery in Menands. I made 2 unsuccessful trips to this nearby spot before finally finding some Crossbills there on the third try. In years

past I had only ever seen this species twice and had to journey to the northern Adirondacks to find them. The WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS were not nearly as abundant in our area as the PINE SISKINS this winter but they made up for that with a little more charisma. For one thing they are colorful with the males a pinkish red, and females yellow and gray, both having 2 very prominent white wing bars. Their crossed bills, shared only in North America with their cousin the RED CROSSBILL, are a unique adaptation for crunching cones from spruce and other conifer trees in order to eat the tiny seeds within. Many birders at the cemetery reported hearing crunching sounds in the trees and seeing a shower of cone fragments falling to the ground as large numbers of these finches fed in the trees, often

while hanging upside down. Sometimes, the Crossbills were seen in a feeding frenzy on the ground almost oblivious to the birders watching in amazement just a few feet away. It occurred to me that, if the WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS were easily found at Albany Rural Cemetery, then they ought to be in many other urban, lowland areas with conifers, even though few were being reported. To make my point I made a trip to Oakwood Cemetery in Troy, and easily found the Crossbills there as well. After this I also received reports from others of WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS in the Capital Region in such places as an apartment complex, a professional park, a college campus, and another cemetery.

During some winters in our area we are lucky to have one SNOWY OWL that remains faithful to a given location for the winter, while in many winters there are no reported Snowys in the 11-county area. This past winter we were fortunate to have more like an invasion of SNOWY OWLS – North America's heaviest owl. Indeed it is difficult to trace the history of all of the Snowys which were sighted in our area beginning in November 2008, but I will try – drawing mostly from HMBirds internet reports. In November a Snowy was found actually swimming or floating in the Hudson River near the Dunn Memorial Bridge. It appeared to be sick and weak and was captured with help from Rich Guthrie, Will Raup, and an animal control officer. Found to be emaciated but otherwise in pretty good health, it spent most of the winter in the hands of a licensed wildlife rehabilitator eventually being released at the Coxsackie Grasslands in early March in time for the flight back to its Arctic home (*see article*



Snowy Owl: by Ken Harper, Halfmoon, 1/09



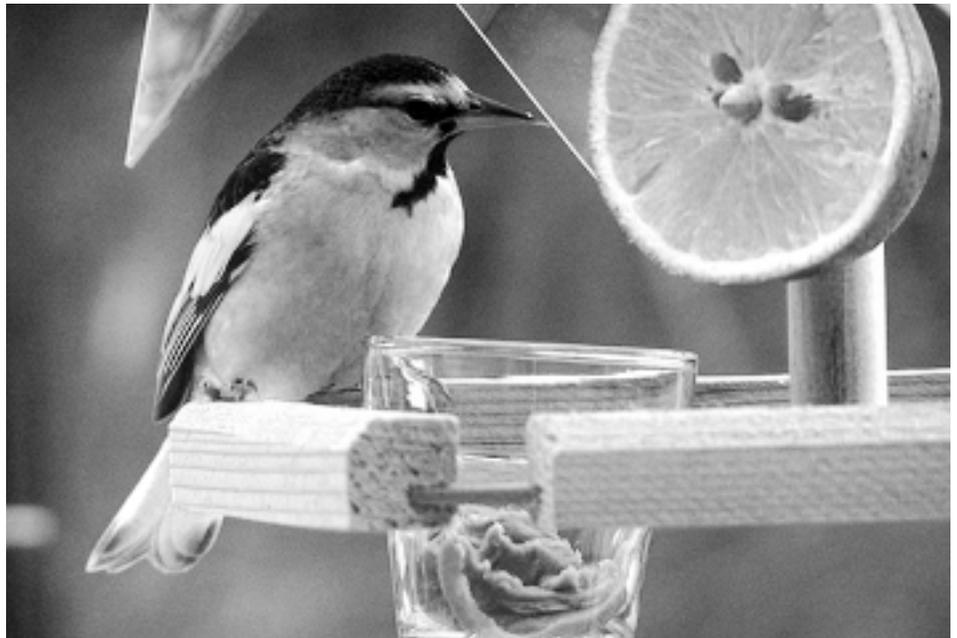
Snowy Owl: by Bill Combs, Jr., Fort Edward Grasslands, 12/08

this issue, page 25). Shortly after this Snowy was captured, another Snowy was seen for several days at SUNY Albany in the Social Sciences Courtyard. Also, in late November two Snowys were found in the Fort Edward Grasslands. I was fortunate to have seen these two owls with the Thursday Morning Group in December. Eventually a third Snowy was discovered at a different location in the Fort Edward area. In early December a Snowy OWL was found on the top of the Troy City Hall for a very brief period, making a story in the local TV news. In late December a contingent of people working in downtown Albany were thrilled to have spotted a Snowy perched at the top of the Key Bank Building. This bird created a great deal of excitement, making a news story in the Times-Union; but, sadly, within about a week of its discovery it was found dead. The cause of death turned out to be a parasitic infection most likely caused by eating an infected pigeon. In January another Snowy was found in the Coxsackie



Short-eared Owl: by Curt Morgan, Fort Edward Grasslands, 12/08

Grasslands. This one eventually moved on, but at the end of February still another one was found in the same general area. Also, a Snowy was found near the Columbia County Airport. Meanwhile in January, Larry Main and I were checking out a small grassland area in the Town of Halfmoon near Mechanicville where 3 SHORT EARED OWLS had been seen in the Troy Christmas Bird Count. To our delight and surprise we discovered a SNOWY OWL perched on the roof of an unfinished house. This Snowy remained faithful to that general area for a month and was visited by many enthusiastic birders, some of whom also got to see a beautiful aerial ballet by the 3 SHORT-EARED OWLS on the hunt over a field at dusk. At one point a few birders were lucky enough to see the SNOWY OWL dueling briefly with one of the Short-eareds as a kind of guest appearance in the Short-eareds' nightly ballet performance. If I've counted correctly, and assuming they are all different ones, that makes 11 Snowys altogether. And, this doesn't include a number of reports of



Bullock's Oriole: by B. Bowen Carr, Copake, 1/09

possible Snowys that were not seen again. And, who knows how many were in the area

that simply went unnoticed or unreported?

Besides the avian visitors who arrive in our area from the Arctic and boreal region with the apparent and understandable purpose of finding food, another rare bird arrived in our area from a very different place and for an unclear reason. This was a male BULLOCK'S ORIOLE which was discovered at a bird feeder in the Town of Copake, Columbia County in mid-January. BULLOCK'S ORIOLES are closely related to our own BALTIMORE ORIOLES and are counterparts to them in the Western United States. They occupy most of the western U.S. starting a bit west of the Mississippi River. The obvious question is what was this Oriole doing in our area of New York in the middle of such a harsh winter? As far as we know, no BALTIMORE ORIOLES were foolish or hardy enough to stay in our part of New York after, say, October. BALTIMORE ORIOLES are known to migrate to the tropical climate of Mexico and northern South America. Likewise, the western BULLOCK'S ORIOLE migrates south to Mexico in winter. But, this oriole, I assume, made a grievous error and flew a minimum of 1500 miles eastward into the harsh New York winter while the multitude of his cohorts flew a comparable distance south to what would seem like a much more hospitable, tropical climate. For me this bird brings to mind the legendary but true story of Roy "Wrong Way" Riegel, a football player for the University of California, who recovered a fumble in the



Northern Hawk Owl: by Ken Harper, Peru, NY, 3/09

1929 Rose Bowl and ran 65 yards the wrong way to within 3 yards of his own team's end zone, resulting in California's humiliating defeat. This rare, wayward oriole spent 17 days around the feeder in Copake before disappearing. I didn't get a chance to see him before he disappeared but many local birders did drive to Copake to pay homage. The home owner who very graciously hosted this beautiful, orange bird at her feeder provided a website with information and photos. She named him "Bob" and provided information on her very exceptional feeder offerings which included his favorite food, strawberry jam enriched with crushed mealworms. She does not know what happened to Bob but fears that a COOPER'S HAWK in the area may

have led to his disappearance. The Wikipedia biography of Roy "Wrong Way" Riegel says that he "went on to live a normal life", and we certainly wish the same for Bob, as well as all of our winter avian visitors who will be returning to points north. The home owner's website: http://www.flickr.com/photos/mudder_bbc/3222678064/in/set-72157612569091641/

Although I'm focusing on "local" birding in this article, I can't resist mentioning one last rare and charismatic visitor from the Arctic/boreal region that many local birders have visited, which is just a little bit out of our 11-county area. This is a NORTHERN HAWK OWL which was discovered in mid-December in Peru, NY, near Plattsburgh,

and was observed the rest of the winter into March. I did not see this bird but remember the one that spent the winter in the Town of Root in Montgomery County in the winter of 2002-3. Like many of the other northern birds mentioned here, NORTHERN HAWK OWLS seem tame, sometimes tolerating close approach. Hawk Owls also hunt during the day, making them especially easy to find and observe. As with all of the unusual birds mentioned above, because they are rare or sporadic in our area, they are best appreciated while they are present because we may not see the same species, or so many of them again, for many more years. 

New York State Bluebird Society Meeting



The New York State Bluebird Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*), our state bird. The Society seeks to monitor and increase production of Eastern Bluebirds and certain other cavity nesting birds through a statewide nestbox program. They have programs to educate or inform people of New York on the ecology and management of Eastern Bluebirds, and conduct research on bluebirds and bluebird habitat selection, including nest box preference studies.

The Society will be holding their spring regional meeting on April 11, 2009 at 1 p.m. at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar. Bring a friend and enjoy a program on bluebirds.

For more information, visit the Society website at: <http://www.nysbs.org/> 

In our next issue...

Peregrine falcons: information, local observations, and interesting facts!

As this issue goes to press, New York State DEC reported that the Dunn Memorial Bridge Falconcam is temporarily unavailable due to a defective transmitter. The new equipment is expected to be delivered, tested and operational soon. They did report, however, that a pair of PEREGRINE FALCONS has returned to their former nest and has laid some eggs at this time. Stay tuned to the website: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/33249.html>

Hudson River Snowy Owl Released



Rescued Snowy Owl moments before its release. Photos by Richard Nadeau

The afternoon of Sunday March 8th was sunny and nearly fifty degrees, but a biting cold wind chilled the small gathering of birdwatchers that came to observe the release of the infamous “Hudson River” SNOWY OWL (see Feathers, Vol. 71 No. 1, “Hudson River Snowy Owl Rescue”) at the Coxsackie Creek Grasslands Preserve. New York State licensed wildlife rehabilitator Kelly Martin was successful in nursing the injured owl back to a healthy weight, and it was ready to be released back to the wild. Rich

Guthrie placed a metal federal ID band on the bird’s leg, so that we might learn where this bird will travel in the future. The owl didn’t seem to mind being worshipped by the small crowd while many pictures were taken just prior to the release. Kelly decided to feed the bird one last meal in captivity, and with the assistance of fellow rehabilitator Michele Segerberg, a three-course mouse dinner was devoured with great relish. Once the moment of truth had arrived, the bird’s flight was powerful and flawless, a relief considering it had not been outside a cage in several months. Many thanks to Kelly, Michele and Rich for sharing this happy ending with adoring fans!

— Elayne Ryba



Upcoming Field Trips

APRIL

VISCHER FERRY (evening)

Sunday, April 5

Coordinator: John Hershey
371-3114

The main focus of this trip will be spring waterfowl. We will search for American Wigeon, Green & Blue-winged Teal, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Wood Duck, Ring-necked duck and Pied-billed Grebe. Possible songbirds include Palm Warbler and Rusty Blackbird. We will linger until a little after dusk to listen for American Woodcock. Bring a flashlight and meet at the main entrance at 5:15 p.m.

BLACK CREEK MARSH- WILD TURKEY PARCEL (morning)

Saturday, April 11

Coordinator: Jennifer Hamilton
861-8202

DEC and the Wild Turkey Federation maintain this parcel adjacent to the marsh which provides a different approach to the marsh and the adjoining areas. Birds of interest seen and heard here include Golden & Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Eastern Towhee, Ruffed Grouse, Brown Thrasher and Pileated Woodpecker as well as Field, Swamp and White-crowned Sparrows. In addition to Wood Duck and Green-winged Teal, we'll also be watching for early migrating warblers. Blue-winged, Yellow-rumped and Black-throated Green Warblers are found here, and on one occasion, a Hooded Warbler.

Waterproof boots are recommended as the trail goes down to the edge of the marsh. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the parking lot approximately 1/4 mile west of the Voorheesville Public Library on the south side of School Rd. (County Rt. 209). Note: The parking area has a large sign, but it is somewhat hidden behind a row of trees.

WOODCOCK AT FIVE RIVERS

Thursday, April 23 (evening)

Coordinator: Craig Thompson
475-0291 (daytime)

During a meandering walk to the Woodcock site, we will look for other early spring birds. Woodcock flight time is expected to be around 8pm. Bring binoculars and a flashlight if you have them.

Meet at 7:00 p.m. at the Five Rivers Interpretive Building.

MAY

PEEBLES ISLAND STATE PARK

Saturday, May 1 (morning)

Coordinator: Gary Goodness
862-9260
goodness@nycap.rr.com

Peebles Island in early May is an ideal environment to watch the spring migration. The variety of habitat insures a plethora of birds; expect to see songbirds, sandpipers, waterfowl and the rest of an early mix of migrants. Meet in the parking lot on Peebles Island at 8:30 a.m. There may be a parking fee of \$6.00 so ride with a friend if you can.

MAGEE MARSH AND OHIO SONGBIRD MIGRATION

(out of state-overnight)

Thursday, May 7 - Sunday, May 10

Coordinators Tim Colborn (primary)
& Leaders: (440) 979-9972
gtcolborn@wowway.com
Gerry Colborn
237-3898
gcolborn@nycap.rr.com
James Colborn

*Maximum group size: 10 Trip is limited to
HMBC members & their guests*

Reservations by March 15

The Magee Marsh Wildlife Area is one of the Midwest's premier songbird migration sites. A forested beach ridge located on Magee provides a critical feeding and resting habitat for more than 150 species of migrating songbirds, including 36 species of warblers, as they rest and refuel before continuing on their journey. The tentative plan is to spend the better part of two days on the boardwalk here, taking short distance trips to Ottawa NWR and Metzger Marsh for water and shorebirds. At the end of day 2, we'll travel east to Cleveland. Our plan for day 3 is to bird Cuyahoga Valley

National Park south of Cleveland looking for more songbirds including nesting Cerulean Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler and Red-headed Woodpecker (birds not typically found at Magee). Day 4 morning birding will allow for additional lakeshore hotspots or rarity chases near Cleveland. While primarily a birding trip, leaders will be open to searching for and identifying mammals, amphibians, reptiles, butterflies, dragon & damsel flies and other critters. Assistance with finding lodging will be happily provided by the primary leader. For

participants who wish to travel by plane, flights should be arranged into and out of Cleveland. Ground transportation will NOT be provided. All major car rental agencies are available in Cleveland (Cleveland is approximately 450 miles from Albany).

BIRDS & BREAKFAST AT FIVE RIVERS

Saturday, May 9 (morning)

Coordinators: Scott Stoner &
Denise Hackert-Stoner
785-6760
scottjstoner@aol.com

Our annual celebration of the arrival of spring will be held at Five Rivers on Game Farm Rd. in Delmar. The center has an excellent trail system through a variety of habitats. You can expect to see and hear a number of resident species and migrants, including Canada Geese with their newly hatched goslings, Eastern Bluebirds feeding their young, and (hopefully) a number of different warblers. An early group will meet in the parking at 6:00 a.m.; the building will open at 6:45 a.m. with coffee flowing, and groups will leave at 7:00 a.m. & 8:00 a.m. You may join one of these groups or go out on your own as we try to find as many species as possible. We'll rally at 10:30 a.m. for coffee, doughnuts, bagels, fresh fruit, (free, but donations will be accepted) and a list compilation.

VISCHER FERRY MIGRANTS

Sunday, May 10 (morning)

Coordinators: Gregg Recer &
Cathy Graichen
899-2678
gregg.recer@verizon.net

This is one of the club's most popular spring trips. We will explore this varied site for warblers and other songbirds as well as marsh species including rails and bitterns. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the main entrance next to the Whipple Bridge.

CENTURY RUN

Saturday, May 16 (*all day!*)

Compiler: Bob Yunick
1527 Myron St.
Schenectady, NY 12309
377-0146

Coordinator: Larry Alden
861-6087
overlook@nycap.rr.com

Each group must stay together and jointly identify species reported. Reports must be mailed to the compiler by May 31 in order to be counted. Also please call or e-mail Birdline with the total species and highlights for your group.

NOTE: You can contact Larry Alden if you have any questions or need suggestions. Also let Larry know if you need people to fill out a group or are interested in joining a group; he may be able to make a match.

NOTE: The compiler must have your results by Saturday May 23 in order for them to be counted and published in Feathers.

GRAFTON LAKES STATE PARK

Saturday, May 23 (*morning*)

Coordinators: Phil & Marge Whitney
477-9050
philandmargwhitney@earthlink.net

Grafton Lakes State Park and the surrounding area include deciduous and coniferous woodland, open fields, marshes, ponds, and a large bird-rich patch of highbush blueberries. Seventy or more bird species are present in summer, including as many as 12-15 warbler species. Most of these should be present in and staking out nesting sites by this time. The trip will include several short walks totaling less than 2 miles. Bring bug repellent, as black flies will be out. Meet at 7:15 am.

Directions: Take State Rt. 2 about 14 miles east from Troy to about 1/2 mile west of Grafton Village. Turn Right at the loop that leads to the main park entrance and park off to the side before reaching the flashing light.

DEER MOUNTAIN NATURE TRAIL

Sunday, May 24 (*morning*)

Coordinators: David & Sandy Martin
765-4982

Deer Mountain Nature Trail is a protected preserve on the Blue Circle Cement property in Coeymans. Worm-eating Warbler has been found there for at least the last three years, and a good variety of woodland birds including orioles, tanagers, vireos, warblers, thrushes & flycatchers nest there. The trail passes along the edge of a swamp and is likely to be muddy, especially if the weather has been wet, so wear appropriate footwear. Meet at the Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk High School on Rt. 9W at 7:00 a.m.

ALBANY PINE BUSH PRESERVE

Saturday, May 30 (*morning*)

Coordinator: Neil Gifford
456-0655 (office)
ngifford@tnc.org

The Albany Pine Bush is one of the best remaining examples of a globally-rare inland pitch pine scrub oak barrens and is also one of the best places in upstate NY for a wide variety of shrubland and successional birds. The Preserve is excellent habitat for Prairie Warblers, Brown Thrasher and Eastern Towhee as well as Nashville Warbler. The Preserve also supports other forest types and wetlands, where we can expect Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Warbling Vireos and a variety of warblers. An early start is important for midsummer birding, so plan to meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Discovery Center 195 New Karner Rd. Albany. We hope you'll join us in searching for some of the 90+ bird species documented in the preserve.

JUNE

June or July

We are trying to coordinate an evening trip through the Pine Bush Discovery Center to look for Whippoorwills in the Albany Pine Bush Preserve. We will post any information on the club website (www.hmbc.net) and, if time allows, in *Feathers*, so check these places for details later.

ROUND LAKE AND THE ANTHONY KILL PADDLING TRIP

Saturday, June 6 (*morning*)

Coordinators: Scott Stoner & Denise 785-6760
scottjstoner@aol.com

We will paddle about 4 miles (2 miles across a deep lake & 2 miles in a stream) looking for cormorants, breeding songbirds and woodpeckers. The main goal will be to observe the activity at a Great Blue Heron rookery. The trip is limited to 6 boats and is restricted to HMBC members and their guests. Participants must bring their own canoe or kayak, paddles and life jackets (PFD) and must wear their PFD at all times. Reservations must be made in advance no later than Thursday, June 4. Contact the coordinators for starting place & time & further information.

SARATOGA NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK & BATTLEFIELD

Sunday, June 7 (*morning*)

Coordinators: Bernie & Chris Grossman
399-9159
bgrossman@nycap.rr.com

We will initially walk along the tour road looking for resident warblers, vireos, sparrows and other birds. We will then walk across the fields to join the road and finally return via the Wilkerson Trail.

This will give us a good exposure to woods and fields with a wide variety of species. The walk will take about four hours. Wear waterproof hiking boots, hats and sunscreen and bring bug repellent.

Meet at 8:00 am at the Battlefield's main parking lot.

CHERRY PLAINS STATE PARKSat June 13 (*morning*)

Coordinators: Phil & Marge Whitney
477-9050
philandmarjwhitney@
earthlink.net

Cherry Plains is situated on the Rensselaer Plateau of the Capital District. The relatively high elevation, cool climate and a variety of forested and wetland habitats make this a good area for northern species. Nesting species include Least Flycatcher, Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow, Scarlet Tanager, Common Raven, Broad-winged Hawk, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Black and White, Yellow-rumped and Canada Warblers, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Veery, Hermit Thrush and Winter Wren also nest here. An early start is important for midsummer birding, so plan to meet at 7:00 am at the parking lot at the Hannaford market on the right side of Rt 43 just past the intersection of Rt 150 in West Sand Lake.

PAPSCANEE ISLAND PRESERVESat June 20 (*morning*)

Coordinators: Don & Nancy Gresens
370-3923
dgresens@nycap.rr.com

This field trip will take us to the different habitats of Papscaanee Island Preserve consisting of deciduous forest, cultivated farmland and freshwater marshes where we will see a variety of bird species.

Swallows, herons and Wood Ducks can be observed in the wetland areas. Chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and woodpeckers are found in the forest as well as Eastern Wood-Pee-wee and Great-crested Flycatcher. Veery, Wood Thrush, and American Redstarts are common. Other summer birds include Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Black and White, and Blue-winged Warblers, Warbling and Red-eyed Vireos, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Meet at 7:00 am in the K-mart on Rts. 9 & 20 in East Greenbush since parking at the preserve is limited.

EMMA TREADWELL THATCHER NATURE CENTERSaturday, June 27 (*morning*)

Coordinator: Ellen Pemrick
452-4284
lmnp@nycap.rr.com

The Emma Treadwell Thatcher Nature Center is located near Thompson's Lake State Park in Albany County. The property offers trails through diverse habitats including woodlands, meadows and fields. We will walk the trails in search of warblers, thrushes, and sparrows. Northern Harrier, Black-billed Cuckoo and Bobolink may also be seen. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the center parking area.

Directions: From Albany, take Exit 4 (Rt 85) off I-90 and continue west for approximately 12 miles to Rt. 157. Bear right onto 157 and continue through Thatcher State Park. After leaving the park, turn right on Ketcham Rd. (Rt 256). Drive 1 mile to Nature Center Way on the left. The center is located at 87 Nature Center Way in Voorheesville. 

Feathers

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