

Feathers

Birding Canopy Tower, Panama *by Gregg Recer*

Cathy and I have been slowly expanding our birding horizons into the tropics for several years now. As idle curiosity with tropical birds has rapidly evolved into something perhaps approaching obsession, I'm constantly on the lookout for new and interesting tropical birding destinations that we can work into our schedule. One of the places that has always sounded particularly intriguing to me is the Canopy Tower, a unique birding lodge located within Soberania National Park on the eastern side of the Panama Canal. I haven't fully researched this claim, but it seems a safe bet that this is only place in existence where one can see things like puffbirds, potoos, antbirds, toucans, tamarin monkeys and sloths while residing in a former military radar facility. With that in mind, Cathy and I spent a week this past July doing

a one-stop tropical birding excursion at the Tower.

We arrived on a non-stop flight from New York City to Panama City, and got through customs and immigration just in time for an intense afternoon downpour. July is in the middle of the rainy or "green" season, although the typical afternoon showers are usually brief and not a big hindrance to productive birding. The lodge driver had us loaded up quickly and we were out of town and at the lodge in only about 90 minutes.

We headed immediately upstairs to our room on the third floor and then to the lounge/dining area on the fourth floor. Canopy Tower is built like a giant tin can topped with a huge yellow soccer ball. It looks kind of weird and utilitarian from the outside, but it's been nicely redesigned inside.



The Canopy Tower

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Sunrise over the rainforest from the Tower

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President's Corner



National Audubon runs the annual Christmas Bird Counts during the last two weeks of December and the first week of January. HMBC sponsors three counts in the Capital District, and several more are run by other groups in Region 8. Chris and I participated in our first count at the end of 1974. We covered portions of Glenville and Scotia including the area north of Collins Lake. The most exciting part of this was the participation of our son Josh who was about five weeks old. Handling binos was difficult, since he was riding in a snugly facing Chris' chest. The coordinators of the counts are listed on the Club's website and trip list. Be sure to contact them if you want to participate in a count.

The Board and its committees are actively pursuing Club issues. A group has begun the move to a paperless organization. Trips for next year have been planned. The trip schedule is included with this issue of *Feathers*; and work is proceeding on policies and other subjects. We need volunteers to join Club governance. Please speak up and take part. My contact information as well as those of the other board and committee chairs is list on the website and in this issue.

Our best for the New Year and be sure to enjoy the Club's programs and trips.

– Bernie Grossman
President, HMBC 

HMBC Contact Information

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E-mail: contact@hmhc.net

HMBC website: <http://hmhc.net>

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 p.m., 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

Pine Bush Preserve

October 1, 2011

The Pine Bush/Great Dune bird trip was a cool damp success. Six birders braved the weather to spend the morning between raindrops to find 34 species. The main rewards were three mixed foraging flocks of chickadees and warblers. Poor lighting conditions made IDs difficult, but the group managed to see PINE, PALM, YELLOW-RUMPED, BLACK-THROATED GREEN, and MAGNOLIA WARBLERS. Other notable sightings included a five pack of woodpeckers, missing only the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. EASTERN TOWHEES were seen and heard. An EASTERN BLUEBIRD was seen among a very large flock of CHIPPING SPARROWS (100+). Upon returning to the parking lot we were greeted with a departing flyover and “caw” of a RAVEN.

— Don Gresens

Brave Battlefield Birders

October 2, 2011

A small yet intrepid and determined group of birders gathered at the Saratoga Battlefield this morning for what we had hoped would be a rain-free outing. The weather held off until, of course, we started out behind the Visitor Center and attempted to walk the Wilkinson Trail. Tom Williams kept promising that it was only a “small band” of rain and that it would stop in “two minutes”... some of us concluded – two hours later – that he would make a most excellent meteorologist.

The rain drove us back to the pavilion at the back of the VC, where we perched (bird pun!) at some picnic tables looking out towards the woods and fields. From there, we were able to dryly, if not coldly, get some nice looks at some CFWs (confusing fall warblers).

— Don Gresens

Our list from this morning:

CANADA GOOSE, TURKEY VULTURE, AMERICAN KESTREL, DOWNY WOODPECKER, HAIRY WOODPECKER, NORTHERN FLICKER, EASTERN PHOEBE, BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE, TUFTED TITMOUSE, WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH, RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET, EASTERN BLUEBIRD, AMERICAN ROBIN, BLUE-HEADED VIREO, RED-EYED VIREO, BLACKPOLL WARBLER, COMMON YELLOWTHROAT, SCARLET TANAGER, NORTHERN CARDINAL, COMMON GRACKLE, AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

Despite wishing for same, none of the park service rangers built us a fire or brought us the makings for s'mores. Still, they waived the fee for us, which was pretty nice.

So a big thank you to all of you who braved the elements (and, as several mentioned, at least it wasn't sleet or snow) to come out this morning.

Happy birding,

— Marne Onderdonk

Woodlawn Preserve

October 15, 2011

A group of HMBC birders (11) roamed the wilds of the Woodlawn Preserve even though the weather was a concern. Dark overcast made some early IDs difficult due to the poor light. About a half hour into the trek things began to improve and picking up colors (etc.) was easier. We had a few highlights with PALM and YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS continuing to be seen. Other sightings included BROWN CREEPERS, RUBY-CROWNED and GOLDEN KINGLETS, BELTED KINGFISHER, and BLUE-HEADED VIREO. Total species seen was a respectable 29. A nice walk was had even though we were dismayed at the end by the noise and reckless riding of a couple dirt bikes (dirt bikes are illegal in the Preserve).

HMBC Trip to Collins Lake

November 12, 2011

On a nice cool Saturday morning 11 Club members braved the Collins Lake flood plain. The first part of the walk was a surprise because we were able to drive down to the beach. Previously that part of the lake access had been closed due to flood damage. Unfortunately, the group could not find much of interest. CANADA GOOSE, RING-BILLED GULLS, COMMON MERGANSER and a few MALLARDS were all that could be found. Moving on to the East side of the lake, we did find a couple of our target birds. The previously reported BUFFLEHEAD and AMERICAN COOT were found. The amount of waterfowl on the lake was scarce, but some very nice looks at HOODED MERGANSERS were had by all. Continuing on to the bike path on the north side of the Mohawk River did not add many birds of interest. Other years have produced a lot of activity in this area. This day didn't live up to expectations with a total species count of 29. We did have a flyover of 3 NORTHERN HARRIERS circling together and a bit later a few EASTERN BLUEBIRDS were seen flitting and singing. Though birding was a bit slow, the group had a morning trip to remember.

— Don Gresens

**Holiday Party and
Wintering Raptor Program**

Theresa Swenson and

Jenny Murtaugh,

New York State Department of
Environmental Conservation

Monday December 5, 2011,

7:00 p.m.

Five Rivers Environmental
Education Center

Learn about wintering raptors in the grasslands of the greater Capital Region; speakers will be from DEC and will cover results of surveys and volunteer opportunities for the upcoming winter. Speakers will include Theresa Swenson and Jenny Murtaugh of DEC.

Join us at our annual Holiday Party (bring a dessert or snack to share if you wish) for a discussion of local grasslands and their role in protecting raptor populations.

The Fort Edward Grasslands, Coxsackie Grasslands, and Montgomery County Grasslands serve as critical wintering and migratory areas for raptor species such as the NYS endangered Short-eared Owl, NYS threatened Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, and Snowy Owl. This presentation will provide a brief overview of general information concerning the described areas. It will also review past and current DEC research and monitoring that includes coordinated surveys, along with the capture and tracking of Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers. Current threats to these areas, successes in habitat protection, future conservation goals, and volunteer opportunities will also be discussed.

Grassland habitat is one of the most imperiled habitats in New York State and the larger Northeast region. With large continuous grasslands becoming increasingly rare, efforts are being made to protect these unique and exceptional resources, including grasslands near the Capital Region. The Fort Edward Grassland Complex is the largest remaining intact grassland in eastern New York. Located in western Washington County, it is an approximately 13,000-acre mosaic of actively cultivated farmland, fallow grassland, wetland, and woodlots. The core of this area was designated an Important Bird Area by Audubon New York in 1997. The Otsquago Creek Grasslands in western Montgomery County are an agricultural area that includes over 2,000 acres of extensive open fields used by wintering raptors. The Coxsackie Flats are a wide extent of over 4,000 acres of cultivated farmland and fallow grassland, interspersed with developed areas and woodlands. The Coxsackie Creek Grassland Preserve, owned by the Greene Land Trust, encompasses an assemblage of over 300 acres of protected grasslands located primarily in Coxsackie with the potential to extend into New Baltimore and Athens in Greene County.

Theresa Swenson is currently the Landbird Technician for the Wildlife Diversity Unit based out of DEC headquarters in Albany. She began with the DEC in 2006 in the Natural Resources Damage Assessment Unit and conducted work related to the effects of PCBs on songbirds, waterfowl, and aquatic invertebrate species. More recently

she has done work related to the Golden-winged Warbler, wintering raptors, and breeding grassland bird conservation.

Glenn Hewitt is currently the Endangered Species Technician for the Wildlife Diversity Unit based out of DEC headquarters in Albany. He began with DEC in 2004 with the Endangered Species Unit and has done work related to many rare raptors such as Bald Eagles, Short-eared Owls, and the Peregrine Falcon. He also assists with Karner Blue Butterfly conservation efforts and researching the effects of PCBs on mink and otter.

Jenny Murtaugh is currently a Wildlife Technician in Region 4. She started working for DEC during her senior year of Wildlife Management at SUNY Cobleskill in 2009. She has done work through DEC, the NYS Museum, and SUNY ESF related to coyote genetics and ecology, fishers, Karner blue butterflies, frosted elfins, songbirds and winter raptors. She presented her own ocelot research at the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Agencies Conference in Lancaster, PA in April 2009 and at The Wildlife Society's 16th Annual Conference in Monterey, CA in September 2009.

Upcoming HMBC Programs

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Reservations due for Campfire & Owling

December 7, 2011 - 7:00 p.m.

Contact Scott Stoner & Denise

Hackert-Stoner: 765-6760

scottjstoner@aol.com

Campfire and Owling at Five Rivers

Scott Stoner & Denise

Hackert-Stoner

Saturday, December 10, 2011,
4:00 p.m.

Five Rivers Environmental
Education Center

*Joint program with the Audubon Society
of the Capital Region*

Great Horned Owls are often heard calling around dusk at this time of year in the deep pine woods at Five Rivers. In this special joint program, we will meet at 4 p.m. at the visitor center at Five Rivers for a brief introduction, then walk about 1 mile out to a woods that has been productive for owls in the past. Along the way or on the way back, stop around our blazing campfire and enjoy a hot dog and a cup of hot chocolate. The owls are not guaranteed, but a good time is nearly a certainty in this popular event on the HMBC schedule.

Reservations are needed in advance so we know how much food to buy. Contact either Scott or Denise.

Schenectady Christmas Bird Count

Bill Lee, leader

December 17, 2011, 7:00 a.m.

Contact coordinator for more information. HMBC members will find the coordinator's email address and phone number in the Members' Directory on the HMBC web site .

The Southern Adirondack Audubon Society needs your help to protect the Fort Edward Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA).

The Fort Edward Grassland IBA is a 13,000-acre agricultural grassland, the largest intact grassland habitat of its size in eastern New York. It is a vital area for declining grassland birds such as Eastern Meadow Lark, Bobolink, Short-eared Owl, Northern Harrier, and Upland Sandpiper.

Currently, this area is threatened with a 352-lot subdivision at the center of

the IBA. Called Killian's View, this development will impact over 245 acres. While a minimal mitigation plan has been submitted, it fails to compensate for the hundreds of acres it will destroy, as some grassland birds need over 100 acres of intact habitat to nest and breed.

Please help the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society in their effort to save the Fort Edward Grasslands IBA from this residential development. Check their website at www.southernadironackaudubon.org for the announcement of the 30-day

comment period, where you can find information on where to mail your letters concerning the Killian's View Residential Subdivision, the mitigation plan, and the issuing of the take permit, called Article 11.

You may also contact SAAS's president, Ms. Pat Fitzgerald, at 79 Laurel Lane, Queensbury, NY 12804, or by email at audubon@netheaven.com

Thank you!

— Patti Packer,
Conservation Chair 

A Look at the HMBC Annual Budget

HMBC President Bernie Grossman's front-page article in the August issue of *Feathers* about the Club's plan to "go paperless" ruffled some feathers (sorry) and raised questions about our finances. This article is an effort to clarify matters by explaining the Club's budget and some of the financial issues that impacted our decision.

For some of you, especially current and former Board members, the topics discussed in this article may be "old news," but I hope that it will make all HMBC members more informed about the financial affairs of the Club.

Some Basics

First of all, it bears repeating that the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club, Inc. is a *member-supported organization*, with no paid staff. All of us, from Board members and committee chairs to field trip leaders, are volunteers. Each issue of *Feathers*, from the time it is written to the day it appears in your mailbox, involves a *minimum* of five people to produce and distribute.

Although we rely on volunteer labor, many aspects of the Club's operations,

including our educational mission, have associated costs: e.g., printing *Feathers*, and paying program speakers. We also have regular expenses that one would find in any organization like insurance, postage, and web site hosting.

As the owner of the 100+-acre Reist Sanctuary, which was conveyed to us in 1965, the Club is responsible for ongoing property maintenance and repairs. The ownership of property is somewhat unique among bird clubs in New York State. Despite the use of volunteer labor, the cost of supplies (including lumber for bridges that cross wet areas) is not insignificant. Over the last six years, the Club has spent nearly \$8,000 on repairs and trail improvements at Reist Sanctuary.

Income

For the sake of simplicity, in the sections that follow, I have excluded the income and expenses associated with our Annual Dinner Meeting from all calculations. This event, which takes place in April, is generally self-funding: meals are paid for in advance by participating members, with the exception of the speaker (and

his or her guest) and recipients of the Sam Madison Award, whose dinners are paid for by the Club.

It should come as no surprise that the largest share of the Club's income comes from membership dues. Membership is on a calendar-year basis, as opposed to our budget, which is based on fiscal years (April 1 to March 31). This impacts the budgeting process. The fact that all dues are payable at the same time also presents a challenge, as it means that most of our income is received in the first quarter of the year, while our expenses are incurred *throughout* the year.

Another issue is the number of *life* memberships, some of which were purchased decades ago. We currently have more than 60 lifetime members whose accounts are considered "paid in full," although we encourage annual donations. This affects how much we can collect from dues.

Other sources of income include contributions made towards the upkeep of Reist Sanctuary and the Sam Madison Memorial Fund, interest on the Club's savings account and certificates of

deposit, and sales of our bird-finding book, *Birding New York's Hudson-Mohawk Region*. Book sales were highest when the revised edition was first published and have started to wane.

Occasionally, HMBC receives contributions from friends and family and the estates of members who have passed away. In 2010, for example, the Club received a bequest of \$1,000 from the estate of Tom Palmer that will be earmarked by the Board at a future date.

In 2005 and 2006, HMBC was the beneficiary of more than \$10,000 in wetlands mitigation fees paid by local developers as a requirement of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Board of Directors at the time voted to use these funds specifically for capital projects at Reist Sanctuary. The current balance of our Sanctuary Mitigation Fund is about \$3,000.

To sum up, between April 1, 2006 and March 31, 2011, the Club's income averaged \$8,564 annually, broken down as follows:

- 63% - membership dues
- 12% - book sales
- 9% - bank interest
- 6% - contributions to the Sam Madison Award Memorial Fund
- 6% - contributions to Reist Sanctuary
- 4% - other income

Expenses

Turning to the other side of the ledger, three items stand out: printing, postage, and insurance. Between 2006 and 2011, these items averaged \$5,000 per year, comprising *more than half* of the Club's expenses. Most of the printing and part of the mailing costs are associated with *Feathers* – hence the Board's decision to move to a “paperless” newsletter. The Club's insurance premium is currently \$1,000 a year, a 10% increase over what we paid in 2006 but consistent with what other organizations like ours pay.

Other significant expenses include speaker fees (or honoraria) and refreshments for our monthly programs; phone charges for the operation of Birdline; property maintenance and a Town water assessment for Reist Sanctuary; registration of participants in the Christmas Bird Counts that take place in our region; and financial support as a partner organization of the New York State Young Birders Club.

The Club spends about \$350 for the Sam Madison Award, which was established to encourage and enhance the education of students and teachers about birds, bird habitats, and bird conservation. This is a monetary award, but we also provide each recipient with a plaque to honor his or her efforts.

These expenses are essential to the activities that HMBC offers and reflect our mission to “foster and inculcate and disseminate a knowledge of and appreciation for birds and bird lore and life,” as stated in our by-laws.

To sum up, the Club's expenses averaged \$9,817 per year between April 1, 2006 and March 31, 2011, distributed as follows:

- 32% - printing
- 11% - insurance
- 9% - book printing (incurred in 3 out of 5 years)
- 9% - mailing and postage
- 8% - program
- 6% - Reist Sanctuary maintenance and repairs
- 5% - Birdline
- 4% - Reist Sanctuary water assessment
- 3% - Christmas Bird Count registrations
- 13% - other expenses

Account Balances

Are we in a financial hole? No. As the above analysis shows, our expenses have exceeded our income over the last five years, requiring the Club to dip into its reserves.

Let's focus on those reserves for a moment. Years before my involvement with HMBC, the Club managed to accumulate some funds primarily from the old Audubon film series, which generated large profits. A portion of the reserves was used to survey Reist Sanctuary prior to the development of the surrounding property.

In April 2005 – the year that I became Treasurer – the Club's account balances totaled \$31,125. This figure was subsequently increased by the fees paid by local developers to fulfill wetland mitigation requirements. Even with the use of our reserves in some years to cover budget shortfalls – and with ongoing improvements and repairs to Reist Sanctuary – our account balances in April 2011 totaled \$34,167. There is no cause for alarm.

Conclusion

The Board of Directors believes that significantly reducing the cost of printing and mailing by converting Feathers to an electronic format will go a long way toward correcting the imbalance that exists in the Club's annual budget. A possible next step might be eliminating the phone service used for Birdline, since most people report their bird sightings online. In the coming months, the Board intends to initiate discussions about how large a cash reserve we need to maintain.

Meanwhile, HMBC dues will remain the same; members will continue to have access to quality field trips and programs, to receive our bimonthly newsletter, to have the opportunity to attend our Annual Dinner Meeting, and to participate fully in birding forums and blogs posted on the Club's website. As always, we welcome your questions and comments.

—Ellen Pemrick, HMBC Treasurer

Reist Sanctuary

Mike Gann, our Steward for the Reist Sanctuary asks that the HMBC membership be advised that a section of the Southern Blue Trail in the Sanctuary has been relocated. A short section of that trail, which used to run right along the back yard property line of several homes in the

Hummingbird Manor development, has been **closed** and is to remain closed, permanently. A new section of trail has been cut and marked. This action was taken, with full HMBC Board approval, as a courtesy to the affected Hummingbird Manor homeowners. The old trail section

has been barricaded with brush and limbs and will be allowed to “grow-in” with vegetation over time. **Please do not** attempt to re-open the old trail – its closure was intended and purposeful, and a replacement trail segment is available. 🍃

Save the Date

Save the date of April 2, 2012 for the club’s Annual Dinner. Details to follow. 🍃

Birding Canopy Tower, Panama — *continued*



Collared Aracari

The key features are the lounge area and the rooftop-viewing platform; both give a 360-degree view into and over the forest canopy. Our first highlight of the day from the lounge area was actually not a bird, but a black howler monkey lounging in a tree right outside at eye level. After getting oriented, we headed topside to get our first views above the forest. The Tower is perched on top of Semaphore Hill and has terrific views in all directions. When it's clear, you can see south to the Centennial Bridge over the canal, as well as up the valley forming the Culebra Cut looking toward the north (it's somewhat disorienting, but the canal actually runs slightly northwest-southeast, not east-west).

You can compile a pretty nice list of birds and other wildlife just hanging out on the Tower platform. The immediate vicinity of the building is almost completely encircled with *Cecropia* trees and their abundant fruit and flowers attract a lot of action. Some common birds we saw there nearly every day included CHESTNUT-MANDIBLED and KEEL-BILLED TOUCANS, COLLARED ARACARI, MEALY and RED-



Geoffrey's Tamarin



White-whiskered Puffbird

LORED PARROTS, COCOA WOODCREEPER, GREEN HONEYCREEPER, BLUE DACNIS, PALM, PLAIN-COLORED and GOLDEN-HOODED TANAGERS and SCARLET-RUMPED CACIQUE. The tremulous calls of GREAT TINAMOUS were regularly heard from the adjacent forest, and the hummingbird feeders outside the Tower entrance were visited by BLUE-CHESTED and VIOLET-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRDS, WHITE-VENTED PLUMELETER and the occasional LONG-BILLED HERMIT. The tower is also a very good viewing point for raptors, with TURKEY and BLACK VULTURES a regular feature, along with other goodies like WHITE HAWK and BAT FALCON.

For a change-of-pace from birds, Black Howlers, Geoffrey's Tamarin Monkey, Two and Three-toed Sloth, Agouti (a large rodent), Green Iguanas and House Geckos are regular visitors around the Tower. Among the more peculiar wildlife sightings there, Cathy discovered a young Fer-de-lance (a pit viper) resting on top of the lodge composting bins, we had bats zooming in through the dining-room windows on a couple of evenings and mysterious emanations from a culvert near the lodge entrance that turned out to be calling Tungara Frogs, which we never

saw but heard at all hours.

The Tower's birding fame is due not only its singular architectural features, but also to its proximity to so much excellent lowland rainforest habitat. That is partly a side effect of the history of the canal area. Soberania National Park was established largely to protect the watershed of the Chagres River. The Chagres is the primary water supply for the entire canal system, so maintaining its quantity and quality is critically important and this means a huge area of protected forest has been set aside along the east side of the canal. A lot of that forest might be essentially inaccessible to birders and other casual visitors without another somewhat quirky historical side effect. The northern end of the park is traversed by a single road. It was originally built to service an oil pipeline built by the US military to provide the former Canal Zone with fuel in the event that the canal was ever attacked. The pipeline was never actually used and was eventually abandoned, but "el camino de oleoducto" – pipeline road – remains as a fabulous and easily accessed trail through the rainforest that has been referred to as the single best birding location in the neotropics

*Three-toed Sloth*

There's always going to be something worth looking at when birding pipeline, but the thing that you really want is to run into an Army Ant swarm. Birding ant swarms in the neotropics is sort of like birding the best spring or fall migration fallout you can think of up here, only more so. The birds are following these swarms not to eat ants, but to eat all the other things running for their lives from the ants. This can range from other

*Green Iguana*

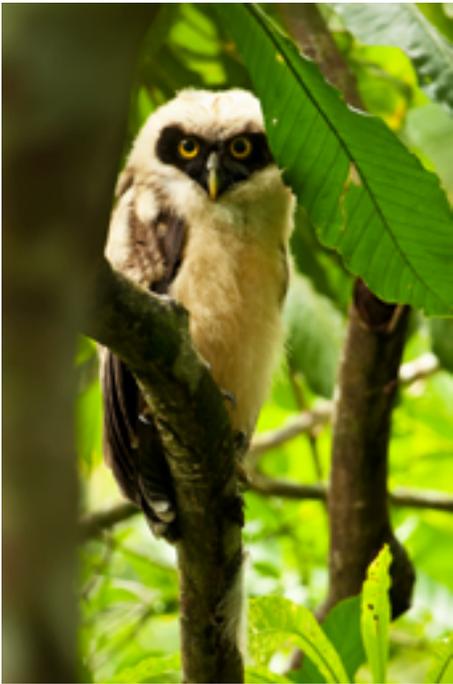
small insects to big spiders to centipedes on up to frogs and lizards. Big swarms will even attract hawks looking to take advantage of all the activity to catch a bird busy following the ants.

On our first morning on pipeline Cathy and I were lucky enough to encounter a huge swarm – the biggest we've seen. We had birded the near end of the road for maybe an hour or so and it had been fairly quiet. Our guide

that day was Carlos Bethancourt – an exceptional birder and well known in the tour company guide community. His ear birding skills are really amazing. He started pointing out a few antbirds – WESTERN SLATY ANTSHRIKE, CHECKER-THROATED and DOT-WINGED ANTWRN – and then as we started scanning through the dense understory more thoroughly, we kept seeing more and different birds. At the same time we began to notice the ants streaming through the leaf litter on the forest floor. This is what you're looking for and we stopped at that spot for what turned into nearly 45 minutes of birding this one swarm.

To begin with, we were seeing birds that are opportunistic ant followers – they will make use of swarms if they stumble on to them, but do not follow them exclusively. In addition to the antwrens, we found WHITE-TAILED and SLATY-TAILED TROGON, a WHITE-WHISKED PUFFBIRD, WHOOPING MOTMOT (recently split from blue-crowned) and PLAIN XENOPS (an ovenbird). Then we started seeing birds that are more obligate ant followers – WHITE-BELLIED, SPOTTED and BI-COLORED ANT BIRDS are the common ones, but we also had nice looks at a NORTHERN BARRED

*Plain-colored Tanager*



Juvenile Spectacled Owl

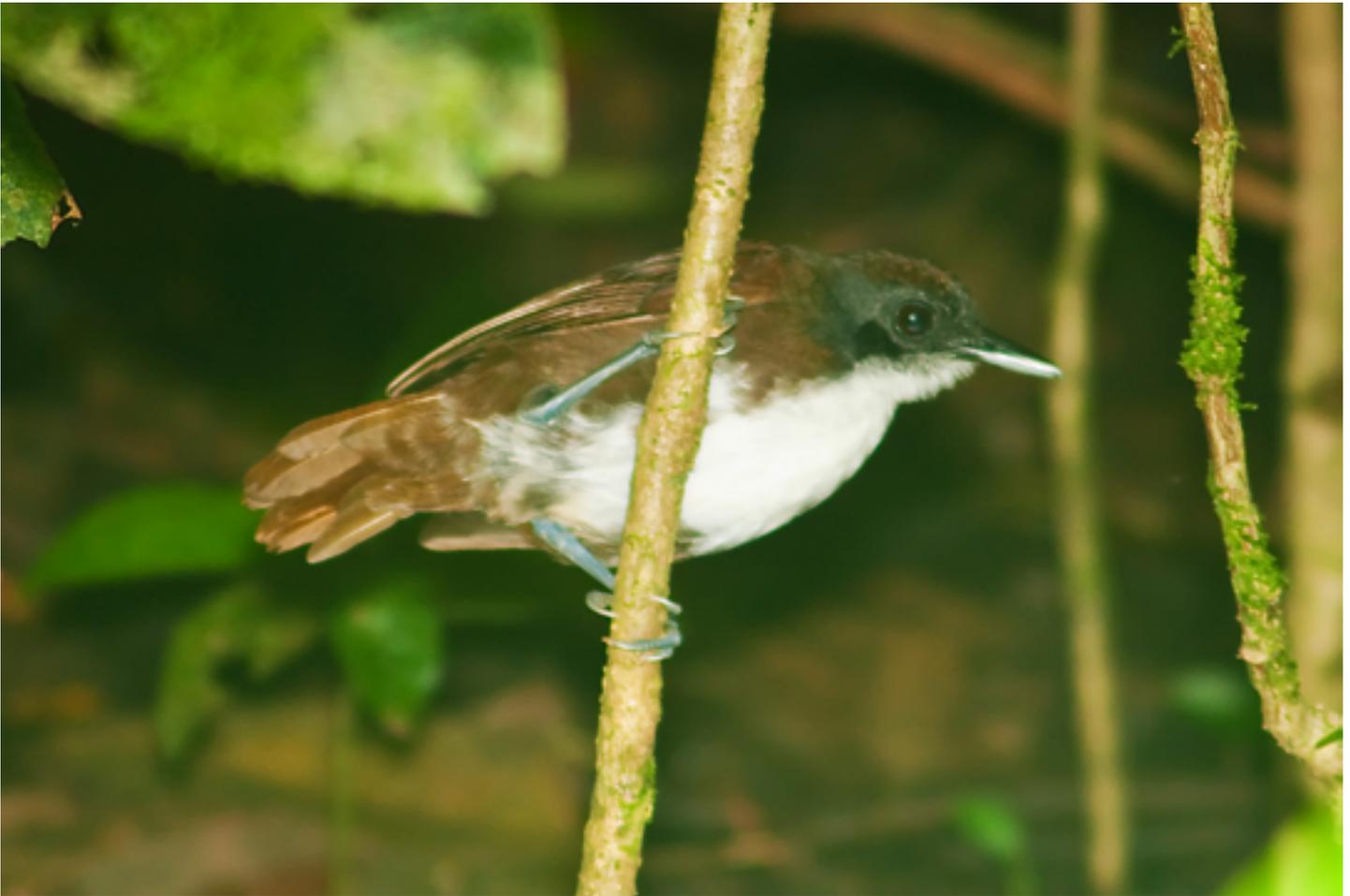
WOODCREEPER and then after a long time following calls that Carlos recognized coming from the dense understory, we had a brief look at an OCELLATED ANTBIRD. Unlike many antbirds that come in fairly plain shades of brown and black, this is a spectacular multi-colored bird and very large compared to other species. Other birds put in an appearance including RED-CAPPED MANAKIN, CINNAMON WOODPECKER, FASCIATED ANTSHRIKE, WHITE-FLANKED ANTWREN, BLACK-FACED ANTHRUSH, RED-THROATED ANT-TANAGER and the remarkable sounding SONG WREN (like some kind of haywire cuckoo clock).

All of that fails to mention the army ants themselves, which are also pretty amazing. This swarm stayed back in the edge of the forest for a long time, but eventually they started moving out

to cross the road in waves. The swarm was so large that we could literally hear the thousands of tiny footsteps as they started marching across the road. Even more amazing was watching other small arthropods running across the road to get out of their way – I've never seen spiders run like that! We kept birding as the ants crossed the road. As long as we avoided standing right in their trails we were in no particular danger. Carlos demonstrated what would happen if you did stand in their path by putting a small branch down into the ant stream. Immediately mobs of ants began scaling the branch and each other. He lifted the tip of the branch off the ground a few inches and the ants kept climbing on each other, creating a living ant bridge from the ground to the twig so that more ants could continue their incessant search upwards.



Snowy-bellied Hummingbird

*Bi-colored Antbird*

All of this in only one morning on pipeline. We spent another whole day later in the trip birding a much longer part of the road. Although we did not have any ant swarms that day, we still totaled 70 species including 5 hawks, SCALED- and SHORT-BILLED PIGEONS, BROAD-BILLED MOTMOT, 8 species of hummingbirds, 5 trogons, 2 puffbirds, BLUE COTINGA, PURPLE-THROATED FRUITCROW, BLACK-CROWNED TITYRA, BLACK-CHESTED JAY and YELLOW-RUMPED CACIQUE. This is one fabulous forest birding spot.

As great as pipeline is, the Tower packs all kinds of other habitat areas into a full week birding package. We covered wetland areas, dry tropical forest, high elevation forest at Cerro Azul bordering Chagres National Park, open garden-type habitat and forest roads and trails right around the lodge, both during the day and at night. Among the many birding highlights were SPECTACLED OWL and CHOCO SCREECH OWL, GREATER ANI, several parrot species, COMMON and GREAT POTOOS and

remarkable totals of 21 tanagers and 25 tyrant flycatchers. An afternoon spent at the Panama Canal visitor center at the Miraflores Locks even had magnificent frigatebirds, along with a really excellent presentation of canal history and a chance to watch operation of the canal locks in action. All told, we saw a total of precisely 200 bird species in a week of birding, all from a single, very convenient base at the Tower. Safe to say that we'll be back. 🍃



Swarming army ants



The Canal's Miraflores locks in action

DECEMBER**RESERVATIONS FOR
CAMPFIRE AND OWLING**

Wednesday, December 7

**CAMPFIRE AND OWLING
AT FIVE RIVERS**

Saturday, December 10

Albany County; late afternoon/
evening

*Joint program with the Audubon Society
of the Capital Region*

Coordinators: Scott Stoner &
Denise Hackert-Stoner
765-6760

scottjstoner@aol.com

Great Horned Owls are often heard calling around dusk at this time of year in the deep pine woods at Five Rivers. In this special joint program, we will meet at 4 p.m. at the visitor center at Five Rivers for a brief introduction, then walk about 1 mile out to a woods that has been productive for owls in the past. Along the way or on the way back, stop around our blazing campfire and enjoy a hot dog and a cup of hot chocolate. The owls are not guaranteed, but a good time is nearly a certainty in this popular event on the HMBC schedule. Reservations are needed in advance so we know how much food to buy. Contact either Scott or Denise.

SCHENECTADY**CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**

Saturday, December 17

Coordinator: Bill Lee

**SOUTHERN RENSSELAER
CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**

Monday, December 26

Coordinator: Philip Whitney

**TROY CHRISTMAS BIRD
COUNT**

Saturday, December 31

Coordinator: Larry Alden

JANUARY**NEW YEAR'S DAY BIRD
COUNT AT FIVE RIVERS**

Sunday, January 1

Albany County; morning

Coordinator: Craig Thompson
475-0291 (daytime)

This year marks the 31st Annual New Year's Day Bird Count at Five Rivers. The goal of the count is to identify all the bird species present on January 1st. This also marks the start of the annual bird list. HMBC joins the event again this year and encourages members to participate. Groups will go out at 9:00 a.m. from the Interpretive Building (visitor center), but birders are welcome to come earlier to get a head start. Call ahead to Five Rivers in case of inclement weather.

**RESERVATIONS FOR LONG
ISLAND PELAGIC TRIP**

Sunday, January 1

Coordinator: Bill Lee
374-3426
bileej@hotmail.com

**LONG ISLAND
PELAGIC TRIP**

Saturday, January 7

Coordinator: Bill Lee
374-3426
bileej@hotmail.com

This will be an eight hour trip 8 a.m.- 4 p.m. out of Freeport, Long Island. Cost is \$120. This is an excellent chance to see alcids like razorbill and dovekie, gannet, jaeger and other wintering seabirds. As of this writing (November 20, 2011), details are still being developed, so contact the coordinator soon to get these. A stay near the dock the night before the trip is necessary because we will need to be at the dock well ahead of time. Warm, wind- and water-proof clothing required.

**ANNUAL STATE
WATERFOWL COUNT**

Saturday, January 14
morning/all day

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

On the local segment of this statewide event, participants will count waterfowl and other birds on the Hudson River between North Troy and Hudson Falls.

Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the Hannaford parking lot on the east end of the North Troy-Waterford Bridge (NY Route 4).

**RESERVATIONS FOR CAPE
ANN & NEWBURYPORT/
PLUM ISLAND TRIP**

Reservations due January 20 for
trip February 18-20

Coordinator: Bernie Grossman
518-399-9159
bgrossman@nycap.rr.com

**BIRDING BY SNOWSHOE
AT FIVE RIVERS**

Saturday, January 28

Albany County; morning

*Joint trip with the Audubon Society of
the Capital District*

Coordinator: Craig Thompson
475-0291 (daytime)

Join Craig for a special outing of birding by snowshoe. Meet at the Visitor Center at 9 a.m. for a brief introduction to snowshoeing, then strap on the waffle stompers and go over the meadow and through the woods in search of winter specialties. We will go afoot if there is insufficient snow. Snowshoes are available at Five Rivers for those who need them. Please call the center by January 25 to register.

FEBRUARY

MOHAWK RIVER/COHOES TO CRESCENT

Saturday, February 11
Albany County; morning
Coordinator: Bill Lee
374-3426

bileej@hotmail.com

This area, including Cohoes Falls and Simmons Island, offers a great opportunity to study gulls and waterfowl that winter along the Mohawk River. We will look for Glaucous, Iceland and Lesser Black-backed Gulls often present in small numbers in the winter. This trip will be a good introduction to the many fine vantage points along the Mohawk.

Meet at the New York State Dam Recreation area behind the U-Haul Rental in Cohoes at 8:30 a.m. From I-787 going north, turn right onto Route 470 (Ontario Street) in Cohoes. Then turn left onto Clark Ave. and proceed to the end.

CAPE ANN & NEWBURYPORT/PLUM ISLAND

Saturday–Monday, February 18–20
(weekend)
Coordinator: Bernie Grossman
518-399-9159
bgrossman@nycap.rr.com

Cape Ann and the Newburyport/Plum Island, MA, areas are prime winter birding locations. We will spend Saturday on Cape Ann's shoreline looking for white-winged gulls, wintering sea ducks such as Harlequins, scoters, eiders and loons as well as other winter visitors like Purple Sandpipers and Guillemot. Sunday will be spent at Newburyport and Plum Island searching for more sea birds, Harriers, Snowy Owl, etc. Monday morning is catch up time where we will pick up any spots and target species missed. Plan for 2–3

nights in a motel. By Club policy, this overnight trip is for members with non-members accommodated if room is available and with the leader's approval. Contact Bernie Grossman by January 20 to reserve a spot and for housing information.

RESERVATIONS FOR WINTER RARE BIRD TRIP

Reservations due Tuesday, February 21 for February/March trip
Coordinator: Bill Lee
374-3426
bileej@hotmail.com

If any especially rare bird is reported in our general area, we plan to take a trip to look for it. This is usually a day trip, but sometimes requires an overnight stay. To get on the notification list for alert and trip details, contact the coordinator. In 2010, participants have seen Northern Hawk Owl, Ivory Gull and Tufted Duck.

FORT EDWARD and FORT MILLER

Saturday, February 25
Washington County; afternoon through dusk
Coordinator: Gregg Recer
899-2678

gregg_recer@alum.rpi.edu

Short-eared Owls are seen most winters in the Fort Edward Grasslands, an Important Bird Area in Washington County.

Snowy Owls have also been seen here in recent years. Wintering hawks, including Rough-legged, Red-tailed, Northern Harriers and perhaps a Bald Eagle or Peregrine Falcon are another feature of this area. Also, wintering field birds such as Horned Lark, Snow Bunting, and possibly Lapland Longspur and Northern Shrike. Depending on conditions on the river, we may also search for waterfowl along the Hudson in Fort Miller.

Meet at 12:30 p.m. in the Park-and-Ride lot in the Malta Business Park. Coming From the south on I-87 (the Northway), take Exit 12 and stay to the right, heading east on Route 67 toward Route 9. (From the north, go $\frac{3}{4}$ around the traffic circle to head east on Route 67) At the next traffic circle after the highway, take the first right into the business park and turn right again to the parking area. This trip will be practically all car birding, but access can be limited in places, so we will need to carpool in as few cars as possible.

MARCH

WATERFOWL OF THE HUDSON RIVER SOUTH

Sunday, March 4
Greene county; morning
Joint trip with the Alan DeVoe Bird Club
Coordinator: Bill Cook
(518) 851-2678
cook@sunycgcc.edu.

On this spring morning, we will search the Hudson River from Coxsackie to Catskill where waterfowl usually congregate on their way north. There is also a good chance of seeing Bald Eagles.

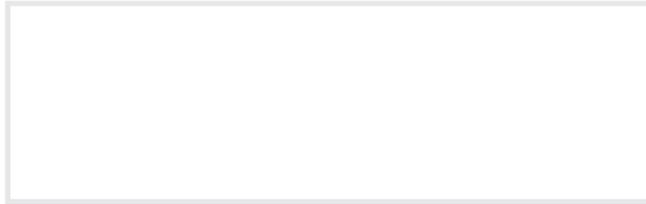
Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Coxsackie Boat Launch. Take the NYSThruway to Exit 21B (Coxsackie - Route 9W), follow 9W south for about 2 miles to Route 385. Go left (east) on Route 385 (Mansion Street) and continue straight to the Hudson River where the road bears left into the boat launch site.

Feathers

Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club
c/o Five Rivers EEC
Game Farm Road
Delmar, NY 12054

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Upcoming Field Trips — *continued*

**WASHINGTON COUNTY
WATERFOWL**

Sunday, March 18
morning

*Joint trip with Southern Adirondack
Audubon*

Coordinators: Joyce Miller
justlookitup@yahoo.com
Lindsey Duval
eccentricvirgo@gmail.com

Register by 7 p.m. on March 17
Join us as we search the Hudson for
migrant waterfowl such as Goldeneye,
Bufflehead, Ring-necked Ducks and
Mergansers. In recent years, Horned
Grebe, Canvasbacks and Tundra
Swans have been lifebirds for many.
Meet at the Schuylerville Central
School on Route 29. The trip is
limited to the first 12 who register.

Contact one of the leaders before 7
p.m. on March 17 to register and for
meeting time. Dress warmly and bring
a beverage/snack, your binoculars
and a scope if you have one. We will
carpool. Trip will end late morning.
You will be contacted if the trip is
cancelled due to weather. 