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Feathers

BIRDING CAMBODIA — (PART 2 OF 2 PARTS)

by Bernie Grossman

(Part 1 of this article was published in the June 2013 issue of Feathers.)

After Tonle Sap Lake we went to an area northwest of Siem Reap called Ang Trepan Thor, a wetland created by the Khmer Rouge using what was essentially slave labor. The people used hand tools to excavate earth to build a large impoundment that was now a rich source for water birds. Workers were organized into small groups that received a cup of rice total per day for the group. We could also see herds of water buffalo grazing in the shallows.

While driving toward Ang Trepan Thor, we passed through a vast flat agricultural area where we found Sarus Crane and Eld's Deer. The Sarus is the world's tallest crane, and its recovery in Cambodia was a major project for Sam Veasna. We couldn't approach the cranes, but we were able to get good views through scopes. Eld's Deer are unique, because they have antlers projecting forward from their foreheads. Their numbers are slowly increasing as a result of conservation efforts, but still are at levels of less than 200.

We left Siem Reap early the next morning for the portion of the trip that went to remote areas of the country. Now we were driven in 4x4 SUVs with our first stop being a grass land known to be the home of the Bengal Florican, a rare species belonging to the bustard family, which is not found in the New World. It was breakfast time when we arrived at the grass land, and the crew set up our breakfast atop a dike. We sat in the camping chairs eating our breakfast and watching for floricans as the crew poured out coffee and tea for us. I vaguely thought how neo-colonial this all was. All I needed was a pith helmet to complete my mental image.

(continued on p 90)

ANNOUNCEMENT - SAVE THE DATE

The Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club is very proud to announce that we are hosting the annual NYSOA conference here in Albany. So mark your calendars now. October 2-4, 2015. That's next year, not this year.

If you'd like to help, just give me a buzz. 518-573-7999.

**Jory Langner
President, HMBC**

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President's Corner

Important News About the Reist Sanctuary

In 1969, 45 years ago, the Schenectady Bird Club (now HMBC) was the recipient of the plot of land now called the Reist Sanctuary. The Sanctuary was given to the Club by Margaret B. Reist in honor of her husband Henry G. Reist.

The Sanctuary has much history with the Club, some of which can be found in the archives of Feathers, available on the Club's website HMBC.net. The Sanctuary is a beautiful 111 acre property in the heart of Niskayuna NY just on the outskirts of Schenectady. If you haven't been there, I suggest spending a few hours walking the trails. The birds might not be as plentiful as some of our region's hot spots, but the Sanctuary offers a woodland retreat for the birds and for many neighbors nearby.

Over the past few months there was some question whether the Reist would remain with the Club and I'd like to take this opportunity to give you the background on what has transpired.

On and off over the past few years, the Club has been in conversation with Union College discussing the possible transfer of ownership. When I became Club president in early 2013, the discussions with Union were on hold and soon thereafter Union informed us that they were not interested in pursuing this. However in December 2013 we were surprised when a number of us were called to a meeting at Union wherein Union expressed a clear interest in pursuing this possibility. At the following board meeting in January 2014, I brought the topic to the board for a decision.

At that time, the board could simply have decided with a simple yes or no vote ... did we want to divest or not? Instead we took this opportunity to look at what possibilities existed for the Club with respect to the Sanctuary. Some of the questions we looked at were:

- What future do we see for the Sanctuary?
- What are the implications for keeping or divesting?
- What other possibilities are there?
- How is the Sanctuary being used by the Club?
- What do the Club's by-laws have to offer us in evaluating this question?
- What are the financial implications?
- What role does the Sanctuary play in the Club?
- Who birds there?
- What birds are seen there?
- What risks are there in keeping the Sanctuary and what are the risks for divesting?

President's Corner(continued)

These discussions spanned six months during board meetings and one lengthy specially scheduled board meeting as well. The discussions were all taken in executive session so that the board would have a chance to discuss the issue internally before bringing it to the full membership.

In the end, the board decided to keep things as they have been, to not divest or seek other options for management of the Sanctuary at this time. The vote was not unanimous. Some of the considerations were:

- For some, there is an undefined, yet clear emotional connection to maintaining the Sanctuary. Presumably the Sanctuary being part of the Club and Club history, gives the Club stature and having the Sanctuary is attractive to potential new members.
- A crucial consideration was that in addition to our ongoing responsibilities, the Club's focus over the next 12 months will be planning and hosting the NYSOA annual meeting to be held in October 2015. Engaging in a simultaneous effort to divest would significantly divide our resources at the board level and for all of our member/volunteers.
- There was general acknowledgement that the Sanctuary was not considered a birding destination. Scant reports on HMBirds and ebird reports confirm this. This led to a discussion of possible futures. In particular, there was considerable support within the board to have the Club own a Sanctuary that would be a true birding destination. This could be achieved by either enhancing the current property or obtaining a different property. Either of these options would involve significant involvement of the Club membership and board, and would probably entail significant fund-raising. These ideas were noted for a future long-range planning effort, to be taken up after the 2015 NYSOA annual meeting.
- Maintenance costs, while significant, are handled within our current budget due to the Club's sound financial cash flow at this time. This had been more of an issue just a few years ago before Feathers was converted to email. In addition, much of the maintenance costs over the past several years has been funded by a mitigation fund which will soon run out. Further, the Club receives some donations specifically in support of the Sanctuary.
- If we decided to divest, questions arise as to our ongoing responsibility to monitor Union's use of the Sanctuary. What responsibilities did the Club take on when we were given the Sanctuary? How do we honor the original intent of the gift and the wishes of Mrs. Reist if we divest?

Had the decision been to divest, our next steps would have been to engage with the members of the Club. Although this was not a consideration for the decision, it was clear that this engagement would have been an essential step.

Once the decision was made to keep things status quo, we informed Union College.

Notes were taken and will be filed for reference should the issue become a consideration sometime in the future.

If you have any questions or comments about this, please contact me or any member of the board.

Jory Langner
 president@[hmbc.net](mailto:president@hmbc.net)

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:

HMBC Contact Information
BIRDLINE of EASTERN NEW YORK:
E-mail: contact@hmbc.net
HMBC website: <http://hmbc.net>

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

Chris Grossman
7 Nott Rd.
 Rexford, NY 12148

Field Trip Reports

Huyck Preserve

Saturday, September 6, 2014

We got lucky with the weather this morning and had a rain-free visit to Huyck Preserve in Rensselaerville, Albany County. We walked from the swimming area on Myosotis Lake to the north end of the lake, and paused there to search the mudflats for shorebirds. We were worried that we wouldn't find any, since the area was being patrolled by a PEREGRINE FALCON, an AMERICAN KESTREL, and a SHARP-SHINNED HAWK. Despite that gauntlet, we did find some shorebirds - KILLDEER, SEMIPALMATED PLOVER, SOLITARY SANDPIPER, LEAST SANDPIPER, SPOTTED SANDPIPER, GREATER YELLOWLEGS, and SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER. An OSPREY was seen fishing near the south end of the lake, and a couple of TURKEY VULTURES cruised over. It was pretty quiet on the songbird front as we continued on to Lincoln Pond. We had three EASTERN WOOD-PEWEES, all together, as well as a LEAST FLYCATCHER and a heard-only EASTERN PHOEBE. The only warblers were one each of BLACK AND WHITE, CHESTNUT-SIDED, AMERICAN REDSTART, and COMMON YELLOWTHROAT. Someone had a RED-EYED VIREO, but even they were hard to come by. Our overall total was 40 species. Thanks to all who participated.

- John Kent

Field Trip Reports..... (continued)

Five Rivers

Sunday, September 14, 2014

An early party of eleven birders rambled around Five Rivers EEC in Delmar for a little over three hours this morning. 53 species were recorded. While waiting for participants to arrive, a few of us heard a late BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO call twice, but we could not locate it. In the middle of the Old Field Trail past the Orchard, we encountered one large group of foraging birds that consisted of warblers, vireos, chickadees and titmice. It took us twenty to thirty minutes to sort through as many of the birds as we could. There were many MAGNOLIA and BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLERS. Other notables were WILSON'S WARBLER, PHILADELPHIA VIREO, NASHVILLE WARBLER, BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER, and PINE WARBLER.

Raptors were present as well, we had AMERICAN KESTREL and MERLIN, SHARP-SHINNED and COOPER'S HAWKS, and a BROAD-WINGED HAWK. A BROWN THRASHER standing in the middle of the Birdwatcher's Path greeted the group. Other notables were GREAT-CRESTED FLYCATCHER, SCARLET TANAGER, and ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK. Thanks very much to all who turned out for the walk, it was a very good time. We had one of those exciting half-hours that will be remembered long after today, where binoculars panned feverishly from one bird to the next, heads whipping around as each new find was called out. Good fun that.

- Tom & Colleen Williams

Upcoming HMBC Programs

Grassland Birds: Monitoring and Management at the Saratoga Battlefield

Speaker: Linda White

October 6, 2014 - 7:00pm - 8:30pm

William K. Sanford Colonie Town Library

629 Albany-Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

Saratoga Battlefield represents important grassland habitat for birds. In this talk, National Park Service ranger Linda White will describe Inventory and Monitoring in conjunction with the Northeast Temperate Network and Management of park fields with a combination of prescribed fire, mowing, and herbicide application.

Linda is a long-time park ranger in the natural resource division at the Battlefield.

Upcoming HMBC Programs..... (continued)

Galapagos

Speakers: Fred and Barbara Nuffer

November 3, 2014 – 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm

William K. Sanford Colonie Town Library

629 Albany-Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

Details to follow.

HMBC Holiday Party & Program: Birding Japan

Speaker: Bernie Grossman

December 1, 2014 – 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm

William K. Sanford Colonie Town Library

629 Albany-Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

Bernie Grossman will speak about birding in Japan. Details to follow.

Upcoming Audubon Programs

A Hitchhiker's Guide to Bird-parasite Coevolution

October 21, 2014 : 7 PM - 8:30 PM

William K. Sanford (Colonie Town) Library 629 Albany Shaker Road, Loudonville, N.Y.

Dr. Chris Harbison, Siena College Biology Department professor of Ornithology and Biology, will present a fascinating program on his research projects that have focused on the ectoparasite community of pigeons and doves. He has found that some of the bird *ectoparasites* "hitchhike" rides to new bird hosts. Chris will also talk about host-parasite co-evolution focusing on adaptations birds have for combating parasites, reciprocal adaptations of parasites for evading host defenses, and how this antagonistic dynamic plays out over long periods of time.

This "What you never really thought were in bird's feathers" program, among other interesting research he has conducted on birds over the years.

On Nature

Where Have All the Monarchs Gone?

by Denise Hackert-Stoner and Scott Stoner

For years and years, one of the highlights of late summer and early autumn has been viewing these beauties as they begin their long migration to their wintering habitat in the mountains of Mexico. Often, while hiking in open fields or along the beach, or even while paddling our canoe along a river or creek, we would enjoy counting the Monarchs we observed. It was fairly easy to spot these relatively large butterflies with their bold pattern of orange and black as they seemed to aimlessly flutter through the air. It was hard to imagine that their flight had any intended pattern to it at all, it appeared to be so random. We would often just shake our heads and wonder at the amazing fact that these fragile-looking insects traveling with no apparent "flight plan" would actually make it to Mexico at all, let alone by the millions and millions.



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But this year has been different. Noticeably different. We have seen one or two Monarchs, but that's about it. Concerned, we have asked friends about their Monarch observations, and the response from them has been similar. And now we are seeing media reports on their decline as well. The news is not good, but all too familiar. According to Monarch Watch (monarchwatch.org) the problem is a combination of habitat loss due to deforestation in their Mexican wintering habitat and development in their summer habitat here in the US. Additionally, the massive loss of Milkweed (the sole food source of the Monarch caterpillar) due to intensive use of herbicides in agriculture since the development of herbicide-resistant strains of corn and soybeans has contributed to the decline of Monarchs.

It is hard to imagine that these beautiful, familiar, and formerly so plentiful butterflies could be in such trouble now. The Monarch is iconic. It is often the first butterfly that children recognize. I remember my own children, when coloring a butterfly, always asking for the orange crayon. Their loss is unthinkable. Even the fact that we need an organization called Monarch Watch is rather startling. But need them we do, and their site is filled with information from Monarch biology, migration, threats, and happily, actions that may help reverse their downward trend. Most importantly, they suggest practical things that we can do to help the Monarchs

On Nature..... (continued)

So we will keep the Monarchs in mind this season. We will consciously look for them as we enjoy the cooling temperatures on our late summer outings. When we see one or two, or hopefully more, we will be happy and wish them well. And in the spring we will plant more milkweed.

Denise and Scott

Reist Sanctuary Report

Our Reist Steward, Mike Gann, reports that in early August this year a section of the long bridge on the Southern Blue Trail collapsed. The two long support beams for the section broke in half, right in the middle of the span. Rather than continue with the "patch-up" repairs this bridge has received over the past couple years, it was decided to replace this 12 foot long section of bridge with all new materials. Subsequently, sufficient pressure-treated (40 year life) support beams and new decking were purchased and a new bridge section constructed and installed. Materials cost was \$165.35, paid out of the COE Mitigation funds assigned HMBC some years ago. The work was completed in mid-August, returning the bridge to full functionality. Although much effort has been expended in attempting to extend the life of this bridge, the longest one in the Reist, it is inevitable that additional such incidents will occur as the original construction materials age. It is the intention of our Steward, with HMBC Board approval, to replace future deteriorated/collapsed sections with all new pressure-treated material.

HMBC and Capital Region Audubon Team Up to Investigate an Airport Management and "Species of Concern" Issue

by John Loz

Back in June, Hudson Mohawk Bird Club (HMBC) member Tom Williams reported seeing Grasshopper Sparrows and other grassland birds singing and displaying at the Albany International Airport (AI). A couple days later, he reported that the grasses alongside the road and in between the tarmacs had been mowed to quite a short length. He and a number of birders were concerned that the airport might not be aware of these NYS DEC 'Species of Concern' there and that these grassland bird nests might be getting mowed over. Tom and other concerned HMBC members brought this to the attention of Audubon NY's Larry Federman and HMBC president Jory Langner to see how to approach the airport about their concerns and more so to understand what kind of processes there were in place at AI to address animals and birds that appear on the property. Some may be deemed threatened and even endangered. Did AI have a plan in place to address these issues?

HMBC and Capital Region Audubon Team Up to Investigate an Airport Management and “Species of Concern” Issue...(continued)



Grasshopper Sparrow

It was suggested that HMBC join forces with ASCR to approach the airport property management staff together. Jory Langner contacted me, John Loz, president of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region (ASCR), about the observations at the airport and to see how both organizations could move forward together, addressing our members concerns regarding, in particular, grassland bird management at AI. I indicated that I had a good relationship with Stephen Iachetta, AI’s Airport Planner, who by the way is also a strong supporter of birds. I reached out to meet with Stephen and he shared with me that when the grasses between the tarmacs and the approaches to the airport runways reach 15 inches, the grass has to be cut per FAA regulations. But, he said, they do not cut the grasses less than 6 inches as that length is a deterrent to flocking birds. Flocking European Starlings and Canada Geese, among others don’t like tall grasses and generally avoid grasses 6 inches and higher. Albany International, in fact, rejected a plan of replacing the natural areas of the airport property with an Astroturf material that many other large airports across the country have installed to cut down on maintenance costs. As I understand it from Stephen, there are administrators and planners within AI that support having the airport property look as natural as possible within the landscape of the surrounding community. And yes, natural grasses are definitely more aesthetically pleasing at an airport, but it is really used as a wildlife management tactic to protect aircraft from collisions with flocking birds. As many of us know, aircraft flying into and through flocks of birds can cause expensive damage to aircraft, but more so, life-threatening situations to the pilots and passengers within the aircraft. The *Miracle on the Hudson* is a particular event that comes to mind.

Mr. Iachetta then directed Jory and me to the local office of the USDA APHIS Wildlife Services in Castleton, NY. AI contracts out the biological expertise and services of the USDA to monitor all wildlife at the airport and make recommendations on how to deal with animals that wander or fly onto the airport property, as well as the flightline approaches of each of the North- South and East-West runways there.

Jory and I then met USDA reps Allen Gosser, Wildlife Biologist and Assistant State Director, and Ken Preusser, District Supervisor who monitors the airport grounds, at their offices on July 10th, 2014. We shared a bit about our individual organization’s history and missions and then specifically about the concerns our memberships had regarding bird species of concern at the airport. We asked Allen and Ken to share with us what their specific roles were at the USDA and their mission as contractors with AI. They were happy to hear our concerns and discussed the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) guidance on this issue. They directed Jory and me to the Certalert 06-07 Advisory Cautionary Non-directive Airport Safety and Operation document that guides both airports and Wildlife Services’ activities regarding State-listed species and airports. Here are the specific excerpts that speak directly to the airport landscape that attracts a variety of wildlife and specifically Grasshopper Sparrows:

HMBC and Capital Region Audubon Team Up to Investigate an Airport Management and “Species of Concern” Issue...*(continued)*

“An airport’s air operations area (AOA) is an artificial environment that has been created and maintained for aircraft operations. Because an AOA can be markedly different from the surrounding native landscapes, it may attract wildlife species that do not normally occur... Some of the grassland species attracted to an airport’s AOA are at the edge of their natural ranges, but are attracted to habitat features found in the airport environment. Also, some wildlife species may occur on the airport in higher numbers (ex: flocking birds) than occur naturally in the region, because the airport offers habitat features the species prefer. Some of these wildlife species are State-listed threatened and endangered species or have been designated by State resource agencies as species of special concern.”

“Hazardous wildlife are those species of wildlife...that are associated with aircraft strike problems, are capable of causing structural damage to airport facilities [such as terminals] or act as attractants to other wildlife that pose a strike hazard.”

“For example, the grassland habitat preferred by Grasshopper Sparrows, which are listed as threatened in New York¹,”

“Airport operators must decline to adopt habitat management techniques that jeopardize aviation safety.”

“[Airport operators]...must take immediate action to alleviate wildlife hazards whenever they are detected.”

So, AI does have to mow grasses in accordance with the directives above, but does not have to mow less than 6 inches, as indicated by Mr. Iachetta. AI does not ‘deliberately’ preserve wildlife habitats at their airport, such as grasslands, but rather they are a naturally occurring aesthetic consequence of using grasses as a flocking bird deterrent. Grasshopper sparrows, grassland raptors, and in the case of this past winter, Snowy owls, are attracted to wide swaths of flat open area are not flocking birds, but they are basically ‘tolerated’ on the airport property as long as they are not a threat to aviation safety. We birders benefitted from the Snowy Owls ‘behaving’, if you will, and the owls were monitored and left alone by the Airport and USDA wildlife management staff.

So the bottom line, as paraphrased by Jory Langner: “The airport needs to follow the FAA rules, part 139, which basically states that - The safety of people, planes, the airport and surrounding communities obviously ‘trump’ any concerns for the Grasshopper Sparrows (and other non-endangered species). [As a result,] there will be no special maintenance of the grasslands for these species at the Albany airport. Smaller, local airports like Saratoga airport follow different rules.”

More information gathering needs to be done to see what smaller Capital Region airports can do to accommodate such possible bird preservation tactics, but in talking with the Airport Director at a local Long Island airport a couple years ago, this writer found out that there was a program involving the installation of 30 bluebird houses out in the lesser used areas of that Long Island airport.

HMBC and Capital Region Audubon Team Up to Investigate an Airport Management and “Species of Concern” Issue...*(continued)*

Returning to what protocols the Albany International Airport has in place for wildlife and bird management, Stephen Iachetta, his airport colleagues, and the USDA have in place “non-lethal” dispersal methods to clear airport runways, flightlines and approaches of threatening birds or mammals that may wander into those areas. Initially, they will use noise cannons to attempt to disperse the threat, but if that does not work, they use a trap-and-release method, when at all possible. Logan Airport in Boston has for decades used nets fired from a cannon to capture Snowy Owls and other raptors and relocate them to a suitable area and be released well away from the airport.

In conclusion, as far as the fate of ground nesting grassland birds go at AI, they really do not belong there. And if they do try to build nests there, it will be an unfortunate choice for them to make. Large airports are governed by the rules and safety regulations of the FAA and as a result trump any laws that state or local municipalities pass regarding ‘species of concern.’ If anything, in this writer’s opinion, it’s a sign that these grassland ground nesting birds are looking for a new place to build and fledge their young. Where once there were plenty of grasslands for generations of grasshopper sparrows and other grassland birds to migrate back to and breed, there is certainly much less now. Whether it’s because of possible residential development or old farms that have succeeded into forest habitats, these birds in one way or another are forced to find the next best habitat – in this case, a man-made grassland that runs in between airport tarmacs. What can, we, as birders, do to help situations like this one? This writer subscribes to the old adage, ‘Think Globally and Act Locally’, and advocate for sustainable habitat management and preservation of open space in our local towns and rural areas. We can follow up with county farm bureaus and the DEC to acquire documentation to share and educate local farmers and property owners to encourage bird-friendly property and long-term preservation of existing open fields and lands. That way, we can hopefully stem the reduction of suitable habitat for all grassland birds and help our little Grasshopper Sparrows create their own safe ‘Flightline approaches’ and ‘Nesting Terminals’ for their young.

The Great White!

by Robert P. Yunick

Shark, you say? No...Gyr Falcon!

Sunday, April 6, 2014, at Ft. Edward was a day never to be forgotten. Several extraordinary circumstances coupled with a good dose of serendipity made for a most eventful day leading to not only the discovery, but the unquestionable photographic verification of a bird species not seen locally in many a moon. A bird on every birder’s “to-die-for” list. It all happened in tiny, sleepy Durkeetown in the Town of Ft. Edward, Washington Co., New York west of the Durkeetown Baptist Church as people were gathering for the Sunday service.

The Great White!..... *(continued)*

It began as an ordinary day of raptor trapping for American Kestrels, North America's smallest falcon, and led to the discovery of North America's largest falcon, the Gyrfalcon; but not any old Gyrfalcon, rather the extraordinary white morph. Rarely do these two species share company less than 100 yards from one another.

Alison Van Keuren and I were touring the Ft. Edward grasslands raptor trapping, having already banded a Red-tailed Hawk on Fitzpatrick Rd., and an American Kestrel on CR 46 south of Cary Rd. as we headed toward the Durkeetown Baptist Church, the most prominent landmark in Durkeetown. About 120 yards west of the church we dropped a trap containing a mouse lure for two kestrels on a roadside wire.

The usual procedure after dropping the trap (at 0921) was to drive on down the road a short distance, turn and face back toward the trap to observe the kestrels' behavior. This is where serendipity struck. I parked along the roadside not knowing I was within 75 yards of the Gyr, not even knowing it was there. One of the kestrels made at least three flights to the trap only to be flushed from it by passing traffic before it was caught at 0924.

As we sat there glued to the behavior of the kestrel waiting for it to be caught, Alison commented there was a large, pale bird atop a dead tree trunk due south of us in a meadow, and wondered what it was. In haste I took a look at it, and in further haste concluded a large leucistic buteo or of all things an impossible white-morph Gyrfalcon!!

But I had to attend to the now-caught kestrel on the trap, and as I drove forward to retrieve the bird, serendipity struck again as Dr. Gordon Ellmers appeared out of nowhere, saw the kestrel on the trap and stopped. He is a veterinarian in Glens Falls whom I had met previously on the Ft. Edward grasslands circuit with his long camera lens, and whose remarkable pictures grace the website of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society.

I jumped out of the car to fetch the kestrel and yelled to Gordie that there was a white Gyrfalcon perched just down the road on a dead tree trunk. Gordie drove to where directed and out came his infamous lens, camera and tripod, shooting off pictures as fast as he could at the bird only 75 yards away.

I banded, weighed, measured, etc. the kestrel and released it at 0929 to now return attention to the Gyr. Alison and I noted the many features of the bird as it accommodatingly changed positions on its perch to present several profiles. Its bluish cere (area atop the base of the bill) and bill color indicated it was a second-year bird, hatched in 2013.

Thankfully, Alison who was first to see the bird had a cell phone (I'm not that modern); and further thankfully saw fit to use it to call John Kent to alert him. Alison lacked Bill Lee's number in his directory, but I provided it from memory telling Bill where this bird was. Bill activated the HMBC telephone alert line and a few people burned rubber coming up the Northway to see this regal bird.

The Great White!..... (continued)

Gordie left with his camera full of memorable impressions. John Kent arrived from Albany, as did Jim Ries and his daughter from Queensbury and Tom and Colleen Williams from Colonie. More pictures were taken, and by now eight people had seen this bird.

At 1046, after at least an hour and 25 minutes on its perch, the Gyr took flight to the south heading toward the ground, quickly out of view behind some brush. In a minute or two it reappeared in view about 500-600 yards away as a large white bird against the dark background of the distant hill where CR 46 and Cary Road meet.

It began circling, catching a thermal that quickly matched it against the cloudless, brilliantly blue sky above the horizon. Soon, it was a mere dot in the sky and gone, possibly passing over us going north, but too distant to track, despite numerous scannings of the overhead sky with binocular.

Alison and I resumed raptor trapping, but it was not the same as before. How could it be with the view of that Gyrfalcon seared into our minds? Catching three more kestrels was a big letdown.

BIRDING CAMBODIA – (PART 2 OF 2 PARTS)..... (continued)

This was our first real exposure to the Cambodian country side. The land is very flat and is intensively farmed for rice. Because it was the dry season and the crop harvested, the paddies were rock hard and covered in short stubble. Much of this had burned, so we walked through dust and ash, and dodged cow turds. During the wet season, however, the countryside is inundated, and all the village homes are built on 6-8 foot high stilts.

Only about 500 Bengal Floricans remain, so we felt fortunate to see several flying reasonably close to us. We also saw Pied, Western- and Eastern-Marsh Harriers. The Pied male is a strikingly beautiful sight. After watching the harriers and floricans, we prowled through the rice stubble in the paddy fields. This resulted in our kicking up a buttonquail species, some pipits, sparrows and several warbler species. Old World warblers are completely different from the New World warblers because they are much more drably colored and difficult to identify without experience.

We drove off toward Tmatboey in the northeast of the country with a stop at a famous temple for lunch. This area had seen fighting, so international organizations had run minesweeping projects to clear it. Several prominent signs pointed out that plots of land around the temple had been swept clear.

After lunch, we left the paved roads and proceeded along reasonably good dirt roads. Along the way we stopped to see the rare White-rumped Falcon. Here, too, we began to see the effects of slash and burn settlement with drastically thinned forests and burned off understory. We also saw large rubber tree plantations that were replacing the natural forests of the area.

BIRDING CAMBODIA — (PART 2 OF 2 PARTS)..... (continued)



White-rumped Falcon

A major SVC project involves the village of Tmatboey. The villagers are encouraged through payments to reduce their hunting and not to burn the forest understory. The SVC also helped them establish a small ecotourism camp consisting of cabins and a dining building. Our room in a duplex had mosquito net covered beds, an asian style bathroom, a ceiling fan, and solar powered low voltage lighting and solar heated hot water. Asian bathrooms for

westerners usually have a western toilet, a sink, but no shower enclosure. Shower water flows directly onto the floor and out a drain. Flushing the toilet often requires scooping a large ladle of water from a cistern or bucket and dumping it into the toilet. It works. We had to be careful ladling, since small frogs liked to hang in the water buckets and on the toilet seat.

Tmatboey is a typical rural village having no electricity or paved roads, but it did have communal water pumps. The houses are all on stilts with either thatched or metal roofs. Some have solar or generator powered lights. Dogs, chickens, hogs and cattle wander freely, and little children are abundant. There are a few small stores selling food, supplies and the national beer, Ankor. Bottled water was readily available.

Rare storks and ibis are attracted to the seasonally dwindling water holes, and we spent time walking through forests looking for them. We also searched for owls. Our local guide had an amazing ability to lead us a distance through the forest to a particular tree that was the roost of an owl species. He would stop by the tree, point up, and there it was. The forest also provided us with sightings of many different woodpecker species including the Gray Slaty Woodpecker which looks like a flying dinosaur.

After Tmatboey, we drove to Veal Krous and its even more primitive lodgings. After a rough five kilometer drive through the forest, we came to our campsite run by local villagers for the SVC. We had tents with uncomfortable mosquito net covered cots. A small, hot latrine tent was set up a distance away. The crew slept in mosquito net covered hammocks slung between trees.

A veterinary antibiotic had been introduced into SE Asia about twenty five years ago that proved fatal to vultures, and this resulted in a plunge in vulture populations. The antibiotic has been banned, and governments and conservation groups are supporting measures to boost the vulture population. One initiative involves establishing "vulture restaurants" around the country. Villagers are paid to slaughter a cow periodically leaving the carcass out as vulture food. Our tour paid the Veal Krous villagers for a cow to attract vultures for our viewing. Late in the afternoon we walked to the viewing blinds to see three vulture species, Red-Headed, White-rumped, and Slender-billed feed.

BIRDING CAMBODIA — (PART 2 OF 2 PARTS)..... (continued)

The cots prevented a good night's sleep for me. The next morning, we returned to the viewing blinds and found about sixty vultures around a much diminished carcass. The sixty birds represent about 20% of the country's vulture

population. We were fortunate, too, to see an Asian Golden-backed Jackal try to grab some goodies from the body.



3 Vulture Species

After a forest walk, we left Veal Krous for Kompong Thom and its grasslands. This was an overnight stop on the way to Kratie, our last tour point. In the grasslands, we were fortunate to locate an Asian Golden Weaver, an uncommon grassland bird.

We birded grasslands some more the next morning, then took off for Kratie which was on the other side of the Mekong River. The Mekong is quite wide, so few bridges cross it in Cambodia. We had to drive about 100 miles south of Kompong Thom to get to the nearest bridge, then drive north again on the east side of the river to Kratie.

Early the next morning we boarded a boat for cruise to look for the Irrawaddy Dolphin, a rare fresh water dolphin that is the town's big tourist attraction. Other goals included finding Little Pratincole and the recently described Mekong Wagtail. The latter lives in the scrub found on small islands in the river, and its scientific name honors Sam Veasna. We quickly found both birds with good looks at each. The rest of our time on the river was spent looking at the dolphins. Because we were the first group out on the river, the time was most pleasantly spent.

BIRDING CAMBODIA — (PART 2 OF 2 PARTS)..... (continued)



Little Pratincole



Mekong Wagtail

After the river trip, we headed back to Phnom Penh with a stop along the highway to look for a proposed new species of tailorbird, a type of warbler. We finally found it after some searching, and I was able to get good pictures of the female. Srnh said that we were among the first 20 westerners to have seen the bird, the Cambodian Tailorbird.

BIRDING CAMBODIA – (PART 2 OF 2 PARTS)..... (continued)



Cambodian Tailorbird

Our trip home started just before midnight with a five hour flight to Seoul. We had a nine hour layover most of which was spent napping in a nice airport hotel room rented by the hour. Next followed a ten hour flight to Los Angeles. Our son had asked that one of us spend a couple more days with them, so Chris stayed to help him with his boys in Ventura. I had a mad dash to a different terminal to check in and clear security for my next flight to Chicago. Fortunately there were no lines, so this flight was made. I finally returned home after a thirty hour journey. Chris returned three days later.

Cambodia was an amazing experience. We look forward to more birding trips particularly to Latin America.

Upcoming Field Trips

OCTOBER

Saturday, October 4, WOODLAWN PRESERVE (Schenectady County; morning)

Coordinator: Don Gresens 370-3923 dgresens@nycap.rr.com

The Woodlawn Preserve is located in the Southeast corner of Schenectady County abutting the western edge of the Pine Bush. The area contains a flood control pond, forested sand dunes and general wetland habitat. Trips in prior years have seen migrating warblers and sparrows. The pond may attract various waterfowl.

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in front of Barnes & Noble in Mohawk Commons at the corner of State Street and Balltown Road (State St side). We will carpool the short distance to the preserve.

Sunday, October 5, FIVE RIVERS ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER (Albany County; morning)

Coordinator: John Kent 424-2234 jwkent@fastmail.fm

We'll walk about 2 miles over generally flat terrain with some small hills, passing through a variety of habitats. Previous trips have come up with 6 species of sparrows and 5 species of woodpeckers as well as both species of kinglets. Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Wood Duck and perhaps other waterfowl may be present. Wet grass and muddy spots may be encountered.

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot by the visitor center.

Saturday, October 25, COLLINS LAKE (Schenectady County; morning)

Coordinator: Don Gresens 370-3923 dgresens@nycap.rr.com

We will visit Collins Lake to view late migrating waterfowl from the beach and the east side of the lake. We will also take a walk going east along the north side of the Mohawk River for fall sparrows. Fox Sparrows have been seen in previous years. Foliage will be off of the trees to make finding LBJ's (Little Brown Jobs) a bit easier.

Meet at the western end of the Gateway Bridge at Jumpin' Jacks in Scotia at 8:00 a.m. Bring a scope if you have one.

NOVEMBER

Saturday, November 8, TOMHANNOCK RESERVOIR (Rensselaer County; morning)

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

Join us for a morning trip around the Tomhannock Reservoir. We should find a good variety of waterfowl as well as resident and migrant passerines and possibly shorebirds. Rarities have turned up at the Tomhannock in the fall and we often find Bald Eagles.

Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the parking area at the intersection of Lake Shore Dr. and NY Route 7 at the west end of the causeway. Bring a scope if you have one.

Upcoming Field Trips..... (continued)

Sunday, November 16, VISCHER FERRY NATURE AND HISTORICAL PARK (Saratoga Co; morning)

Coordinator: John Hershey 371-3114 hershey@nycap.rr.com

On this trip we'll be looking for migrant waterfowl and winter residents. Rusty Blackbirds are often observed at this time of year. We will start at the main entrance of VFNHP. We will also explore some of the lesser known areas of the Preserve, such as Ferry Drive and the area around the Vischer Ferry Power Plant where Bald Eagles and migrant waterfowl are often seen.

Meet at the main entrance of VFNHP at the Whipple Bridge at 8:30 a.m.

DECEMBER

Saturday, December 20, SCHENECTADY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

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

Saturday, December 27, SOUTHERN RENSSELAER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Coordinator/Compiler: Phil Whitney, 377-9050, philandmarjwhitney@earthlink.net

Saturday, January 3, 2015, TROY 2014 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

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

Feathers

Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club

c/o Five Rivers EEC

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Delmar, NY 12054