

The Fledgling

Newsletter of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society
www.audubon.noncommercial.org

Vol. 21 No. 3 Mar - May 2004

From your President:

The snow commenced Feb 3rd promptly at 3:00 PM just as forecast. By 10:00 PM it looked as though ten inches had fallen, and it was still snowing steadily. I contemplated clearing part of the bird yard tonight, knowing the work would not be accomplished in one effort, but with rest periods between shorter periods of shoveling. The bird feeders have been filled. I'll wait until tomorrow. Tonight I'll just be glad the temperature is in the high twenties instead of 20 below zero.

When I do shovel I am in the company of chickadees and nuthatches. Their seemingly fearless presence and twittering is like a thank you for feeding them. I look at the deer fences and see the snow is so deep the deer could practically walk over them. For some reason they haven't. I marvel that these little birds and the animals have withstood such a cold January, and wonder how a bird count taken now would compare with the Christmas Bird Count.

Perhaps the Great Backyard Bird Count and Project FeederWatch will help answer that question. As observers, our input for these counts is very important. If you have not participated this winter, I hope you will next winter.

The woolly bear caterpillar tally I wrote about in the December Fledgling is putting the caterpillar's forecast in a poor light. After seven weeks, its record is 2 weeks right, 4 wrong, and one too close to call. Perhaps it will do better for the next 6 weeks.

As for the irruptive birds predicted, I counted up to 50 Common Redpolls at my feeders in early January, and one Hoary Redpoll which stayed near the outer edges of the group of commons. After much careful observation of this very light, barely streaked bird, I finally saw its pure white rump. I'm still on the lookout for crossbills, which were last in my area in Nov. 1997.

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SAAS Calendar

Monthly chapter meetings are held at the Crandall Library, on the fourth Wednesday of the month, except as may be noted below. For changes and updates, please check this column in each issue. Mark your calendar and join us for the presentations by guest speakers featured below. The meetings start promptly at 7pm. Guests are welcome so please bring your friends with you!

Mar 24 - Bill Gorman - "Ducks, Geese and Swans"

Bill Gorman will present this interesting program just as the waterfowl migration season begins!

Apr 28 - Sean Mahar - "Pesticides"

Sean Mahar from Audubon New York will present a program on pesticides - their use and abuse - and the importance to your family's health.

May 19 - Al Koechlein - "Hawaii"

Long standing SAAS member Al Koechlein will entertain and educate us with a program on these fascinating islands.

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This is a good time of year to watch the activities of waterfowl. On Jan 18th I was privileged to see a 10 minute pairing display performed by 2 male and 1 female Hooded Mergansers. Both males, with fully open crests, circled the female, bobbing their heads in unison, with occasional sky pointing and presenting of their breasts above the water. They were displaying again on Feb 10th.

Keep looking for the unexpected pleasures of winter, and for spring.

Your President,
Linda Hoyt

From the Membership Chair

Claire Hunter



MEMORABLE MARCH: Twenty-one years ago, in March 1983, a group of about 50 members of National Audubon met in Glens Falls at the Methodist Church to initiate the organization of a local chapter. Goals to be met included recruiting at least 60 new members, starting a newsletter and choosing a name. As spring progressed we moved to the Crandall Library and "Southern Adirondack Audubon Society" was selected as the chapter name through a local contest. The contest winner was awarded a big bag of bird seed - what other prize was possible? Later the name "Fledgling" was chosen for the newsletter; the name reflected our chapter status at that time. We hoped that our SAAS chapter would grow in numbers and strength and survive its nestling phase.

SAAS has survived and proven a source of fellowship and knowledge throughout the years. This year we have been happy to offer a choice of membership. A Chapter Only membership includes all activities and "The Fledgling", at the yearly dues of \$10. This year we also have an attractive local membership card bearing the chapter logo in an appropriate green. All local dues benefit local projects. Also available is the National membership, which adds the Audubon magazine (four issues yearly) to the other benefits. National dues are \$20; senior and student members pay \$15.

A HAPPY SPRING WELCOME TO six new Chapter Only members: From Queensbury are Dorothy and Phil Bentley, Frances Roberts, Joanna McGuire, and Winslow McGuire; From Lake George, Leanna Lenhart; from South Glens Falls, Mary Ann Dorvee. Three Chapter Only members renewed in December also. Nationally, 22 new members were assigned to our chapter and 44 renewals were reported.

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS were popular during the winter holidays. What better way to welcome spring than with a chapter membership. On request, the recipient will receive a card reflecting best wishes for birthday, Easter, Passover or Spring.

Your calls and notes are always welcome. Membership is a people job and we enjoy contact with our members.



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Birding South Texas

Submitted by Barb and John Youker

It was going to be a warm sunny January day, 55 degrees, in south Texas. At 7.00 AM we boarded a bus in San Antonio to head for Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The San Antonio zoo was sponsoring a day trip to the Gulf coast to view the Whooping Cranes and other birds wintering in Aransas. It was about 150 miles to Rockport, Texas. We boarded a small boat for the four hour trip through the canals and marshes of the preserve.

The Whooping Crane stands about four and one half feet tall. It has a big white body with long black legs and black tips on the wings.

There is a bare red patch on the crown and

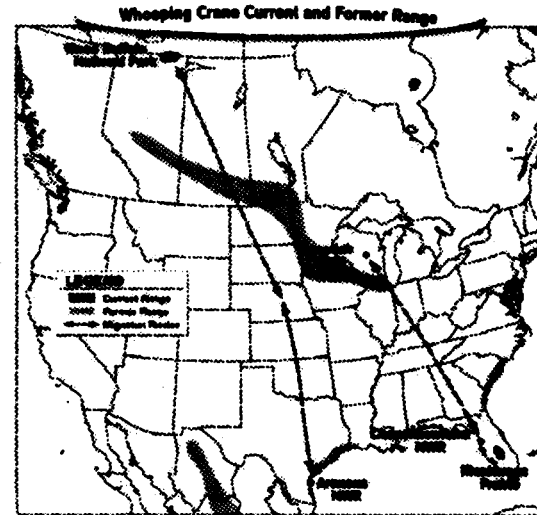
cheeks. The birds summer and nest in Wood Buffalo National Park, Alberta, Canada and winter in Aransas NWR. Each pair maintains a 200-acre territory.

There were only eleven birds when counted in 1941. In 1956 there were 16 birds and through careful protection, collection of eggs, and artificial insemination, there are now over three hundred birds in three flocks. The natural migration flock from Wood Buffalo to Aransas numbers 200 plus. The non-migrating flock at Kissimmee, Florida numbers 100 plus birds. The migrating flock newly formed in the last three years, numbers 35 plus with about 17 birds flying in 2003. That flock, guided by ultra-light airplanes, starts in Wisconsin and arrives at Chassahowitzka NWR on the gulf coast of Florida.

With us were four zoo employees that work exclusively with the three mating pairs and their hatchlings at the zoo. The mating sequence starts with the lengthening of the daylight hours which, at the zoo, is controlled by lights. In the wild, the female lays two eggs about a week apart. The second egg or second hatchling is usually destroyed, and the pair spends all its time raising one offspring. When the family arrives at Aransas, the juvenile has a rusty head and a mixture of white and rusty feathers.

The zoo collects and incubates all eggs from both the zoo's birds and some eggs from in Florida. When they

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Last Call to Volunteer for Atlas 2000!

In the early 1980's, New York was one of the first states to undertake an Atlas project, mapping the breeding distribution of its birds. Now New York is working on a new Atlas in order to learn how breeding bird distribution has changed over the past twenty years. Field work for the second Atlas began in 2000 and the final year of study will be 2004.

Additional volunteer birders are needed to participate in this last season of Atlas 2000. Volunteers adopt an atlas block, visit the various habitats within their block and record the evidence of breeding for the birds that they see. The Regional Coordinator provides maps, instructions and field cards for reporting data. There are still areas not covered and this is the last chance to take part in this valuable study. Participation is both fun and rewarding. The current breeding season is underway, so please consider joining in this important project by contacting a Regional Coordinator today.

Contact Information for the Coordinators in our Region 8 area:

Jane Graves
133 York Ave.
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866-2533
email: jgraves@skidmore.edu (email preferred)
phone (518)-587-8992 (before 6 pm)

Mark Fitzsimmons
56 Somerset Drive
Glenmont, NY 12077
email: markfitz@earthlink.net
phone (518) 439-8403



Time to Gather those Nest Materials!

-Mona Bearor

Nesting season will soon be upon us and you can give a warm welcome to returning songbirds by providing nesting materials in addition to nest boxes. One of the best parts about collecting and offering nest materials for your yard birds is that there is little, if any, cost involved. There are many items you can find in and around your home right now that the birds would welcome as they gather the bits and pieces which will soon shelter their babies. Recycling in this way is fun and performs a valuable service for your feathered tenants.

All the following may be offered: narrow strips of cotton fabric or natural fiber yarns cut into 3 or 4 inch lengths, short lengths of cotton string or thread, feathers from an old down pillow, almost any natural fiber in neutral colors, hair from your hairbrush. Your pets can help too - hair from your dog would be welcome and, if you have horses, those long strands of horsehair from the mane or tail are especially loved by some species. Never set out dryer lint for birds; although it was recommended in the past, the

current thinking is that it can contain synthetic fibers not healthy for the birds and it does not hold up well after a rain - it becomes compressed and dries out too slowly, making an uncomfortable nest. Remember that mud is a construction material utilized by many species so keep a muddy puddle available in an out of the way corner of your yard.

When you perform spring cleanup in your garden you can save some thin dead twigs, dry pine needles, dried grass, straw and even the wilted leaves from daffodils and tulips. They will all be used.

Nesting materials should be placed so that birds can easily find them. They may be set out in the crevice of a tree, in a suet basket or in one of those mesh bags in which onions are purchased. Never place nesting materials in or on a nest box because the birds may think that the nest box is occupied. Providing nesting materials can be a fun and interesting way to observe bird behavior. Try it this spring and let us know what other items you have found that your birds chose to use in their nest. We'll print them in the next newsletter and you can use that money you saved to buy another field guide!

Cats and Bluebirds

-Liza Porter

We have a magnificent bluebird family that returns to our bird boxes every year. These are grandchildren and great-grandchildren of a line that goes far into the time back before we came to be stewards of these acres. The blue of the males sets off specific "ahhh" neurons in the brain that are tuned to that blue alone, similar neurons as the ones that are pleased by an especially green view in August or a pointillist hillside in autumn.

The first year we were here, we were not familiar with bluebirds – I had seen maybe one or two in my whole life. We felt very lucky to have found a place that came complete with bluebirds. The responsibility was heavy. We hoped to be worthy of our bluebirds. We got to hear the male's fuzzy, tender song, sung from the phone wire out front or from the top of the white pines all through the spring, saw the female come and pick out the right box, saw them both eating our plentiful grubs and wireworms every day, saw the young hatch and fledge and take wing, some to return the next year. This went on as it undoubtedly had for generations.

Then a new cat came into the picture. I have to defend myself by saying that I had a blind cat for 14 years who was a great mouser but never bothered birds despite being outdoors a lot. I gradually forgot about cats and what they do to birds. This was not an excuse, but it was my only defense. After my dear cat died, we got another one, a lovely lithe gray kitten who was also a great mouser. One hot day in the middle of summer I came home after work and went into the vegetable garden. As I weeded, it gradually came to me that the bluebird was singing a little too loudly and insistently for midsummer. He sounded upset, in fact. I looked up at him singing wildly in the top of the white pine. He definitely sounded upset. "Don't be silly," I said to myself. His four babies had hatched a few days ago. Maybe he was singing in jubilation. Well, no, he sounded upset. I couldn't put it out of my head. I weeded on, feeling a little ridiculous for my anthropomorphizing. Then, I came around a corner in the garden where the high plants had hidden...oh, no. Oh, no. The female bluebird. In pieces. Oh no. I went over to the bluebird box. The hatchlings were in the last stages of inanition, two already dead. The cat must have killed her in the early morning, because he had been inside all day, and the male had probably been singing since sunup. Oh, no. What could I do? I reassembled and buried the female. The male sang on into the evening, a sobbing song. Later we buried the dead hatchlings and removed the nest as well.

The male didn't say anything for a week or so, and then half-heartedly started singing for a mate again and built another nest. He gradually recovered and did find a mate



and raised a second brood. The bluebirds forgave us and have continued to come home every spring. The cat became an indoor cat, much against his better judgment, and assuaged himself, somewhat huffily, by keeping our house mouse-free until he died a few years later. So, how can I not believe that it is possible for there to be cross-species communication? That birds can feel and transmit strong emotion? That we are connected to each other in ways we cannot easily understand? My cats ever since have been indoor cats. But I know my neighbors' cats frequent my garden. They just aren't as much at home and so do not feel free to kill my birds. I hope. I hope.

© 2002, Liza Porter, from "Essays for Our Time".



Spring Field Trips

Sat - April 24 - Betar Byway (morning)

Leaders: Mona Bearor & Carol Fischer

The Betar Byway is a paved walking/biking path along the Hudson River in the Village of South Glens Falls.

This easy half-mile hike will reveal land and water residents and perhaps some early migrants. This trip is perfect for newer birders and anyone just wishing to enjoy a spring morning. Meet at 7:30AM at the parking lot at the end of First St., in the village of South Glens Falls, 2 blocks south of the bridge over the Hudson River. This is a joint walk with the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club.

Sun - June 13 - Pember Nature Preserve

Leaders: Mona Bearor & Joyce Miller

This underbirded Washington county parcel is comprised of 125 acres of open fields, mixed hardwood and conifer forest, and extensive marshes along the Black Creek. Two miles of trails and an observation deck allow viewing of all habitats.

Woodpeckers, flycatchers and thrushes are well represented here. In addition to the regular woodland and marsh species, the following have been observed: American Bittern, Osprey, Northern Goshawk, Wild Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Virginia Rail, Sora, American Woodcock, Winter Wren, Brown Thrasher, Veery, Hermit Thrush, Rusty Blackbird, and Fox Sparrow.

This is a joint trip with the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club. Please contact a trip leader for meeting time and place. You may reach Mona at 745-8637 or ramonabearor@adelphia.net and Joyce may be reached at justlookitup@yahoo.com

2003 Christmas Bird Count

The Results are in!

The 2003 Christmas Bird Count took place on Saturday December 20th. There were five groups of birders covering a total of 362 miles to record data for this important event. Those birders were; Joan Robertson, Mona Bearor, Barb Putnam, Ginny Vogel, Russ Hilliard, Stewart Brown, Joyce Miller, Beth and Brad Bidwell, Nancy Eustance, Don and Earla Woodworth, and Linda White. Many thanks go out to these folks for devoting this day to the count. The data made possible by this work has been and will continue to be invaluable. The most unusual sightings for this count were the Pintail Ducks seen by the Bidwells. Species Count: 51 Total Individuals: 8108

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|----------------------|-----|-------------------------|------|------------------------|------|
| Canada Goose | 425 | Rock Dove | 1080 | Northern Shrike | cw |
| Mallard | 359 | Mourning Dove | 407 | Blue Jay | 137 |
| American Black Duck | 19 | Great Horned Owl | cw | American Crow | 426 |
| Northern Pintail | 2 | Barred Owl | 1 | Common Raven | 5 |
| Common Goldeneye | 148 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 3 | European Starling | 2103 |
| Hooded Merganser | 23 | Downy Woodpecker | 38 | American Tree Sparrow | 239 |
| Common Merganser | 31 | Hairy Woodpecker | 7 | Song Sparrow | 9 |
| Bald Eagle | 3 | Pileated Woodpecker | 8 | White-throated Sparrow | 22 |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | 4 | Horned Lark | 253 | Dark-eyed Junco | 210 |
| Cooper's Hawk | 3 | Golden-crowned Kinglet | 18 | Snow Bunting | 734 |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 39 | Cedar Waxwing | 23 | Northern Cardinal | 43 |
| Rough-legged Hawk | 15 | Northern Mockingbird | 3 | Eastern Meadowlark | 4 |
| American Kestrel | 1 | Eastern Bluebird | 7 | Purple Finch | 3 |
| Merlin | cw | American Robin | 3 | House Finch | 127 |
| Wild Turkey | 36 | Black-capped Chickadee | 199 | Common Redpoll | 68 |
| Ruffed Grouse | 1 | Tufted Titmouse | 46 | American Goldfinch | 351 |
| Ring-necked Pheasant | 20 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 16 | House Sparrow | 355 |
| Ring-billed Gull | 5 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 25 | | |

As in previous years, this information was compiled and submitted by Linda White, the Education Chairperson for SAAS. Linda spends many hours in the field and at home to record this valuable data and we thank her for her continuing dedication to this project. We also extend our thanks to Linda and her husband, Blake, for hosting the counting party. After many miles and hours spent in search of birds, their hospitality was, as always, a welcome treat.

South Texas *con't.* from page 2

hatch, a zoo attendant dons a white burka, one arm like a crane's neck complete with a hand puppet fashioned as a crane's head on the end. They become the mother crane and teach the hatchling all it needs to know to survive using this arm and head. Those destined to fly south with the ultra-lights are played the motor sounds while still in the egg so they think that this what the mother sounds like and will eventually follow the ultra-light. They are shipped north to central Wisconsin and trained to follow the planes south (1255 miles in 17 days). After the first flight south they migrate back north and south on their own. Seventeen birds followed the planes south in 2003.

We watched five families feeding on blue crabs and bugs. Observing from about thirty five yards they were impressive. For more information go to the web site www.bringbackthecranes.org or in October www.operationmigration.org to follow the ultra-lights. All together we identified 38 species with four additions to our life list. A great day.

SOUTHERN ADIRONDACK AUDUBON SOCIETY

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2003-2006

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| Joan Robertson | 656-9223 |
| Linda Theis | 793-4557 |

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

National Membership in the Audubon Society includes the quarterly magazine, *Audubon*, and the SAAS newsletter, *The Fledgling*. The cost is \$20 for regular memberships and \$15 for seniors or students. Make check payable to "National Audubon Society" and send with name, address and phone number to address below. Chapter Membership is \$10 annually and includes a subscription to *The Fledgling*. Make check payable to Southern Adirondack Audubon Society and send with Name, Address, and Phone number to: Claire Hunter, 3 Edgewood Dr., South Glens Falls, NY 12803

Newsletter Submission Policy

We welcome submissions to The Fledgling. Please email your articles to the editor if possible and include your name and contact information. We reserve the right to edit as necessary. If you cannot e-mail, please submit to Barb Putnam at 190 Palmer Ridge Rd., Gansevoort, NY 12831. Please be sure to include your phone number and call her at 518-792-7542 before sending material.

The
Fledgling



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