

President's Message

Spring has been generous in its distribution of birds this year. Along with the normal influx of expected species came several that do not visit my yard often, including a beautiful male Indigo Bunting and a busy House Wren. I was able to add a Blue-winged Teal to the list of birds I have identified in or from my yard, bringing the total to 164. Actually, it was the first teal I ever saw in the Town of Horicon. I spotted it on a rainy evening when I was looking at a group of Wood Ducks. Its white facial crescent stood out despite the gloom. The following morning the teal was still with the two pairs of Wood Ducks, and I had a clear view of it through my spotting scope.

It was heartening to read the May 18th Post-Star article about the Ravens' nest with young on the Pirate Ship attraction. I think we should all applaud the Great Escape's decision to shut down the ride until the young ravens have left the nest on their own.

The announcement in April confirming Ivory-billed Woodpeckers have been found in the Big Woods area of Arkansas was wonderful news. It is good to know the Nature Conservancy has been protecting a large piece of land where the Ivory-bills were discovered. Wouldn't it be a shame if the very forest in which they are located was on the government's list of forests, parks, and preserves slated to be logged, mined, or drilled? Some places most of us thought were inviolable, such as the Greater Yellowstone forests, the Arctic Preserve, and many more are slated for such disasterous activities if public pressure and advocacy do not prevail.

Our government would also by-pass or lower the hard-won regulations of the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act with new rules that circumvent the current protective laws. We don't need more untreated sewage flowing into public waters, or more poisonous mercury emitted into the air from power plants. If these thoughts bother you, write your con't. next column

The Fledgling

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

Vol. 22 No. 4 June 2005 - Sept 2005

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. Meetings are also published in the Post Star, on the SAAS website and on the Post Star online Events Calendar. 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!

June 22 – Jillian Liner, Important Bird Area Coordinator for New York state will speak on the IBA program and its importance to nesting and migrating birds. With a 440 unit sub-division proposed in the Fort Edwards Grasslands IBA, this should be an interesting presentation.

July & August – No Meeting See you in September!

con't. from previous column

senator and say that our environment and health must be protected by upholding and even strengthening the current laws, and remind that Senator that his/her health and wellbeing are also at stake.

Your President, Linda Hoyt



North Country Wild Care



Wildlife Emergency Hotline 518-964-6740

8am - 8pm 7 days/wk

From The Membership Chair

-Claire Hunter

WELCOME: Phil and Mary Baugh from Corinth who are new National members and also Chapter Supporters; we thank you!



Spring is upon us and there are many reasons to send gift memberships in SAAS – Graduations, Anniversaries, Good Report Cards for kids, Birthdays. Members in the local chapter are called "Chapter Supporters" and the yearly dues are just \$10. All the money stays within our chapter to help provide valuable services such as the monthly public programs, the newsletter, and presentations on birding for civic clubs and local schools. Please consider giving a loved one a gift membership in your local chapter. I'll be happy to send an appropriate card announcing your gift.

Editor's Ramblings

-Mona Bearor

Another spring migration season is almost past and nesting has begun for many species of birds. This is the season birders anticipate through the long winter. I try to spend some time birding each day; often I leave my home at daybreak and start the day with a few hours alone in the woods or along a river. I have also been fortunate this spring to do some traveling to observe birds in other parts of the country. Trips to Arizona, North Carolina and Canada added many birds to my life list; however, new birds that have visited my yard this spring have given me as much pleasure as those viewed in other states. This spring I was pleased to add an Indigo Bunting and both Nashville and Wilson's Warbler to the list of birds that have paid a visit to my yard. When I find a new species on my property it tells me that I have done well in adding native trees and shrubs to my property. My small garden pool and waterfall is a welcome drinking and bathing spot for many species as they move through on their journey north.

Several SAAS members offered their writings for inclusion in this issue. John Youker's essay, "Travel and Birds" should pique your interest if you have yet to travel and see new bird species. "Woodpecker Folklore" by Drew Monthie was offered for use in celebration of the rediscovery of the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker in Arkansas. Liza Porter's "The Lawn-Bankers" is a true-to-life portrait of one of our summer residents, the robin. Add Sean Mahar's words on pesticides and messages from President Hoyt and membership chair, Claire Hunter, and I hope this issue will offer each of you something of interest. My thanks to those who help keep this newsletter varied with their submissions.



Woodpecker Folklore

-Drew Monthie

In many cultures the woodpecker is associated with thunder and lighting. An Italian proverb claims that its



pecking forecasts rain and in some areas the bird is thought to be a rainmaker. The opposite is true in North America where the Prairie Indians believe the woodpecker protects its friends from lightning and storms. Perhaps because of its fiery head, this bird is attributed with bringing the gift of fire to the Semang Negito.

According to Pawnee mythology, the woodpecker and the turkey once had a debate as to which bird should be called the protector of humankind. The turkey felt she deserved the title since she laid the largest clutch of eggs. However, the woodpecker's cautious ways won the argument since she kept her young safely nestled inside the tall tree trunks. Although the woodpecker laid fewer eggs, the survival rate of her young was greater than that of the turkey's because she taught them so well that they were certain to live to old age.

Greeco-Roman mythology contains a few stories about gods who were changed into woodpeckers. Circe turned Picus, the Roman god of agriculture and manure, into one because he rejected her. Since Picus was famous for his divination skills, this bird became a symbol of prophecy. In Greece, Celeus was changed into a green woodpecker for attempting to steal honey from the baby

The woodpecker was associated with ploughing and agriculture because it appeared to use its beak to plow for insects. This bird was called the "Axe of Ishtar." (Ishtar was the Babylonian goddess of fertility, love, and war. Her lovers tended to come to an evil end but the only death she regretted was that of her brother-husband, Tammuz. A fertility-agriculture cult grew up around the death, resurrection, and marriage of Tammuz and became so popular that Jewish women wept for Tammuz at the gates of the temple in Jerusalem (Ex 8:14). The woodpecker was sacred to Mars and fed his young sons, Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of Rome, as they hid in a cave.

According to a Lakota legend, the red-headed woodpecker taught a poor young suitor how to make and play the first flute. The suitor was then able to win the respect of his tribe and the hand of the chief's beautiful daughter. That is why their flutes are made to resemble this bird.

This bird is a fertility symbol. It is considered a guardian of the trees, a traveler's guide, and a lucky omen. Its nest holes are a symbol of security, protection, and a return to the womb.

Observations of an Avian Voyeur -Mona Bearor

With the nesting season upon us, memories of last year's work for the Breeding Bird Atlas comes to mind. I share with you here some of the sights and sounds I was privileged to enjoy as birds paired up, mated, fed their young and defended their territories in 2004.

It was mid-February when I first noted the interactions of Downy Woodpeckers. Groups of three birds would entertain as they teased and chased each other up and down the trees of my yard. It was also at this time that I heard the first songs of the male House Finch as he perched at the highest point to announce his presence to any available female. During the same month Barred Owls called in the dead of night as I sat by the roadside, alone, wondering if I had lost my mind or if this was some strange rite of passage for becoming an accomplished birder.

March brought me my first observance of the American Woodcock remarkable flight display; it impressed me so much I returned to experience it again and again, never tiring of listening and watching.

In mid-April I heard some odd vocalizations over my head; I looked up and saw 3 Northern Flickers. Two males were vying for the attentions of a female and it was fascinating to watch their head-bobbing and tail-spreading. Their plumage was so brilliant it appeared as if they were dressed for a spring prom. In another locale, I was watching from only a few feet away, and was rewarded for patience as a male Pileated Woodpecker claimed his mate and drove a challenger from the area. He then returned to his lady, performed a "bill-waving" duet and they flew off together. To see the crests of these birds raised and backlit by the morning light was a treat.

Quiet descended on the roadside marsh on a May morning as a Cooper's Hawk came to rest at the top of a nearby snag. Perhaps he was simply resting as he made no effort to rustle up an early breakfast. When he decided to move on and flew to the northwest, the song of the White-throated Sparrow burst forth as if giving the "all clear." Often when straining to hear over the traffic noise, I wonder how the birds, possessing hearing so much more acute than ours, can stand the amount of road noise to which we humans subject them.

One afternoon a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks circled low over my head and called to each other as I walked a forest trail on Mt. McGregor. This special experience only increased my love of and respect for raptors. Tiny birds capture my fancy as well. With a friend I observed a pair of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers constructing a nest – flitting in and out with nest materials, chattering away, warning us to not get too close!

As I walked alone on Lincoln Mountain, the haunting melody of a Veery's early morning serenade followed my every step and made me realize once again how fortunate we are to live where these birds nest. Nearby I observed a pair of Mourning Doves as they prepared to raise their family. He brought a stick for the nest and she placed it. She then settled in the nest and he stood guard nearby.

Mid-June brought three male sapsuckers in a dispute of some kind – chasing each other, hollering continually and one even drumming on a metal road sign very near my car—what a racket! I also enjoyed an incredibly close look at an Ovenbird who was very upset at me with its crest raised and chipping loudly. I believe it had a nest nearby, however I could not find one with out further distressing the bird so I left the area – wondering if I'd be attacked from behind as I retreated! June also brought me a Louisiana Waterthrush as it collected food for its young – perched on an exposed limb, bill chock full of insects and turning from side to side. This was my first sighting of this species so I was thankful that the bird displayed all of its field marks for me!

A special treat was watching an American Kestrel hunting and feeding 3 young birds. An early summer day, blue sky, non-threatening clouds, and a slight breeze to keep biting insects at bay – what could be finer?

What could be finer? Perhaps a single summer morning with views of Indigo Bunting, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Scarlet Tanager all singing in the early sunlight. It just doesn't get any better...



An SAAS member has several records, yes, those soon-to-be antique vinyl disks! – of birdsongs and the calls of frogs and toads. These recordings were created and distributed by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The owner would like to find a new home for the records, so if you are interested please email Liza at doport@spa.net for more information.



Butterflies of North America -Mona Bearor

What better way to spend a summer afternoon than in the company of colorful butterflies! A visit to the website

http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/distr/lepid/bflyusa/bflyusa.htm#links will encourage you to spend a few hours searching for these interesting inhabitants of our area – but watch out! – you might become addicted!

The "Butterflies of North America" web pages are a part of the larger Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center website, whose mission is to provide the scientific information needed to conserve and manage the nation's biological resources. The NPWRC can be found at http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov. This site has an array of information available to those who will take the time to visit. The "Butterflies of North America" website consists primarily of species accounts, photos, distribution maps and checklists. I'll describe the basics here.

The *Photo Thumbnails* section is an invaluable resource. Here are small, quickly loaded pictures, arranged by family, ie: swallowtails, skippers, sulphers, which, in many cases, include not only the adult butterfly, but the caterpillar and the chrysalis as well. Although small in size the pictures are of high quality and each links to a larger version for closer inspection. This is a valuable resource for identification purposes.

The *Checklists* page allows you to retrieve a checklist of the butterflies, by county, for any the lower forty-eight states. This is a "work in progress" as new species are added as they are reported so some counties are more complete than others. Saratoga, Warren and Washington counties have 65, 63 and 42 listed respectively.

In the *Distribution Maps* area you can choose your state, be presented with a species list, then link to the species account for that butterfly. On that page you will find all the data you would expect in a field guide – photos, identification, habitat, food, range, and conservation information in addition to distribution maps.

Extensive references are quoted for those who wish further information and directions are given for the submission of new sightings enabling each of us to become a part of this valuable collection of data.

A visit to this site will be invaluable for those already interested in butterflies and may convert those not yet under the spell of these summer beauties.

Travel and Birds

by John Youker

While traveling on overseas vacations, two trips became quite bird oriented. Even though birds were not our initial reason for going, both, taken in Jan/Feb are worth thinking about. Sometimes it is nice just to get away and add variety and interest to your bird list.

An easy trip to Costa Rica, either as a regular tourist or on an organized tour, will provide lots of viewing fairly inexpensively. We were on a general nature tour and identified over 138 new birds. Along the way we met several "bird tours" who were much higher in their counts. Costa Rican tourism offices have worked hard to emphasize the natural wonders of their relatively unspoiled country. Huge numbers of local and migratory birds spend much of the winter there.

Farther away, and a totally different atmosphere, are the Serengeti Plains of Kenya and Tanzania. Again we were on a nature oriented tour but still added another 182



birds to our list. We were lucky to have other interested bird watchers in our group and a twenty year career naturalist for a guide. The birds of Africa are every imaginable color and description. They are also larger; lots of bigger birds and even the little birds seemed bigger. Here also, we came across small tours that were "just birding", although I cannot imagine not looking at the thousands of other animals. I spoke with one guide and his group was well over 300 birds in one week. The huge national parks of Kenya and Tanzania are well preserved. The lack of wildlife outside the park is really noticeable. Population and poverty take their toll on wildlife.

Another quick tour to an area abundant with birds would be a June trip to Iceland. Thousands of migratory birds and nesting populations are there at that time. Again, nature oriented tours and "birding tours" or Elderhostel are available at many localities.

The spring catalog for Elderhostel programs listed 32 separate 5 day programs that are devoted specifically to birding. Ten of them are within an easy day drive from Glens Falls or Saratoga. Descriptions are available online at www. elderhostel.org. Traveling to distant places can be interesting no matter what your reason for going, but if you add birding to your agenda the places come alive and you will certainly see and enjoy the trip more.



The Lawn-Bankers

-Liza Porter



Robins hop across the lawn dressed like bankers, russet vest and dark suitcoat, with a banker's paunch and back-leaning attitude, keeping a tally of the worms in the ground as bankers do my money. Their clucking alarm cry sounds at evening when I walk into their garden, which I actually think of as mine. Surely there are plenty of worms for both of us in the soil of the garden. We have lots of grubs and delicious wire-worms for them, too. Once, I watched as one caught a grub in its beak and flew up onto one of the nearby garden fence-posts. He grabbed it securely with his claws and started to chew it. He chewed it up and down, methodically up to the head and down to the other end, twenty times at least. Then, bottoms up! He threw his head back with abandon and swallowed it down. Yum. I have no problem with them eating all the grubs they

want. My garden, I mean their garden, is a veritable cornucopia of treats for them. There are perches for them on fence-posts and trellises. There is nice soft soil to peck and scratch in, counting and recounting the worms. There are lots of other birds to socialize with, although they are so serious in their pursuit of dinner that I doubt much socializing goes on. But then at sunset they become bankers who play the flute and appreciate beautiful music. Their quick triads of notes last right through dusk, slower and sleepier as the cool dark comes on. The stars come out, the fireflies start to flash, and the robins finish their song. Lovely. Bankers too have and need aesthetic outlets.

© 2005 Liza Porter, from "Essays for Our Time".

Attracting Birds to your Garden

by Mona Bearor

A few small changes in the way you garden will be beneficial to both resident and migratory birds. Not only will you be helping the birds survive and raise their young, but their songs and presence in your garden will add to your gardening pleasure.

- *Water, water, water! The single most important addition to your garden for attracting birds is a water feature. A pond and waterfall would be attractive, however, a traditional birdbath or simply a shallow glazed pot saucer would afford birds a needed place to drink and bathe. Remember that although birds can drink from almost any water-filled container by perching on its rim, they need only 1-2" of water for bathing and deeper containers must have rocks or other perches to afford access.
- *Shelter Birds require shelter not only to rest and raise their young but also from predators. You can help your neighborhood birds by providing cover for them in the form of dense evergreens or "tangles" which they will use to evade hunting hawks and roaming cats. Build a small brush pile during the gardening season in an out of the way place and it will be a valuable winter roost site. Simply remove in the spring and start again to avoid its becoming too large and unsightly.
- *Food A variety of native plants that provide fruit or seeds over several seasons is best.

 Plant berry producing shrubs in clumps for higher yield of fruit and to make a more visible display for the birds to find. Sweet berries such as Mulberry and Blackberry are important to many birds while they are raising young. Fall migrants require the fruits of shrubs such as flowering dogwood, spicebush, and mapleleaf viburnum to build fat reserves for their long journey. Wintering birds enjoy the fruits of conifers, bayberry, hawthorns, crabapples, and sumacs to help them survive subfreezing temperatures. Some flowers and grasses allowed to go to seed in an out of the way garden corner will provide food for those ground feeders.

You can redesign your entire landscape or make one simple change - be assured that whatever you do it will be appreciated by our feathered friends. The beauty and entertainment you derive from their visits will far outweigh the work involved!

Creating Healthy Backyard Habitats

By Sean Mahar; Conservation Chair

As spring is finally upon us, many are now fully engaged in the annual ritual of planting and seeding their lawns and gardens. As your thoughts are turning to everything you will need to take care of your backyards, this year, stop and think about how the products and plants you use may be affecting the environment.

One thing to keep in mind is that the use of lawn care pesticides and herbicides, primarily for aesthetic purposes, is continuing to proliferate at an alarming rate in New York and across the United States. Each year tens of millions of pounds of toxic pesticides are used on lawns throughout the United States, in fact about 3 times more pesticides are applied per acre than on agricultural crops. In some cases homeowners don't even know they are applying pesticides, as "Weed and Feed" products contain both fertilizers and herbicides, which provides confusion. As the use of these chemicals is increasing, they are now routinely found in surface and groundwater. A recent US Geological Survey (USGS) study found at least two pesticides in every stream sample and one or more in every fish sample. The risks these chemicals pose to birds, other wildlife and humans are continuing to become clearer.

Pesticides and herbicides harm birds in three ways: through direct and secondary ingestion, depletion of food supplies, and destruction of essential habitat. Typically, birds and other wildlife that ingest these toxic chemicals are more susceptible to predation and disease, their fertility rates have been known to decrease, they become neglectful of their young and can even abandon nests. Pesticides don't discriminate, attacking any insect unlucky enough to be where the pesticides are, regardless of their impact on the lawn or garden. For birds, this means less food. Lastly, the use of herbicides in destroying "pest" plants can degrade and destroy essential habitats for many bird species, and destroy many beneficial plants on which birds rely. In all, the impact on birds is staggering, resulting in the deaths of an estimated seven million birds annually.

Many researchers are now uncovering links between exposures to the types of pesticides typically found in the environment and serious long-term human health problems ranging from cancers and birth defects to neurological and reproductive disorders. Children are being found to be more susceptible to the toxic effects of pesticides, as pound for pound their developing bodies are exposed to more toxins than adults. They, like pets and other wildlife, spend more time closer to the grass and carpets, and frequently come in contact with unwashed

hands and other objects that have been exposed to pesticides and other toxins. Even though the effects on children are well documented, regulations for pesticide exposure limits are set for adults and not children, and current labeling requirements do not adequately explain the impacts.

While few argue the impacts of pesticides and herbicides, few have committed to a lifestyle that eliminates their use. This spring, Audubon New York, the state program of the National Audubon Society, is launching their Audubon at Home Campaign which seeks to promote the usage of alternatives to these chemicals, and inspiring homeowners to embrace a new "lawn ethic". Audubon wants to empower homeowners to transform their lawns into their own pesticide free backyard habitats, which will ultimately lead to an environment that is better for flora, fauna and people. It's not that hard to do, and can even save you time in the garden!

A healthy, bird-friendly backyard habitat consists of a diverse range of native plant and grass species, which naturally require less maintenance and care as they are already adapted to the local environment. These native plants also attract more birds and beneficial insects, that can lead to a healthier lawn, by balancing any pest problems that may occur. The reality is, however, that non-native plant species, pesticides, herbicides, and other lawn chemicals don't create a healthy backyard habitat for birds, wildlife, plants, and people. They create monoculture lawns that consist of a single grass species, which are more susceptible to disease and create a dependence on chemical fertilizers to stay healthy. These toxic chemicals drive away many of the same bird and beneficial insect species that help keep lawns healthy, which cause the need for increased time and money for lawn and garden maintenance.

As you begin to plan your lawns for this spring, Audubon is strongly encouraging citizens to help inspire a new lawn ethic across the state, by turning their lawns into pesticide free model backyard habitats, packed with native plants. And they have many brochures and flyers available to help you get started. Please contact their offices (518-869-9731 / smahar@audubon.org) to obtain copies of our educational materials on pesticides and creating bird friendly backyard habitats. Also to learn more tips and ideas, don't forget to visit the Audubon at home website, http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/



Audubon New York Releases "Important Bird Areas of New York: Habitats Worth Protecting"

* SAAS is pleased to have Jillian Liner, co-author of "Important Birds Areas of New York", as the speaker for our June 22 public program. Ms. Liner will discuss the IBA program and its importance to bird populations in New York State. With our own chapter's Fort Edward Grasslands IBA in jeopardy with the proposed Killian Subdivision, it is crucial that we learn all we can about protecting this habitat.

Audubon New York, the state program of the National Audubon Society, has updated and released the second edition of *Important Bird Areas of New York* to provide the most current information about critical habitat for bird populations that live in or migrate through the state. The 136 sites listed in the book cover every region of the state and offer readers ample information about habitat, the bird life supported at each site, and how the sites are used by our avian friends - for breeding, over-wintering, or during migration - as well as explaining conservation issues faced at each site."

Co-authored by Audubon New York staff members Dr. Michael Burger and Jillian Liner, this new book is the culmination of a two-year process of identifying IBAs in which many people assisted, including members of the technical committee and others who nominated sites, provided data, and reviewed site summaries. This book will serve as a catalyst for preserving, managing, and/or restoring these remarkable places through a broad array of scientific, educational, and advocacy initiatives on local, state, and national levels. Over the upcoming year Audubon New York, with the help of local Audubon Chapters and others, will be working to educate the public, elected and appointed officials, and conservationists to use the information provided by *Important Bird Areas of New York* to preserve the most important habitats for birds in the State.

Habitat is the key to conservation," said Dr. Michael Burger, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon New York. "To thrive, birds need adequate and appropriate places to nest, forage, stop-over during migration, and over-winter." Habitat loss and degradation are the leading threats to vulnerable bird species in North America. It follows that habitat protection and proper stewardship are the primary goals for bird conservation.

"IBAs have become a powerful and internationally accepted method to focus bird conservation efforts," said Jillian Liner, IBA Program Coordinator. "Whether you are the local town planner, a backyard bird watcher, a school teacher, or a budding scientist, *Important Bird Areas of New York* will serve as a rich tool for individual activity or community action. The future of New York's birds will depend in large part on the protection and proper management of the critical habitats found at these sites."

For more information on the IBA program, or to order copies of *Important Bird Areas of New York* online, please visit http://ny.audubon.org/IBA new.htm or call Audubon New York at 518-869-9731

To order your copy of Important Bird Areas in New York State, 2nd Ed. please fill out this form and send it with your check
for \$19.99 (includes tax, shipping and handling) payable to Audubon New York to:
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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 Supporting 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.



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