



The Fledgling

Newsletter of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society, Inc.

Vol. 32 No. 2, December 2014—February 2015

Visit SAAS at: <http://www.southernadirondackaudubon.org>

This newsletter is in color online!

Join a Bird Count team on Dec. 14

Area birders and nature enthusiasts are invited to participate in the annual Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, Dec. 14.

Tens of thousands of volunteers will participate in more than 2,000 individual counts scheduled to take place throughout the Americas from mid-December to early January. The collected data contributes to the U.S. government's natural history monitoring database.

SAAS birders count species within a 15-mile diameter circle centered in Hudson Falls. The circle includes the city of Glens Falls, the villages of South Glens Falls, Fort Edward, and Hudson Falls, as well as much of the towns of Queensbury, Fort Edward, and Moreau.

You do not need to be a bird identification expert to participate. Birders of all skill levels are needed. Non-birders are welcome to help spot birds or keep team records. Most of the birding is done from a car, but

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Peru, Easter Island and Short-eared Owls featured in winter programs

John Schneider will present “**Machu Picchu, Easter Island, and Lake Titicaca: Three More Bucket List Items**” on Wednesday, **Jan. 28, 2015**, during the monthly program of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society. The program will be held at 7 p.m. in the Christine L. McDonald Community Room on

the lower level of Crandall Library in Glens Falls. Admission is free.

The slide show and talk will focus on Schneider's travels to South America in May, 2014. He visited three places that he wanted to see since childhood: Lake Titicaca and Machu Picchu in Peru, and Easter Island in Chile. The trip was organized by the Appalachian Mountain Club.



John Schneider took this photo on Lake Titicaca.

Lake Titicaca, between Peru and Bolivia, is the highest navigable lake in the world at 12,500 feet above sea level, and the third largest lake in South America. The group visited the famous floating reed islands still inhabited by people on a full time basis. The group also toured the Inca ruins in and around Cuzco, the capital of the Inca Empire, and hiked the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, one of the sacred sites of the Incas.

The group then flew to Easter Island, about 2,400 miles off the coast of Chile. This small volcanic island, triangular in shape, is only about 10 miles per side. The native population created 1,000 large statues, but only about 400 were taken out of the quarry and erected in single rows.

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Southern Adirondack Audubon Society Board and Committees

Website:

<http://www.southernadironackaudubon.org>

Email: info@southernadironackaudubon.org

Officers:

President: Pat Fitzgerald

(518-792-6846; fitzgeraldsaas@yahoo.com)

Vice-President: OPEN

Secretary: Linda Hoyt (518-494-2380)

Treasurer: Mona Bearor (518-745-8637)

Board of Directors:

2011-2014 Barbara Beatty
Linda Hoyt
Sue Pierce

2012-2015 Jason Goldsmith
Joyce Miller
Carol Moyer

2013-2015 Jim Campinell
Pat Fitzgerald
Jim Ries

Board meetings are held monthly. Members are invited to attend. Contact Pat Fitzgerald for details.

Committees:

Newsletter Editor: Joyce Miller

(editor@southernadironackaudubon.org)

Education: Mona Bearor (518-745-8637)

Publicity: Carol Moyer (518-793-1960)

Conservation: Jason Goldsmith (518-480-4243)

Membership: Barbara Beatty (518-793-1454)

Southern Adirondack Audubon Society (SAAS) is a certified local chapter of the National Audubon Society. The organization's primary goal is to protect the environment by preserving natural habitats and promoting environmental education. The group has more than 450 members in Warren, Washington, and northern Saratoga counties in New York State.

Which binoculars to buy?

Binoculars that are easy to focus and have a crisp image will make your birding experiences much easier. For tips on buying binoculars and brand recommendations, go to Cornell Lab or Ornithology's All About Birds site (<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/>). In the search box, type in terms such as *binoculars* or *budget optics*.

Bird Count on Dec. 14

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some teams may walk along trails or in area parks. The many diverse habitats within the SAAS count circle make for interesting observations. It's also a fun way to get to know area birders and increase your skills.

The Christmas Bird Count started in 1900 as an alternative event to the over-hunting of birds for feathers for the millinery trade.

To join a count team for a whole or partial day, contact Linda White at 518-792-4446 or 518-222-5675. For details, see the SAAS website.

Membership update

Currently, 474 members of National Audubon live in our chapter area. Many of our 132 chapter supporters belong to the National Audubon Society and also financially support our local efforts of conservation and education. Chapter supporter dues are the main support for our chapter activities. Gift memberships are available, and will be announced with an appropriate card at your request. Our newest chapter supporters are:

<i>Patricia Maddock</i>	<i>Glens Falls</i>
<i>Barbara Henry</i>	<i>Mayfield</i>
<i>Pat Demko</i>	<i>Bolton Landing</i>

SAAS wish list items sought

The Southern Adirondack Audubon Society board has these "wish list" items:

- postage stamps
- gift cards for area businesses
- reams of white copy paper
- bird-related gift basket items for monthly raffle
- dry, secure storage space or a storage unit
- meeting space for monthly board meetings.

Online donations possible

SAAS is now a member of **NY Charities.org**. This free online contribution portal allows anyone to make a secure donation to our chapter.

We have placed a link on the homepage of our website making it easy for those who wish to donate.





Hayden, a Queensbury native, has worked at DEC for 10 years. He attended the University of Wyoming to earn a bachelor of science degree, and the University of Maine for graduate school. His master's thesis focused on marsh bird habitat use and population trends in Maine. He specializes in non-game birds and mammals for DEC Region 5, which encompasses Fulton, Saratoga, Warren, Washington, Essex, Hamilton, Franklin and Clinton Counties.

Please avoid wearing fragrances to avoid triggering allergies, asthma, and migraines in others attending the program.

Winter programs

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Retired since 1997, Schneider has traveled extensively both in the United States and abroad. He has twice visited Antarctica and the Galapagos Islands, taken river cruises in Europe and China, visited South Africa, Swaziland and Namibia, taken a 12-day train ride across Russia, and enjoyed a 32-day ocean voyage on the Atlantic Ocean. He has visited 49 of the fifty states and hiked in about 38 of the major national parks. He has been to 52 countries and destinations recognized by the Travelers' Century Club.

Jed Hayden, a wildlife biologist from the N.Y.S. Department of Conservation (DEC), will present **"Washington County Grasslands: A Resource Worth Saving"** on Wednesday, Feb. 25, as part of the SAAS monthly program.

The slide show and talk will offer a general overview of the DEC's work in the Washington County Grassland in Fort Edward. It includes the DEC's winter research with grassland raptors, focusing on Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers. The program will cover the projects and research practices. It also includes spring and summer work with breeding songbird surveys.

Above, John Schneider's photo captures a scene on Easter Island.

Below, Dr. Gordon Ellmers provided this photo of a hunting Short-eared Owl, taken in the Washington County Grasslands in Fort Edward.





Species Spotlight

Red-tailed Hawk

By Joyce Miller, Newsletter Editor

The Red-tailed Hawk is the most common hawk in our area. A drive on the Northway almost always ensures the sighting of a few hunched in trees scanning for prey.

Red-tails have a four-foot wingspan and measure about 25 inches from tail to bill tip. Wild Red-tails usually live up to 15 years. They belong to the Buteo group of large, stocky, short-tailed hawks. They breed across North America and are year-round residents in most of that range.

A perched Red-tail has a distinctive profile: a small head, heart-shaped body with a short, squared-off tail. Look for a buffy chest with a brownish-striped belly band. From the back, you can often see the red-dish tail of the adult and buffy inverted-V pattern on the back.

The descending, screeching “keeeeeerrrr” call of this hawk is famously used on television commercials and in movies, even though other raptors like Bald Eagles might be pictured. Red-tails primarily eat small rodents, rabbits and squirrels, but also snakes, small reptiles and amphibians, insects and occasionally birds.

They can spot prey from as far away as 100 feet. Because they weigh less than three pounds, they cannot carry off animals more than five pounds, despite urban legends. In spring, Red-tail pairs lock



Dr. Gordon Ellmers photographed this Red-tailed Hawk being pursued by a Red-winged Blackbird. Blackbirds perceive hawks as possible predators and will aggressively chase them from the smaller birds’ territory.

talons and fall through the air as part of their courtship dance. Breeding pairs can hunt cooperatively. For more information about Red-tailed Hawks, see Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s page on All About Birds: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/red-tailed_hawk/id.

Birding by the Month

Winter species arriving

By Mona Bearor, Education Chair

Watch for these bird activities in upcoming months:

December

- Owls begin pairing up for the nesting season; listen for them calling at dusk.
- Look for signs of irruptive species, such as redpolls, siskins and grosbeaks.
- Check all flocks of Snow Buntings and Horned Larks in agricultural areas for a Lapland Longspur.

January

- Carefully check locations where gulls concentrate for that rarity!
- Large bodies of open water may host uncommon species such as scoters and grebes.
- The raptor show is on in the grasslands! Look for hawks and harriers during the day, owls at dusk.

February

- Bald Eagles may be found near any areas of open water.
- Waterfowl numbers are on the rise; keep an eye on the Hudson River from Fort Miller to Stillwater.
- Red-winged Blackbirds return to herald the start of Spring!

President's Message

Climate March sends message

By Pat Fitzgerald, President

In September, I made my way to New York City to join 400,000 supporters in the People's Climate March. It was the largest gathering, to date, of people concerned about the effect climate change is having on our world.

Being there, seeing the number and diversity of people, and knowing that more than 2,600 rallies in 162 countries were happening around the world made me feel that we were sending a powerful message.

This event coincided with National Audubon's *Birds and Climate Change Report*, which predicts that over 300 North American bird species will be seriously threatened by climate change by the end of this century.

The species at risk are separated into two groups: those which are climate threatened and those which are climate endangered. According to the report, climate endangered species could lose over half of their current ranges by 2080, and climate threatened species could lose over half of their current ranges by 2050.

In our area, which is part of the Atlantic Flyway, some summer birds will no longer be seen, instead finding their ways northward to a more suitable climate. The Chestnut-sided Warblers, Scarlet Tanagers, and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are among some of my favorites whose numbers are already diminishing in our area.

Find more information on the bird species, their changing ranges and what you can do to help by going to National Audubon's The Climate Report webpage: <http://climate.audubon.org/>.

Field trips start again in 2015

The field trip season is over for 2014. The upcoming late winter and spring schedule will appear in our March issue. We will also post field trips on our Facebook page and website. Chapter supporters for whom we have an e-mail address will be receiving notices about field trips as information becomes available. If you would like to be added to the field trip list, notify us through our webpage. If you would like to be deleted from the list, simply respond to the first field trip notice requesting to be removed from further notifications.

SAAS helped fund local bird survey

The report "Priority Bird Habitats in the Town of Putnam" was completed this summer by researcher Sheila Tuttle for the Lake George Land Conservancy (LGLC).

Southern Adirondack Audubon partially funded this important survey. A link to the survey is available on the SAAS website, under Conservation.

The Town of Putnam is located in northern Washington County, New York, and is part of the Lake Champlain watershed. The LGLC supports a 51-acre preserve in the Town of Putnam, the Last Great Shoreline with 2,357 feet along the lake.

A total of 101 species of birds were observed between mid-May and mid-August.

Bird habitat in Putnam ranges "from diverse wetlands to coniferous and deciduous forest, to vast stretches of prime grassland," Tuttle wrote in the report's introduction. "The study area contains key habitat that is contiguous with the exceptional habitats

of the Putnam Preserve, located due west of the current survey area. These contiguous habitats provide connectivity essential to many birds." She surveyed several areas in four major habitat types: wetland, shrubs, forest, grasslands.

LGLC works to protect land within the Lake George watershed. According to the group's website, the LGLC is "a not-for-profit land trust dedicated to working with willing landowners and other partners to protect the world-renowned water quality of Lake George and to permanently preserve the natural, scenic, historical and recreational resources of the Lake George region. Founded in 1988, LGLC uses progressive conservation strategies to work with landowners, government officials, conservation partners, volunteers, and supporters aimed at securing the protection of special natural places for future generations to enjoy.

Our nature preserves are open to the public for educational, scientific or passive recreational pursuits, such as hiking, bird watching and photography."

Buy Duck Stamps

Consider purchasing a \$15 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp ("Duck Stamp"), for yourself or as a holiday gift for your favorite birder.

Ninety eight cents of every dollar generated by the sale of the stamp goes directly to purchase or lease habitat in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The stamp also serves as an entrance pass for National Wildlife Refuges. Since 1934, the stamps have generated over \$800 million, which has been used to purchase or lease over 6 million acres of waterfowl habitat in the US.

Duck stamps can be purchased at <http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps/stamps.htm> or at your nearest post office.

Stop, Look and Listen!

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Another tip is to break up your outline by standing in front of some greenery rather than in the middle of a road or trail. Wearing clothing that blends with natural surroundings helps as well. Pete Dunne, the Director of the Cape May Bird Observatory, says, "Good birders don't wear white!"

Look!

All too often I find myself meandering down a trail hoping birds will appear without actually "working" to find them. To be really aware of your surroundings and focus on the sights around you takes a lot of practice.

I try to be aware of any movement by first watching the area nearby, then the landscape further away. It always pays to check the tops of any trees for perching songsters that may be too far to hear, but still recognizable in your binoculars.

Scanning with your binoculars can be productive as well, especially at "edge" habitat - where two distinct habitats meet, such as a meadow and forest. Birds are often very active at edges, particularly if that spot receives sun on early mornings or on cool days. Any tree or shrub that produces berries can be a bird magnet, so pay special attention to those.

In the fall, wild grape vines can host many species of migrants. Trees that flower early in the spring will have insects that attract warblers so give all fruit trees a second look.

Listen!

Although the scream of a hawk or the meow of a cat would cause a bird to take cover and remain motionless, the sound of your voice often has no effect on birds.

That said, if you are chattering to your birding partner

while walking a trail you most likely will not be able to hear all the birds around you. Since birds are more often heard than seen, it pays to be quiet.

This is especially true on a field trip where the voices of several people can be disruptive to the leader as he or she tries to locate birds for the participants. There are birders who can still hear and recognize bird calls while they carry on a conversation, but these people are few and far between. For the benefit of everyone talk

quietly, if at all.

Just as observation skills have to be cultivated, so does the ability to listen well. I sometimes find that closing my eyes helps me to focus on listening; it removes the visual stimulus that ruins my concentration. Of course, I recommend doing this only after determining that there is no bird movement nearby!

Practice locating where a sound is coming from. I have searched for a bird in front of me, only to find it perched behind me. Some birds are

real ventriloquists and it makes them particularly hard to locate.

If you have searched and searched but can't locate the bird singing, try facing the way you think the song originates, cup your hands behind your ears, really concentrate, and listen again - you may find that the sound is actually coming from a slightly different direction.

I'm sure you've learned that bird songs most often lead you to the male of the species, while locating the origin of those tiny chips and squeaks might reveal a female or juvenile. I find this especially interesting as quite often it leads to observing a new behavior.

Birding is a continuing learning process - one of the things about it that I especially enjoy. There is always something new, whether it is a new bird, a new song, or a new behavior.

These skills do take time to cultivate. However, if you simply stop, look, and listen you will be rewarded with many sightings that might otherwise be missed.



This Short-eared Owl was spotted by Dr. Gordon Ellmers.

Renew your membership now!

If your mailing label shows 2014, it's time to renew your Southern Adirondack Audubon membership!

Local memberships end with the calendar year.

Membership as a "Chapter Supporter" is only \$10 annually. All dues are used locally to support chapter activities, local conservation issues, monthly programs, and field trips. You will also receive four issues of *The Fledgling* newsletter.

Chapter Supporter memberships are a perfect holiday gift for nature enthusiasts.

Make your check payable to "Southern Adirondack Audubon Society" and send with name, address, and phone number to: **Barbara Beatty, 12 Heinrich St., Queensbury, N.Y., 12804.**

To save paper, time and postage, opt to receive *The Fledgling* in electronic format. Just indicate this on the membership form. You may also fill out the form on the SAAS web page: <http://southernadirondackaudubon.org/membership/membership.html> or sign up at one of our monthly programs.

You may also want to renew your membership in the National Audubon Society. National membership in the Audubon Society includes the magazine, *Audubon*, and the SAAS newsletter, *The Fledgling*. Dues for the National Audubon Society go to support national issues. The cost is \$20 annually for regular membership and \$15 for seniors and students. Make checks payable to "National Audubon Society," and send with a name, address, phone number, and e-mail (optional) to Membership Chair Barbara Beatty.

Thanks for renewing now!



Send in your renewal today!

Consider saving resources by receiving *The Fledgling* newsletter in electronic form only. The electronic version is in color and arrives faster.

- ☐ **Yes, electronic only. Thanks!**
- ☐ **No; paper newsletter, please.**

Please print clearly below or attach a mailing label:

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

Phone: (____) _____

I've enclosed a check for either a chapter supporter or national membership:

- ☐ a check made out to "Southern Adirondack Audubon Society" (chapter supporter: \$10)
- ☐ a check made out to "National Audubon Society" (national: \$20; \$15 seniors/students)

I am also including a gift of \$_____ for chapter use.

Please mail the form and your check to **Barbara Beatty, 12 Heinrich St., Queensbury, N.Y., 12804.**

Thank you for your membership!



The Fledgling
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Stop, Look, Listen!

By Mona Bearor, Education Chair

Do you remember hearing this in grade school when the teacher was giving you safety tips for crossing the street? Today, the same advice applies if you want to maximize the number of birds you see - whether out for a morning walk alone or participating in a field trip.

Stop!

Birds are food for many different predators and birds must constantly be alert to their presence. Think of yourself as a large mammal moving through their space - to them you spell "danger." Birds are extremely alert to their surroundings, and at first sign of disturbance they will seek cover and remain motionless until they perceive the threat has passed. You can minimize your impact by simply stopping occasionally and remaining in place while the birds settle down. This method is used by professionals when using the "point count" method of bird surveying. It calls for a three minute period of stillness after exiting your vehicle before the counting begins. If you are inactive the



A Northern Harrier floats over a Fort Edward field in this photo by Dr. Gordon Ellmers.

birds will not see you as a threat and will resume feeding or moving about where you can then see them. Remember that if the sun is at your back your shadow will precede you down the trail and have the same effect on birds, as will waving your arms at mosquitoes.

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