



The Fledgling

Newsletter of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society, Inc.

Vol. 34 No. 2, December 2016-February 2017

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



Gerry Lemmo will talk about the ecology of the Albany Pine Bush on Feb. 22. The colorful Prairie Warbler is one of many birds found there. Photo: Gerry Lemmo.

website, "Audubon's passion for birds carried him across a continental wilderness to observe them in their natural habitat, and his skills as an artist and observer immortalized them and their environment to remind and inspire us two centuries later. A singular visionary in frontier America, Audubon was the godfather of today's conservation movement."

The film's director, screenwriter and producer Al Reinert, co-wrote the screenplay for Apollo 13, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Writing, Screenplay. He received his second Oscar nomination for Best Documentary, Feature for the film, *For All Mankind*, which also garnered the Sundance Film Festival's Audience Award for Documentary. Producer and Editor John Aldrich has worked for Discovery, PBS and National Geographic Television.

Photographer and naturalist Gerry Lemmo will present "**Exploring Albany's Pine Bush**" on Wednesday, **Feb. 22**, in Glens Falls.

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2017 starts with Audubon film and Pine Bush show

By Joyce Miller, Newsletter Editor

Southern Adirondack Audubon's monthly programs will continue to alternate between Crandall Library in Glens Falls and the Saratoga Springs Public Library. There is no monthly program in December.

"**Audubon The Film: The Story of John James Audubon**" will be shown on Wednesday, **January 25** at the **Saratoga Springs Public Library** on Henry Street in downtown Saratoga Springs. The program will start at the special time of **6:30 p.m.**, earlier

than usual. The documentary is 92 minutes long.

The 2015 documentary tells the story of naturalist John James Audubon (1785-1851). According to the film's



Portrait of John James Audubon by John Syme, 1826, The White House Historical Association. (Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8e/John_James_Audubon_1826.jpg)

Area Christmas Bird Counts

Saturday, Dec. 17:

- Southern Adirondack Audubon's CBC, Glens Falls/Hudson Falls area
- Lake George Land Conservancy CBC, Lake George area

Sunday, Dec. 18:

- Saratoga CBC, Saratoga Springs area.

See page 8 for details.

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Southern Adirondack Audubon Society

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Board and Committees

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2014-2016	OPEN OPEN OPEN
2015-2017	Barbara Beatty Jody Schleicher Laurel Male
2016-2018	Joyce Miller Rob Snell Pat Demko

Board meetings are held monthly except July, August and December. Members are invited to attend. Contact John Loz for details.

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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 500 members in Warren, Washington, northern Saratoga and southern Hamilton counties in New York State. Contact a board member to find out more about volunteer opportunities.

Bird Banding: Part I

The Technology of Tracking Birds

By John Loz, SAAS President

John Loz is sharing a new series about bird tracking technology, in lieu of a President's Message. This series will delve into the details of different types of tracking devices, from unpowered tiny polymer bird leg bands to solar battery-powered transmitter bird backpacks. These devices shed light on the science of bird behavior and where exactly birds go for the winter.

Have you ever looked up at a V-shaped formation of flying Canada Geese and wondered, "Where exactly do they go for the winter?" Many bird species migrate, but not all fly south. Some migrate locally to where food sources are, and some only fly a short distance south within the same state. Others fly between their breeding grounds in the Canadian boreal forests to their wintering grounds in the jungles of Central and South America.

So how do we know where they all go? Thank the constant innovations in technology to give us the answers.

A Short History of Bird Banding

The most notable cataloguer of birds in the United States was John James Audubon. Audubon was born in 1785 on the island of Hispaniola in what is today known as Haiti, then under the control of France. To save his son from being drafted into Napoleon's Army, Audubon's father shipped John off to America where he settled in Mill Grove, Pennsylvania. Audubon discovered birds he had not seen in Hispaniola. He wondered if the birds he saw were the same birds that returned each year. He concocted the idea of attaching a tag to a silver wire and tying it around a nesting bird's leg to see if the same bird returned. To his delight and luck, he saw the same bird the following spring with the silver wire and tag still intact. This was the first time "banding" of birds was initiated in the young United States. Audubon's passion for birds was fueled by this experiment, and led him to document this young nation's birds through his famous paintings.

Banding birds was nothing new, though. Four hundred years before Audubon, in western China, Mongolia, and the Middle East, falcons and Golden Eagles were typically employed for hunting. During the 1200's, these falconers affixed a silver tablet to the feet of a bird, with the owner's name imprinted upon the tablet. But even before that, pigeons were "banded" by the Romans with tiny pieces of parchment, with inscribed messages to send messages to generals throughout the empire. Although these different forms of banding did not identify exactly where birds migrated, it did establish a way to identify the bird when it was found.

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Today's bird bands have more detailed identification information than Audubon's silver wire.

SAAS Winter Programs

Continued from page 1

The program will be held in the Christine L. McDonald Community Room on the lower level of Crandall Library. The program starts at 7 p.m. and is free to the public.

The Albany Pine Bush is where the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly still survives, though surrounded by human development. In this program, people will learn about the many plants and animals, both common and rare, that are protected within this remarkable oasis of nature, Lemmo said.

The Albany Pine Bush is located on New Karner Road in Albany. It is one of only approximately 20 remaining inland pitch pine scrub oak barrens worldwide, according to its website. It is home to 45 wildlife "Species of Greatest Conservation Need," including 15 birds, 14 reptiles and amphibians and 16 insects, as well as hundreds of other more common wildlife species.

Gerry Lemmo is a professional photographer, naturalist and lecturer specializing in wildlife, natural history and travel images from around the globe. He has photographed wildlife and scenery in six continents. Lemmo's photos have been featured in exhibits across the country, from the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, to California's San Diego Zoo, as well as regionally: the Adirondack Park Visitor Interpretive Centers in both Paul Smiths and Newcomb, the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake and The Wild Center in Tupper Lake.

He presents more than 175 lectures each year, offering 31 different color slide presentations to schools, libraries and other organizations throughout the region.

Lemmo has taken more than 100,000 photographs, from common backyard insects to endangered species from upstate New York to Antarctica, Patagonian Chile, Trinidad, Alaska, Central America, Madagascar and The Amazon. His photos appear



The Spotted Turtle is found in the Albany Pine Bush. It is a species of Special Concern in New York State. Their numbers have greatly declined due to pollution, pet collecting and loss of habitat. Below, the Discovery Center at Albany Pine Bush. Photos: Gerry Lemmo.



in more than 100 books for adults and children, and his articles and diverse images have been published in national and international magazines.

He has provided photos to more than 60 publishers, as well as clients such as The National Geographic Society, International Paper Company, General Electric, The London Times, The National Wildlife Federation, Na-

tional Audubon Society, Animal

Planet, MSNBC, Monterey Bay Aquarium and The Nature Conservancy, among others. A native of Queens, Lemmo moved to Queensbury 41 years ago. Some of his photos can be viewed at <http://www.gerrylemmo.com>.

Please avoid wearing fragranced products to the program. Fragranced products trigger allergies, asthma and migraines in others attending the event.

Six Months of Birding Memories

By Mona Bearor
Education Chair

You never know what amazing things you will see if you take your binoculars with you every time you leave the house.

January brought a lovely pair of Hooded Mergansers on the Hudson observed from the Betar Byway in South Glens Falls, a White-throated Sparrow that stayed with me at home all winter, and Eastern Bluebirds on snow-covered trees on the Towpath in Hudson Falls.

February rewarded me with the sight of thousands of American Crows settling into their roost along the Hudson and the beauty of a Long-tailed Duck on a frigid, rainy, and windy day on Sandy Hook in New Jersey.

March's prizes were a Great Horned Owl on a nest in the Ballston Creek Preserve and seeing Northern Gannets diving into the ocean near Emerald Isle in North Carolina.

April brought views of more than 200 Black Skimmers resting on a sandbar in Beaufort, N.C., then after returning home, a Black-crowned Night-Heron foraging along the old Champlain Canal.

May taught me that male Baltimore Orioles will recycle nest material from a previously used nest and use it in a new location. The month also brought a lone American Avocet to a flooded field on New Swamp Road in Hudson Falls, and the beautiful sighting of a male Indigo Bunting in a blooming wild apple tree.

June was full of surprises! Two Sandhill Cranes flew over my car while driving north on I-87 in Warren County, an American Bittern "sang" in full view in a marsh in Bolton, a male Northern Harrier defended his territory against five Turkey Vultures.

Take notes about your own sightings and experiences each month!

Species Spotlight

Barred Owl

By Joyce Miller, Newsletter Editor

Though the Barred Owl is the most commonly seen owl in our area, it is still always a thrill. This owl has a round head with no ear tufts and dark brown eyes. (The Great Horned Owl has noticeable ear tufts and yellow eyes.) This sturdy owl is about 18 inches tall, with a four-foot wingspan. Here's the mnemonic for their calls: "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-aaaall? (The Great Horned Owl says "Who's awake? Me toooo!")"

Barred Owls prefer forests and swampy woods. They eat squirrels and other small animals and even an occasional fish. They are permanent residents in their ranges, and do not migrate. Females are larger than males, and can defend their territory all year, swooping at intruders. Great Horned Owls, hawks, raccoons and other animals will eat the owls' eggs and chicks.

Their mating season runs from December to March. In late winter, a courting pair will perform duets together, barking and hooting, including a long "hoo-aaah" call. (This writer once stood under a pair of Barred Owls in the Everglades as they sat right next to each other, loudly caterwauling, their bodies bent horizontal with effort. Memorable!)

Pairs stay with their mates over the years. Barred owls nest in tree cavities or use nest boxes. The female incubates her two or three eggs for a month. The young take another month to fledge. The oldest known Barred Owl was 24 years old.

Barred Owls are native to the eastern United States, but their range has expanded north across Canada and down into the Northwest. The North American Breeding Bird Survey reports that their populations have risen 1.5% per year in the last five decades. According to Partners in Flight, about 3 million Barred Owls exist.

For more, see Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds site, https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Barred_Owl/id.



Don Polunci took this photo of a Barred Owl on the Towpath Road in Hudson Falls.

Bird Banding

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Modern Bird Banding

Today, bird banding technology involves the mass production of molded plastic polymer rings or rings made from various types of metal. Specialized banding pliers and rivet guns were also invented to safely band different bird legs. For some polymer bird bands, a tool is not required: they are a coiled band resembling a child's slap-on bracelet toy.

To accommodate different size birds, more than 30 different standard sizes of bands can accommodate the leg of a hummingbird to a Bald Eagle or Trumpeter Swan. Bands can range in widths from 2 mm to 27 mm.

Molded polymer bird bands are constructed typically with light weight materials, such as celluloid, Reoplex, and polyvinylchloride Darvic, which do not impede a bird's flight or foraging habits. A typical songbird only weighs 15 to 30 grams or 0.5 to 1 ounce, so a properly weighted band should only weigh .01 ounce or 0.3 grams overall.

As mentioned, bird bands can be made from a plastic polymer or from a number of metals, such as aluminum, and typically have butt ends. These bands are usually imprinted with letters, numbers, symbols, and sometimes country codes, for distinguishing birds of the same species. Various organizations, state agencies and environmental research groups use multiple bands on the same bird using different colors and combinations of aluminum and plastic bands to distinguish where the bird was banded and who is doing the banding.

Determining the type of band to use on a specific species of bird is based on how long a particular bird lives and its habitat. Does it frequent a fresh water lake or river or does it forage and breed in a more corrosive environment, such as a salt water marsh? Aluminum and polymer bird bands have a life expectancy as well. Materials degrade and wear out after prolonged exposure to the elements,

so choosing the appropriate band for a bird requires some knowledge of the birds' inherent nature.

Small birds, such as songbirds and hummingbirds, typically have a shorter lifespan (~2 to 8 years) and encounter fresh water from rain or bird-baths. They would only require a band made of plastic or aluminum.

Larger birds, such as Ospreys and Bald Eagles, can live more than 25 years and often encounter salt water habitats. They would require a metal band that is more resistant to the environment. Bands made from stainless steel, aluminum, copper, monel or incoloy (a type of superalloy) are typically more expensive, but have a much longer lifespan and usually are made with a robust fastening feature, such as a lock-on rivet. These bands also deter these large raptors from removing the band with their strong bills. The lock-on rivets are usually attached using a device called a "pop-rivet gun" developed by Charles Sindelar, an ornithology professor formerly at University of Wisconsin.

Although bands are typically attached around a bird's leg, there are other variations of metal and plastic polymer bands created for different sized birds. For larger marsh birds and waterfowl such as geese and herons with long necks, non-heat conducting, flexible vinyl neck collars are used. These neck bands will allow a long-legged wading bird to move through a marshy area without catching a leg band on debris.

Other waterfowl such as the Common Loon have thin, almost rectan-



Small birds, like this European Serin, get more petite bird bands. Photo: Júlio Reis/CC BY-SA 2.5

gular legs. These birds require a specially made flattened band that looks like a squashed ring, which fits comfortably on the bird's leg allowing it to paddle unencumbered.

Bird banding has been used for more than 100 years and continues to be used as an inexpensive means of tracking a bird. There are, however, limitations. The banded birds must be observed or re-caught in order to identify the banding code on the band or ring. There is mortality, as well, and not all birds are re-seen or recaptured. In Part Two of this series in the March issue, we'll look at another technology that is being used to better track bird locations: electronic transmitters.

Resources:

From U.S. Geological Survey:

- About Bird Bands (<https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/homepage/btypes.cfm>)
- Identifying Unusual Bands (<https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/homepage/otherbnd.cfm>)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

- Deep Dive: A Closer Look at Bird Banding (<http://tiny.cc/nwfogy>)

Raptor Resource Project Blog

- <https://raptorresource.blogspot.com/>

Raptor Research Foundation:

- www.raptorresearchfoundation.org/files/2015/10/Chapter-13.pdf

Natural gift ideas

Here are some holiday gift ideas to benefit the natural world:

- Sponsor a loon or Northern Saw-whet Owl to support the research by the Biodiversity Research Institute's Adirondack Center for Loon Conservation in Saranac Lake. Sponsorship gift packages include a certificate, a letter with information about the bird, photographs and more. See <http://www.briloon.org/support-our-work/adopt-a-loon>.
- Buy Duck Stamps - A \$15 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp ("Duck Stamp") serves as an entrance pass for National Wildlife Refuges. Ninety-eight cents of every dollar from the sale of the stamp goes to purchase or lease habitat in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Visit <http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps/stamps.htm> or your nearest post office.
- Give a SAAS chapter membership. See page 7 for more.
- Although we fully support shopping locally whenever possible, for those times when you shop online, you can donate to our chapter by shopping on the AmazonSmile website. Log in with your existing Amazon.com ac-

count or sign up for a new account by clicking on the AmazonSmile logo to the left. Choose *Southern Adirondack Audubon Society, Inc.* from the dropdown menu and Amazon.com will donate .5% of your purchase price to us! After your initial login, AmazonSmile will remember that you have chosen Southern Adirondack Audubon Society each time you shop with them.

Plan gardens now

As winter settles in, it's nice to think about planning a garden. The National Audubon Society offers some websites that can help:

- **10 Plants for a Bird-Friendly Yard** <http://www.audubon.org/news/10-plants-bird-friendly-yard>—This site describes native perennial plants, trees and shrubs that birds love, such as Purple Coneflowers, Milkweed, Cardinal Flower, Trumpet Honeysuckle and Dogwood. The site includes links to more information and suggested books.
- **How to Make Your Yard Bird-friendly**—<http://www.audubon.org/news/how-make-your-yard-bird-friendly-0>—"The secret to success

lies in choosing locally native plants, which brim with nutritious insects, berries, nectar, and seeds to give birds vital food and refuge," according to the site.

- Native plants can replace lawns. Audubon's page says that the United States has 40 million acres of lawn. Eighty million pounds of pesticides are applied each year to U.S. lawns. Native plants thrive without pesticides. Lawn mowers use 800 million gallons of gas each year in the United States.

Crow roost time

In winter, American Crows gather at dusk by the hundreds or thousands in large, noisy flocks to roost, or rest at night, together. Late in the afternoon, look skyward to notice streams of crows flying in the same direction as they head to their roosting spots. In recent years, one roosting spot in South Glens Falls has attracted hundreds of chatty crows.

For a two-minute podcast and transcript about this fascinating natural event, go to BirdNote's episode "The Crows' Night Roost": <http://birdnote.org/show/crows-night-roost>.



Winter birding hotspot—*The Washington Important Bird Area grasslands in the Fort Edward area has long been an important summer breeding area and winter home for bird species that are rapidly declining in the eastern part of this country.*

Area birders travel to this area to look for winter migrants such as Short-eared Owl, Rough-legged Hawk and Snow Buntings. Hay bales such as these provide roost places for Short-eared Owls. At least two Short-eared Owls were seen in late November in this area.

For more information about birding in these grasslands, see: <http://southernadirondackaudubon.org/> and click the Birding link. (Photo by Mona Bearor)

December is membership renewal time!

Local chapter memberships end with the calendar year. Please renew your membership now!

Membership as a "Chapter Supporter" is only **\$10 annually**.

Use the form below, or renew online at <http://southernadirondackaudubon.org/membership/membership.html>. You can also sign up at one of our monthly programs.

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.

To save paper, time and postage, we send electronic copies of our newsletter, so make sure to include your email address. (Of course, your email address is kept confidential and never shared.) If you want to receive a paper copy of *The Fledgling*, indicate this on the membership form below. You can also read *The Fledgling* on our website at anytime.



Chapter Supporter members receive notices about field trips and other SAAS events through the chapter newsletter.

Welcome, new members!

Our newest chapter supporters are:

*Darren Briggs, Granville
Craig Foster, Warrensburg
Catherine Atherden, Queensbury
Beth Smisloff, Saratoga.*

Currently, we have 164 chapter supporters, and 504 members of National Audubon in our area.

Chapter supporters belong to National Audubon Society and also financially support our local efforts of conservation and education. Members may consider including an additional donation for our chapter.

Memberships are a perfect holiday gift for nature enthusiasts! Gift memberships are available, and will be sent with an appropriate card at your request.

Send in your 2017 renewal today!

Memberships are renewed at the start of each calendar year. Chapter supporters receive *The Fledgling* newsletter by email in March, June, September and December, and help support the educational efforts and programs of the chapter. Renew online or print clearly below:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email address: _____

Phone: (_____) _____

Please indicate your choices:

- ☐ I've enclosed a **\$10** check made out to "Southern Adirondack Audubon Society" to be a local chapter supporter and member.
- ☐ I am also including a tax-deductible gift of \$_____ for chapter use.
- ☐ I would prefer to get the newsletter in paper format and am including an additional donation of \$_____ to help cover postage and printing. (Suggested donation: \$5.)
- ☐ I am interested in volunteer opportunities.

Renew online or mail this form and your check to:

**Barbara Beatty, Southern Adirondack Audubon Society
P.O. Box 4076, Queensbury, NY 12804**

Thank you for your membership!

Upcoming SAAS Programs

Wednesday, January 25

Audubon The Film: The Story of John Jay Audubon
Saratoga Springs Public Library. Note special time:
6:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 22

Gerry Lemmo: Exploring Albany's Pine Bush
Crandall Library, Glens Falls, 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, March 22

John Schneider: Patagonia
In partnership with Adirondack Mountain Club
Saratoga Springs Public Library, 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, April 26

Neil Van Dorsten: Africa
In partnership with Adirondack Mountain Club
Crandall Library, Glens Falls 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, May 24

Fred Breglia: Ancient Forests and Champion Trees
Saratoga Springs Public Library, 7:00 p.m.

Details about the spring programs will be in the March newsletter issue and posted on the SAAS website. Programs for Fall 2017 will be announced in September. Hope to see you at a monthly program!

Region's Christmas Bird Counts set for Dec. 17 and 18

Tens of thousands of volunteers will participate in more than 2,000 individual counts throughout the Americas from mid-December to early January. The information becomes a valuable addition to the U.S. government's natural history monitoring database.

Area birders and nature enthusiasts are invited to join other SAAS members in the 117th annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, Dec. 17.

In the SAAS area, birds are counted within a 15-mile diameter circle centered on Harrison Avenue in South Glens Falls. The circle includes Glens Falls, South Glens Falls, Fort Edward and Hudson Falls, and much of Queensbury and Moreau.

Birders of all skill levels are needed. Non-birders are welcomed to help spot birds or keep team records. Most of the birding is done from a car. Some teams may walk along trails or in area parks. It's a fun way to get to know area birders and increase your skills. To join a count team for a whole or partial day, contact Linda White at 518-222-5675 or email lindamezzadonna@gmail.com.

Lake George Land Conservancy, based in Bolton Landing, will also hold its Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 17. The count circle includes sections of Bolton, Diamond Point, Cleverdale, and the east shore of Lake George from Pilot Knob to Black Mountain. For details, see: <http://www.lglc.org/events-and-programs/>.

The Saratoga Christmas Bird Count will be held on Sunday, Dec. 18. Contact Jean Holcomb (jeanh46@icloud.com) for more information.

The Christmas Bird Census started in 1900 when ornithologist Frank Chapman suggested it as an alternative to Christmas "side hunts," competitions to see which teams could shoot the most birds and other animals. Instead, birders count every bird they see in the design-

nated count areas. It is now considered the world's longest running citizen science project.

Saturday, Dec. 17:

- Southern Adirondack Audubon Society CBC, Glens Falls/Hudson Falls area
- Lake George Land Conservancy CBC, Bolton/Lake George area

Sunday, Dec. 18

- Saratoga CBC, Saratoga Springs area

Planning trips with eBird

Want to see Horned Larks, Short-eared Owls or Eastern Bluebirds, but not sure where to look for them? Check the eBird online checklist website. The eBird project was started in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society.

On the **Explore Data** page of eBird (<http://ebird.org/ebird/explore>), try these features:

- Use the **Species Maps** to search for specific bird species, limiting the date range to a certain month.
- Click the **Explore Hotspots** link to zoom in on a map of the world. Investigate local hotspots, such as the Fort Edward Grasslands, or plan locations to visit on a day trip or vacation.
- Each Hotspot's Overview page now offers a new **Printable Checklist**. Hit the road with a customized list of birds!
- The Overview page also links to the **Bar Chart** page, showing when specific bird species are seen in that area.

Even better, add your own sightings to eBird. Use the eBird app in the field if wanted. Regional reviewers check submissions before they enter the database. eBird can act as your personal checklist, recording the species you've seen in specific areas. Your information also contributes to the scientific knowledge of educators, land managers, ornithologists and other biologists.