



The Fledgling

Newsletter of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society, Inc. (SAAS)

Vol. 38 No. 2, March - May 2021

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SouthernAdirondackAudubonSociety/>

Website: <http://www.southernadirondackaudubon.org>

Spring programs: nests, Hudson River, bird murals

*Space is limited for monthly programs on Zoom. To receive the Zoom links for each program, please make sure to **register in advance** at the library's events calendar pages (listed below).*

On **Wednesday March 31**, Anne Swaim will offer a multimedia Zoom presentation at 7 p.m. on "**Bird Architecture**," on the wide variety of bird nests.

Please register in advance to receive the Zoom link at Crandall Public Library's March events calendar: <https://bit.ly/3pUYNL1>.

Birds are master builders, from the massive nests of eagles to walnut-sized hummingbird nests, from cavity-nesters inside trees to ground-nesters to birds that weave intricately woven baskets that hang from branches. Swaim will also discuss how different bird species develop from eggs to nestlings to fledglings, and what to do if you find a nest or young birds in need of help.

Anne Swaim is Executive Director of Saw Mill River Audubon, a local chapter of National Audubon based in Chappaqua, Westchester County. She began as Staff Naturalist in 1989 and became executive director in 2004. She works with four staff and many volunteers to maintain eight wildlife sanctuaries and offer more than 200 free public programs and field trips annually. Swaim has a B.S. in Environmental Biology from Clarion University and M.Div. from East-



Along the Hudson River, the Bear Mountain area shows stunning autumn colors in this photo by Scott Stoner and Denise Hackert-Stoner. They will present a program on Zoom on April 28. Please register in advance.

ern University. She previously worked for Pennsylvania State Parks and the Pennsylvania Chesapeake Bay Program. As part of her work with Saw Mill River Audubon, Swaim lives at the 92-acre Pruyn Audubon Sanctuary in Chappaqua.

On **Wednesday April 28**, Scott Stoner and Denise Hackert-Stoner will present "**Hudson: The Story of a River**" at 7 p.m. To get the Zoom link, register in advance at the Saratoga Springs Public Library's events website: <https://sspl.libcal.com/event/7522020>.

The Stoners have spent about two years researching and photographing the river from near its beginning to its mouth in New York City. Their digital slide program covers its natural and human history, including its key role in the foundation of the environmental movement. Hudson River changes dramatically as it journeys 315 miles from the Adirondacks to New York Harbor. We'll pass its deepest and widest points, view it from boats, shorelines and mountains, and observe the wildlife and habitats as it changes alongside the way.

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Southern Adirondack Audubon Society

P.O. Box 4076
Queensbury, NY 12804

[http://
www.southernadirondackaudubon.org](http://www.southernadirondackaudubon.org)

Email: info@southernadirondackaudubon.org

Board and Committees

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2019-2021	Joyce Miller Rob Snell Margie Amodeo
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Board meetings are held monthly except July, August and December. Members are invited to attend. Contact John Loz for details.

Committees:

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Education: OPEN

Membership Secretary: Lori Barber
(membership@southernadirondackaudubon.org)

Newsletter: Joyce Miller
(editor@southernadirondackaudubon.org)

Programs: John Loz (Interim chair)
(programs@southernadirondackaudubon.org)

Publicity: OPEN

Southern Adirondack Audubon Society (SAAS) is a certified local chapter of the National Audubon Society. SAAS has approximately 600 members in Warren, Washington, northern Saratoga and southern Hamilton counties in New York State.

SAAS's primary goal is to protect the environment by preserving natural habitats and promoting environmental education. Contact a board member to learn about SAAS volunteer opportunities.

Meet our board members

David Covey

Dave Covey of Ballston Spa has been elected to a three-year term on the SAAS Board of Directors.

Covey has had a lifelong interest in birds. A fond memory from school days was a field trip in seventh grade to hear Roger Tory Peterson speak at a college in Albany. His interest in birds has continued as a hobby. He enjoys outdoor activities, and keeps an eye out for wildlife, especially birds.

He received a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from RIT. After graduation, he went to work for the New York State Department of Correctional Services. Covey was a member of the Corrections Emergency Response Team and a certified trainer in a variety of subjects. After 25 years of service, he retired as a Lieutenant.

After retiring, he earned his master's degree in Social Policy from SUNY Empire State and went to work in Human Services, serving in leadership roles for several Capital District not-for-profits. Covey became involved with the Audubon Society of the Capital Region (ASCR) and served on their board and as Vice President.

He and his wife moved to Ballston Spa four years ago to be closer to their daughter and her family. He has found some new hiking trails and is looking for opportunities for more outdoor activities. He enjoys snowshoeing and hiking. He was put in touch with SAAS through a friend he met through ASCR, and joined soon after. His SAAS board term started in January of this year.



Board member Dave Covey poses at the entrance to the Malta Ecological Park near his home in Ballston Spa. This one-mile loop offers an easy, flat wooded trail for year-round recreation.

Ecuador trip in October

SAAS is planning to host a birding trip to the Chocó-Andes Region of Ecuador from Oct. 26 to Nov. 4 this year. The trip is organized by Holbrook Tours, which has organized previous SAAS trips to Costa Rica and Belize.

See this page for details: <http://www.southernadirondackaudubon.org/Ecuador2020/DD%20AE%20BT%20EC%2020%20SAAS%20%2800000003%29.pdf>.

Monthly programs

Continued from page 1

The award-winning nature photography of Scott Stoner and Denise Hackert-Stoner of Naturelogues has been exhibited in galleries across New York's Capital Region. Their work has appeared in numerous publications including *The Kingbird*, *Birder's World*, *National Wildlife*, *New York State Conservationist*, the *Albany Times Union*, and several books: *New York Wildlife Viewing Guide*, *In Praise of Poison Ivy* by Anita Sanchez and *Birding the Hudson Valley* by Kathryn J. Schneider.

They provided much of the photography for the new visitor center at the Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar, and serve as longtime judges for the Albany Pine Bush's annual photo contest. They have each served as officers, field trip leaders, and directors for the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club.

They offer nature photography workshops, natural history slide programs for adults and children to organizations, as well nature photography and note cards; see <https://www.naturelogues.com/>. Stoner is retired after a 31-year career with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, and is a longtime volunteer at Five Rivers. Hackert-Stoner is an ordained deacon in the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests.

On **Wednesday, May 26**, tour guide Leigh Hallingby will talk about **"The Audubon Bird Mural Project."**



Scott Stoner and Denise Hackert-Stoner took this portrait of a Bald Eagle along the Hudson River.

During the presentation, more than 40 murals will be shown, plus Audubon's grave site, in a 50-minute slide presentation with live commentary.

Hallingby is a licensed New York City tour guide who specializes in the Audubon Mural Project. She explores all five boroughs and beyond on foot, mostly through organized walking tours. Hallingby is retired from a 36-year career as a non-profit librarian in New York City. She loves doing research about the neighborhoods in which she gives tours and sharing the information with attendees. After growing up in Westchester County, and then living in northern New Jersey for 35 years, she moved to the Upper West Side of Manhattan in 2011.

Register in advance at <https://bit.ly/3pVAbSt> to get the Zoom link on Crandall Library's events calendar for May 26.

The Audubon Bird Mural Project, sponsored in part by the National Audubon Society, is an effort to create murals of more than 300 North American birds.

Most of the murals are in the Harlem neighborhoods of Hamilton Heights and Washington Heights, where John James Audubon lived the last 10 years of his life.

The project is designed to display the birds' beauty as well as to raise awareness of the challenges that they face. All of the birds painted are threatened by climate change. The artworks range from panels that fill in a former window to huge murals covering the side of a building.

Artist ATM created this mural of a Townsend's Warbler for the Audubon Mural Project in Harlem. SAAS President John Loz took this photo on the tour in 2019.



Edward Jones
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

Production of this issue of *The Fledgling* newsletter is provided by Edward Jones, 34 Congress Street, Suite 102, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

President's Message

Spring into canal birding

By John Loz, SAAS President

Those of us who love birding also love other pursuits. Some love astronomy and a few birders I know are geologists. I love all types of transportation history, but canal history is by far my favorite topic.



These two pursuits, birding and canal history, work out really well for me. Abandoned and active canals have some of the best habitats for birds! Our region is very lucky to have a number of these remarkable waterways, which run through Important Bird Areas (IBAs), N.Y.S. Bird Conservation Areas, and local birding hot spots.

I have enjoyed hiking, birding, and exploring the old Champlain Canal towpaths, the paved Feeder Canal trails and the abandoned, overgrown canal locks hidden deep in mature Mohawk River forests that now hide the old Erie Canal.

Last year, I focused my birding and history gathering exploits on a few sites along the [Erie Canalway Heritage Corridor](#).

One unique place was the [Schoharie Crossing State Historic Site](#) located in Fort Hunter. It is only a half hour south of Caroga Lake and Northville, and it is worth the short trip from anywhere in the southern Adirondacks. Upon arrival, I marveled at the "ancient" remains of an Erie Canal Aqueduct that still partially crosses the Schoharie Creek. I then took in the newly installed exhibits at the visitors center nearby and then embarked on a wonderful birding experience, hiking a shady 2.5-mile towpath by an impressive old lock to a historic canal store building overlooking the Mohawk River.

My next trip took me to the [Utica Marsh Wildlife Management](#) area in Utica. To get to the marsh, I walked a

paved rail trail alongside the present day Mohawk River Barge Canal. Within five minutes, I had a Bald Eagle, Cedar Waxwings, and shorebirds before I even made it to the marsh! This was an incredibly fulfilling day trip. You can read more about it in the June issue of *The Fledgling*.

Closer to home, I'll mention my favorite Erie Canal birding site, the Vischer Ferry Nature and Historic Preserve in Clifton Park, NY. This preserve is located along the 26-mile audio tour of the [Mohawk Towpath Scenic Byway](#), which is drivable and cell phone activated. The 21 historic tour stops visit key points along the old Erie Canal between Waterford and Rexford. More stops are planned for downtown Schenectady. While I had birded the nature preserve numerous times, I finally decided to drive the entire historic byway route, exploring each audio tour stop, and bird the preserve along the way.

What made this canal birding trip even more interactive was a smartphone-enhanced bird trail starting opposite a restored canal walking bridge at the preserve's main parking entrance. Four wooden bird trail posts are each printed with a square bar code I scanned with my smartphone camera (see photo). The code launched a narration about each diverse habitat I encountered, and images of the preserve's birds. This walk-able bird tour location was a timely break while driving the byway. Not only was there a picnic table at the preserve to have my lunch, but just down the road, I was able to use the restroom at the nearby [Vischer Ferry General Store](#).

What interests besides birding are you passionate about? Are you able to combine or share them with a friend? Well, if you have a friend who is not a birder, but an avid



Above, the Whipple Bridge, an original restored Erie Canal bridge located at the main entrance to the Vischer Ferry Nature and Historic Preserve at the intersection of Van Vranken and Riverview Roads, Clifton Park.

Below: The QR codes can be scanned with a phone to learn more about species seen along the trail.



historian, and you both like to spend time outside, may I suggest a canal birding adventure? Not only will you both be able to satisfy your thirst for knowledge, but you'll be able to enjoy the outdoors and maybe learn something more about each other along the way. Happy Spring Birding!

On the SAAS website, see the Birding tab to learn where you can explore more birding sites in our area: <http://www.southernadirondackaudubon.org>.

Species Spotlight

Indigo Buntings

By Joyce Miller, SAAS Newsletter Editor

Indigo Buntings return to their breeding grounds in our region in April. These small birds with a cheerful song might be more common than you realize.

These birds breed in the eastern half of the United States. In the fall, they migrate as far as 1,200 miles to spend winters in Central America, the Caribbean and the southern end of Florida.

Small, chunky and a rich midnight-blue, Indigo Buntings males can look almost black in shady areas. Males tee up on a high perch and belt out a distinctive, loud, paired-note song, which sounds like a whooping “*What! What! Where? Where? See it! See it!*”, according to Cornell Lab or Ornithology’s *All About Birds* page: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Indigo_Bunting/sounds.



The richly-colored male Indigo Bunting above was photographed in its typical shrubby habitat by Dr. Gordon Ellmers of Fort Edward.

Left: A more plainly-colored female or immature Indigo Bunting is shown in this photo by Dr. Ellmers. Though drab overall, the bird may show a blue-tinged tail.



The females and immature males are a drab brown, so could even be mistaken for a House Sparrow at first glance. Females build their small cup-shaped nests in the fork of shrubs or in grassy areas. Nests are usually not more than three feet from the ground. They’ll raise one to three broods a year, with three or four white eggs in each.

Populations are in decline due to habitat destruction, the caged bird trade and other factors, but they remain fairly common birds in our area. Indigo Buntings are seed-eaters, as their sturdy cone-shaped bill indicates. They’ll also consume berries, tree buds, caterpillars, and other

insects.

They are often found in weedy areas, along roadsides, and in shrubby areas on the edges of woods. In the Queensbury area of Warren County, they have been seen and heard on the hillsides near Aviation Mall, in neighborhoods off Sherman Avenue, and frequently, along the Warren County Bikeway near the bridge over Rte. 149.

To learn more about Indigo Buntings, see this *All About Birds* page: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Indigo_Bunting/overview. Track daily sightings of Indigo Buntings reported on the eBird online checklist: <https://ebird.org/species/indbun/US-NY>.

Renew for 2021

Southern Adirondack Audubon chapter memberships correspond with the calendar year. Your membership supports our chapter’s educational efforts and community programs. If you haven’t yet renewed for 2021, just visit the SAAS Membership page: <http://www.southernadirondackaudubon.org/membership/membership.html>.

About Wildflowers

Greater Celandine

By Diane Collins

Greater Celandine (*Chelidonium majus*) is not a native wildflower but has adapted nicely to the Northeast and to our area, flowering from May to August. It can be seen in lightly shaded areas along a lower Cole's Woods trail, the Betar Byway in South Glens Falls, and, in the Glens Falls area, by the bridge over the Feeder Canal to Haviland Cove.

It is a sprawling and somewhat invasive perennial in the poppy family, growing one to two feet tall. The plant is a hermaphrodite, and is pollinated by bees, flies, and beetles. The small bright yellow flowers have four petals. The large leaves are pinnately divided and lobed. And I believe its yellow-orange sap cured a wart on my hand! One summer on my daily walks along the Feeder Canal trail with my dog, I would snap off a small stem, gently squeeze out the orangey sap onto my wart, and voila, it was gone within a month.

Greater Celandine is native to Europe and Western Asia and was known as a medicinal species since antiquity. The list of ailments it was said to help is extraordinary. According to the *Doctrine of Signatures*, the yellow sap was used to treat jaundice and liver sicknesses, which turned skin yellowish. As far back as Pliny the Elder (1st century) it was recognized as a wonderful cure for eye troubles, sores and ulcers.

The genus name *Chelidonium* is from the Greek word for the group of birds called swallows. A possibility for the origin of this name is that the celandine begins blooming in the spring with the arrival of the European swallow and blooms until their departure in the fall. Greater Celandine is one of the many wildflower species



described by the father of taxonomy, Carl Linnaeus, in volume I of his *Species Plantarum* in 1753. In ancient times, thinkers did not know about migration and some thought that swallows hibernated underwater. Even Linnaeus, while keen and brilliant in identifying and naming plants, didn't always get it right. He is thought to have agreed to the notion that swallows survived the winter in "mud-bound hibernation." Another fanciful idea (Charles Morton, 1680) was that swallows, sustained by excess body fat, slept on the moon.

A charming connection exists between swallows and this wildflower, highlighted by the plant's common name in the U.S., "Swallow Wart."

Wildflower photographer Diane Collins is the author of *Trailside Wildflowers in Cole's Woods*; see <http://www.wildflowersinyourownbackyard.com>. Cole's Woods is located in both the City of Glens Falls and the Town of Queensbury, next to Crandall Park. Collins sells her booklet for \$10; proceeds go to The Friends of Cole's Woods and our Audubon chapter.



Birding by the Month: Spring arrivals

By Mona Bearor

Watch for these bird activities in upcoming months:

March

- Waterfowl are on the move. Check open water for unusual species, including that elusive Cackling Goose.
- Red-winged Blackbirds are everywhere. Enjoy watching their behavior as the males fight for the best territory and show off for the females.

- Wintering birds will leave our area soon. Travel the Fort Edward IBA (Important Bird Area) for a last look at Rough-legged Hawks, Short-eared Owls, Snowy Owls and Northern Shrikes.

April

- Osprey return; keep an eye on the nest on Route 4 south of Fort Edward - but don't get too close! That stresses the birds.
- American Woodcock will be displaying at dusk. The well-camouflaged Wilson's Snipe can be found in wet areas of open fields.

- The first warbler species return: Yellow, Yellow-rumped, Palm, Pine and Louisiana Waterthrush.

May

- The spring chorus is at its peak. Take time to listen to the incredible variety of birdsong at dawn.
- Many species of flycatchers and vireos are heard in all types of habitat. Learn their songs so you can identify them when they are hidden by leaves later in the spring.
- May is warbler heaven. Thirty-two warbler species have been recorded in our chapter area.

Christmas Bird Count recap

By Linda White, CBC coordinator

On Dec. 19, despite more than 30 inches of snow and frigid temperatures, our group of citizen scientists observed 57 species and counted 6,868 individual birds on the 2020 Hudson Falls Christmas Bird Count.

The other challenge was birding separately because of Covid-19. A great deal of thanks and appreciation go to this intrepid group. They are: Beth and Brad Bidwell, Joyce Miller, Russ Hillard, Jeff Gardner, Jason Krahnke, Jacquie Tinker, Laurie McKaren, Suzy Nealon, Sue Pierce, Mary Lou Munger, Glen Wiltsie, Jackie Bogardus, and Barb Putnam. Together they logged 502 miles by car, hiked over a mile and a half, and snowshoed 3 miles (thank you Sue Pierce for your perseverance with the snowshoeing). Feeder watchers Ruth Lamb, Barb Putnam, and Mike Rivette put in 10.5 hours and contributed some great birds.

Here are the observations:

Canada Goose 56, American Black Duck 28, Mallard 154, Common Goldeneye 72, Hooded Merganser 16, Common Merganser 4, Ring-necked Pheasant 1, Wild Turkey 24, Great Blue Heron 1, Black Vulture during count week, Northern Harrier 1, Sharp-shinned Hawk 2, Cooper's Hawk 7, Bald Eagle 1, Red-tailed Hawk 61, Rough-legged Hawk 5, Ring-billed Gull 2, Rock Pigeon 442, Mourning Dove 203.

Short-eared Owl 8, Red-bellied Woodpecker 29, Downy Woodpecker 37, Hairy Woodpecker 8, Pileated Woodpecker 5, American Kestrel 2, Merlin 2, Peregrine Falcon 2, Blue Jay 199, American Crow 683, Common Raven 2, Horned Lark 28, Black-capped Chickadee 166, Tufted Titmouse 110, Red-breasted Nuthatch 25, White-breasted Nuthatch 45, Brown Creeper 5, Carolina Wren 5, Golden-crowned Kinglet 4.

Eastern Bluebird 38, American Robin 221, Northern Mockingbird 6, European Starling 2356, Cedar Waxwing 1, Snow Bunting 3, American Tree Sparrow 469.

Dark-eyed Junco 831, White-throated Sparrow 19, Song Sparrow 12, Northern Cardinal 131, Red-winged Blackbird 5, Common Grackle 2, Brown-headed Cowbird 1, Pine Grosbeak 56, House Finch 34, Common Redpoll 5, American Goldfinch 35, House Sparrow 162.

The high number of Dark-eyed Juncos (831) was very unusual. This is only the third time since the count started in 1983 that we had Pine Grosbeaks (56). The Common Grackle has only been observed on four other counts and the Black Vulture on three previous counts.

Birds observed during count week (3 days prior and 3 days after count day) are not included in



Sue Pierce spotted this Merlin on top of a powerline pole in Queensbury during the Christmas Bird Count.

total species numbers. While all the data has been entered into Audubon's database, it will be available after it is verified in February. Check this page for updates: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>.

Photographer Eric Crisler of Hudson Falls shared this photo on the SAAS Facebook page. He spotted this red morph Eastern Screech Owl peeking out of a Wood Duck box in Kingsbury this winter. Screech Owls will occasionally use these nest boxes for both winter roosting and nesting.



© Eric D. Crisler - Photographer

Christmas Bird Count photos

Sue Pierce captured these images during her second SAAS Christmas Bird Count in New York on Saturday, Dec. 19. Here are her photos and thoughts about the day:

All across America, Audubon Society volunteers go out on a particular winter's day and count all the birds they see. Each group of volunteers attempts to cover an area within a 15-mile circle of certain towns.

It had zoomed up to 8 degrees when I got to my first stop. That was the easy part. The fact that we got almost 30 inches of snow two days earlier would complicate things. I had the challenge of checking out areas north of Quaker Road, between Route 9 and Meadowbrook Road.



Above, a Red-tailed Hawk is fluffed up against the single-digit chill.

Right, another Red-tail takes flight from its perch in a Cottonwood tree.

Overnight, a flaky frost had sugared all the tree branches. My first birds to count were an eerily silent group of crows, below, checking out the action in a store parking lot.



Below, heavy snowfall two days before the count resulted in high snowbanks.

