



The Fledgling

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

Vol. 42 No. 3, **March 2025 — May 2025** *Now in our 42nd year!*

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Website: www.southernadirondackaudubon.org



A male Eastern Bluebird perches on a branch in this photo by Dr. Gordon Ellmers.

Spring programs: bluebirds, rattlesnakes, bees

SAAS will offer several programs this spring as part of its monthly programs.

On Wed., March 26 John Rogers will talk about **“Bluebirds - and More”** at 7:00 p.m. at the Saratoga Springs Public Library.

Rogers is the co-founder of the NYS Bluebird Society. His presentation includes the life history of the Eastern Bluebird, other birds that nest in bluebird boxes, nest box management, and more. Rogers also shares his love for the natural world, with photos of wildflowers, butterflies, other birds and quotations by great naturalists of the past.

Rogers has maintained a trail of bluebird nest boxes in central New York, north of Syracuse, for more than four decades. He has offered bluebird slide programs and workshops for hundreds of organizations in 12 states and two Canadian provinces. Rogers was a co-founder of the

New York State Bluebird Society in 1982, and elected a lifetime board member in 2002. He has received numerous awards for his bluebird conservation work, including the Bluebird Conservation Award from the North American Bluebird Society. He is a past board member of that organization. In 2010, he was a recipient of the Hero of Conservation Award from the Syracuse Post Standard. He is an experienced birder and member of the Onondaga Audubon Society in Syracuse. He earned a BA in Biology, SUNY Oswego. He lives in Oneida.

On Wed., April 23 at 7:00 p.m. Saratoga Springs Public Library, Dr. William S. Brown will present **“Timber Rattlesnakes: How They Live, What They Do.”**

Brown will summarize the basic biology of Timber Rattlesnakes and to focus on some of the research questions that are useful for evaluating its conservation status. He will frame this perspective toward outdoor enthusiasts and naturalists who may encounter a rattlesnake in the wild.

Brown is a vertebrate zoologist and herpetologist. He holds bachelors and masters degrees from Arizona State University and a Ph.D. degree in Biology from the University of Utah. He is a Professor Emeritus at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, and for 21 years was a biology lecturer at the Department of Biological Sciences, State University of New York at Albany.

He is currently a research associate at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Darrin Fresh Water Institute in Bolton Landing.



Dr. Bill Brown holds an adult male Timber Rattlesnake in this 1981 photo. Brown is now in his 46th year of studying Timber Rattlesnakes. Photo courtesy of Bill Brown.

He has served as president of the international professional organization Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (SSAR), and was a consultant for New York State in evaluating development projects impacting reptiles and amphibians and other wildlife. He has also provided evaluations for conservation groups and landowners concerning developments that may impact endangered or threatened species.

In 1978, Brown began a long-term study of the life history and ecology of Timber Rattlesnakes, a widely occurring North American species of the eastern deciduous forests.

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Southern Adirondack Audubon Society

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Publicity: OPEN

Chapter memberships are \$20. Renew at southernadirkondackaudubon.org/membership/, or send a check using the form on the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society (SAAS) website. Contributions support SAAS's education and conservation activities in our region.

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.

President's message

Go wild!

By Rob Snell, SAAS President

In the United States, there are approximately 50 million acres of lawn. They consume an estimated 9 billion gallons of water a day, and contribute about 5% of greenhouse gas emissions from mowing. Additionally, about 17 million gallons of gasoline are spilled refilling mowers each year.

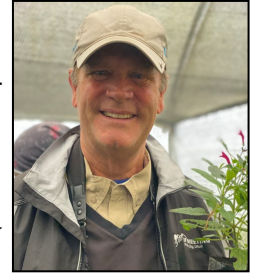
Oh, did I mention that lawn maintenance is a pain in the neck?

After all this, lawns contribute almost no ecological benefit.

Reversing this trend means we must go wild! Meadows, nature's lawn equivalent, require little water and almost no maintenance when established. They are colorful, beautiful spaces that provide excellent habitat for birds, butterflies and humans.

The challenge is making a smooth and sustainable conversion from lawn to meadow. Fortunately, there are some pioneers in this area that can help. In

2024, Sara Weaner Cooper and her husband, Evan, were featured in *The New York Times* for successfully transitioning their large lawn to meadow. (See *New Directions* in the *American Landscape*, www.ndal.org.)



Rob Snell, SAAS President

They took a novel approach. Instead of attempting to take ownership over the land, they treated it as a living system of which they are a part, and with which they had a relationship. According to Sara, it was "a mindset shift from traditional gardening. We're meeting the land where it is, guiding and editing as needed, rather than micro-managing."

Although this transition method may take a bit longer, it's more natural and less aesthetically challenged than the alternatives. If you are interested in learning how to transition all, or a portion of your lawn to meadow, join us on April 2nd at 7:00 p.m. for a virtual program with Sara Weaner Cooper.

See Page 4 for details. Go Wild!

Win this prize-winning photograph!

Renew or join as a chapter supporter by early April 2025 to receive chances to win this photo of a Western Grebe with two chicks. It was a 2022 Audubon Photography Award winner, taken by Peter Shen.

Annual chapter memberships are only \$20. They run for a year, renewable on the month one signs up. An additional ticket will be allotted for every \$5 donated through the SAAS membership or donation page.

Contributions support SAAS's local educational and conservation activities. Many National members also become chapter supporter members to financially support SAAS's local efforts. Visit www.southernadirkondackaudubon.org/membership/.



An adult Western Grebe holds a small fish as its two chicks each grab an end.

About Timber Rattlesnakes

Dr. Bill Brown provided these facts:

- In New York, Timber Rattlesnakes are distributed in two dozen counties. Many populations were extirpated or depleted throughout the state over the past two centuries. The species was as listed as “threatened” in 1983 and has been fully protected by NYS law for the past 40 years.
- In the northeastern sector of the state, Timber Rattlesnake dens represent ancestral populations that have been in continuous existence for approximately 8,000 years following climatic warming and withdrawal of the most recent glacial ice sheet.
- The snakes hibernate through the winter for seven months, October through April.
- After emerging from hibernation, the active season lasts for five months, from May through September. Each spring, the snakes make long distance migrations (average about two miles) between their winter dens and their summer foraging grounds.
- In their deciduous forest habitat, Timber Rattlesnakes are important predators of small mammals (mice, voles, chipmunks, squirrels). Rattlesnakes play an important role in the food web.
- Timber Rattlesnakes are not aggressive and will usually attempt to escape from a potential predator. However, if provoked or disturbed, a Timber Rattlesnake may hold its ground in self defense. Common-sense precautions are simple: do not approach or molest a rattlesnake — if you see one, leave it alone.
- A Timber Rattlesnake bite is a serious medical emergency. The venom attacks the blood’s clotting ability and is tissue-destructive. If bitten, emergency procedures by trained medical personnel greatly reduce the risk of fatality. The nationally accepted first-aid recommendation for a rattlesnake bite is simple: go to the nearest hospital immediately.

Spring programs

Continued from page 1

Now in its 46th year, Brown’s study involves capturing, marking, and recapturing rattlesnakes in the southeastern Adirondack Mountains of northern New York. His field research is one of the longest continuous capture-recapture studies of any rattlesnake conducted in the wild. The results provide new information on the snakes’ longevity, reproduction, and population dynamics.

Over the past four decades, Brown’s field study has revealed new information on the Timber Rattlesnake’s life history. Recaptures of marked snakes show that the maximum lifespan exceeds 40 years.

Females do not reach maturity until an age of about nine years. Adult females have a low birthing frequency, reproducing only at 3- to 4-year intervals to about eight newborns. In the summer mating season (July through August), male rattlesnakes move widely searching for a receptive female.

Brown has published his research in magazines such as *National Geographic* as well as peer-reviewed journals. He serves on New York’s Timber Rattlesnake Recovery Team of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. Brown received The Nature Conservancy’s (Eastern New York Chapter) annual Oak Leaf Award in 2003 citing his “many years of study and efforts toward preservation of Timber Rattlesnakes” and a “lifetime achievement in herpetology” award at the Biology of Pitvipers Conference in 2022.

On **Tuesday, May 20 at 6:00 p.m.** at the Greenwich Free Library in Washington County, beekeeper Cindy Elsenbeck will present **“Explore the Beauty and Benefit of the Honeybee.”**



Beekeeper Cindy Elsenbeck lifts a frame from a beehive. She will present a program on May 20. Photo courtesy of Cindy Elsenbeck.

The program will take a visual and interactive journey exploring the beauty and incredible life of the honey bee. Attendees will witness the honey bees in action by viewing a secure observation hive.

Elsenbeck has been keeping bees for seven years and provides education programs to elementary schools and the community. She is the Education Coordinator for Southern Adirondack Beekeepers Association.

Animated Bird Migration Explorer site

The National Audubon Society and other partners offer the Bird Migration Explorer site, an animated guide to the annual migration journeys of more than 450 bird species in the Western Hemisphere.

Users can learn more about a species, the migratory birds at a specific location, or a conservation challenge birds face. See the Bird Migration Explorer at explorer.audubon.org/.

The site will help you discover when Ruby-throated Hummingbirds will arrive in upstate New York in May.

See Page 4 for details about two more SAAS programs:

- **April 2** on Zoom: “Lawns to Meadows” by Sara Weaner Cooper
- **May 6** at Saratoga Springs Public Library: “Hummingbirds are Amazing!” by Dave Katz



Hummingbird researcher Dave Katz demonstrates his Fritz's "Almost Famous" Hummingbird Feeder Hat. He'll talk about hummingbirds at on May 6. Photo courtesy of Dave Katz.

Hummingbird talk on May 6 in Saratoga

Hummingbird researcher and inventor Dave Katz will present **"Hummingbirds are Amazing!"** on **Tuesday, May 6** at the Saratoga Springs Public Library at 7:00 p.m.

He'll share hummingbird facts, how to attract Ruby-throated Hummingbirds to your yard, and show photos of hummingbirds from his recent visit to Colombia, such as the Buffy Helmetcrest. He'll discuss his hummingbird research at Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in Basking Ridge, N.J.

Katz has spent time in Nicaragua and Costa Rica studying and banding Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. He has traveled within the United States, and to Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Panama to study and photograph indigenous hummingbirds.

Katz is a retired design engineer for a medical research company, as a physicist/engineer for the U.S. Department of Defense, and as an engineering consultant. He holds a bachelor's degree in physics from Syracuse University, and a master's in systems management from the Florida Institute of Technology.

He is a federally-permitted hummingbird researcher and has designed patent pending equipment to assist hummingbird banders. He is an administrator on the Hummingbird Whisperers Facebook page, which is the largest educational hummingbird page in North America, with over 200,000 members. He

volunteers and does research at the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey. He serves on the Board of the Directors of the non-profit Friends group that supports the Refuge. He is also the designer and manufacture of Fritz's "Almost Famous" Hummingbird Feeder Hat.

"Lawns to Meadows" talk, April 2 on Zoom

SAAS will offer a virtual Zoom program with Sara Weaner Cooper on **Wednesday, April 2** at 7:00 p.m. She will present **"An Experiment in Organic Lawn to Meadow Conversion: Exceeding Expectations."**

Sara and Evan Cooper moved into their new home in a suburban Philadelphia neighborhood in April 2022. After one spring and summer of consistently mowing their 5,000 square foot front lawn, Sara Cooper initiated the process of transitioning the lawn into a native wildflower meadow. To avoid herbicides and heavy physical labor, she left the turf in place and began a turf-to-meadow conversion process.

After two growing seasons, the results exceeded expectations and were featured in *The New York Times* in 2024. Learn about the practical steps they took and the successes and challenges they have so far encountered.

Cooper is executive director of New Directions in the American Land-



Sara Weaner Cooper will talk about converting suburban lawns to meadows on April 2 on Zoom. Photo courtesy of S.W. Cooper.

scape (NDAL), the educational division of her father Larry Weaner's design firm.

Visit this page to register for the Zoom link: sspl.libcal.com/event/14106782.

Birding festivals

Registration opens April 1 for the 78th annual New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA) conference in Ithaca on September 19 to 21, hosted by the Cayuga Bird Club. See www.nysoa2025.org.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology offers a searchable list of upcoming birding festivals around North America: www.allaboutbirds.org/news/birding-festivals.

Birding by the Month

By Mona Bearor

• March

- Waterfowl are on the move. Check open water for unusual species, including that elusive Cackling Goose.
- Enjoy watching Red-winged Blackbirds as the males fight for the best territory and show off for 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 display at dusk 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.
- May is warbler heaven. So far, 32 warbler species have been recorded in our chapter area.

Spring field trips

Field trips are planned this spring to a variety of birding hotspots in Saratoga, Washington and Warren counties. The trips are organized by SAAS volunteer trip leader Damon Russo.

All will take place in the morning. Watch for details and updates on the SAAS website, Facebook and Instagram pages.

- **Saturday, March 8** - Hudson Crossing Park (Schuylerville)
- **Sunday, March 30** - Saratoga National Historic Park, Southern Entrance Grasslands (Stillwater)
- **Sunday, April 6** - Bog Meadow Trail (Saratoga Springs)
- **Saturday, April 19** - Alfred Z. Solomon Grasslands (Fort Edward)
- **Saturday, May 3** - Hudson Pointe (Queensbury)
- **Monday, Memorial Day, May 26** - Big Bend, Moreau Lake State Park (Moreau)

Please register in advance at birdwalks@southernadirondackaudubon.org.

On **Sunday, May 4**, SAAS program chair John Loz will lead a bird walk at 8:00 a.m., for the 50th Anniversary of the Crown Point Bird Banding Station near Lake Champlain. Check the SAAS website for details.

First Saturday Bird Walks continue

Join SAAS members for morning bird walks along the beautiful **Spring Run Trail** in Saratoga Springs on the first Saturday of each month.

Ray Perry will lead walks on these Saturdays: **March 1, April 5 and May 3**. Walks start at 8:00 a.m.

The one-mile trail is paved and flat.

Field trip guidelines

- Review our SAAS **Field Trip Guidelines** (southernadirondackaudubon.org/field-trip-guidelines/).
- SAAS trips follow the American Birding Association's **Code of Birding Ethics** (www.aba.org/aba-code-of-birding-ethics/).
- Check the SAAS website and Facebook pages for updates on trips.



It is used for walking, running and biking, as well as birding. It offers a variety of habitats.

So far, 134 bird species have been reported along the Spring Run Trail. See the species checklist on eBird: ebird.org/hotspot/L1548124/bird-list. The "Bar Charts" link show species seen for each month.

Bring binoculars if you have them. All skill levels are welcome. Meet at 8:00 a.m. sharp at the Spring Run Trail parking area near the corner of East Ave. and Excelsior Ave. If the parking area is full, park just slightly down the road on Excelsior Ave. in the EBI Beverage Center parking lot adjacent to the Spring Run Trail.

For directions and details, see www.southernadirondackaudubon.org/Spring-Run/.

More pop-up events

Check SAAS's Facebook and Instagram pages for more pop-up events:

- **Email:** sign up for announcements and updates at www.southernadirondackaudubon.org/subscribe/. You do not

need to be a SAAS member to receive these email notices from SAAS's MailChimp service.

- **Facebook:** Join the 2,300 people who follow SAAS at www.facebook.com/SouthernAdirondackAudubonSociety/.
- **Instagram:** Follow @adkbirds (www.instagram.com/adkbirds/).
- **Website:** Check www.southernadirondackaudubon.org/ for updated and new event information.

Changes and details about scheduled events will be shared through these announcements.

Borrow a birding backpack!

Want to interest someone in birding? Free SAAS birding backpacks are available to borrow in 20 public libraries in the SAAS region. The backpacks can be used by local birders of any age.

- Each birding backpack contains:
- two pairs of durable 10×42 Celestron Outland binoculars
 - instruction books
 - a "Rite in the Rain" birding journal, so users can record interesting things and pass along to the next users
 - *Birds of New York* folding laminated guide, with birding information on common New York birds
 - Four Seasons bingo cards and two washable markers
 - *Birding Adventures for Kids* book.

For details, see www.southernadirondackaudubon.org/education/.



Above, left: Roos holds a Gray Catbird while volunteering at the banding station at the Albany Pine Bush.



Above, right: In 2023, Roos volunteered at the Wild Wings Nature Center in Mendon Ponds NY. She's holding Rosalie, a Saker-Gyr Falcon hybrid and a retired falconry bird.

Meet our new board member

Liz Roos

Liz Roos is a new member of the SAAS Board of Directors.

Her passion for birds began with insects. When her age was in the single digits, Roos raised monarch butterfly caterpillars every summer with her family in Clifton Park, New York. This eventually grew into an interest in all wildlife.

In 2017, at sixteen years old, Roos became a NYS licensed apprentice falconer and trained a Red-tailed Hawk named Auburn until 2019, when Auburn was released back into the wild and Roos left for college. After that, she went on to volunteer as a raptor educator at the Wild Wings Birds of Prey center in western New York.

Roos returned to Saratoga County in 2023 after graduating from SUNY Geneseo with a major in English. She now works remotely as a curriculum project manager for electrician textbooks and courses. She lives with her partner, Zack, and their two cats.

In her free time, Roos can be found writing the second draft of her work-in-progress novel, or birding around upstate New York and fostering a new interest in wildlife photography. This isn't the first time Roos's name

has shown up in *The Fledgling*. In 2019, Roos interned as a Bald Eagle nest watcher for SAAS and helped with community outreach.

Roos is also a volunteer bird bander at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, and is always looking for ways to contribute to wildlife conservation any way she can.

Now, she participates in events and field trips, and looks forward to being a new board member.

Climate Watch starts May 15

National Audubon Society's citizen science project Climate Watch resumes on May 15. The survey is conducted twice a year: May 15 to June 15 and January 15 to February 15.

Volunteers look specifically for Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches to observe how those species are affected by climate change. Using maps of a specific area, birders conduct 12 counts, observing for five minutes each. They also record the numbers and species of other birds identified within 100 meters.

Climate Watch started after National Audubon issued a report in 2014,

Birds and Climate Change, on risks faced by North American bird species from climate change. Contact SAAS president Rob Snell (birdbrane1@gmail.com) for details.

Betar spring wildflower booklet available

The wildflower booklet *Springtime Birds & Wildflowers Along the Betar Byway: South Glens Falls, NY* is available for purchase for \$10.

SAAS's booklet features wildflowers and birds seen along the popular Betar Byway trail in South Glens Falls. It was published in 2023.

The booklet was written and produced by Glens Falls resident Diane Collins, *The Fledgling's* wildflower columnist. It features Collins' flower photos plus local bird photos by renowned local wildlife photographer Gordon Ellmers of Fort Edward.

Collins collaborated with SAAS to win a Touba Family Foundation grant to publish the booklet.

Visit the SAAS website for details and to purchase copies.

Copies are also available at St. Andrews Ace Hardware on Upper Glen Street in Queensbury.



Diane Collins' spring wildflowers booklet is available through SAAS and the St. Andrews Ace Hardware store in Queensbury.

Christmas Bird Count results

By Linda White
SAAS Christmas Bird Count Compiler

SAAS's annual Hudson Falls Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, Dec. 14, 2024.

Our outstanding team of citizen science observers spread out across the 15-mile diameter circle. They traveled 388.5 miles, walked 16 miles, and put in a combined total of 54.5 hours.

Their expertise and dedication resulted in this amazing tally of individuals and 63 species seen.

Snow Goose - 1
Canada Goose - 1,780
American Black Duck - 46
Mallard - 230
Ring-necked Duck - 18
Bufflehead - 8
Barrow's Goldeneye - 1
Common Goldeneye - 114
Hooded Merganser - 54
Common Merganser - 88
Wild Turkey - 117
Great Blue Heron - 1
Northern Harrier - 1
Sharp-shinned Hawk - 3
Cooper's Hawk - 3
Bald Eagle - 9
Red-tailed Hawk - 57
Ring-billed Gull - 68
Herring Gull - 11
Rock Pigeon - 813
Mourning Dove - 103
Barred Owl - 1
Short-eared Owl - 1
Belted Kingfisher - 2
Hairy Woodpecker - 12
Red-bellied Woodpecker - 25
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - 1
Downy Woodpecker - 35
Northern Flicker - 2
Pileated Woodpecker - 10
Killdeer - 1
American Kestrel - 2
Merlin - 1

Peregrine Falcon - 1
Northern Goshawk - 1
Blue Jay - 118
Gray Catbird - 1
American Crow - 4,940
Common Raven - 7
Horned Lark - 45
Black-capped Chickadee - 174
Tufted Titmouse - 67
Red-breasted Nuthatch - 4
White-breasted Nuthatch - 58
Brown Creeper - 5
Carolina Wren - 20
Golden Crown Kinglet - 13
Eastern Bluebird - 133
American Robin - 45
Hermit Thrush - 1
Northern Mockingbird - 11
European Starling - 1,313
American Tree Sparrow - 27



This photo by Marton Berntsen shows the bright orange legs and bill of the Taiga Bean-Goose. This photo was taken in the Netherlands in 2014. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Rare goose visits our region

An extremely rare goose, a Taiga Bean-Goose, visited our area in January. Hundreds of birders from as far as Texas arrived in Washington and Saratoga Counties to see the mega-rarity.

The goose is a native of northern Europe and Asia. This is the first time the species has been seen in eastern North America. It was first spotted in Quebec earlier in the winter.

After it was found in early January at Saratoga Lake, birders shared their sightings on the Discord and WhatsApp platforms, as well as eBird and the Hudson-Mohawk bird email listserv.

Chipping Sparrow - 1
Dark-eyed Junco - 330
Gray Catbird - 1
White-throated Sparrow - 2
Song Sparrow - 6
Northern Cardinal - 84
Red-winged Blackbird - 1
House Finch - 20
American Goldfinch - 30
House Sparrow - 74



Sue Pierce photographed this Hermit Thrush during the SAAS 2024 Christmas Bird Count.



Wildlife photographer John Hershey took this photo of the Taiga Bean-Goose at the north end of Saratoga Lake on January 2. Photo courtesy of John Hershey.

During its visit, it moved between the Hudson River in Fort Miller and Hudson Crossing Park in Schuylerville to the confluence of the Battenkill River in Greenwich, and grazed in corn fields in Saratoga County east of the Hudson River. It was last spotted in early February in the vicinity of Hudson Crossing Park.

The *Albany Times-Union*, *Glens Falls Chronicle* and WTEN news covered the rare bird visit and resulting birding crowds.

Several other interesting waterfowl were also spotted by avid birders: hybrid Ross's Goose/Cackling Goose (both species are usually seen in central/western North America), Barrow's Goldeneye (usually seen in northwestern North America) and several migrating Canvasbacks.

A huge thank you and kudos to the Bidwell family (Brad, Beth, and Nathan have done almost every count and this year had 49 species), Jeff Gardiner, Russ Hilliard, Jason Krahnke, Sue Nealon, Pat Fitzgerald, Sue Pierce, Steven Farr, Elizabeth and Matt Roos (first time for the sibling duo), Mike Rivette, Jacquie Tinker, Vicki Bocketti and Helen Crawshaw.

This count continues to be a significant contribution to the Christmas Count database, and also provides significant data for this area.

Editor's note:

SAAS offers its tremendous thanks to Linda White, who has served as SAAS Count Compiler since the chapter's first count in 1983.

Avian advocates

Saratoga PLAN

This is the fourth in a series highlighting the work of Southern Adirondack non-profit organizations that support wild birds. This information was provided by Saratoga PLAN, based in Saratoga Springs.

*By Anna Gomez Domenech
Communications Manager, Saratoga PLAN*

What is Saratoga PLAN?

Saratoga PLAN (Preserving Land and Nature) is a 501(c)(3) community-based nonprofit organization that actively works to permanently protect land in and around Saratoga County. As a land trust, PLAN can acquire land outright or work with willing private landowners using conservation easements.

Saratoga PLAN was formed in 2003 through a merger of the Saratoga Springs Open Space Project and the Land Trust of the Saratoga Region.

Stewardship

Saratoga PLAN stewardship staff partners with more than 58 landowners who have conservation easements to care for their land by conducting annual boundary monitoring. PLAN staff also work with more than 100 volunteers year-round to care for 27 nature preserves owned by PLAN which provide crucial wildlife habitats and corridors. These preserves provide important ecosystem services for local communities such as protecting drinking water, preventing flooding, and reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide.

Public Nature Preserves

To connect people to nature, 13 of

PLAN's 27 nature preserves are open to the public year-round and free of charge. These open spaces provide an area for educational programming, ecological research, birdwatching, hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and more. PLAN staff actively manage a total of 32+ miles of trails, including both PLAN and partner trails, with the support of volunteers to ensure visitors can safely access the outdoors.

Community Planning

Saratoga PLAN works closely with local municipalities to help communities create plans that balance growth with conservation to sustain the region as a great place to live, work and play. Land Protection staff can provide municipalities with data, mapping, resources for funding, and advice to help inform their planning process.

Round Lake Preserve

Once slated for residential development, the 90-acre Round Lake Preserve now protects a significant number of scenic wetlands, woodlands, meadows, and fields. Saratoga PLAN and the Town of Malta acquired the land adjacent to Round Lake and Anthony Kill from the Sweeney family in 2008.

The agricultural fields within the Preserve are now being assessed as a potential site for a grassland bird habitat restoration project. PLAN staff are currently learning more about local grassland bird communities and conducting several surveys including those for raptors and Northern Harrier in the spring.

Southern Palmertown Range Initiative

PLAN strives to achieve regional coordination and cooperation in land use, open space and recreational trail planning. One example is the Southern Palmertown Range Initiative. The vision is to establish the Southern Palmertown Range area as a regional recreation destination and bolster the region's economic development while conserving critically important natural resources.

PLAN is currently working with partners on the development of a multi-use core trail connecting Saratoga



Above: A view of the Graphite Range Community Forest on Route 9 in Wilton. Photo courtesy of Saratoga PLAN.

Spa State Park to Moreau Lake State Park. The core trail is part of an envisioned 50-mile trail system called the Sarah B. Foulke Friendship Trails Network. The recently opened Big Bend Preserve in Moreau will be the Northern tip of the Core Trail.

The Graphite Range Community Forest in Wilton opened in November 2023. It acts as the recreational hub with over six miles of trails right off Route 9.

Saratoga PLAN's funding

PLAN is funded through private donations from individual supporters and business partners, foundation grants, government grants and contracts, and PLAN for the Future, PLAN's annual primary fundraising event.

Get Involved

You can help by clearing trails, removing invasive plants, providing nature photography or video content, attending events as an ambassador, writing guest blog posts, and helping with mailings, just to name a few.

You can also become an engaged community member. Advocate for conservation in your local community and/or consider joining your municipality's planning board or zoning board of appeals. Learn more by visiting www.saratogaplan.org or email Anna Gomez Domenech, Communications Manager, annag@saratogaplan.org.



About Wildflowers

Canada Mayflower

By Diane Collins, Wildflower Columnist

The first week in May brings a forest carpet of small low leaves to let us know spring is here.

Canada Mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*) has an infertile shoot with a single basal leaf and a fertile shoot with a flowering stalk and two to three alternate leaves. The flowers show up a few weeks later. The flower stems are short and often zig-zag with clusters of tiny white star-shaped flowers in a raceme.

This understory perennial plant, about five inches tall, is native to Canada and the northeastern United States. Though it is native, it acts like an invasive, growing in huge colonies



and spreading by underground rhizomes. This vigorous member of the Lily family is also called False Lily-of-the-Valley and Canada Beadruby, referring to the color and shape of the plant's fall berries enjoyed by birds and chipmunks.

The genus comes from the Latin word meaning May blossom, and the species name tells us where it grows.

In the 1700's curious and adventurous "citizen naturalists" traveled the globe identifying plants and sending samples back to Carl Linnaeus in Sweden to give the scientific name. At that time this whole part of the world was referred to as Canada and there was no United States. I searched and cannot certify that Linnaeus gave the name *Maianthemum canadense*. (But, he probably did.)

Wildflower photographer Diane Collins is the author of several local wildflower booklets, including the new Springtime Birds & Wildflowers along the Betar Byway, South Glens Falls. Visit www.southernadironack.audubon.org/order-betar-booklet/ to order a booklet. Collins' website is wildflowersinyourownbackyard.com.

Species Spotlight

Common Raven

By Joyce Miller, SAAS Newsletter Editor

April 27 is International Crow and Raven Appreciation Day.

According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, the population of Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*) is growing across North America. Their numbers are believed to be increasing in the Northeast due to reforestation efforts.

Common Ravens typically lay three to seven eggs in March or April. Ravens build their nests on cliffs, trees, or other high, rocky structures. In Washington County's farmlands, it's not unusual to spot their large stick nests atop silo ladders.

These opportunistic birds eat a wide range of food, including carcasses, eggs, nestlings, and plant crops.

Common Ravens live throughout the Northern Hemisphere: North America to Europe, across Asia, and into eastern Russia. In North America, they can be found throughout Canada, in the Northeast, and west of the Rockies.

It has a large brain and is known for



These photos by Gordon Ellmers show the diagnostic Common Raven traits: a wedge-shaped tail, a heavy hatchet-like bill and overall hefty size.



its intelligence and adaptability.

In his 1999 book *Mind of the Raven*, biologist Bernd Heinrich highlights their intricate social behaviors, communication skills, quick learning abilities, use of tools, playful nature, and ability to recognize individuals of other species. Ravens are capable of making up to 33 different vocalizations.

The Common Raven is the largest member of the crow family.

How can you tell the difference between an American Crow and a Common Raven? Ravens produce deep, croaking calls like a loud frog. American Crows have a familiar "caw" call. Ravens are larger, 21 to 27 inches long, compared to a crow's 16 to 20 inch length. Raven tails end in a

pointed wedge shape, as seen in the left-hand photo above. Crow tails are squared off in a fan shape. Ravens also have much larger, thicker, hooked bills and shaggy throat feathers.

In flight, crows have steady wingbeats. Ravens have proportionally longer wings and are more likely to soar and perform aerial acrobatics such as somersaults and flying upside down.

The oldest known wild Common Raven lived for more than 22 years. Captive ravens have been known to live up to 80 years.

To learn more about Common Ravens, see Cornell's All About Birds: www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Raven/overview.

Featured birding trip

Birding in Australia

By Joyce Miller, Newsletter Editor

I joined 10 other birders on a trip to Australia from mid-October to early November. The trip was organized by Field Guides Birding Tours and led by biologist/guides John Coons and Cory Gregory.

We traveled from Darwin in the hot, dry Northern Territory, to Cairns and Brisbane in the eastern state of Queensland and finally to cool, sunny Tasmania, an island state 150 miles off the southeast coast of mainland Australia. Birds were active because it was springtime in the Southern Hemisphere.

We saw more than 250 bird species, including Cassowary, Splendid Fairy-Wren, bowerbirds, and Laughing Kookaburra. Of those, 177 bird species were new to me. My "life list" is now 3,088 bird species, out of about 11,000 in the world.

We also saw many other unusual Australian creatures, including wombats, platypuses, echidnas, kangaroos, wallabies (a small kangaroo cousin) and a six-inch-long spider.

Below: A colorful Australian Brush-turkey walks through a Queensland park. They create large nest mounds, similar to compost heaps, for their eggs.

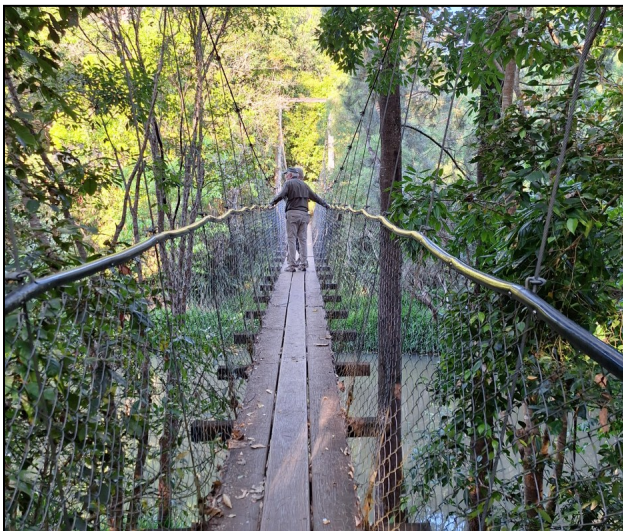


Above: A Satin Bowerbird arranges a variety of blue objects near its grass bower in hopes of attracting a female, at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat at Lamington National Park in Queensland. Some of these bowers are several generations old. The birds build nests nearby.

Photos by Joyce Miller



Left: A five-foot-tall male Southern Cassowary strolls with its chick through a beach-side camp in Queensland, Australia. Though they have a ferocious reputation for attacking people with their large claws, the Cassowary's relative, the Ostrich, has actually killed more people.



Left: The group peered over the side of this bridge to watch a swimming platypus feed on insects in the river below.



Right: A freshwater crocodile crawled out of a lotus swamp to sit in the sun. They have very narrow snouts. This one is about five feet long.