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HIGHLIGHTS OF TWO WEEKS OF BIRDING IN GREAT BRITON

Eleanor Byrne

Our introduction to common English birds was on a morning walk in Kew Gardens. An overcast day in late May (1978), with an occasional sprinkle, did not give us good light, but many of the birds were used to people and we could get quite close. We quickly learned to identify the attractive English robin, song thrush, mistle thrush, blackbird (here, it was a thrush having a lovely song), chaffinch, greenfinch and pied wagtail. A jay was perched on the back of a park bench; we were told the jay here is not the bold fellow we know, but a rather shy creature we were fortunate to see so well. Our leader took us along a path near the edge of Kew Gardens from which we could see the Thames. At a distance were mute swan, coot, moorhen (the same as our common gallinule), and mallards. Since in Great Britain the accent is on the second syllable, this familiar duck always seemed like a stranger when we heard its name. To my surprise, we passed Canada geese on a lawn; somehow I had not expected to see them in Europe. Pheasant calls rang out from behind shrubbery, but it took us some time to locate the birds. Rhododendron was in glorious bloom, and we were many times distracted from birds by the beauty of the flowers.

This trip was basically a two-week tour of Reserves operated by the Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds, visiting selected Reserves on the east and west coasts, one in Wales, in Scotland, and the Outer Hebrides. I had joined, not only for the birds, but because I saw no other possibility of ever seeing the Highlands of Scotland or the Hebrides. On both counts, the trip was most successful and fulfilling. We travelled by an unusual de-luxe bus, equipped with bar, kitchenette, driver and hostess. Distances between Reserves were sometimes great, and on many days we ate the hostess-prepared lunch while riding. Every moment was occupied, some provision was made for limited sightseeing in Canterbury, Chester, Coventry and York. We had no time at all for shopping; the ladies were sternly informed they were there to see birds, not shops. Days afield were long, dinner usually late by U.S. custom, and I, for one, was ready for bed shortly after dinner.

After a night in Canterbury, we drove to Stodmarsh Nature Reserve of the Nature Conservancy, here a branch of government, not a private association as is ours. The Reserve is located on the estuary of the River Stour. We walked from the parking area down a narrow lane with hedges on both sides. Many birds were heard on this sunny, but windy, day; but along the lane we saw only a few, among them were the skylark, goldfinch and house

martin. Our group clambered over a stile into the Reserve proper, and was met by the Warden, who led us along the main dyke. Great-crested and little grebe were on the water, as were mallard and shoveler. A group of teal flew overhead and with them a pair of garganey. This was pure luck, as garganey are summer visitors mostly, with fewer than 100 pair breeding in S.W.England. Reed warbler and sedge warbler were common; we soon learned to recognize both. Reed bunting we had to hunt for.

After about two hours on the dyke, we returned to the coach, our lunch, and the run to the Northward Hill Reserve near High Halstow. This Reserve has the largest heronry in England and a very large rookery as well. Again we were met by the Warden, who led us down a steep lane, but with a view toward the Thames, with Tilbury across marshes to our left. The path at the bottom became muddy and slippery, but we saw willow warbler. The warden told us the nightingale always sings from cover and is almost impossible to see. We didn't see it, although he said one was nearby. We observed both the heronry and rookery for some time since young were in the nests, and adults were moving about. We then took a rough path up the hill through woods and ferns; the bluebells here were in full bloom. Down again to the bottom and up the lane, having seen stock dove, wood pigeon, turtle dove and collared dove in the clearings. Just as we were about to board the bus, a grey partridge was spotted in a field, and a little owl some distance away was seen watching us from the top of a hay bale.

The night was spent outside Cambridge, and since most of us wanted to see the town, we were willing to get up for breakfast at 7:00 am and an 8:30 departure, so we could have a short walking tour of the colleges. We were then off for Minsmere Nature Reserve, which is in Suffolk on the coast, due east from Cambridge.

Minsmere Reserve is a major Reserve of the Society, operated for the benefit of water birds chiefly, and for conducting research and training programs. Ponds had been built into sections of the marshes, and each could be observed from wooden shelters or so-called "hides". This was watching in comfort; a bench to sit on, a shelf to rest one's elbows on while holding binoculars up to one's eyes, and a narrow slit to see through so the birds could not see us. To see avocet, oystercatcher, black-tailed godwit, many ducks, gulls, and little and Sandwich terns under these conditions was paradise. Our group had been split into small segments, each with a leader from the Reserve staff, so we moved from hide to hide, to watch. After a picnic lunch back at the coach, we went out again, this time into woodlands. There were plenty of birds, but nothing new. We continued to walk around the marshes. I went a bit farther to the top of some dunes to see the North Sea. Remnants of concrete baffles among the dunes, built during World War II to prevent tank landings along this coast, could be seen. We continued to walk along the top of a dyke to our starting point, weary, but well content with this day's expedition, having additionally seen, marsh harrier, redshank, dunlin, ruff and ringed plover.

Actually, the day was far from over. We drove to the Pier Avenue Hotel in Southwold for dinner, and then returned in the direction of Minsmere Reserve to Westleton Heath to listen for nightjar, woodcock, owls, and possibly nightingale. We took a sandy path into a woodsy area, but the pace was too fast for me, and I fell behind. The main party was quickly lost to sight, and with darkness falling, I retraced my steps to the road. I did hear an owl in the distance, but had not long to wait before the others returned, having heard no more than I. On to Ipswich, arriving about 11:00 pm, tired, but having had an outstanding day.

The next day was a travel day, across to the west, through the Vale of Evesham, Stratford on Avon, Warwick, with an hour's stop at Coventry to see the new Cathedral and the ruins of the old. Then on to Wales where we stayed the night at the Mountains Hotel beyond Brecon. The next morning we toured through the Welsh mountains, got lost, had to get out of the coach and walk up a steep hill, so the coach (loaded with our luggage) could make it. However, we were all happy to walk for a bit. Considerable time was wasted trying to find the right road, but the scenery was spectacular, and we certainly saw a part of Wales off the usual tourist route.

Gwenffrwd Reserve consists of a "hanging oak wood" so-called. Actually, it is a wood at the very top of an extremely hilly and steep sheep pasture. The featured bird was the pied flycatcher. The group started up the hill in the sheep tracks, but as it was a very hot day, and hill climbing is not the best thing I do, I went only to the first plateau where the trees began, and watched birds there, while the others continued upwards. I came down very slowly, mostly sideways in the sheep tracks. Grateful to be back on the road, I walked alone for a bit, and identified a yellowhammer near a farmyard, and was ready for lunch by the time the others returned. They had seen the pied flycatcher, but nothing else remarkable.

We drove north towards Chester, our overnight stop. However, the ordeal of the morning for the bus made it overheat now, and about 4:00 pm we had to pull off the road in a small village to let it cool. The driver got water from a householder for the engine, while the rest of us birded along the village street. Lots of trees and bushes made this an enjoyable thirty minutes; I would have liked more of this leisurely birding. A rather late arrival into the Queen Hotel in Chester did not permit us time to see the city that evening.

During the night, our driver took the coach back to its garage in Droitwich to be checked over, and was not due back until 10:00 am. This gave us a couple of hours to sightsee the Cathedral, the old city wall, the famous "Rows" - predecessor of a shopping arcade. It was a Bank Holiday so nothing was open, a blow for the shoppers! Our driver finally returned, loaded our luggage, and we were off for Leighton Moss, another RSPB Reserve on the west coast, inland from famous Morecambe Bay. Our leader, Mr. Charles Wilson, is Chairman of the Management Committee here, so we had royal treatment (though we had had that at all the other Reserves). Again we divided into small

groups, each led by a member of the Reserve staff, to walk the Reserve and observe water birds from hides. These were fresh water marshes so we did not have the spectacular numbers that were at Minsmere. Pochard was the only new duck seen. We heard bittern booming, but saw none. Lots of land birds were around, and warblers were singing, but they were hard to find in the shrubbery. The warblers at first glance, all seemed to be little brown birds - none had the brilliant patches of distinguishing coloration of our American warblers.

From Leighton Moss our route went north to St.Bee's Head. The RSPB has control of the cliffs for some miles here, but a public footpath runs along the edge; and since they cannot prevent the public from using it, the Society is concerned for the cliff-nesting birds. We pulled into a farmyard near St.Bee's Lighthouse and walked across cow pastures to the cliffs. We climbed a stile (the first of many this day) to be able to look over the edge for the birds. They were there in quantity; guillemot (the same as our common murre), black guillemot (also our black guillemot), puffins, kittiwakes, cormorant and great black-backed gull. After we had absorbed all we could, we walked the public footpath to St.Bee's Village which we were told was 1.5 miles away. As the cormorant flies that may have been true, but we had to climb stiles at the end of every pasture, slither down rocks and trudge up sheep tracks at every undulation of the coast, so to me, the distance seemed twice as long. On this hot, sunny day, the view over the sea was beautiful, as were the flowers on the cliffs - pink thrift, devil's bit, scabious, and many more. Each time I stopped to rest, I appreciated all this, but when moving watched only where my next footstep would be.

Our coach was waiting for us, parked alongside an ice-cream van. Almost everyone had a cone to cool off with before boarding the coach for our picnic lunch. En route to Scotland we were given a mini-tour of the Lake District before our arrival in Glasgow for the night.

The next morning we left Glasgow for Oban and the ferry to Lochboisdale on South Uist in the Outer Hebrides. On a beautiful drive past Loch Loman, the hydrangeas and azaleas were in full bloom. The ferry was to leave at 1:30 pm, so we had time for lunch in Oban, and to change traveller's checks in a bank. This was about the first we had been able to get into since our arrival. The trip to Lochboisdale took seven hours (reminded me of the 'Bluenose' to Nova Scotia). Another gorgeous day - we saw many shearwaters and gannets. We sampled scones hot from the galley oven, which were delicious. I'd never had any so good elsewhere.

We landed about dusk, and after unloading the coach we drove north up South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist (islands connected by causeways) to Loch Maddy. The road through the islands is paved, though narrow and bouncy in spots where it crosses peat bogs. The hotel welcomed us with coffee and sandwiches.

After a good Scotch breakfast we were off on a tour of North Uist. The island appeared desolate, with few houses and few trees. It is by sea lochs and the landscape is more undulating than hilly. It was easy to imagine what it must be

like in winter, although in May, lilacs and wildflowers were blooming. Our goal was Balranald Reserve where we were again met by the Warden and led along a track over the moors to the open ocean. On our left was a sheltered bay where oystercatchers were nesting. A fulmar was perched on the chimney of an isolated cottage. A red-throated diver was seen on a loch, and a wheatear along the road added to our total. Some of the group were lucky enough to hear and see a corncrake.

The next day we had a 5-hour ferry ride from Loch Maddy to Uig on the island of Skye, one of the Inner Hebrides. Skye appeared very green and lush compared to North Uist. We had no time for concentrated birding here, though the coach stopped long enough for us to see a buzzard (a hawk, not a vulture) and a golden eagle. The short, five minute ferry ride from Kyleakin to Kyle of Lochalsh brought us back to the mainland. We drove north up the coast, seeing range upon range of the Highlands on the way to our destination, Ullapool. This attractive town has its main street right along the water with houses on one side only. After dinner, some of the group walked the length of the street, since there was still daylight at 10:00 pm.

The next day we left for Tarbet, the take-off spot for Handa Island, a RSPB Reserve off the coast of northern Scotland. We were in mountainous country with narrow roads, steep grades and beautiful scenery. Alas for the schedule - this day was Sunday and neither boatmen nor boats were available to take us to Handa Island. In the Highlands, Sunday is sacrosanct. After some telephoning and local advice, our leader had us drive further north where an "Adventure School" was located. This school was known to have a launch and perhaps would take us to Handa. At the School sign, our coach turned left on a very narrow road down a steep grade toward the sea. About halfway down a sign warned cars not to go any further, as the grade was too steep for them to get up again. Our coach stopped and we all got out. Of course, there was no room for a bus to turn around, so our skillful driver backed up the road to the intersection. No "Adventure School" was in sight either, but a sign pointed to a path up and over the adjacent headland. Our leader forged on ahead to see what arrangements could be made, and the main group straggled after him. It was early afternoon by this time, but the School was located and the owner was willing to take us to Handa Island, not to land as we had expected to do, but to ride around it to see the thousands of seabirds which nest there. Although this is a larger island, the situation here is much like Bonaventure Island in the Gaspé. A long gradual slope from the landward side terminates at the top of the cliffs where the birds nest. The birds are seen better from a boat on the water than from the top looking over and down. It was a tired bunch of people who were finally landed by small boat from the launch, walked back over the headland to the road, and then up to the coach. We were weary, but exhilarated from all that had been seen.

The following morning we turned south on a circuitous route through the Highlands. Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in Britain, lay ahead of us, snow still visible at its crest. We took a pass through the Cairngorms, through Inverness, and south along the east shore of Loch Ness. No monster was seen. We had to be satisfied with sighting Slavonian grebe and black-throated diver. The small lochs we passed produced heron, mallard,

tufted duck, eider, goosander, shelduck, graylag goose and sandpiper. We made a quick stop to see a golden eagle perched against the skyline in the mountains. As we came down to a lower elevation, almost every field along the road held curlew - what a thrill to see them.

We stopped overnight at Aviemore, a winter ski resort area. The hotel grounds and a bridle path nearby provided good birding for the short time we had in the evening and also the morning before departure. Crested tit and coal tit (cousins of our chickadee) were seen near the hotel.

Take-off time was 9:00 am for the Reserve at Loch Garten. As usual, we were met by the Warden, and then taken on a woods walk of about a mile. The day was rather windy and birds difficult to find, but a tree creeper and great spotted woodpecker rewarded our efforts. Our path returned to the road, and further along it, we were taken to a hide looking out at the original eyrie to which the ospreys returned to Scotland in 1959 after an absence of fifty years. Fixed telescopes showed us an adult bird and young in the nest.

It rained at intervals during the afternoon, our first since Kew Gardens, but most of the time we were travelling south toward Edinburgh and so were not bothered by it. One short stop was made at Inch Marsh Reserve, but nothing new was found. We were in the city early enough for a short walk on Princes Street and a quick look at the old section. The following day was to be devoted to an excursion to Bass Rock, site of an extensive gannetry. Since I had seen the gannetry at Cape St. Mary's in Newfoundland, and Edinburgh is one of my favorite cities, and also because it was my birthday, I decided to stay behind and treat myself to a day in the city.

Bass Rock is probably the best known of the thirteen gannetries in the British Isles, and is 1.25 miles from the coast at the entrance to the Firth of Forth near North Berwick. The cliffs are on the eastern side, and the island slopes down to sea level on the south. Landing is not difficult though the climb up is a little strenuous. About 7,500 pairs of gannets nest there; and approximately 2500 non-breeding and immature birds are there also, at least until August when the gannets begin to leave. Fulmar, shag, lesser black-backed and herring gull, kittiwake, razorbill, guillemot and puffin also frequent Bass Rock: to see all these made a memorable day for those who went.

Driving further south the next day, our birding stop was at Fairhaven Ings Reserve. This is former coal mining country, subsidence of the land, and an incursion of water had formed a new haven for ducks and gulls. We walked a path to an upper level from which we could see over the ponds. Immediately in front of us was an island holding the nest of a little gull, the first known nesting site of this species in Great Britain. The Warden and staff were naturally very pleased and asked us not to talk about it for fear someone would overhear and disturb the nest. In another section of the Reserve we were shown two whooper swans. Having been previously injured, they could not fly and were being cared for on the Reserve.

This was our final birding day of the trip, during which I had seen 118 British birds, and the group as a whole, 151. It was a memorable expedition, well run, and with a knowledgeable English leader. The sponsoring company is Jornee Unlimited of Hartford, Conn., whose ad in Audubon Magazine had enticed me to partake of this rewarding experience.

SOUTHERN RENSSELAER CHRISTMAS COUNT

Mike Kuhrt

Late 1978 and early 1979 have brought extremely strange weather conditions to the Capital District. Alternate snows and thaws, heavy rainfalls and the remnants of an abundant natural food supply have strongly altered the feeding patterns of winter resident birds. Comments from many feeder watchers have been verified by field parties - we are observing a nice variety of species but numbers are down both at feeders and in the field. In fact, birds seem to be very localized, with near-normal counts at a few feeders but very few, if any, birds at others. Even today (Feb. 15, 1979), some of our most reliable feeders are still doing little or no business. There is a strong invasion of evening grosbeaks, but other typical invading species such as pine siskin, redpoll and purple finch are absent or present in extremely small numbers.

The Thirteenth Annual Southern Rensselaer County Christmas Bird Count, conducted December 23, 1978, reflected the birding situation of this season. The species count of 56 was about average. However, the total individual count of 18916 (6867 disregarding starlings) was lower than in recent years. Hawks and owls were not as conspicuous as in 1977. Evening grosbeaks were the predominant species in the field (disregarding roosting starlings). Bob Korn's observed a flock of 46 Canada geese on the Hudson River near his home. He also spotted a Carolina wren in his neighborhood. Both species were second sightings for the count. The real prize was an Eastern bluebird, observed by Bob Budliger, at dawn, in the St. Agnes Cemetery in Albany. This is the first recorded sighting of the species for our count. Other notable sightings were made by Ed Cummings (red-shouldered hawk, 4th sighting), Richard Hall (grey catbird, 2nd sighting), and Bill Lee (bobwhite, 3rd report, first since 1969; Lapland longspur, 4th report, first since 1970). The now-famous field sparrow at the Gorman feeder has returned for the fifth consecutive year.

Observation time for the 1978 count was from 5:30 am to 5:00 pm on December 23. Conditions throughout the day were mild, with early morning cloudiness giving way to sun in the afternoon. Temperatures ranged from 23 to 45 degrees with calm air and high barometric pressure. Natural food was exceptionally abundant, snow cover was scant and ice cover on small bodies of water was nearly complete. Larger bodies of water, including the Hudson River were partly open. The area covered included the territory inside a circle 15 miles in diameter with its center in Best, at the intersection of Hwy. 152 and Best-Luther Road.

Feeder observers this year included Noel Albertson, Joe Baum, Malcolm Bell, Mrs. W. Bubie, Chris Carabateas, Bob Christiansen, Paul Connor, Helen Covert, Jeanne Covert, Muriel Danahy, Mrs. R. Don, Frank Dufour, Ray Elliot, Edna Gorman, Mary Grandjean, Donna Gruett, Patricia Gundrum, Richard Hall, Mrs. J. Hargrave, Mrs. J. LaPan, Dave Messer, Alice Mohl, Helmut Neumann, R. Pearce, Jessie Plume, and Oscar Widstrand.

GROUP A: E. East Greenbush and NE Schodack. Monte Gruett and Mike Kuhrt. Golden-crowned kinglet.

GROUP B: W. East Greenbush and W. Schodack. Bill Lee, Dick Guthrie and Peter Feinberg. Bobwhite, great black-backed gull, red-winged blackbird, swamp sparrow, and Lapland longspur.

GROUP C: Sand Lake and N. Nassau. Dick Philion, Bob Johnson, and Greg Meisner.

GROUP D: North Greenbush and Albany. Bob Budliger. Eastern bluebird.

GROUP E: NW East Greenbush and Rensselaer. Bill and David Gorman. Sharp-shinned hawk, screech owl.

GROUP F: Poestenkill. James Covert III and Donald Bermas.

GROUP G: Glenmount. Robert Kornis. Canada goose, and Carolina wren.

GROUP H: SE Schodack and S. Nassau. Ed Cummings. Red-shouldered hawk, Eastern meadowlark, and pine siskin.

GROUP X: Ring-necked pheasant, catbird, and field sparrow.

SOUTHERN RENSSELAER CHRISTMAS COUNT

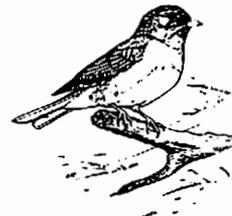
December 23, 1978

Species	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	Total
Canada goose	0	0	0	0	0	0	46	0	0	46
mallard	0	9	0	20	4	0	0	0	0	33
black duck	0	5	0	7	9	0	0	0	0	21
sharp-shinned hawk	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
red-tailed hawk	3	11	2	8	6	1	1	0	1	33
red-shouldered hawk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
rough-legged hawk	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	4
American kestrel	1	2	1	3	1	3	1	2	0	14
ruffed grouse	6	1	2	0	2	0	1	1	2	15
bobwhite	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
ring-necked pheasant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
gt black-backed gull	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
herring gull	1	45	0	2	15	0	18	0	0	81
ring-billed gull	0	45	0	0	12	0	6	0	0	63
rock dove	126	130	55	530	160	166	0	0	67	1234
mourning dove	9	28	56	6	30	2	4	6	90	231
screech owl	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
belted kingfisher	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2

SOUTHERN RENSSELAER CHRISTMAS COUNT

December 23, 1978

Species	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	Total
common flicker	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	4
pileated woodpecker	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
hairy woodpecker	5	3	4	1	2	1	3	0	17	36
downy woodpecker	7	8	8	5	1	4	2	2	25	62
horned lark	0	67	0	0	0	0	0	35	0	102
blue jay	19	30	35	22	16	58	5	10	77	272
common crow	30	90	60	70	15	270	50	10	13	618
bk-capped chickadee	37	42	50	72	40	34	20	15	170	480
tufted titmouse	0	2	0	0	4	3	3	1	27	40
wh-breasted nuthatch	9	5	5	4	1	1	5	1	27	58
rd-breasted nuthatch	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3
brown creeper	1	0	0	3	3	0	1	0	3	11
Carolina wren	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
mockingbird	2	6	2	6	2	0	1	1	5	25
catbird	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
American robin	0	0	0	0	11	0	8	0	2	21
Eastern bluebird	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
golden-cr kinglet	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
cedar waxwing	0	11	0	12	1	0	10	0	32	66
starling	251	350	120	370	10K	141	300	25	494	12051
house sparrow	64	175	22	50	90	144	35	30	195	805
Eastern meadowlark	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
red-winged blackbird	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
common grackle	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	4
brown-headed cowbird	0	10	0	0	2	6	0	0	3	21
cardinal	1	12	4	10	12	2	3	2	47	93
evening grosbeak	52	325	130	130	11	650	8	8	309	1623
purple finch	4	1	3	0	0	12	1	0	29	50
house finch	0	30	0	52	0	0	0	0	75	157
pine siskin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
American goldfinch	17	24	16	12	1	0	4	6	72	152
dark-eyed junco	2	1	26	14	20	2	0	5	77	147
tree sparrow	42	9	30	35	0	3	0	3	40	162
field sparrow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
wh-throated sparrow	5	5	0	1	1	0	0	2	5	19
swamp sparrow	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
song sparrow	2	8	1	3	4	0	2	1	4	25
Lapland longspur	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total Species	25	39	23	28	36	19	28	24	33	56
Total Count	697	1508	635	1450	10482	1503	551	1916	174	18916



TROY CHRISTMAS COUNT

William W. Shuster

A total of 10,761 individual birds were seen during the annual Troy Christmas count held on Saturday, December 30, 1978. Some 57 species were reported by six field groups and a number of feeding stations observers. Probably the most notable sighting was a gadwall seen along the Mohawk River. This bird was seen by the whole field group and compared with nearby mallards. This group also repeated the sighting of last year of an Iceland gull. Other interesting sightings included a white-crowned sparrow, a field sparrow, a Lapland longspur, a pintail, two goshawks, a Cooper's hawk, a common snipe and a number of robins.

Hawks were rare with the exception of redtails. Cardinals and evening grosbeaks were plentiful. A large flock of pine grosbeaks were seen by one group. Owls were quite scarce with only one screech owl and five great horned owls reported. Only one group reported seeing cedar waxwings. Thanks go to the twenty-one field observers and the following feeder station reporters: Pat Canavan, David Jahne, Dorothy MacChesney, Lois Norton, Nancy Shuster.

The report area is within a 15 mile circle centered at River and Turner Roads in Melrose, (42 degrees 50 minutes North, 73 degrees 40 minutes West) and includes Center Brunswick, Clifton Park, Cohoes, the Hudson River from Troy to near Stillwater, Melrose, Schaghticoke, Speigletown, Tomhannock Reservoir, and most of Troy. December 30, 1978 6:00 am to 4:30 pm. Clear to partly cloudy; 9-20 degrees F; wind 0 mph; snow cover about 6-9 inches; water partly open. There were a total of 21 observers in six parties plus five feeder reporters. Total party hours 49; 14 afoot and 35 by car. Total party miles 386; 40 on foot and 346 by car.

GROUP A: Tomhannock area. William Gorman, Daniel Gorman, Monte Gruett. 6:30 am to 4:00 pm. 4.5 hours afoot 5.0 hours by car. 4 miles afoot 40 miles by car. Lapland Longspur, ruffed grouse, screech owl, pileated woodpecker, red-breasted nuthatch.

GROUP B: Melrose, Speigletown to Schaghticoke. William Shuster, Mary Stewart, Ruth MacClellan, Nancy Dennis, Elizabeth Washburn. 7:30 am to 3:30 pm. 1 hour afoot 7 hours by car. 3 miles afoot 64 miles by car. Pine grosbeaks, purple finches, Cooper's hawk, Northern shrike.

GROUP C: East and west sides of Hudson River. Samuel Madison, Audrey Madison, Peter Lansing, Richard Guthrie. 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. 5.5 hours afoot 3 hours by car. 4.5 miles afoot 43 miles by car. Pine grosbeaks, goshawk, pheasant, horned owl, robins, Northern shrike.

GROUP D: Mohawk River, Cohoes, Green Island. Richard Philion, William Lee, Martha Dunham. 7:20 am to 3:20 pm. 1 hour afoot 7 hours by car. 3 miles afoot 40 miles by car. Pintail, gadwall, Iceland gull.

GROUP E: Lower Saratoga County. Walton Sabin, Robert Budliger, Alan Mapes. 6:45 am to 4:45 pm. 1.5 hours afoot 8.5 hours by car. 6 miles afoot 102 miles by car. Common snipe, brown-headed cowbird, field sparrow.

GROUP F: Brunswick and Eagle Mills. Marilyn and Norman Fancher, Peter Corrigan. 7:00 am to 12:10 pm. .5 hours afoot 4.5 hours by car. 1 mile afoot 57 miles by car. Robin, mockingbird.

GROUP X: Feeder reports collected by Lois Norton. 5 feeder reports. Purple finch, white-crowned sparrow, song sparrow.

TROY CHRISTMAS COUNT

December 30, 1978

Species	A	B	C	D	E	F	X Total	Total
Canada goose	1	0	32	0	0	0	0	33
mallard	0	12	16	358	0	0	0	386
black duck	0	0	4	76	0	0	0	80
gadwall	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
pintail	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
common goldeneye	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
common merganser	0	0	17	12	0	0	0	29
goshawk	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Cooper's hawk	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
red-tailed hawk	4	13	12	1	13	2	0	45
rough-legged hawk	4	1	0	0	2	0	0	7
American kestrel	0	3	4	3	2	2	0	14
ruffed grouse	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
ring-necked pheasant	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
common snipe	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Iceland gull	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
gt black-backed gull	0	0	0	42	0	0	0	42
herring gull	0	0	1	29	0	0	0	30
ring-billed gull	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	26
rock dove	350	632	877	60	235	342	0	2496
mourning dove	8	105	158	30	91	59	28	479
screech owl	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
great horned owl	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	5
belted kingfisher	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	4
common flicker	0	0	9	0	0	1	0	10
pileated woodpecker	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
hairy woodpecker	6	3	6	0	2	2	2	21
downy woodpecker	10	11	16	6	19	13	4	79
horned lark	60	6	0	21	32	0	0	169
blue jay	34	27	23	11	34	32	19	180
common crow	45	62	21	92	104	55	0	379
bk-capped chickadee	55	35	44	17	62	31	14	258
tufted titmouse	0	2	7	3	7	0	2	21
wh-breasted nuthatch	13	1	12	6	10	2	5	49
rd-breasted nuthatch	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
brown creeper	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
mockingbird	2	2	0	3	5	8	1	21
American robin	1	1	80	0	0	4	0	86
cedar waxwing	0	0	37	0	0	0	0	37
Northern shrike	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	5

TROY CHRISTMAS COUNT

December 30, 1978

Species	A	B	C	D	E	F	X	Total
starling	57	167	438	2000	115	259	11	3047
house sparrow	285	91	174	57	245	133	119	1104
brown-headed cowbird	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
cardinal	10	31	24	8	24	24	16	137
evening grosbeak	250	52	126	2	28	158	67	683
purple finch	0	8	0	0	0	0	12	20
house finch	0	13	0	4	21	0	0	38
pine grosbeak	0	32	7	0	0	0	0	39
American goldfinch	5	2	6	25	22	24	14	98
dark-eyed junco	7	11	7	0	15	5	13	58
tree sparrow	5	32	75	8	86	99	23	328
field sparrow	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
wh-crowned sparrow	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
wh-throated sparrow	4	14	27	1	0	39	5	90
song sparrow	1	4	10	7	10	0	1	33
Lapland longspur	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
snow bunting	27	12	0	30	0	0	0	69
Total Species	32	31	35	33	28	21	20	57
Total Count	1259	1388	2278	2943	1242	1293	358	10761

GREAT GRAY OWL INVASION

An unprecedented influx of great gray owls into the northeast and lower Canada is still in progress as we go to press. Thus far 44 great gray owls have been verified by competent observers in various parts of New York State. Our eleven county area has had more than its share with ten birds seen and seven more probables. We hope to have the final tally by the time the next issue of "Feathers" is published.

Along with the great gray owls, a relatively small number of hawk owls and boreal owls have been reported. No hawk owls were seen in our area, but a well described boreal owl was seen and photographed in Saratoga, (the film has not been developed at this writing) and a dead boreal was found in Scotia. These are believed to be the first records of boreal owl for our area.

The owls are believed to have been driven from their normal habitat in western and northern Canada because of a shortage of mice and other four footed mammals upon which they prey. Weather may also have played a part in forcing this movement.

Many great gray owls (at least nine at this writing) were found dead (due to starvation) along the northern shores of Lake Ontario, indicating the difficulty the birds were having in finding food. Two birds in our area were reported shot (one of which lived and the carcass of the second could not be located), and we know of at least one other bird in the state that was killed in this same fashion.

Many people mistook the barred owls, common to our area, for great grays. A photo of a saw-whet owl was printed in the Schenectady Gazette without identification after they had been taken to task a few days earlier for printing a barred owl and identifying it as a great gray. This points up the need for careful observation of all species of birds, even for experienced observers.

We hope to have more details in the next issue of "Feathers".

-- Ron Laforce



Photo by Ron Laforce

This is the Rensselaer, N.Y. great gray owl which was originally found by youngsters who were out hunting. Attempts to "live trap" this bird for banding were unsuccessful. It was later reported that this bird had been shot (by an adult), a fact which could not be confirmed.



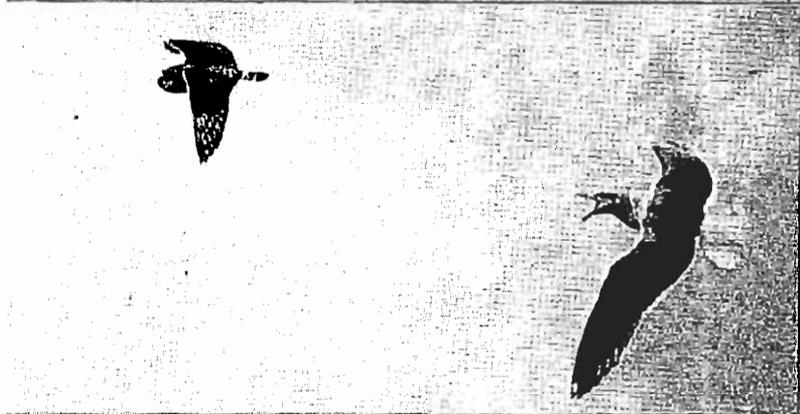
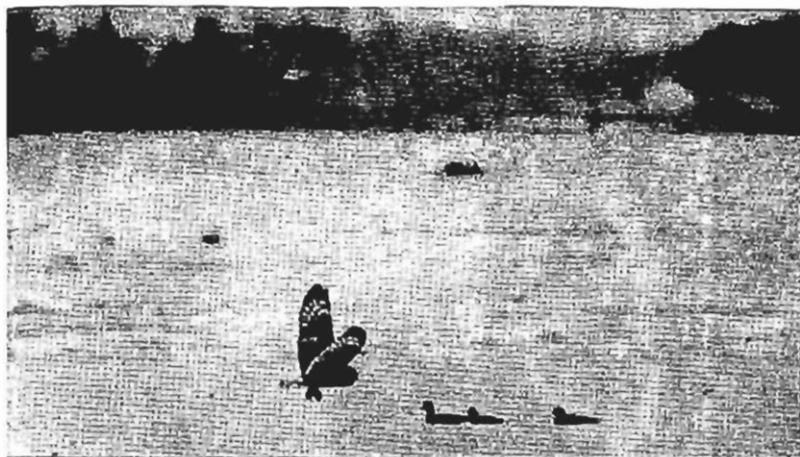
Photo by Ron Laforce

One of the four long-eared owls that were found at Salisbury, Mass. on the Cape Ann - Plum Island field trip is shown. The birds were somewhat nervous so we could not approach very closely, but good views were obtained with scopes and binoculars.



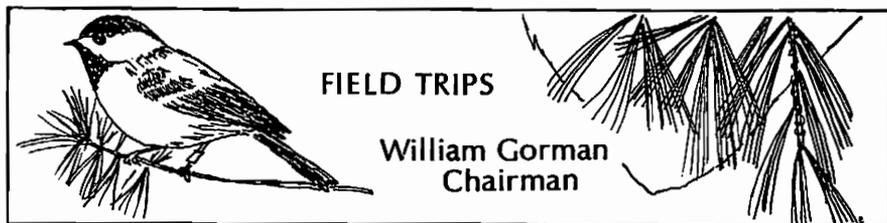
AREA BLUEBIRDS

Al Schroeder is interested in obtaining information from anyone who maintains bluebird houses in our area. He is interested in how many bluebirds are being raised and what percentage of the houses that are maintained have bluebirds. If you wish to help in this investigation, call him on 356-2420.



Photos by Ron Laforce

This short-eared owl in Salisbury, Mass. is shown in flight with a mouse he caught, being chased by gulls that eventually made him drop his catch, and finally, perched on a branch and looking for another chance at a meal.



FIELD TRIPS

William Gorman
Chairman

North Jersey Shore

November 18, 1978

On November 18, 1978, a clear cold morning, a group of Hudson Mohawk birders started birding at Long Branch, New Jersey. We found a number of ring-necked ducks, laughing gulls, and pied-billed grebes at Takanassee Lake. As we moved south we had close looks at snow geese, American wigeon, fish crows and purple sandpipers. At Shark River we found mute swans, whistling swans, greater yellowlegs, great blue herons and a European wigeon. At Manasquan we added black-bellied plovers and three gannets, finishing up the day with a list of 49 species.

The following day was again clear and cold as we headed north for Sandy Hook. The ponds and rivers had a low number of ducks and waterfowl suggesting we were a little early in the season for the main influx. We added red-throated loon and great cormorant to our list as we arrived at Sandy Hook. We found a great many brant along with some snow geese, surf scoter and oldsquaws on the bay. As we hiked through the holly, briar tangles and prickly pears, we found house finches and a number of sparrows. Along the ocean we added horned lark, sanderling and dunlin. We ended the day with 45 species giving a two day total of 61 species for the trip.

-- Bill Gorman

Cape Ann - Plum Island

January 27, 1979

On January 27, 1979, about 19 Hudson-Mohawk birders started birding at Gloucester harbor. A light rain was falling as we searched a group of common goldeneyes in vain hope of finding a Barrow!s. We did see some great cormorants before we proceeded to Eastern Point where we saw white-winged scoter, common eider, red-breasted merganser and a little gull. We left just in time to avoid being marooned, as abnormally high tides started to cover the road. At Niles Pond and Brace Cove we saw several Iceland gulls and a black guillemot. Near East Gloucester we

watched a glaucous gull and several Kumlien's gulls. Between Andrew's Point and Lane's Cove we saw purple sandpipers and snow buntings. Near Plum Cove we watched several common loons, one of which had some features suggestive of an Arctic loon. However, the continuing rain hampered observation and prevented a positive identification. We proceeded to Magnolia where we had a nice look at four harlequin ducks. We stopped birding about 4:30 pm and joined a group of Alan Devoe birders for dinner. We picked up our 34th species for the day, a pair of great horned owls at about 10:00 pm.

The following day, the rain had stopped and we proceeded to Plum Island where we watched and photographed a cooperative snowy owl perched on a telephone pole. We drove to Salisbury Beach where we found a marsh hawk, 6 short-eared owls and 4 long-eared owls. All of the owls remained in the area most of the day enabling observation by birders from many areas. We added horned larks and Lapland longspurs to our list and moved to Newburyport. We could not find any Barrow's goldeneye on the river, but did see several seals and added oldsquaw, greater scaup and a black-headed gull to our list. We went about half way down Plum Island and picked up pintails. We then moved south to Danvers, Mass. where we looked in vain for a sandhill crane. We finished the day with 54 species giving a trip total of 63 species which afforded most of our group the chance to add from 1 to 12 species to their life lists.

-- Bill Gorman

FOSTER CHICK REPORT

Audubon Leader

Nine whooping cranes hatched from eggs placed in sand hill crane nests in Idaho have returned safely to their wintering grounds in New Mexico. They are the survivors, so far, in an experiment begun three years ago. Seven were lost during the fall migration. Rod Drewien, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist on the project, said this loss was "a little higher than anticipated" but he remains optimistic the experiment will succeed in establishing a second wild flock of whoopers.

NEW HAWAIIAN BIRD

Audubon Leader

Condominiums are springing up all over Hawaii and sprawling developments are displacing pineapple and sugarcane fields. Worried conservationists there say Hawaii has a new unofficial state bird: the building crane.

BOOKS

FOREST SERVICE BIRDING LEAFLET

C.Ray Agnew of the Greenwich Audubon Society thought of the idea and passed it along to a fellow chapter member, Dr.Elvis J.Stahr. Stahr, in turn, enlisted the aid of Robert Arbib, editor of "American Birds", and together they sold the Forest Service on the idea of publishing a leaflet to let the public know about the pleasures and fascination of birdwatching in the national forests. "Now Discover Birding in the National Forests" is off the press and should be available at all Forest Service district offices.

BOOK FOR BIRDERS

Tips on buying binoculars, scopes, telephoto lenses, and tape recorders; thumbnail descriptions of periodicals and books for birdwatchers; lists of birding organizations; places to go and guided tours to take. These are among the offerings of "The Complete Outfitting & Source Book for Bird Watchers", by Michael Scofield. The 192-page book is available in soft cover for \$6.95 at bookstores or direct from the publisher at 75 cents extra for postage: The Great Outdoors Trading Company, 24759 Shoreline Highway, Marshall, California 94940.



Photo by Ron Laforce

The snowy owl shown, was one of four species of owl found on the Cape Ann - Plum Island field trip. Unusually high tides had left fewer of his usual perches available, so he sat cooperatively on this power pole for all passers-by to observe.

SUMMER CONSERVATION CAMP

Camp Colby

The Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club plans to once again sponsor a boy or girl for a weeks attendance at the conservation camp of the Department of Environmental Conservation. Camp Colby is in the Adirondacks near Saranac Lake. This years dates are July 15 to 21, July 22 to 28, and July 29 to Aug. 4. Youngsters from ages 12 to 14 are accepted. If you know a deserving candidate with an interest in conservation and the outdoors, or if you need more information, call Bob Budliger on 439-0006.



Photo by Ron Laforce

Although not photographed on the latest trip to Cape Ann - Plum Island, this Lapland longspur was seen and photographed at Salisbury, Mass.

POSSIBLE EAGLE PROBLEM

Audubon Leader

Reports reaching the National Audubon Society indicate that lead poisoning of waterfowl from swallowing lead shot is also a problem for scavenging bald eagles that may eat poisoned ducks. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is already phasing out use of lead shot in areas susceptible to lead-shot problems, permitting hunters to use only steel shot in such areas. The society has turned its information over to the federal agency which, in turn, has promised to undertake studies to determine how serious the problem may be for eagles.

CITY IS A SANCTUARY

Audubon Leader

With the aid and encouragement of the Blue Mountain Audubon Society, Walla Walla, Washington, has officially designated itself a bird sanctuary. It was the first city in that state to take this action to promote interest in wildlife and remind people of the laws protecting birds.

Dial-a-Bird (518) 377-9600

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PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY HUDSON-MOHAWK BIRD CLUB, INC.

MEMBERSHIP: Life \$150; Sustaining \$10; Active \$5; Student \$2; with an additional charge of \$1 per additional family member. Write or call MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN: Mrs. E. L. Thomas, 37-B Fuller Road, Albany, N.Y. 12205----- (518)-489-2267

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PUBLISHED BY HUDSON-MOHAWK BIRD CLUB, INC.

THE GREAT GRAY OWL AND BOREAL OWL INVASION OF 1978-79

Robert P. Yunick

During this past winter local birders were treated to a good dose of great grayitis -- a feverish illness of the dead of winter that spread in epidemic proportions. The infection was brought on by the largest recorded invasion of great gray owls (*Strix nebulosa*) ever to be noted not only locally, but also statewide, regionally, and in the recorded ornithological annals of continental North America! At least 20 of these tame, sylvan creatures of the mysterious north drew considerable attention from all quarters of the Capital District.

Statewide, at least 60 were listed and in the eastern Canadian provinces and the Northeastern U.S. over 300 sightings were documented. To put the state invasion in perspective, one must compare this year's total of 60 sightings with a total of 31 previous reports in the state's entire previously recorded ornithological history stretching back to 1875!

It all began as quietly as a falling flake of Adirondack snow on New Year's Eve when the first sighting of a great gray owl at Jay, Essex Co. was made. Within a few days this report was fed into the Club's Dial-A-Bird information gathering network. From that point on, the winter was destined to be unlike any other, and very fittingly that electronic bird, Dial-A-Bird, became the herald of this record-breaking invasion.

There were two well publicized January events, namely the January 8 report of the famous Lloyd's Neck bird on Long Island that lingered to March 26; and the first local report of a bird on January 23 at Berne, Albany Co. This latter event was doubly significant in that as of this date and continuing with the end of February there were almost daily reports of note and an otherwise wild, feverish excitement that permeated birding circles. It was an ecstatic experience that was not limited to just the birding world. Via Dial-A-Bird, the printed medium and the television medium, the general public became deeply involved. With this involvement came a flood of owl reports of all kinds. Local birders were kept busy with binocular and telephone, sorting out the would-be from the real. The public's owl awareness was running a high pitch through February.

During the period of January 23 to February 22, 42 of the state's 60 reports, and 13 of the 20 local sightings were logged. By March, the activity calmed to a mild roar as new sightings slowed, even though an abundant scattering of birds existed. It was at this time that Amherst Island, Ontario, a

small agricultural island in the northeast corner of Lake Ontario, became famous beyond belief with reports of up to 25 great gray sightings in one day (34 were estimated to be the island's total), up to five great grays perched in one tree, and during the week prior to March 10 a report of 132 owls of ten species ranging from barn to boreal and just about everything in between! By the end of March over 1000 birders had come by ferry to tiny Amherst Island, measuring only about 20 miles wide, to slog through its snow and mud, kicking aside its abundant mouse population to search for owls.

Just as Amherst Island's mouse population explosion drew these raptors with almost magnetic attraction, it was the very opposite occurrence - a scarcity of food in the great gray's normal boreal wintering range - that forced these birds to invade in such numbers. Some of the invaders found little respite. For five or six consecutive weekends from late December to early February storms of mixed snow and rain followed by freezing temperatures piled up impervious crusts of ice that limited the availability of food in upstate New York. The fact that many of the sightings were so transitory or short-term, suggests that the birds which arrived in weakened condition either expired or were forced to move on to find food. Some reports of birds found dead of emaciation were received. At one point, nine of the then 16 birds seen near Kingston, Ont. had been found dead, presumably due to starvation. Unfortunately, there were also those instances of misguided shootings of some of these conspicuous birds.

There were three major areas of concentration in the state: Watertown, Massena and the Capital District. Statewide, the reports of new birds were received as follows: one in December, 14 in January, 34 in February and 10 in March. The last reports statewide and locally were on April 5 when previously reported birds were last seen at Colton, St. Lawrence Co. and near the Vischer Ferry Nature Preserve, Saratoga Co.

From the Dial-A-Bird reports and other sources, the following reports were gleaned:

1. Jan. 23 - One day only near Berne, Albany Co. Bird seen by K. P. Able, appeared unapproachable and wild. Seen hunting in a cattail marsh.
2. Jan. 29 - Reported to DAB by Richard Weber at Weber Const. Co. on Burdeck St., Rotterdam, Schenectady Co. and seen by well over 100 people. Last seen at 1700 on January 31 at which time the bird appeared sluggish and sickly looking, and may have died during a time of extreme wind chill. It had been seen to capture mice.
3. Feb. 5 - Reported to DAB by Deborah Shaw and verified by several people, along Luther-Best Rd. Luther, Rensselaer Co. Last seen on February 14. Very elusive and unpredictable. It was sought and missed many times in that period.
4. Feb. 7 - Reported to DAB and seen only one time by Jane Young who gave a convincing description of the bird, along Rt.

- 146 near Rexford. It could not be relocated despite several attempts.
5. Feb. 10 - Reported to DAB as photographed along Rt. 197 near Rt. 32 near Ft. Edward, Washington Co. by James Maston. It could not be relocated on the following day. The description was convincingly that of a great gray.
6. Feb. 12 - Found by a paperboy who reported it to a neighbor of the park in Cohoes where the bird was found. Subsequently it was reported to N.Y.S. Envir. Cons. Dept. and DAB. It was seen by many persons, and as a result of its shooting on February 15, it became an object of considerable TV notoriety. It had been seen to kill a cottontail rabbit and some mice.
7. Feb. 12 - Reported from Oak Hill Rd., West Sand Lake, Rensselaer Co. by Mrs. Sulls and confirmed by R. Phillion when last seen on February 16.
8. Feb. 12 - Reported one day only by Mr. & Mrs. Frank Fee who gave a convincing description of the bird on Featherbed Lane along Rt. 67 six miles west of Ballston Spa, Saratoga Co.
9. Feb. 15 - Reported to DAB as seen by several members of the Destefano family and convincingly described during its periodic night visits to their bird feeder on Upper Newtown Rd. near Halfmoon, Saratoga Co. until February 23. This location is only one-two miles from the location of the only other, previously locally reported great gray of March 1972.
- 10,11. Feb. 15 - Two birds reported to DAB by a group of youngsters from Rensselaer, Rensselaer Co., across the river from downtown Albany about two weeks before this date. Allegedly one bird was shot prior to this date when the report was made, prompted by the publicity on the February 12th bird from Cohoes. The remaining bird was seen and photographed by dozens of people until about February 20 when it too was alleged shot by a nearby resident.
12. Feb. 19 - Reported by the Clickner family on Moon Lawn Dr. Eagle Mills, Rensselaer Co. to W. B. Sabin of N. Y. S. Envir. Cons. Dept. Had been seen for two-three days prior to this date.
13. Feb. 19 - Reported by P. Cote as seen by three hikers along Mohawk River at Vischer Ferry Nature Preserve. Attempts to relocate the bird failed. The bird was convincingly described to R. L. Marx.
14. Feb. 20 - Found dead on Parker Rd. near Rt. 43, West Sand Lake, Rensselaer Co. There was no apparent cause of death. It was given to the Wildlife Unit of N. Y. S. Envir. Cons. Dept. for autopsy.
15. Feb. 22 - Reported to DAB from along Sand Creek Rd., Colonie, Albany Co. where it was seen by several people and subsequently captured, banded and photographed by R. P. Guthrie on February 25. It may have been the same bird that had been seen in the same general area earlier in the month being mobbed by blue jays, but which had not been described convincingly enough to count it as a confirmed sighting.

16. Feb. 22 - Reported to DAB by the family at 1 Charlton Rd., Ballston Spa, Saratoga Co. until February 24. It was seen to kill and eat a cottontail rabbit in their yard.

17. Mar. 8 - Reported to DAB by L. Roth at Aqueduct Rd., west of Ravena near Coeymans, Albany Co. Seen until March 19 and photographed by R. Duncan with photos verified by R. P. Guthrie.

18. Mar. 18 - Seen and photographed to March 20 near Voorheesville, Albany Co. when allegedly shot. Photos verified and report made by K. P. Able.

19. Mar. 28 - Reported to DAB by several people and seen by dozens of people causing a traffic jam along Rt. 146 at McDonald's restaurant at Clifton Park for about three hours. Not seen again despite several searches of area.

20. Mar. 30 - Reported by Lee Palmer sporadically to April 4 when captured, banded and photographed by R. P. Yunick. The bird was hand captured in weakened condition with an eye injury, though it was capable of flight and hunting. Recaptured on April 5 too weak to fly, turned over to veterinarian for treatment, but did not respond. Apparently it was blind in one eye and was unable to hunt adequately to survive.



Osprey -- Pinnacle in the
Helderburgs

Photo by Ron Laforce

HAWKING

If you were not able to identify the above photo as an osprey without reading the caption, you need practice at identifying hawks in flight. Why not join one of the two field trips to Pinnacle this fall and enjoy the spectacular views this fine hawk watch close to home affords us. Weather permitting, the Sept. 15th trip should find many broadwings in migration. The Oct. 13th may not find the same quantity of birds, but the variety on a good day can be fantastic.

GUY BARTLETT CENTURY RUN

BARN OWL BECOMES 238 ON COMPOSITE LIST

Robert P. Yunick

The Club's 34th consecutive Guy Bartlett Century Run of May 19, 1979 featured the addition of barn owl as the 238th composite species, along with some other rarely tallied species, but was otherwise an average count with a total of 153 species. Several of the 32 observers commented about the difficulty of finding species for their lists, and in large part this difficulty was, as usual, attributable to the weather. The highest single-group list of 113 species reflects this difficulty. In the five previous years, the highest single tally has averaged 123 species. Four of the eight groups topped the century mark.

Beside the barn owl report from Coxsackie, two other owls contributed worthily to the list. The saw-whet owl at Luzerne is only the second such report of the species in count history. It had been reported previously in 1958. Similarly, the long-eared owl that responded to a tape at Luther's Forest at Malta was only the second one to be recorded, however, one must reach back 46 years to 1933 for the previous record. Also recorded for only the second time was the fish crow, previously listed in 1958. The crow and the owl are strange bedfellows to occupy the position of prominence on this year's Century Run list, but of such stuff are these yearly contests made.

Also unusual were the fifth occurrence of goshawk (nesting at Great Bear Swamp), the seventh report of orchard oriole, and the ninth reports of common goldeneye, dunlin, great black-backed gull and olive-sided flycatcher. Based on this being its fourth consecutive year on the list, the black-back appears to have become a species-to-be-expected on future counts. Due to only recent recognition of the two song types of the former Traill's flycatcher as separate species, the willow flycatcher ("fitz-bew" type) appears on the list for only the third time, however, it has long been a common local breeder. The alder form ("phe-be-o" type) has not yet been recorded though it should be found in the more boreal swamps of the region.

The above reports were culled out of a total of over 80 owl reports, which included one screech owl (*Otus asio*) in February; three great horned owls (*Bubo virginianus*) in February and one in March; five snowy owls (*Nyctea scandiaca*) in February; two barred owls (*Strix varia*) in January, 12 in February and three in March; three short-eared owls (*Asio flammeus*) in February; one saw-whet owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) in January and one in February; and two boreal owl (*Aegolius funereus*) reports. Many of the barred owl reports were received as alleged great gray sightings. In addition, there were in excess of 28 other owl reports, most of which were reported as great grays, but for which either insufficient information was given, the reporter could not be contacted for verification, or for whatever reason exact identity could not be established. Several of these 28 could well have been genuine great gray sightings. Twenty of these reports were received in February at the peak of the great gray sighting activity.

While the great grays made history and caught the eye of the public due to their conspicuousness, an even rarer, more retiring owl, the boreal owl, made history as well. While three birds are not normally termed an "invasion", they do represent an unusual influx even though they were enjoyed by only a mere handful of people. Furthermore, never in the state's history have as many as three of this species been recorded in a single winter, so in that respect it was an "invasion".

The first report of a December 26 sighting in Saratoga Springs was received on the DAB tape, but due to the rush of the holidays, the message was not detected until December 30. Within 24 hours, Bill Lee, Ron Laforce and I were at 205 Circular St., Saratoga, roaming the neighborhood with tape recorders, cameras, mouse, etc. looking for the owl with David Smith, who had made the report. This bird was not seen other than at its original sighting between 1000 and 1600 on December 26 as it perched in a white cedar near a bird feeder in an urban setting. Colored 35-mm slides taken by David Smith at the time of the sighting were examined by me and left no doubt whatsoever that the bird was indeed a boreal owl. It became the state's 17th recorded sighting of this species.

The second report was of a bird found dead by Jim McTaggart in his yard on Droms Rd. Extension, Glenville, Schenectady Co. on the morning of February 5 after a night of clear skies, brisk nw wind and severe wind chill. The bird was under a spruce where it apparently died at its roost. Not knowing what it was, Mr. McTaggart contacted his neighbor and Club member, Barry Havens, who called me on February 7 with the electrifying news that he had a suspected boreal owl. I dashed over in a light snow storm and there indeed, on the Havens' table, was this shyest and rarest of northern owls. Dead or alive, it mattered not, because just to see one of these much-sought-after critters was an exceptional experience.

Examination of the bird revealed considerable emaciation. The bird weighed only 88.7 g. which is less than the average weight of the smaller saw-whet owl. The specimen was turned over to the N.Y.S. Museum in Albany. It is the state's 18th recorded occurrence and the first ever in Schenectady Co.

The third report was of a bird seen alive on March 3, 4 and 6 near Rochester. Several Club members saw the bird on the 4th.

Undoubtedly, for many winters to come, memories of the owl fever of 1978-79 will titillate the imaginations of the afflicted. Such deeply instilled experience does not fade easily from one's mental recesses. And then there will be those persons yet to come on the birding scene who, like those of us who did not experience it, but only hear repeated mention of the blizzard of '88, will only be able to read about it and imagine what an exciting experience this invasion must have been. Surely it will rank as one of the ornithological events of the century, and were it not for readily available efficient communication and the effort of the people who manned these rare bird networks, the diagnosing of the disease to the extent that it was enjoyed would not have been possible.

In that vein, I should like to acknowledge the contribution of the following people for their information gathering services

for Dial-A-Bird: K. Able, L. Chamberlaine, D. Crumb, R. Guthrie, R. Laforce, W. Lee, R. Marx, M. Peterson, W. Sabin and J. Van Riet.

The tree sparrow report is the eleventh for the list and is unusual at this late a date. This year's date is one day away from the latest date that any count has been held, and is about three weeks past the normal late departure date of this species.

Despite the supreme effort of the eight groups that were afield from 0300 to 2255, there were some unusual misses on the list. Both the blue-winged teal and white-crowned sparrow have been logged in 31 of the previous 33 years, but were not found this year. Similarly, the ruby-crowned kinglet, Cape May warbler and vesper sparrow, all of which have occurred in 30 previous years, escaped listing. The Cape May was last missed 23 years ago in 1956. For the vesper sparrow, it was the second consecutive year of absence on the list. The Carolina wren does not seem to have recovered from its bout with northern winter weather and was missing for the fourth consecutive year. Among raptors, the red-shouldered hawk with 26 previous listings and harrier with 24 were not found.

An abrupt turn to unseasonably warm weather earlier in the month caused the foliage to advance lushly and rapidly, thereby making tree-top viewing of migrants nearly impossible. However, more significantly, three days of nearly stagnant warm, humid weather before the count, accompanied by no wind to speak of, is what really put the lid on the count. Migrant activity was practically nil, and showers during the day did not help the field observers.

Twenty-nine species were reported by all eight groups and 24 were seen by one group only. The latter are listed with each group under the following group summary.

Key to groups:

GROUP A: Robert P. Yunick and Robert J. Pantle. 0430 to 1400. Banding at Vischer Ferry Nature Preserve and at feeder in Niskayuna. 47 species.

GROUP B: Craig Jolly and Nancy Dennis. 0445 to 1800. Irish Lane (Cambridge), Shushan Swamp, Vischer Ferry, Colonie Landfill, Saratoga Lake and Saratoga National Park. 68 species-pintail, scaup and ruby-throated hummingbird.

GROUP C: S.R. Madison, W.B. Sabin, C. Parker, R. Kornis and H. Ingraham. 0405 to 2255. Black Creek Marsh, Indian Ladder, Five Rivers, Delmar, Karner Pine Barrens, Niskayuna Wide Waters, Lock 7, Stoney Creek, Round Lake, Luther's Forest, Saratoga Lake and city. 106 species- osprey, red-breasted nuthatch and northern parula.

GROUP D: Nancy Slack, Bill Huntley, Hank Stebbins and Megan Edwards. 0530 to 1430 and 1900 to dark. Glenville, Black Creek Marsh and Indian Ladder. 80 species - great blue heron and Cooper's hawk.

GROUP E: Richard Guthrie, Peter Feinberg, and part time, Andrew Guthrie and Lester Thomas. 0330 to 2230. Coxsackie Flats,

Vosburgh Marsh, New Baltimore, Alcove Res., Black Creek Marsh, Thacher Park, Five Rivers, Saratoga Lake and Lake Luzerne. 111 species - upland plover, barn owl, saw-whet owl, horned lark and fish crow.

GROUP F: Marilyn and Norman Fancher and Peter Corrigan. Vischer Ferry, Stoney Creek Res., Black Creek Marsh, Helderberg Workshop, Picard Rd., Bear Swamp and Five Rivers. 83 species - tree sparrow.

GROUP G: R. Budliger, W. Lee, A. Mapes, A. Ross and J. and W. Suozzo. 0300 to 2230. Five Rivers, Whitbeck Preserve, Black Creek Marsh, Tygert Marsh, Thacher Park, Indian Ladder, Cohoes, Niskayuna Wide Waters, Watervliet Res., Alcove Res., Basic Creek Res., Bear Swamp Preserve, Huyck Preserve, Partridge Run GMA and Albany (all areas in Albany Co.). 107 species - ring-necked duck, solitary vireo and yellow-breasted chat.

GROUP H: W. Gorman, R. Laforce, M. Dunham, M. Gruett, M. Kuhrt and B. Gaines. 0300 to 2100. Cherry Plain, East Greenbush, Vischer Ferry, Saratoga, Castleton, Five Rivers, and Round Lake. 113 species - broad-winged hawk, solitary sandpiper, pectoral sandpiper, dunlin, long-eared owl, yellow-bellied sapsucker and golden-crowned kinglet.

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>GROUP</u>	<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>GROUP</u>
common loon	e gh	dunlin	h
great blue heron	d	great black-bkd gull	c e gh
green heron	abc efgh	herring gull	bc e gh
American bittern	a d fgh	ring-billed gull	abc e gh
Canada goose	cdefgh	common tern	c e h
mallard	abcdefgh	rock dove	abcdefgh
black duck	bc efgh	mourning dove	abcdefgh
pintail	b	yellow-billed cuckoo	abc efg
wood duck	abc e h	black-billed cuckoo	c efgh
ring-necked duck	g	barn owl	e
greater scaup	b	screech owl	c e g
common goldeneye	e g	great horned owl	e g
bufflehead	e h	barred owl	b e
common merganser	c h	long-eared owl	h
goshawk	fg	saw-whet owl	e
Cooper's hawk	d	whip-poor-will	e h
red-tailed hawk	bc efgh	common nighthawk	cde fgh
broad-winged hawk	h	chimney swift	a cdefgh
osprey	c	ruby-th. hummingbird	b
American kestrel	bcdefgh	belted kingfisher	bcde gh
ruffed grouse	ab e h	common flicker	abcdefgh
ring-necked pheasant	cde g	pileated woodpecker	c e h
Virginia rail	c ef h	yel-bellied sapskr.	h
sora	f h	hairy woodpecker	bc fgh
common gallinule	de gh	downy woodpecker	a cdefgh
killdeer	abcdefgh	Eastern kingbird	bcdefgh
American woodcock	abc e gh	great-crest. flyctr.	cdefgh
common snipe	c fgh	Eastern phoebe	bcdefgh
upland sandpiper	e	willow flycatcher	c efgh
spotted sandpiper	bcdefgh	least flycatcher	a cdefgh
solitary sandpiper	h	Eastern wood pewee	cdefgh
greater yellowlegs	c ef h	olive-sided flyctr.	f
pectoral sandpiper	h	horned lark	e
least sandpiper	bc f h	tree swallow	abcdefgh

SPECIES	GROUP	SPECIES	GROUP
rough-winged swallow	bc efg	yellow-rump. warb.	c efg
barn swallow	abcde fgh	blk-thr green warb.	cd gh
cliff swallow	e gh	Blackburnian warbler	gh
purple martin	cde h	chestnut-sided warb.	abcde fgh
blue jay	abcde fgh	blackpoll warbler	e g
common crow	abcde fgh	pine warbler	c h
fish crow	e	prairie warbler	cde gh
black-cpd chickadee	abcde fgh	ovenbird	abcde fgh
tufted titmouse	abc ef	Northern water thrush	bcde gh
white-brstd nuthatch	a c e gh	Louisiana w' thrush	cde gh
red-brstd nuthatch	c	common yellowthroat	abcde fgh
brown creeper	c fgh	yellow-breasted chat	g
house wren	abcde fgh	Canada warbler	cde fgh
winter wren	cde g	American redstart	abcde fgh
long-bld marsh wren	cde fgh	house sparrow	abcde fgh
mockingbird	c e gh	bobolink	bcde fgh
gray catbird	abcde fgh	Eastern meadowlark	bcde fgh
brown thrasher	bc fgh	red-winged blackbird	abcde fgh
American robin	abcde fgh	orchard oriole	e
wood thrush	abcde fgh	Northern oriole	abcde fgh
hermit thrush	cde fgh	common grackle	abcde fgh
Swainson's thrush	cd gh	brown-headed cowbird	abcde fgh
veery	abcde fgh	scarlet tanager	bcde fgh
Eastern bluebird	b d f	cardinal	abcde fgh
blue-gy gnatcatcher	de fgh	rose-breasted g'beak	abcde fgh
golden-cr kinglet	h	indigo bunting	bc e
cedar waxwing	efg	evening grosbeak	c g
starling	abcde fgh	purple finch	b de gh
yel-throated vireo	cde fgh	house finch	a cde gh
solitary vireo	g	American goldfinch	abcde fgh
red-eyed vireo	bcde fgh	rufous-sided towhee	bcde fgh
warbling vireo	cde fgh	Savannah sparrow	cde g
black-and-wh. warb.	cde fgh	grasshopper sparrow	b
worm-eating warbler	d f	Henslow's sparrow	c e gh
golden-winged warb.	cde gh	dark-eyed junco	cd gh
blue-winged warbler	b de fgh	tree sparrow	f
Tennessee warbler	cd f h	chipping sparrow	bcde fgh
Nashville warbler	de	field sparrow	bcde fgh
Northern parula	c	white-thr sparrow	abc fgh
yellow warbler	abcde fgh	Lincoln's sparrow	ab
magnolia warbler	c e h	swamp sparrow	a cde fgh
blk-thr blue warb.	d fgh	song sparrow	abcde fgh

EXPENSIVE BIRDS

Audubon Leader

A flood control project in Orange County, California, has been held up because it would temporarily (for one breeding season) destroy a salt marsh that is an important feeding ground for the California least tern, an endangered species. With the aid of advice from Barbara Massey, a biologist and member of the El Dorado Audubon Society, Long Beach, the authorities have devised a plan for building a substitute marsh nearby to lure the terns away. The Orange County supervisors have approved expenditure of \$165,000 to build the marsh--a price that works out to \$916 per bird.

AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILMS 1979 - 1980

RETURN TO THE TETONS
Charles T. Hotchkiss
Tuesday, October 2, 1979

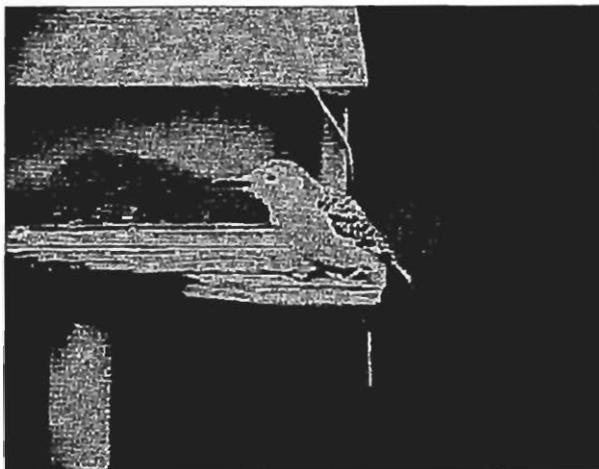
VANISHING AMERICAN WILDLIFE
Burdette E. White
Wednesday, November 7, 1979

SONG OF THE NORTHERN PRAIRIE
Allen J. King
Tuesday, December 11, 1979

ADVENTURES OF A WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER
Robert W. Davison
Monday, February 25, 1980

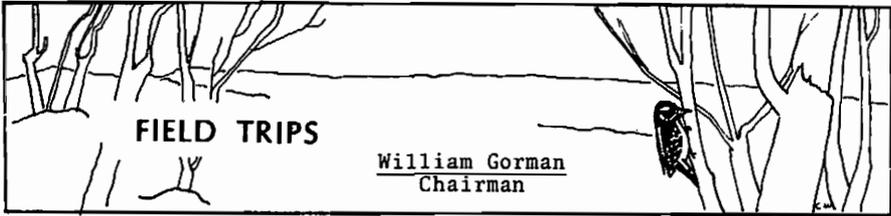
AROUND THE BAY
George Regensberg
Thursday, April 17, 1980

All films will be at the Niskayuna High School Auditorium.
Ticket prices are \$10 Individual Series; \$20 Family Series; \$5
Student Series; \$3 Adult Single; \$1.50 Student Single.



Red-bellied Woodpecker -- Scotia N.Y.

Photo by Al Schadow



WILD TURKEY TRIP

February 10, 1979

On February 10, 1979, a group of Hudson-Mohawk birders set out in search of wild turkeys. We stopped to pick up Nancy Kern, who had agreed to show us the areas where wild turkeys had recently been sighted. Our first stop was in Ghent, overlooking a large hillside. As soon as we got out of our cars, we spotted three turkeys among some brush on the hill. As we checked the hill further, several deer and six more turkeys were found. We moved on and checked several other areas without success. We did see many more deer and a small flock of pine grosbeaks. As we continued our search, we found six more turkeys in a wooded swamp. When we brought Nancy Kern home, she kindly invited us in for a welcomed cup of hot coffee to thaw us out. We added a flicker, several hawks, pheasants and sparrows to our list for a total of 27 species. Although the wild turkeys were scarcer and were harder to find this year, we had a good time and were happy to find 15 wild turkeys for our efforts.

-- Bill Gorman

LOWER HUDSON

April 7, 1979

A storm, characterized by violent north-west winds, but without snow locally, swept through April 6-7. With frequent gusts up to 50mph on the 6th, the winds reached 77mph (hurricane strength) in Schenectady at 8:00 p.m. The wind had subsided slightly by morning for the 9 hardy observers, probably gusting to about 40mph during the trip. Land birds were quiet and difficult to find. Ducks, gulls etc., were in evidence, but for distant viewing the telescopes had to be held or braced to prevent blowing over. The temperature was in the 30's (F), the skies becoming mostly fair.

The trip from Rensselaer down to Stockport Creek began quickly with five oldsquaws in a Hudson River cove at Rensselaer (where 11 were present the day before). Horned grebes in breeding plumage were also present in the river, including seven in excellent light close to shore at Newton Hook. Other species included Canada goose, mallard, black duck, green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, American wigeon and wood duck in Papscaene and Schodack creeks, and bufflehead and common merganser in the

river. The most numerous gull was the ring-billed, represented by numerous migrant adults. Other birds to mention were turkey vulture, marsh hawk, and common snipe. The total was 38 species, fewer than usually listed for this trip.

-- Paul F. Connor



REIST SANCTUARY

April 28, 1979

The weather was cool and cloudy at the start of the trip, but improved by noontime. Bird activity was limited due to the cool weather. The Sanctuary was wetter than usual in swampy areas. A ruffed grouse was found about 15 feet off the ground in a tree. The best bird was a winter wren singing its unusually long song, which we finally located a few seconds before it flew. A brown thrasher was high up in the top branches of a 40-50 foot tree. We also had excellent views of a low flying broad-winged hawk.

-- Alfred and Shirley Schadow

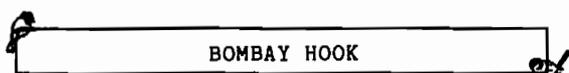


VISCHER FERRY

May 5, 1979

Both weather and wind were against us on this trip. There was very little movement due to the cool northwest winds. This is a new trip to a section of Vischer Ferry east of the bird banding area and should prove fruitful in warmer weather. One spotted sandpiper and one solitary sandpiper appeared to be unusually early migrants of these species.

-- Alfred and Shirley Schadow



BOMBAY HOOK

May 5-6, 1979

On Saturday morning we arrived at the Pokomoke Swamp without making any wrong turns. This was somewhat remarkable, as the trip leader (yours truly) had forgotten to bring his maps. We found white-eyed vireos and prothonotary warblers everywhere. A worm-eating warbler cooperatively sat on a bare branch in the sun for over a minute while all in the group (eleven people) observed. Yellow-billed cuckoos were numerous, but no black-billed were found. A little later in the morning most of the group saw a Kentucky warbler sitting in the sun and singing from a branch about 20 feet up and 120 feet away.

By noontime we were back at the motel and shortly thereafter, we headed for Chincoteague and Assateague. A number of oystercatchers were present as we crossed the causeway. A trip around Wildlife Drive netted snow geese and a few shorebirds. As we left the visitors center and turned onto the

road to the lighthouse, my wife cried out, "Wait, there's a blue bird back there". After backing the car up about 100 feet, we found a pair of blue grosbeaks on the opposite side of the road in some short grass. While we were enjoying these birds, another group of birders stopped also. As we were all watching the grosbeaks, one person in this other group spotted a brown-headed nuthatch. Talk about indecision: Which bird should we watch? I tried to photograph both birds and ended up not doing particularly well on either. We saw gannets over the ocean later in the afternoon and toward the end of the day, a beautiful black-crowned night heron posed in the setting sun on the opposite bank of a small channel. The total number of species found on Saturday was 117.

On Sunday morning we returned to the Pokomoke Swamp and added yellow-throated warbler, blackpoll warbler and hooded warbler to our lists.

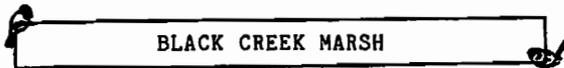
We then moved to the coast and made our way up to Bombay Hook, stopping at Indian River Inlet and Cape Henlopen on the way. At Bombay Hook we found bald eagle, least bittern, stilt sandpiper, black-necked stilt, American avocet and Wilson's phalarope.

Late Sunday afternoon we finally quit, as most people were quite exhausted. Everyone was happy to think back over the enjoyment we had while finding 143 species in the two days of birding.



-- Ron Laforce

Hooded warbler



May 12, 1979

About 65 people showed up for the annual Black Creek Marsh--pancake breakfast field trip. Happily they were split into two groups. a 6:00 a.m. group and an 8:00 a.m. group. Still, with groups this large, it is difficult for everyone to get a chance to see all the birds. On the plus side, not many birds go undetected with so many pairs of eyes scanning the area.

A total of 63 species was found (down slightly from some past trips), including snipe, blue-gray gnatcatcher, bay-breasted warbler, Nashville warbler, Tennessee warbler, and the best bird of the day -- a bald eagle! Afterward, 40 people enjoyed a pleasant breakfast at the Tom Sawyer Motor Inn.

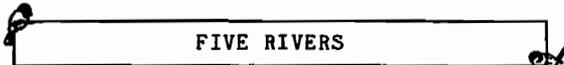
-- Ron Laforce


 VISCHER FERRY BIRD BANDING

May 19, 1979

A long wet trail of crushed broad-leafed plantain and wild carrot was evidence of 53 persons attending the bird banding at Vischer Ferry, but the rainy weather was not conducive to an exciting day in the field. Frequent showers kept Bob Yunick and Bob Pantle from bringing in more than three or four birds on each pass through the net lanes. A total of only 31 birds were banded. Of the 16 species; goldfinch, yellowthroat and song sparrow were high with four or five caught. At a pond on Van Vranken Road, I watched a pair of mallards feeding and wondered if any of the groups would sight a hundred species on the 1979 Century Run.

-- Lois A. Norton


 FIVE RIVERS

May 26, 1979

Cloudy, overcast skies with forecasts of rain didn't stop 19 people from spending the morning at Five Rivers. Warbler migration was over, but 54 species of representative families were seen or heard. Two families of Canada geese, each with six young, were on the ponds. The expected Henslow's sparrows were found, and one cooperated long enough to get added to a few life lists. Two young gray foxes were seen at their den.

-- R. E. Budliger


 CHERRY PLAIN

June 2, 1979

Seventeen observers visited Cherry Plain, a plateau high in eastern Rensselaer County, on June 2, 1979. They located 42 species, several common to areas much further north. Using a tape recorder, expertly operated by Bob Marx, they had arms-length views of the following species: Northern waterthrush, magnolia warbler, Canada warbler, scarlet tanager, chestnut-sided warbler, Blackburnian warbler, black-throated blue and black-throated green warbler. Red-shouldered hawks and a solitary vireo were also seen. The highlight of the trip was the sighting of a ruby-throated hummingbird in excellent light and at distances of ten feet and less. The bird perched and the iridescent nature of its colorings were vividly apparent to all.

-- Michael Kuhrt

FEDERATION OF NYS BIRD CLUBS

ANNUAL MEETING 1979

The FNYBC annual meeting will be held in Binghamton, N. Y. on Sept. 21-23, 1979. All birders are welcome, whether or not they are individual members of the Federation. There will be a delegates meeting, workshops, papers sessions and exhibits at the Holiday Inn-Arena. Field trips to local areas will include; Nuthatch Hollow, IBM Glen, Chenango Valley State Park, Greenwood County Park, and Waterman Wildlife Center. There will also be a canoe trip on the Otselic River (limited to 12 people--bring your own life jacket) and a bird banding demonstration.

The guest speaker on Saturday evening will be Dr. Steven Kress from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. He will give an illustrated talk on his continuing efforts to re-establish puffins in Maine.

Registration fee will be \$5.00 before September 10 and \$6.00 after that date. Reasonably priced meals and a box lunch for Sunday will also be available.

For additional information write or call:

Mrs. Glenys Curran
15 Cooper Drive
Apalachin, New York 13732
Phone (607) 625-2973

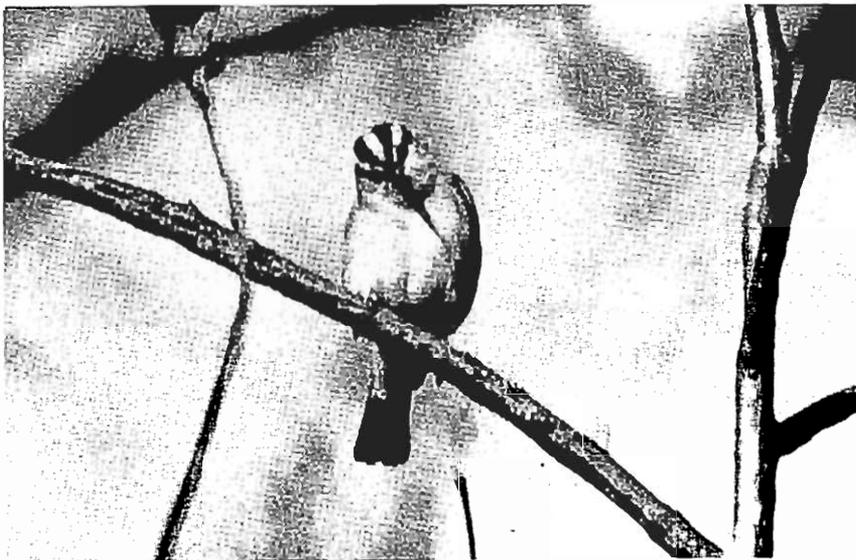


Photo by Ron Laforce

Worm-eating Warbler -- Pokomoke Swamp Md.

BLACKBIRD KILLER FINED
Audubon Leader

It has been an off-again, on-again story. When 6,000 dead birds, mostly red-winged blackbirds, grackles and cowbirds, were found last month in and around a cornfield in upstate New York, near Newburgh, deliberate poisoning was suspected at first. Then the state Department of Environmental Conservation reported laboratory tests indicating the deaths were caused by nitrate poisoning from a heavy dose of fertilizer under a freak combination of weather conditions. But later the department announced the birds had died of parathion, a restricted pesticide used illegally by the farmer, Thomas Palmerone. He has paid a \$1,250 fine in settlement of charges brought by the department.

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PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY HUDSON-MOHAWK BIRD CLUB, INC.

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OWLS, OWLS, AND MORE OWLS

Elba Van Dresar

When reports of a boreal owl began to circulate, I became quite eager; this bird had escaped me in Toronto in '78 and again in Rochester on March 3 and 4, 1979. Frustration had set in. When an alert came on HMBC's Dial-A-Bird of 4 boreal owls on Amherst Island, near Kingston, Ont., I vowed not to miss that species this time.

March 10th found us in line with other birders from far and near waiting for the little car ferry to Amherst Is. An exciting ride through a narrow channel of open water got us across the frozen lake to the island. From the ferry we sighted one snowy owl on the ice. Numerous common mergansers swam ahead in the channel.

A short drive brought us to several parked cars - the spot for a boreal owl, according to our directions. After a mile walk across a muddy, wet, plowed field, the wooded area was reached. Here in a clump of cedar trees perched the boreal owl! There was not just one, but two dear, sleepy, little owls, trying to figure out the curious birders approaching within a few feet of them. Their little eyelids would slowly close, only to pop open as so much activity made sleep impossible.

This area was well populated with mice, as countless piles of pellets indicated many birds had been feeding for quite some time. Kingston Field Naturalists had been banding the previous day. They had reported 6 saw-whet owls, 5 great greys in one tree. These birds were not sighted by our group.

Next we drove to another part of the island. Snowy owls were everywhere! They were on fence posts, telephone poles, in trees, flying, or sitting in fields. The trip would have been worthwhile for the snowy owls, even if there had been nothing else.

Continuing along, we came near patches of open water along the shore. Countless goldeneyes, scaup, and other ducks filled these areas. The hundreds of old squaws were thrilling as it was the first time I had seen so many of them. Being unfamiliar with these ducks, I was curious about the sound which suggested the sound of geese in the distance. I learned from a friend that old squaws are quite noisy. This ceaseless chattering is given as the reason for naming this duck "old squaw."

After enjoying the sightings of snowy owls and old squaws, we continued on to our original objective, the sighting of a hawk owl. After having spent practically an entire winter with our North Gage hawk owl, I was delighted to find another one on Amherst Island.

A second hike through several inches of water and slush took us to another woods. Wet, cold feet were soon forgotten as we joined birders admiring a long-eared owl. A few yards away in a large white oak tree sat a great grey owl. This, the fourth time I was privileged to see one of our rare visitors of winter 1979, was the most satisfying. There sat a soft, fluffy, feathered giant, staring from a branch of the rough barked, huge, gnarled old oak tree. Truly the perfect ending for a wonderful day with owls.

Editor's Remarks

As editor of FEATHERS I encourage each member to submit items for future publications. Have you been on a birding trip? What has been happening at your feeder or in your backyard? Have you traveled to see a rare species? Birders enjoy reading about birds. Need I add more?

The closing dates for material to be submitted will be the 15th of February, May, August, and November. Any material received after the 15th of above months will appear in the next issue unless it is dated and would not be of use by the time the next issue of FEATHERS is published.

In case you wish to file FEATHERS in a 3-ring binder, appropriate marks for punching holes are on margin.

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DIAL-A-BIRD 377-9600

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A REMINDER!

The AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILM "Adventures of a Wildlife Photographer", Robert Davison, Lecturer, will be on Monday, February 25, 1980 at 8:00 p.m. at Niskayuna High School.

The films are always beautiful and instructional at the same time. Invite a friend. I have heard that audiences years ago numbered 800 or better! Let's show support of the Audubon Film Series and equal that number. See you there!

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BIRD STUDIES COURSE AT SCHENECTADY MUSEUM

"The Living World of Birds" an 8-week course for adults is being offered at the Schenectady Museum Tuesdays, 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., starting March 18.

Lessons will include classification, distribution, habitat preference, migration, identification, field guide use, and song recognition. Perching birds, waterfowl, shorebirds, hawks, and owls will be studied. The approach will be a practical where, when, and how-to-find methods for beginning birders. Slides and tape recordings are featured in the classroom discussions. The final session will be a field trip to the Museum's nature preserve.

Contact the Museum or the instructor, Bob Marx (377-1453) for fee and registration information. Enrollment is limited.

SANCTUARY HAWK WATCH A SUCCESS

from
THE WARBLER
Alan Devoe Bird Club

ADBC's first organized hawk watches at Dorson's Rock were fruitful, with a total of 403 hawks and vultures sighted during two weekend vigils, Sept. 13, 15-16, and Sept. 29-30.

Soaring, flapping, gliding, sailing, plummeting past the bluff were 102 turkey vultures; four sharp-shins; one Cooper's hawk; 18 red-tails; one red-shouldered hawk; 154 broadwings; three marsh hawks; 10 ospreys; two merlins; 15 kestrels, 27 accipiter species; 21 buteo species; two falcon species; three hawk species.

Twenty-four ADBC members, and 21 people from the community, joined in the watch during the five days, and no one fell off the rocks, even in the most exciting moments.

Weather proved to be the dominating feature, with the most migration activity occurring Sept. 15, a day of high winds, perhaps associated with Hurricane Frederick, some cloud cover, and some sun. Clear, calm, sunny days were less productive, and the worst was Sept. 29, which was completely overcast; we could not even see small airplanes passing close overhead.

Comparing our observations from Dorson's Rock, at 864' elevation, with sightings Sept. 22-23 at Mt. Everett, an established hawk migration outlook at 2,610', we felt we did well with our beginning work.

Nancy Kern, Debbie Shaw, and Juanita and Jack Cook were at Mt. Everett, joining the Hoffman Bird Club's watch, which reported a count of 250 hawks for the two days.

Summarizing a hawk watch in terms of numbers is misleading, however, since numbers do not reflect the beauty of the setting, the companionship of birding, or the joy of seeing majestic birds flying safely overhead.

November 1979

...Kate Dunham

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

The National Audubon Society is 75 years old

On January 4, 1905 35 state Audubon societies joined forces as the National Assn. of Audubon Societies for the Protection of Wild Birds and Animals, an unwieldy name later shortened to National Audubon Society. Today the society is one of America's oldest conservation organizations and the largest of its kind.

FIELD NOTES
 Summer 1979
 Richard P. Guthrie

The weather for the region varied for the period as much as the region's physiography does. July precipitation in amounts of 6 inches (15+ cm) fell in areas of higher elevations of Albany, Greene, and Rensselaer Counties. However most of the region received 3 inches (7.6 cm) or less, and the City of Albany had about one inch (2.5 cm) for July. The temperatures varied even more dramatically. A warm start for June was thwarted by a very late frost in widely separated locations later in the month. A low temperature of 28°F (-2°C) was recorded on June 26 in Washington Co. On the other extreme, the high temperature for the period came from both southern Rensselaer Co. and Saratoga Springs with a vigor melting 102°F (39°C) on July 14. The first "cold" front came through the area on July 18, and with it came the first fall migrants including some recently fledged Swainson's thrushes into the Hudson Valley. Did they come all the way down from the mountains, or did they originate in the lowlands nearby?



Favorable trends noted from the reports received are the continued come-back of the two smaller accipiters and the red-shouldered hawk. Also encouraging is the widespread repopulation of turkey to the region, as evidenced in part by the record take by hunters during the spring season which ended in early June. On the topic of mixed blessings is the woeful loss of our white ash trees along the bottomlands. This loss should, however, provide ample nest site opportunities for red-bellied woodpeckers. The apparent spread of the mysterious maple wilt through our sugar maples should like wise benefit the red-headed woodpeckers in the uplands. Finally, the spread of the practice of early-June mowing of hayfields as advocated by agricultural advisors such as Cornell Cooperative Extension will likely continue the decline of the grass sparrows such as vesper, Henslow's, savannah and grasshopper sparrows, as well as bobolink, and perhaps short-billed marsh wren.

Contributors whose observations are reflected, with thanks, in this report are Ken Able, William Able, Arlene & Tom Brown, Jim Bush, Paul Connor, Bill Cook, Juanita Cook, Rena Dodd, Kate Dunham, Barbara & Hugo Gardina, William Gorman, Elisabeth Grace, Monte Gruett, Andrew Guthrie, Carolyn & Ron Laforce, Bob Marx, Tom Palmer, Al Schroeder, Tommy Williams, Hudson Winn, and Robert Yunick.

Abbreviations used in this report are BBS=Breeding Bird Survey, Col=Columbia County, HR=Hudson River, JL=Jenny Lake, NB=New Baltimore. The BBS run this year were Catskill (observer JB), Cobleskill (KA), Ballston Lake (AS), Duanesburg (BM), Medusa (RG), North Eastern (WG), North River (RG), Plattecove (RG), Petersburg (HW), South Berne (KA), and Ghent (MG).

LOONS-DUCKS: Common loon: one Alcove Reservoir June 21. Double-crested cormorant: along HR thru period; max. Imboct Aug 19. Great blue heron: one S. Berne BBS; three Medusa BBS; three Cherry Plains June 17. Old Squaw: one female swimming rapidly northward in HR at NB during a driving rainstorm July 18 (RPG).

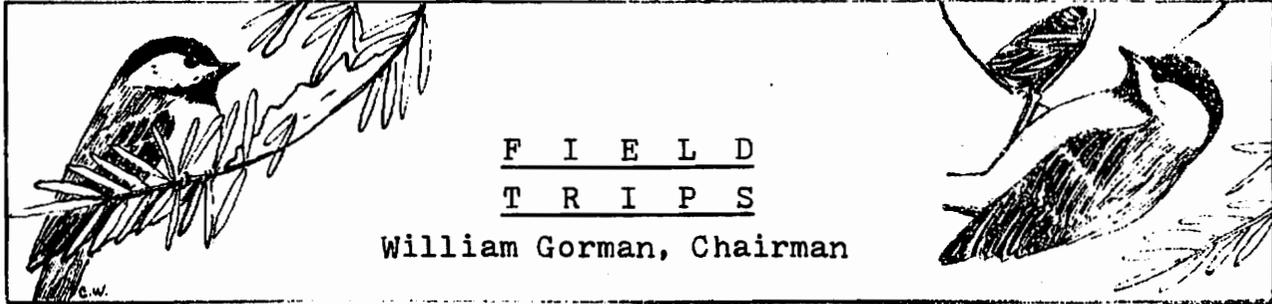
HAWKS-ALGIDS: Goshawk; reports from Cherry Plain and Helderbergs, June & July. Sharp-shinned hawk; one Plattecove BBS seen carrying a starling; also NB thru period. Cooper's hawk; one each Cobleskill and Medusa BBS; also Chatham and Castleton reports. Red-shouldered hawk; three N. River BBS; and three other reports. Bald eagle; one adult over Catskill June 25 (JB). N. harrier; Aug 5, 13, & 26 Castleton (JC). Osprey; June 16, 30 & Aug 13, 26 HR at Castleton (JC). Turkey; large group (60-80) with many juv. in trees at Schoharie July 4; also flocks reported from Col June and Aug. Sora; one July 22 Rensselaer (PC). C. snipe; June 29 thru Aug 30 Col & Rens Co. Short-billed dowitcher; one Aug 4 Mohawk R. (C&RLaf). Sanderling; one Churchtown Pond Aug 9 (A&TB). Boneparte's gull; four HR at NB Aug 12.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Black-billed & yellow-billed cuckoo; both seem to be maintaining their recent gains. Barred owl; normally heard at JL thru summer, but absent this year (RPY). Red-bellied woodpecker; nesting in dead ash by Roeliff Jansen Kill, Ancram June 9 (RPG). Red-headed woodpecker; two June reports from Colonie; and reported again at Stuyvesant. Downy and hairy woodpeckers; reported in approximately 4 to 1 ratio on BBS.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Yellow-bellied flycatcher; seven banded late Aug at NB. Willow flycatcher; Cobleskill (one) and N. Easton (two) BBS; at Papscanee Cr. 12 on June 3 and 14 on July 22 (PC). Alder flycatcher; three S. Berne BBS, only report. Olive-sided flycatcher; one S. Berne BBS. Tufted titmouse; poorly reported despite recent range expansions. Swainson's thrush; none on BBS; early migrants at NB July 24. Golden-crowned kinglet; two Cherry Plains July 29 - migrants?

VIREOS-WARBLERS: Yellow-throated vireo; seems to be doing well with numerous reports of pairs throughout the region including the higher elevations. Philadelphia vireo; two Coeymans Aug 30 (AG&TW). Groups of warblers began moving through JL July 13 (RY). The first noticeable migrants through the lower elevations came a week later. Warblers of note reported this season are Prothonotary; the male that had the light socket in the truck garage in Chatham staked out finally left on June 9. Blue-winged; more widespread and numerous than usual; nine banded at NB. Tennessee; one early migrant banded at NB Aug. 23. Ovenbird; noticeable increase in birds banded at JL with two to three times the number compared to recent years (RY). Canada; reported from their usual montane haunts; three banded NB Aug. 11-28.

WEAVERS-SPARROWS: Rose-breasted grosbeak; mixed reports; some say numbers down in Col; R. Yunick banded more than in each of the last two years at JL. Purple finch; R. Yunick reports double broods at JL; first brood fledged early by July 1; second brood was more successful and fledged by Aug 16; 64 were banded on Aug 17. Evening grosbeak; first report Aug 30 at Coeymans. Pine siskin; interesting reports of four at Guilderland June 1 thru 20; also, one each Medusa and N. River BBS. Savannah sparrow; a strong 13 found on the Cob BBS and 5 on the NE survey; a healthy conclave exists in the Cox Flats as well. Grasshopper and Henslow's sparrows; no reports. Vesper sparrow; a small cluster of about five pairs were located in Northern Col Co. (TP); other reports are from Chatham & Ghent. White-throated sparrow; 18 N. River BBS; seven Plattecove BBS and three each from S. Berne and Medusa BBS.



PLUM ISLAND
September 8-9, 1979

The trip highlight was the weather, for those like me, who work indoors without a window. There were two beautiful days, plus the seashore and a good group of birders, to make an unforgettable weekend. For the two days we managed to get 98 species. In the first few minutes I added a new bird to my Life List. Seeing the Wilson's warbler was terrific for me. Then we hit the tide right in the Merrimack River for good viewing of the shorebirds on Joppa Flats. Then on to the salt flats on Plum Island where there were good views of whimbrels, yellowlegs, pectoral sandpipers, plovers, and other birds. At the Hellcat Trail I managed to disperse 11 people in all directions, but the lucky ones saw a Philadelphia vireo. On Sunday the birds I remember were the knot, stilt sandpiper, black tern, and arctic tern, and throughout the weekend the dramatic visit of the merlin.

SPECIES: Pied-bill grebe, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, green heron, little blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, Louisiana heron, black-crowned night heron, Canada goose, mallard, black duck, green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, American widgeon, wood duck, marsh hawk, merlin, American kestrel.

Ring-necked pheasant, semi-palmated plover, killdeer, American golden plover, black-bellied plover, ruddy turnstone, whimbrel, spotted sandpiper, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, red knot, pectoral sandpiper, white-rumped sandpiper, least sandpiper, dunlin, short-billed dowitcher, stilt sandpiper, semi-palmated sandpiper, western sandpiper, Hudsonian godwit, sanderling.

Great black-backed gull, herring gull, ring-billed gull, Bonaparte's gull, Forster's tern, common tern, Arctic tern, black tern, mourning dove, chimney swift, belted kingfisher, common flicker, downy woodpecker, eastern kingbird, eastern phoebe, tree swallow, barn swallow, blue jay, common crow, black-capped chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, long-billed marsh wren, mockingbird, gray catbird, brown thrasher, American robin, water pipit, cedar waxwing, starling, red-eyed vireo, Philadelphia vireo, black-and-white warbler, yellow warbler, Cape May warbler, black-throated green warbler, Blackburnian warbler, bay-breasted warbler, prairie warbler, common yellowthroat, Wilson's warbler, house sparrow, eastern meadowlark, red-winged blackbird, northern oriole, common grackle, brown-headed

Plum Island (continued)

cowbird, cardinal, purple finch, American goldfinch, rufous-sided towhee, savannah sparrow, sharp-tailed sparrow, white-throated sparrow, song sparrow, Ipswich sparrow.

Edward Koch

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Helderberg Hawkwatch
September 15, 1979

Twenty-two birders manned the Pinnacle Hawkwatch in the Helderbergs on this windy, cloudy day. A cold front had just passed through the night before, making the day a reasonably good hawk day.

Broadwings (47) were the commonest hawk with American kestrels following with 8 seen. There were 6 each of sharpies and ospreys. Three red-tails, 2 turkey vultures, and a goshawk rounded out the list.

Landbirds: Rock dove, mourning dove, common flicker, downy woodpecker, tree swallow, blue jay, common crow, black-capped chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, American robin, cedar waxwing, starling, yellow-rumped warbler, American goldfinch, song sparrow.

Robert Budliger

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Henry G. Reist Wildlife Sanctuary
September 22, 1979

Very few birds were seen on this overcast morning. A good-sized flock of cedar waxwings, along with white-throated sparrows and catbirds, was seen in the fields to the west of the sanctuary.

Species: Canada goose, chimney swift, common flicker, blue jay, common crow, black-capped chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, gray catbird, American robin, cedar waxwings, Tennessee warbler, black-throated green warbler, scarlet tanager, and white-throated sparrow.

Marilyn Fancher

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Helderberg Mountains
October 13, 1979

Eleven people gathered at the Star Plaza for the short trip to Pinnacle on a cloudy, cool morning. As we turned the corner into the Pinnacle Camps, a marsh hawk flew over the car at a height of about 20 feet. We met four more people at the hawk-watch to complete our group. Observation started at 9:00 a.m. but only one unidentified accipiter (plus the marsh hawk) was seen in the first hour. The action improved somewhat after that, with a few sharp-shins, red-tails, and kestrels. Later on, a turkey vulture, another marsh hawk, and an osprey were also seen. Altogether, 32 birds were seen during 6 hours of warching.

Ron Laforce

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Round and Saratoga Lakes
November 17, 1979

Fourteen birders visited Round and Saratoga Lakes on a gray, cool Saturday. As usual, only a few ducks and many gulls were seen on Round Lake. Saratoga Lake had most of its ducks and geese located in the middle. Members were down, but the birders had a good time.

Species: Common Loon (8); red-throated loon (3); pied-bill grebe (1); Canada goose (14); mallard (?); black duck (?); canvas-back duck (10); scaup (?); common goldeneye (61); common merganser (?); red-tailed hawk (2); rough-legged hawk (1); coot(1); herring gull (?); ring-billed gull(?); kingfisher (1); flicker (1); pileated woodpecker (2); hairy woodpecker (1); downy woodpecker (1).

Blue jay (6); crow (5); black-capped chickadee (?); white-breasted nuthatch (4); red-breasted nuthatch (1); brown creeper (1); cedar waxwing (12); cardinal (2); evening grosbeak (?); American goldfinch (40); junco (3). Note: ? means many or too far away to be certain of count.

Bernard Grossman



Birds in muted silence
wait for the great master
to begin the morning symphony

B. Finney

FORTY YEARS AGO

The Season
Summer 1939

Summer of 1939 had many worthwhile additions to the records of the birds of Schenectady, chiefly because of concentration of observations in types of territory unfortunately missing or at a minimum in previous recent summers.

Numerous species previously considered rare or questionable summer residents locally were found without question. A spruce swamp at Berne (ABC) this year contributed summer records of the red-tailed hawk, hermit thrush, red-breasted nuthatch, the Nashville, myrtle, magnolia, and Blackburnian warblers, purple finch, slate-colored junco, and white-throated sparrow. A somewhat similar swamp, the Consalus Vlaie indicated as summer birds the broad-winged hawk, Wilson's snipe (?), olive-sided flycatcher, yellow-bellied sapsucker, brown creeper, hermit thrush, and blue-winged, golden-winged, Nashville, and magnolia warblers, purple finch, and white-throated sparrow. Some of the species mentioned above have been found in previous years in other sections; others are locally new.

There were several other items of interest during the summer, including the breeding-bird census of Niskholm. The American egret arrived at the Crescent Lake section of the Mohawk River on June 17 and was there regularly in varying numbers after July 4. Black ducks were more common breeders, as were wood ducks; and blue-winged teal, as in 1938, seemed also to have been summer residents, if not breeders. The woodcock as breeding bird of the city was unusual. Records of the pileated woodpecker, with young at Berne and in late summer at the Consalus added to the known range of this uncommon species. There was one record of the orchard oriole, a first year male recorded at Collins Lake on June 11. Baltimore orioles seemed to be unusually common through the summer. The finding of a prairie horned lark nest with three eggs on July 10 indicated a second nesting of this bird which regularly nests early. The prairie warbler again was found as a summer resident at Karner.

The weather report for 1939's summer, incidentally, showed an emphatic deficiency in rainfall. May was the driest in 20 years, with rainfall two inches below normal; June rainfall was nearly normal; July was the driest in six years; and August deficiency was more than two inches. Both May and August were well above normal in temperature, and June and July slightly above normal.

Guy Bartlett

Note: Consalus Vlaie was located north of Rt. 67 just past Scotch Church corner in Galway. Niskholm is located at the edge of the wide waters in Niskayuna.

BIRD WATCHING COURSES SCHEDULED

Two courses in bird watching, primarily for beginners, are scheduled to start in the spring. On leisurely walks at favorite local birding areas, participants will learn how to find, observe, and identify many species of birds. All sessions will be field trips to such places as Vischer Ferry Nature Preserve, Black Creek Marsh, Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, and Whitbeck Grove Preserve.

The Shenendehowa Continuing Education course will be six Wednesday mornings beginning April 16. The College of Continuing Studies (SUNY) course will be six Saturday mornings beginning April 19.

Contact the schools or the instructor, Bob Marx (377-1453) for fee and registration information. Enrollment is limited.



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Published Quarterly by the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club, Inc.

MEMBERSHIP: Life \$150.; Sustaining \$10; Active \$5; Student \$2; with an additional charge of \$1 per additional family member. Write or call MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN; Mrs. E. L. Thomas, 37-B Fuller Road, Albany, N.Y. 12205 - 518/489-2267

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