

Feathers

BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE HUDSON-MOHAWK BIRD CLUB, INC.

THE GREAT TEXAS BIRDING CLASSIC

by Hope Batcheller

The fallout was unbelievable. Warblers were everywhere, flocks of grosbeaks and buntings were sitting on the ground, and orioles were in every bush. I had heard about fallouts like this on the Texas coast, but to be witnessing one at South Padre Island was another realm. I, and my three fellow teammates on the ABA/Leica Tropicbirds team, gawked at the wonder – a spectacular introduction to the four days following.

Cape May Warbler observed at South Padre Island



The Great Texas Birding Classic (GTBC) is a midnight-to-midnight birding event that takes place annually on the Texas coast. Our team consisted of Neil Gilbert, 15, of California; Saraiya Ruano, 17, of Colorado; Nico Sarbanes, 14, of Maryland; me; and Jeff and Liz Gordon as our leaders/drivers. The team members were selected by an application process, and were raising money for the American Birding Association’s education programs. Saturday, May 3rd was our Big Day, but we arrived several days early to scout the Lower Coast and Rio Grande Valley area.

During the next few days of scouting, we covered almost all the famous birding locations of the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge with its moss-draped trees and elusive CLAY-COLORED ROBIN; South
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P R E S I D E N T ' S C O R N E R



In previous messages, I have noted that HMBC is a field oriented group. This means that we have few club-wide meetings other than the wonderful regular monthly programs ably arranged by Scott Stoner. Typically these field trips are scheduled a few months in advance by the Field Trip Committee's soliciting leaders to suggest a location, date and time. Recently, it has been increasingly difficult finding leaders, so I am asking our members to consider becoming a leader.

Trip leadership is not a difficult job. It requires a reasonably good (not "expert") knowledge of the local birds; a sense of how to keep a group together, and a bit of self-confidence. Occasionally, away trips are scheduled if there is a volunteer, so there would be more responsibility involving arranging accommodations.

I see two routes to developing these skills: 1) Assisting an experienced leader and/or 2) taking a trip leader "course." We are preparing a brief guide which will help orientate people to this end.

The Club used to offer trips to places such as Cape Ann, Bombay Hook NWR, Long Island and Montauk, Jamaica Bay NWR, the Adirondacks, and Niagara Falls. Many of the leaders of these trips are no longer active or are gone, so the Club is in danger of losing its knowledge base of these more far afield hot spots.

The opportunity to visit these places was one of the Club's attractions when we joined 30+ years ago. It still is perhaps the easiest way to see birds that are not readily found in the Capital District. If you are interested, please contact me or our Field Trip Committee Chair, Donna Zimmerman, and we'll get started. My telephone number is 518-399-9159 and e-mail is bgrossman@nycap.rr.com.

— Bernie Grossman 

HMBC Contact Information

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E-mail: contact@hmbc.net

HMBC website: http://hmbc.net

HMBC Board Meetings

HMBC Board meetings are open to all Club members. Meetings are held at Five Rivers Center or other local venues at 7:00 PM, usually on the second Monday of odd-numbered months.

Newsletter Contributions Desired

- Have anything you think other birders would be interested in?
- Have a favorite birding spot you want to share?
- Are there any stories or photos that would inspire others?

Share them with the HMBC membership by submitting them to the addresses below:

Please send all *electronic* submissions *via e-mail* to: Chris Grossman at **bgrossman@nycap.rr.com**

Send **all** paper submissions to:

Chris Grossman

7 Nott Rd.

Rexford, NY 12148

Padre Island with LEAST BITTERNs stalking the marshes and the incredible fallout; and Santa Margarita Ranch with AUDUBON'S ORIOLES and MUSCOVY DUCKS. By Friday evening, we were familiar with the area and its birds, and could put the final touches on our route.

On a Big Day, timing and route planning are key. If you waste time at one place, other stops will be rushed. Our itinerary was fairly simple: Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park for owls and nightjars, then west for desert birds, and then gradually back toward the coast for everything else. After a long nap on Friday afternoon, I awoke wired and ready-to-bird. While normal people were eating dinner and heading to bed, we were eating breakfast and packing up. Soon after midnight, we were on a small dirt road anxiously awaiting the first bird.

The team found this injured Lesser Nighthawk on the road near Sable Palm Grove



Immediately after clambering out of the van, we were greeted by a COMMON PARAUQUE. EASTERN SCREECH-OWL, ELF OWL, and GREAT HORNED OWL soon chimed in their voices, and a CHUCK-WILLS-WIDOW sitting on a post was a pleasant treat. After an almost clean sweep of night birds, we settled at the Salineno Boat Ramp to welcome dawn.

The day flew by. RED-BILLED PIGEON, GRAY HAWK, RINGED and GREEN KINGFISHERS, and ALTAMIRA ORIOLE all showed their faces at Salineno, and CLAY-COLORED and LARK SPARROWS, NORTHERN BOBWHITE, and ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER all cooperated at nearby Starr County Park. After a long drive (four over-tired, but hyper, caffeine-stimulated teenagers in a van – I'm sure you can imagine) we arrived at Santa Ana NWR, where we added CLAY-COLORED ROBIN, NORTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANNULET, and other specialty birds of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.



Muscovy Duck at the Salineno Boat Ramp

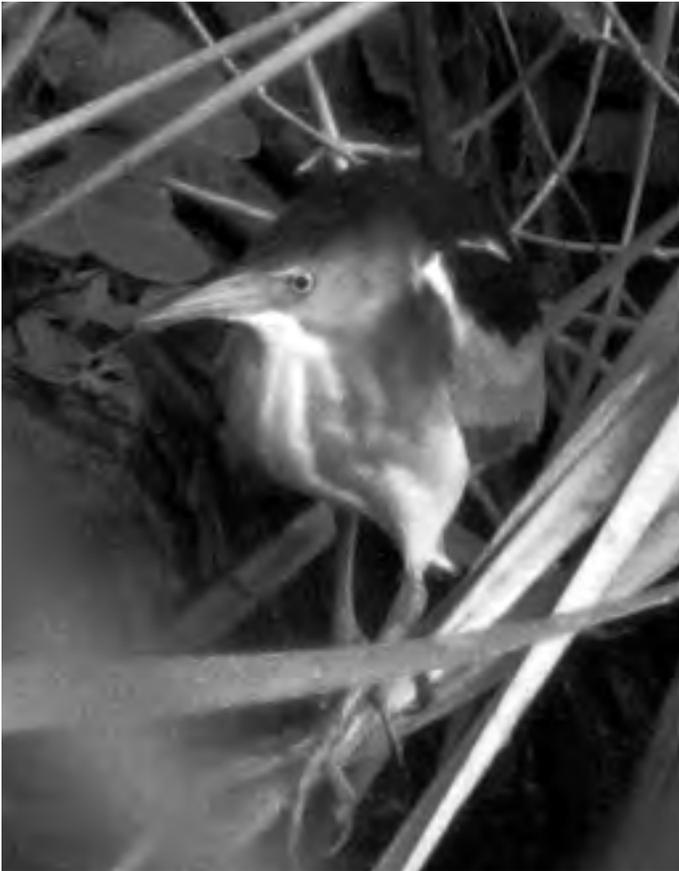
As we approached the coast, we visited several shorebird locations, where we found UPLAND SANDPIPERS (perhaps more aptly called "Bug-eyed Grasspipers"), many peeps, BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPERS, LONG-BILLED DOWITCHERS, and a stunning HUDSONIAN GODWIT. When we arrived at South Padre Island, we were racing the remaining daylight, and quickly worked the passerine and shorebird flocks. Although the fallout had dispersed somewhat, migrant passerines still abounded, and we feasted our eyes on warblers, tanagers, and grosbeaks. Marsh birds and shorebirds also cooperated, and we were lucky to find two flyover SOOTY TERNS. Daylight soon faded, though, and as midnight approached, we were ready to crash into bed.

During the day, we had tallied 195 species – enough to win the youth division! Our total for the whole trip was 230 species, 26 of which were life birds for me. Most importantly, we raised over \$5,000 for the ABA's education programs,

– continued on next page

ABA Leica Tropicbirds team, left to right: Neil Gilbert, Nico Sarbanes, Saraiya Ruano, Hope Batcheller





Least Bittern at South Padre Island



Chuck-will's-widow near Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park

Salineno Boat Ramp, left to right: Hope, Saraiya, Nico, Neil





Upland Sandpiper at the La Feria Sod Farm



Vermilion Flycatcher at Starr County Park

The ABA/Leica Tropicbirds team at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge



and many thanks go to all who sponsored me, as well as the ABA, Leica, and Jeff and Liz Gordon. The trip was an amazing experience, and I look forward to visiting Texas again.

More photos, and videos, can be viewed at:
<http://picasaweb.google.com/hope.batcheller/GTBC2008>

About ABA/Leica Tropicbirds

Top young birders from across North America are selected for two ABA/Leica Tropicbirds youth birding teams, which participate in two major spring birding competitions/fundraisers—The Great Texas Birding Classic and the New Jersey Audubon World Series of Birding. Hope Batcheller, age 16, lives in Petersburg, NY. 

I probably spent way too much time last year (2007) at Vischer Ferry Preserve. But, there have been rewards such as fresh air, exercise, and some really great birds (not to mention some great people), for the time spent. My main focus for the year was to see how many bird species I could find at the Preserve, the only goal being to beat my total from 2006 -- 154. I think I did pretty well with a final tally of 172. Of these 172, 24 are considered "at risk" by the NY Audubon Important Bird Area (IBA) Program of which Vischer Ferry Preserve is a part. I'm going to list just my highlights for 2007 here and then post the complete list in a Word file at the HMBirds website under Files. (In this file I've also mentioned some species that I missed but that others have reported which could bring the total even higher than 172.)

COMMON LOON, RED-NECKED GREBE, TRICOLOR HERON, LEAST BITTERN, AMERICAN BITTERN, BRANT, REDHEAD, WHITE-WINGED SCOTER, BLACK SCOTER, KING EIDER, GREATER SCAUP, LESSER SCAUP, RED-BREADED MERGANSER, OSPREY, BALD EAGLE, RED-SHOULDERED HAWK, PEREGRINE FALCON, VIRGINIA RAIL, SORA, COMMON MOORHEN, AMERICAN COOT, AMERICAN WOODCOCK, WILSON'S SNIPE, PECTORAL SANDPIPER, BONAPARTE'S GULL, BLACK TERN, EASTERN SCREECH-OWL, GREAT HORNED OWL, BARRED OWL, COMMON NIGHTHAWK, WHIP-POOR-WILL, OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER, CLIFF SWALLOW, COMMON RAVEN, PHILADELPHIA VIREO, CAPE MAY WARBLER, BAY-BREADED WARBLER, CANADA WARBLER, FOX SPARROW, LINCOLN'S SPARROW, COMMON REDPOLL

Now that I've listed some of the highlights, I'd like to make some comments about the state of the wetlands and the rails and bitterns that live there. In 2007 in late winter and early spring the 2 notoriously dry back "ponds" separated by the main path to the river had only narrow portions of surface water surrounded by dry vegetation. There were few ducks there in the late winter and early spring, unlike 2003 when I remember there were 300 or more RING-NECKED DUCKS in these ponds. Later in the spring, however, rainfall increased dramatically so that by mid-May the back ponds were filled-in uniformly with a moderate level of surface water. Both BITTERNS, SORA, and VIRGINIA RAIL were all found there. But, by the first week in June the ponds had dried-up and remained so for the rest of the summer. Fish skeletons were left in the east back pond as a vivid reminder of the water that had been there only a few weeks before. The thick vegetation in these ponds remained green throughout the summer suggesting that some water was present under the surface, but it is hard to say what effect the lost surface water had on the rails and bitterns because they normally become quiet in

summer anyway. Water levels are generally more reliable at other ponds in the Preserve.

For me, until 2006, the best avian spectacle available at Vischer Ferry was the Woodcock flight. Last year I witnessed another equally good spectacle, not just hearing the weird water pump "song" of the AMERICAN BITTERN, but actually watching the undulating throat through the scope as it produces this amazing sound. I was struck by how strenuous these dramatic throat work-outs seemed to be, particularly when they are repeated for hours during the morning and evening. At the time I wondered if this male had been able to find a mate because he continued to boom away for weeks. I was lucky to observe a kind of sequel to this spectacle when 8 weeks after hearing the last water pump song, I spotted 3 fuzzy, young AMERICAN BITTERNS standing together at the edge of the marsh, no adults in sight, not far from where I watched the "oong-ka choonk" performances. I was able to get a blurry, digiscoped photo from across the marsh of 2 out of the 3 young bitterns which I have posted in the photo section of this website in an album labeled "VFP". (The AMERICAN BITTERN is designated as "highly at risk" by the NY Audubon IBA Program.)

If there was one bird which I could choose as a symbol for the Vischer Ferry Preserve, it would have to be the LEAST BITTERN. This secretive bird is seldom seen or heard (at least by me). It's in decline in New York State and is designated as "highly at risk" by the NY Audubon IBA program and "threatened" by NYSDEC. The wetlands in NY where these birds live are also at risk, and Vischer Ferry Preserve is no exception. In 2006 I was surprised to hear at least 3 singing males in the marshes. So, I was anxious to see if the LEAST BITTERNS would return in 2007. I eventually heard my first one on 5/28. The next day I was fortunate to actually see one for 3 seconds before it disappeared again into the cattails. I counted at least 3 singing males on one day and heard reports about one other one at another location. I did not hear them after 6/2. Since they had been present well within Breeding Atlas egg dates for the species, I suspect that some did breed this year. I was also pleased to see adult COMMON MOORHENS with chicks in mid-July. SORAS and VIRGINIA RAILS showed ample evidence of holding territory. I saw an AMERICAN COOT in May at about the beginning of the Breeding Atlas egg dates, allowing for a "possible breeder" designation.

There were 2 genuine rarities for our area at Vischer Ferry last year that some birders were lucky enough to see before they moved on. These were an immature male KING EIDER (seen for 8 days beginning 11/25) on the Mohawk River and a TRICOLOR HERON (seen for 2 days beginning 6/2) at Ferry Dr. In the photo section of this Yahoo group website under "VFP", I've posted some blurry, digiscoped photos of these 2 birds.

—John Hershey

Raptor Migration Sites

There are two sites available for HMBC members to observe migrating raptors:

You may use **Camp Pinnacle**. A permit will be necessary. If you want a permit, make a check out to Camp Pinnacle for \$10.00 and send it to Gary Goodness, 15 Kelly Ave., Albany, NY 12203. Include the license plate number. The permit will be sent back to you with rules and directions. The permit is good until mid November 2008.

Glen Doone in Thatcher Park is also available through October 19th. On week days, the gate will be locked but they will open it for you if you call 872-1237 to let them know you are coming. You may then use the back lot of Glen Doone for parking.

On weekends you must park at Overlook and walk into the observation site. If you have questions, e-mail goodness@nycap.rr.com.

—Gary Goodness

Non-migratory Birds

Birds often change their territory after nesting. This is typical behavior among non-migratory birds.

The birds often shift territories based on the availability of food and their changing dietary needs throughout the year. They often require different types of food when feeding young.

Northern mockingbirds are good example: maintaining two separate territories- one for nesting and one for feeding- during the year.

ROBINS, BLUEBIRDS, GRAPEVINES AND CO₂

We have lived at the same location in East Greenbush for 38 years, but only relatively recently have we seen the yard threatened with a takeover by vines - Wild Grape, Virginia Creeper, Poison Ivy, and some we have yet to identify. Our raspberry and blackberry patches are being overrun despite hours spent removing vines, and many trees are also under attack. A web search indicates that this is not just a local phenomenon, and there is some evidence that these and other vines are disproportionately favored by increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide. What does this mean for birds? American Robins and Eastern Bluebirds are dependent on berries for their winter food supply, and the proliferation of wild grapes in particular must be good news for them. Data from the Southern Rensselaer Christmas Count (see *Feathers*, February 2008) show an exponential increase in wintering Robins since about the turn of the century, and Bluebird numbers have increased steadily since their first appearance on the count in 1978. Perhaps we are seeing a positive feedback effect - increased food supply from flourishing grape and other vines sustains larger winter Robin and Bluebird populations; the birds in turn "plant" more vines which feed more birds... and so on, fueled by rising CO₂ concentrations. Where does it end? Stay tuned.

—Phil Whitney

The berries of the Washington hawthorn will attract birds through most of the winter. Viburnums also are good landscaping shrubs, because they can provide berries all winter. 



*Thoughts after the Festival that Port Aransas, Texas is famous for**

*We see them each and every year,
We never miss a chance.
To have some food and smile at them
And watch them as they dance.*

*The moments that we share with them
An intimate sensation.
The promise in their gazing eyes
Completes the celebration.*

*The attitude these erstwhile friends
Has thrown me for a loop.
They never write, they never call,
They only whoop.*

*Ann B'Rells
February 11, 2008*

* Flat-bottomed catamarans get within 10-15 feet of families of Whooping Cranes during the annual Whooping Crane Festival, a "Celebration of Whooping Cranes and Other Birds". The 12th annual festival was February 22-24, 2008.

The inspiration for this poem was a simple birding observation by husband Wayne as we drove back to the condo from a day at the festival. As is usual for me, that phrase (the last of the poem) triggered the entire scene and poem, which was complete by the time we reached home. I particularly liked the analogy with friends that you only see at meetings. 

This Red Breasted Nuthatch decided to hitch a ride into port with the “Wer-On-Um” in late August 2008.

We were heading southwest towards port on Lake Ontario in Oswego NY, when it flew into the cabin. He rode on our shoulders, fingers and even the steering wheel but he seemed to like Captain Lee from Wer-On-Um Guide Service (www.weronum.com) the best and rode most of the way perched patiently on top of his head guiding our way. We did try to get him to fly off but he just didn't want to go. He later must have spotted land as we were pulling into the harbor when he finally flew out the window and headed for the trees.

—Lee Godin 



UPCOMING HMBC PROGRAMS

Monthly programs are open to the public and are held at 7:00 PM at William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library or Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar.

Bicknell's Thrush

Julie Hart

Monday, October 6, 2008 (rescheduled from December 2007)

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

New York's Montane Specialist: Bicknell's Thrush - New York's montane forests are home to a unique, high-elevation bird community that includes the elusive Bicknell's Thrush, the only bird endemic to the northeast region. Bicknell's Thrush have adapted to this extreme environment in a number of ways, most notably with a unique breeding system and unusual food habits. There are a number of management and conservation issues facing Bicknell's Thrush and other high-elevation birds, including acid rain, climate change, wind power development, recreational development, and timber management. A high-elevation songbird monitoring program, Mountain Birdwatch, was initiated in 2000 to provide baseline information for making sound stewardship decisions about these montane issues. This annual point-count survey pays special attention to Bicknell's Thrush, Swainson's Thrush, Blackpoll Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, and Winter Wren. Approximately 120 routes are surveyed annually throughout New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. The results have been used to monitor population levels, create a habitat map, provide site-specific information to guide development decisions, and identify priorities for land conservation. Specific information for New York will be presented, including the distribution of Bicknell's Thrush, Mountain Birdwatch route locations, survey results, and volunteer opportunities.

Bio for Julie Hart

Julie Hart is the coordinator of Mountain Birdwatch with the Institute of Conservation Ecology. She has spent the last two summers surveying Bicknell's Thrush throughout their range, including Mountain Birdwatch surveys and demographic studies of this rare species. She also assists many other ecology programs at ICE involving both birds and butterflies. Prior to working with mountain songbirds, Julie spent five years traveling around the world studying birds. She spent time monitoring Common Loons in New Hampshire, surveying Golden-winged Warblers in the Catskills of New York, protecting Common and Roseate Terns in Maine, researching Kokako in New Zealand, searching for Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Arkansas, and recording breeding birds throughout New York and Vermont. She worked in the bird conservation departments at Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology where she was involved with national bird conservation initiatives such as the Important Bird Areas Program, the Audubon WatchList, and Partners in Flight.

The Canadian Atlantic**Scott Stoner and Denise Hackert-Stoner**

Thursday October 9, 2008

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Joint program of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region and the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club

From the Gannets of Bonaventure Island, to the tides of Fundy and the Highlands of Cape Breton; across the sea to the fjords, bogs and icebergs of Newfoundland and Labrador, Atlantic Canada is a land of spectacular scenery and wildlife. With slides and music we share the wonders that draw us to that special place.

Scott Stoner is past president of both the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club and the Audubon Society of the Capital Region. His photographic work has been published in *Birder's World Magazine*. Denise Hackert-Stoner is a past officer and director of the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club. Together they have birded, explored, and photographed North America from Hawaii to Labrador. They write a monthly birding/nature column for the *Chatham Courier* and recently authored a feature article on Christmas Bird Counts for the *New York State Conservationist*.

Northern Adventures: Birding Alaska**Bernie and Chris Grossman**

Monday, November 3, 2008

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Alaska provides a varied and vast birding terrain. Its brief spring and summer provide an opportunity to view the terrain and wildlife, especially the birds, while they are busy breeding and in their breeding plumage. The state's proximity to Eurasia also increases the chance of seeing rare non-native species. This talk describes a guided trip to six Alaska locations— Anchorage, St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs, Denali, Nome, Seward and Barrow in June, 2007. Slides of the terrain, birds, flowers and other wildlife will be included. Bernie Grossman has been a member of the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club for over 30 years and is currently president. Chris Grossman is also a long-term member and is currently editor of *Feathers*, the Club's newsletter

Bird Photography**Ken Harper**

Monday, December 1, 2008

Holiday Party and Program

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center

More details soon.

Yellowstone (and why we keep going back)**Gary Zylkuski and Adrienne Papazian**

Monday January 5, 2009

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Many of us get to visit Yellowstone once or twice, if we are lucky. Gary and Adrienne have taken many, many trips there - and continue to go back. During their slide program, they show what keeps their trips to Yellowstone interesting and different no matter how many times they go. The first portion of the program will consist of photos and a discussion of some of the highlights that would likely be seen during any Yellowstone visit: the scenery, animals, birds, etc. that are seen by the casual visitor. Then, the bulk of the program delves into what they have discovered as they visit more often and during different seasons, focusing more on certain areas within the Park or certain animals or birds. We'll try to show what happens when you slow down and resist the temptation to try to see everything all at once. The photos cover a myriad of subjects from animals and birds to mountain scenery and thermal features, during all four seasons. Yellowstone's animals and birds are shown as portraits, as well as exhibiting different behaviors from predator-prey interactions to nesting and raising young. Topics we'll discuss range from wolf reintroduction to nesting behavior of sandhill cranes to physical differences between grizzlies and black bears.

Gary grew up in northeastern Massachusetts and graduated from Lyndon State College in Vermont in 1980, with a degree in Meteorology. He has been a marine meteorologist for the past 28 years, working with commercial and private vessels worldwide, and an avid birder for the last 20 years. Gary and his wife Adrienne share a strong interest in all aspects of the natural world. Over the past 10 years or so, their interest in photography has complemented their enjoyment in observing nature.

Come and join us for this unusual and in-depth look at our nation's first national park!

The Whooping Cranes of Aransas Texas

Don Polunci

Monday, February 2, 2009

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

One of the rarest creatures in North America, the whooping crane is making a comeback from a low of 15 birds in 1941. Whooping cranes nest in Canada during the summer and winter at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Strong winds push the bay waters over low-lying shores, forming brackish tidal marshes among the short, salt-tolerant vegetation. It is this habitat that attracts thousands of migratory birds. On their journey between North and Central America, warblers concentrate on the refuge from mid-April to early May. Mild winters, bay waters, and abundant food supplies attract over 392 species of birds to Aransas, including pelicans, herons, egrets, spoonbills, shorebirds, ducks, and geese.

Don Polunci is president of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society

The Great Texas Birding Classic

Hope Batcheller

Monday, March 2, 2009

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Twenty-four hours, four teenage birders, and 195 bird species. It was crazy, yes, and a fantastic experience. The Great Texas Birding Classic is a competitive birding event taking place annually on the Texas coast. Hope Batcheller competed on the 2008 ABA / Leica Tropicbirds team, which was raising money for the American Birding Association's education programs. During the team's four days in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, they experienced the diverse birdlife of south Texas. The area not only boasts species whose primary range is in Mexico, but also migrant passerines and coastal birds. Through stories and photos, Hope will share her adventures from this incredible trip.

Hope Batcheller is 16 years old, and already a very active member of the HMBC. She has been a birder since age seven. Hope has benefited from most of the ABA's youth education programs, and played an active role in starting the NY State Young Birders Club, and originator and organizer of the HMBC's Fall Century Run.

Birding in East Australia from Tasmania to Cairns

Don Morton

Monday, May 4, 2009

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

More details soon. 

Unless otherwise specified, all programs will be held at the William K. Sanford Colonie Town Library 629 Albany-Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211 on the secondnd Thursday of every month, monthly from September - June, 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

The Canadian Atlantic

Scott Stoner and Denise Hackert-Stoner

Thursday October 9, 2008

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Joint program of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region and the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club

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Scott Stoner is past president of both the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club and the Audubon Society of the Capital Region. His photographic work has been published in Birder's World Magazine. Denise Hackert-Stoner is a past officer and director of the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club. Together they have birded, explored, and photographed North America from Hawaii to Labrador. They write a monthly birding/nature column for the Chatham Courier and recently authored a feature article on Christmas Bird Counts for the New York State Conservationist.

The NY Dragonfly Survey

Erin White

Thursday, November 13, 2008; 7 PM

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Given an increasing public interest in the study of dragonflies, but an incomplete knowledge of their status in New York State, and the need to develop a formal conservation strategy for them, NYS DEC and the NY Natural Heritage Program embarked on The New York Dragonfly and Damselfly Survey, a project spanning the 2005-2008 field seasons. The major objective is to document the distribution of dragonfly and damselfly species that occur in New York State. Volunteers are an integral part of this project, who, along with staff and contractors, contribute data through their survey efforts statewide. In addition, intensive survey efforts are directed toward threatened damselfly species and habitats that support odonate Species of Greatest Conservation Need, as specified by the New York Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Join Erin White for an overview of this comprehensive survey to see some preliminary results.

Erin White, a NY Natural Heritage Program Zoologist, is the Project Coordinator for the NY Dragonfly and Damselfly Survey. Erin is based in Albany at the NYS DEC central office, where she coordinates the efforts of 330 registered volunteers with the survey. She spends about 80% of her time working on the survey and is involved with other Heritage projects such as Vernal Pool work in the Hudson River Valley and a statewide tiger beetle survey. She graduated from Antioch New England's Conservation Biology program in 2003 and has a strong background with wetland animal species, including invertebrates.

For more information, contact Greg Rucinski at the Colonie Library at 458-9274. 

Roger Tory Peterson

Born: 28 August 1908 Birthplace: Jamestown, New York

“...the man who made America a nation of birdwatchers.”

—William Zinsser, Writer and Critic

*Your dashes are arrows
in A Field Guide to the Birds, the green-bound “Peterson”
tucked into belts, pushed into pockets, stuffed into backpacks*

*Arrows that lead eyes of millions,
squinting through binoculars,
to the red-brown cap and black “stick-pin”
identifying the passerine in snowy branches.
“That’s it,” the new birder exclaims,
pulls out list, checks off the “Winter Chippy,”
American Tree Sparrow*

*Arrows that fly to crest and black necklace of Blue Jay,
“golden slippers” of Snowy Egret,
yellow “spectacles,” black sideburns, of Kentucky Warbler,
purple throat, green crown, decurved bill of Lucifer Hummingbird,
white tail tip of Eastern Kingbird.
The Bald Eagle with white head and tail is “all field mark.”*

In the salt marsh in May, the birder thinks “Life Bird?”

Focuses on shorebird

*prodding mud flat with Short-billed Dowitchers,
Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones. Greater Yellowlegs,
Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers,
Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers.*

She has identified all with the dried, wrinkled pages of her “Peterson.”

*She studies what she knows to be a plover,
concentrates glasses on this bird feeding
by greening shoots of Spartina grass.*

*Again, she stares at your art,
your arrow guide slanting to the back.*

She rereads your description:

“spangled with golden spots above.”

*Suddenly, her freckled face is a loud smile,
her whisper a bursting
“Golden Plover!”*

Field Guide, 1996

The Roger Peterson Institute of Natural History

Maxwell Corydon Wheat, Jr.

Poet Laureate

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Permission given to use this poem with author credit

Maxwell Corydon Wheat, Jr., was founder and for many years editor of *New York Birders*,
newsletter of the New York State Ornithological Association. 

Since HMBC is now planning Field Trips by the quarter instead of by the year, we are omitting the colored Field Trip insert and instead placing the Upcoming Field Trips at the end of Feathers so that this section may be torn off and referenced separately, if desired.

FIELD TRIP COMMITTEE MEMBERS NEEDED!

Want to help plan the club's 2009 field trip schedule? Committee members are needed to assist the Field Trip Committee chairperson schedule field trips and recruit trip leaders. All you need to commit is a small amount of your time. The committee meets once in the fall to brainstorm ideas for the coming year's trips & the year is divided up among the committee members. Then each person contacts club members to lead field trips for the months they are responsible for and forwards this info to the committee chairperson. Since our field trips are the club's most frequent activity, please help us by assisting with the preparation needed to continue to offer them. Please contact Donna Zimmerman at 869-6624 and volunteer to help.

OCTOBER

Saturday, October 18, 2008

Saratoga National Historical Park

Coordinators: Scott & Denise Stoner
785-6760
scottjstoner@aol.com

The battlefield is a nice place to bird in mid-fall. Foliage color should be good as we walk a portion of the Wilkinson Trail through woodlands & grasslands in search of bluebirds, woodpeckers & sparrows. In recent years the groups on this trip have found Fox Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Eastern Bluebird, Red-headed Woodpecker & Raven. Plan to hike about 2 miles along the trail (hilly in places). Wear bright-colored clothing as there is hunting on lands adjacent to the park. The National Park Service charges a fee for walking this trail. Meet at the park visitor center at 9am.

Sunday, October 26, 2008

Bird Walk & Fall Social at Five Rivers

**RESERVATIONS NEEDED BY WEDNESDAY,
OCTOBER 22**

Coordinators: Scott & Denise Stoner
785-6760
scottjstoner@aol.com

NOVEMBER

Saturday, November 8, 2008

Tomhannock Reservoir

Coordinator: Larry Alden
861-6087
overlook@nycap.rr.com

Join us for a morning trip that circumnavigates the Tomhannock Reservoir. We should find a good variety of waterfowl as well as migrant passerines and possibly shorebirds. Varieties such as Ross' Goose and Gray Kingbird have turned up at Tomhannock in the fall, and we often see a Bald Eagle or two. Meet at 8:30 am at the parking area at the intersection of Lake Shore Dr. and NY Rt. 7 at the west end of the causeway.

Bring a scope if you have one.

DECEMBER

Saturday, December 20, 2008

Schenectady County Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 27, 2008

Southern Rennselaer County Christmas Bird Count

JANUARY 2009

Saturday, January 3, 2009

Troy Christmas Bird Count

A tract of land comprising roughly half of the Albany Pine Bush was named a state bird conservation area last month. This designation was made by both DEC and the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

In an article by Brian Nearing, the Albany Times Union reported on September 19, 2008 that the Executive Director of the Pine Bush Preserve Commission, Chris Hawver, said the designation for more than 1,500 acres shows that taxpayer money used to create and run the preserve has improved habitats for birds and also could mean more state aid.

“We are now seeing birds in the preserve that had not been previously seen there for decades, and there is evidence that they also are breeding there,” Hawver stated.

“Adding this to the list of bird conservation areas will add to its appeal while improving safeguards for more than 40 species of migratory songbirds,” said Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis.

Conservation director Neil Gifford pointed out that the preserve is home to some birds that are in decline regionally due to shrinking habitat, including the American woodcock, red-shouldered hawk and prairie warbler.

“We were surprised to discover in our research that while 67 percent of northeastern bird species that breed in shrubland habitats are seriously declining, the preserve supports very strong populations of many of these birds,” he said.

More than 40 species of migratory songbirds visit the Pine Bush during the spring and fall migrations, including at least 20 species of warblers.

*The original Times Union article may be read online at:
<http://timesunion.com/AspStories/story.asp?storyID=722018>*

Feathers

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