

Feathers

Birding Western Jamaica

by Ellen D. Kiehl

Looking for a vacation that combines beaching for the family's non-birders with great birding for you? I found it in western Jamaica. The Montego Bay-Negril area is a half-day trip via an easy two-hop plane ride from Albany. A wide variety of lodging can be found right on Negril's seven-mile beach. For birders, day trips can take you to areas where you can spot some of Jamaica's endemic birds.

In fact, new life birds likely will appear in your hotel garden on your way to check in. Our hotel grounds featured spectacular RED-BILLED STREAMERTAIL HUMMINGBIRD, speedy yellow-and-black BANANAQUIT, LOGGERHEAD KINGBIRD and—surprisingly—a WATERTHRUSH (I can't tell you confidently which one). Pairs of WHITE-CROWNED PIGEON (BALDPATES) cooed, "who took two?" and flapped in the trees. With the tiny COMMON GROUND DOVE pattering along the paths and the glimpsed WHITE-WINGED DOVE, BALDPATES are among the large number of doves and pigeons to be seen in Jamaica.

According to *Birds of Jamaica* (Audrey Downer and Robert Sutton, 1990), "In Jamaica there are 25 species and 21 subspecies of birds which are found nowhere else on Earth. More endemic bird species occur in Jamaica than on any other Caribbean Island or most other oceanic islands around the world. Birding in Jamaica

is enhanced by the outstanding beauty of many of the birds, the unique richness and variety of the landscape and the pleasant tropical climate." Amen.

Visiting for a week in Feb. 2006, I was able to visit two notable birding spots. Just outside Negril is the Royal Palm Reserve, a nature preserve featuring a boardwalk through the "morass," ending at a viewing tower overlooking the area. Highlights of my two visits there were the endangered WEST INDIAN WHISTLING DUCK, a reliable resident and my first-ever tree duck; LIMPKIN (a large, placid Heron-like wader with beautiful brown and white markings); AND NORTHERN JACANA (related to Gallinules).

Glass-bottom boats that ply the Negril beachfront advertise "River Tours." These take you up the South Negril River to a landing within a 15-minute walk of the Reserve. (We took Captain Mike's boat and found the courteous captain and his first mate Ricky interested in encouraging more eco-tourism.) Our boat trip provided close-range views of GREAT and LITTLE BLUE HERON; GREEN HERON; SNOWY and GREAT EGRET; and BELTED KINGFISHER. A better plan is to take the river trip separately and have a local driver take you to the Reserve for a longer visit than river tours provide.

The birding highlight of my stay came at the renowned Rocklands

Bird Feeding Station, located high on a mountain overlooking the Montego Bay area. Beginning in 1958, ornithologist Lisa Salmon attracted birds to her home there. Her successor, Fritz Beckworth, carries on her work and conducts birders on walks through the grounds. A guest house can accommodate six (876-952-2009; Google the name for more info).

At Rocklands we saw STREAMERTAIL and JAMAICAN MANGO hummers that come right onto the veranda to feed; the enormous CARIBBEAN DOVE (WHITEBELLY); WHITE-CHINNED THRUSH (HOPPING DICK); the green-yellow JAMAICAN ORIOLE; the beautiful little ORANGEQUIT;

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President's Corner




The last two months were highlighted by bird migration. Common Nighthawks, Broadwinged Hawks, Osprey, and many others were seen in the north to south flyway. Yet the major excitement was created by the smallest of birds, a female Rufous. A sincere thank you is expressed to Karl Hellig of Ballston Spa. Karl opened his home to many HMBC members so they could view the beautiful bird. Our thanks to Bob Yunick for capturing, banding and identifying the age and gender. Thanks also to Richard Guthrie for always getting the good word out.

On the business side, our field trip schedule for 2011 was finalized. Thanks to Donna Zimmerman, the chairperson and the committee members: Don Gresens, Bernie Grossman, John Hershey, Bill Lee and Tom Williams.

Congratulations are in order for: Hope Batcheller, Bob Yunick and Peter Nye. Hope was awarded the Lillian Stoner Award by NYSOA, Bob Yunick set a milestone of the number of birds he banded and Peter Nye retired from the ESU of DEC. Peter over 30 years has raised the population of eagles from 1 pair in the 1970s to 192 pair, 173 breeding and 244 young in 2010. DEC and all birders must congratulate Pete for his efforts.

The month of December is the time of the CBCs. If you can help on a count or a feeder count please do. Check HMBC.net for details and Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Happy Birding.

Gary P. Goodness, President 

HMBC Contact Information

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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 p.m., 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

Vischer Ferry September 26, 2010

The HMBC Vischer Ferry Field Trip was held as scheduled this morning despite a Williams BUGCON alert of 4 (invasion) out of 5. Despite an attempt to avoid the worst of the mosquitoes by sticking to the towpath west of the Whipple Bridge, about half of the 15 original birders rather wisely dropped out during the morning due to desanguination. As the trip coordinator, I arrived around 7:30 and spotted a LINCOLN'S SPARROW (my first-of-the-year) just across the Whipple Bridge, but we were unable to find it again after the group arrived. The best bird of the morning had to be the MERLIN spotted high in a tree along the towpath going west. All had good looks with binoculars or scope. Other highlights at the main preserve included a PIED-BILLED GREBE, a good flock of GREEN-WINGED TEAL, a few BLUE-WINGED TEAL, WOOD DUCKS, GREEN HERON, BLUE-HEADED VIREO, MAGNOLIA WARBLER, BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER, and PURPLE FINCH. Those of us who were still left drove to Ferry Drive and walked east, then, as a way to further escape the worst of the mosquitoes. Here one of the highlights was a SWAINSON'S THRUSH though most of us did not get a good look because 2 horseback riders happened to flush it at the worst possible time. We also had a BELTED KINGFISHER, PILEATED WOODPECKER, EASTERN TOWHEE, BLACKPOLL WARBLER, and another BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER.

In total the group had 47 species. This included a much-coveted "WOODPECKER 6-PACK" – that is, DOWNY, HAIRY, PILEATED,

NORTHERN FLICKER, RED-BELLIED, and YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER. The Sapsucker was not seen by all. And, if the trip coordinator includes the 3 extra species (LINCOLN'S SPARROW, COMMON YELLOWTHROAT, and ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK) he saw prior to the group arriving, it was an even 50 for the morning. I should also say that besides the stress of dealing with intolerable levels of mosquitoes this late in the season, it was disheartening to walk along the towpath and see a "pond" that is almost completely dry. There was little water for ducks. In the 9 years I have been birding at Vischer Ferry I have never seen the long pond along the towpath – which has been the most productive pond in the preserve-- this dry. Even worse is the fact that vegetation has quickly moved into some of the dry areas perhaps becoming permanent like what happened years ago at the back ponds.

— *John Hershey*

HMBC Field Trip at Five Rivers EEC October 10, 2010

Nineteen birders turned out on a frosty, but pleasant, fall morning at Five Rivers. I had arrived early and spent some time watching the crab orchard, where an immature SHARP-SHINNED HAWK was fixated on the idea of having a BLUE JAY for breakfast. It repeatedly chased the jays around the orchard, but they easily escaped into the interior of the crabapple trees each time. They did not seem very concerned, and continued to visit the feeders. As the group assembled in the parking lot, we had good scope views of an EASTERN BLUEBIRD perched in the

sunshine at the top of one of the tall spruces. As we headed out behind the orchard we encountered flocks of sparrows, the majority of them WHITE-THROATED. There were also immature WHITE-CROWNED, and at least one each of FIELD, SONG, and SWAMP SPARROWS, along with a few DARK-EYED JUNCOS. There were WOOD DUCKS in Goose Pond, including a male that gave us a fairly good scope view. Some members of the group saw RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET, GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET, RUSTY BLACKBIRD, HERMIT THRUSH, and BLUE-HEADED VIREO. We also had good looks at BROWN CREEPERS in two locations. At the Visitor Center feeders we added PURPLE FINCH and RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH to our list. In all, 45 species were tallied, including TURKEY VULTURE and CEDAR WAXWING, both of which were seen from the parking lot after we did the compilation and after most people had left.

— *John Kent*

Saratoga Battlefield October 16, 2020

On Saturday October 16, about 10 people spent an enjoyable morning birding the Saratoga Battlefield (a unit of Saratoga National Historical Park). We tallied a total of 31 species as we walked about two miles, mostly on the Wilkinson Trail. Of interest in the skies were a flock of about 50 DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS, along with two each of TURKEY VULTURE, NORTHERN HARRIER, and RED-TAILED HAWK. Woodpeckers included RED-BELLIED, DOWNY, HAIRY, NORTHERN FLICKER, and four PILEATED. The fields and edges were quite active with birds, including

about 25 each of EASTERN BLUEBIRD and AMERICAN GOLDFINCH. Sparrows included CHIPPING, FIELD, SONG, and WHITE-THROATED, and we picked up at least 5 YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER and two PALM WARBLERS. We also had an EASTERN PHOEBE, and at least one, perhaps two different individuals of HERMIT THRUSH. Many thanks to all who participated!

— *Scott Stoner and
Denise Hackert-Stoner*

Fall Social at Five Rivers October 17, 2010

On a breezy day in mid-October, a dozen members gathered at Five Rivers for an afternoon of birding, followed by a cook-out of hot dogs and hot chocolate. The wind worked to diminish the bird activity, with a total of only 27 species after 2 hours of birding. The spirits of the intrepid birders seemed to lift as they gathered around the roaring fire, however, and seemed even more enlivened after toasting marshmallows and consuming s'mores!

Some of the birds seen on this windy day were: YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER, WHITE-THROATED SPARROW, RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD, PURPLE FINCH, GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET, EASTERN PHOEBE, TURKEY VULTURE, and RED-BELLIED, DOWNY, HAIRY, and PILEATED WOODPECKERS, as well as NORTHERN FLICKER.

Our thanks go out to Gregg Recer, Alan Mapes, John Kent, and Don Gresens for helping out on this trip, and to everyone who attended.

— *Denise and Scott Stoner* 

Birding Western Jamaica — *continued*

the chocolate-breasted JAMAICAN WOODPECKER; and, startlingly, a tame-seeming BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER—just one of “our” warblers that winter there.

A final word – if you visit, do take the time to learn the local names for the birds. Besides adding a colorful dimension, I believe it was appreciated by Fritz as showing respect for Jamaican birding tradition, and it will be indispensable for communicating with your drivers. One of ours recounted childhood memories of being wakened by the Cling-Cling. We would have missed the point without knowing the Jamaican name for the raucous GREATER ANTILLEAN GRACKLE (they're everywhere).


RESOURCES:

Bird Songs in Jamaica (George B. Reynard and Robert L. Sutton) – 2 CD set available from Cornell University.

Birds of Jamaica (Audrey Downer and Robert Sutton, 1990) – field guide with photos

Birds of the West Indies (Herbert Raffaele et al., 2003) – field guide with illustrations; distribution maps for the area

Introduction to the Birds of Jamaica (R.G. Taylor, 1954) – monograph organized by habitat

Birds of Jamaica (Frank Bernal, 1989) – hand-painted illustrations, detailed descriptions 

Neophyte Wanderings in Southern Africa: Two weeks in Uganda, Madagascar and South Africa

Steve Mesick

HMBC Holiday Party and Program

Monday, December 6, 2010

7:00 p.m. at Five Rivers

Environmental Education Center,
Delmar

Steve Mesick, a physician practicing in the Albany area, has been interested in birding for about ten years when he and his son started going to the Five Rivers bird walks. He started to get involved with HMBC eight years ago when he became the adult leader of the HMBC Merlins - a youth team that participated in six of the last eight World Series of Birding hosted by the NJ Audubon Society. For five of those years he has been the Youth Coordinator for the club.

In May of 2010 he and his family spent 18 days in Uganda, Madagascar and South Africa and got to survey a little of each country. Join us as Steve shares pictures and stories from the trip!

Happy Holidays; bring a dessert to share if you wish.

Ornithological Research at the New York State Museum

Dr. Jeremy J. Kirchman, Curator of Birds, New York State Museum

Monday, January 3, 2011

7:00 p.m. at the Colonie Library

Dr. Jeremy Kirchman grew up in Illinois. He caught the ornithology bug as a college student when he worked on a field crew of bird surveyors in the Ozark Mountains. He earned a BA in Biology from Illinois Wesleyan University in 1994,

and a MS in Zoology from Louisiana State University in 1997, where he studied the population genetics of the Cave Swallow species complex. It was at LSU that Jeremy first became interested in museum specimen-based ornithology. From 1997-2000 he worked at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, and from 2000-2001 taught biology at Chicago's St. Gregory High School. In 2001 Jeremy returned to grad school and earned a Ph.D. in Zoology at the University of Florida in 2006. His advisor was Dr. David Steadman, Curator of Birds at the Florida Museum of Natural History, and his dissertation research was on the speciation and extinction of flightless rails on Pacific islands. Since 2006 Dr. Kirchman has been the Curator of Birds at the New York State Museum in Albany, NY, and Affiliate Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology at the State University of New York at Albany.

His research focuses on historical questions concerning the biogeography and evolution of birds. His goal is to document patterns of bird diversification and extinction over the last few million years and to understand the evolutionary processes that affect bird populations. He primarily makes use of DNA sequencing technology, including "ancient DNA" techniques, to examine genetic differences among populations. Since coming to the NYSM in 2006, he has worked to modernize the Ornithology Collection and to establish research projects on extinct North American bird species, and on birds that breed in isolated habitats such as the pitch pine-scrub oak barrens near Albany,

and the boreal forest "islands" at high elevations in the Catskills and Adirondacks.

His talk on January 3rd, entitled "Ornithological Research at the New York State Museum" will be an overview of ongoing research projects by himself, his students, and other collaborators. The talk will also include a behind-the-scenes look at the labs and the research collection at the NYSM.

Troy's Fastest Resident

Curt Morgan

Monday February 7, 2011

7:00 p.m. at the Colonie Library

From her hatching in Quincy Massachusetts to her successful fledging of eight young, Emma, the female peregrine Falcon, is not only Troy, New York's fastest resident; she is a part of the fastest species on the planet. To see her in action over the skies of the Capital Region is breathtaking. Join us to see Curt Morgan's presentation of this awesome wonder.

Curt Morgan grew up here in the Capital Region and has been birdwatching for 30 of those years. He has watched birds across New York and the Northeast, Florida, California, Arizona, Argentina, and Israel. After 400+ birds on his life list he has stopped counting. He has been doing some volunteer work for New York's Department of Environmental Conservation in monitoring the progress of local Peregrine Falcons. Curt and his wife Linda live in West Sand Lake, New York and he is the founding pastor of East Ridge Community Church now located at the former Sand Lake Elementary School.

All About Bluebirds - and More**John Rogers**

Monday, March 7, 2011

7:00 p.m. at the Colonie Library

This quality PowerPoint presentation encompasses the life history of the Eastern Bluebird, nest box management, other birds that nest in bluebird boxes, and more. The focus is on bluebirds, but John also shares his passion for the natural world. With visually beautiful photographs, sounds, and a sincere, enthusiastic presentation style, this program is of interest to anyone who appreciates nature.

John Rogers has maintained an extensive trail of bluebird nest boxes north of Syracuse for over 35 years, and has fledged over 12,200 Eastern Bluebirds. He is a recognized authority on bluebird trail management, and has done slide programs and workshops for hundreds of groups including in ten states and two Canadian provinces. John was a cofounder of the New York State Bluebird Society in 1982 and elected a lifetime (volunteer) director in 2002. He is a recipient of the John and Nora Lane Bluebird Conservation Award from the North American Bluebird Society, and a past board member of that organization. John is a member of the Onondaga Audubon Society near Syracuse. He received a BA in Biology from SUNY Oswego.

HMBC Literary Night

Monday, April 4, 2011

7:00 p.m. at the Colonie Library

The Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club will host a literary event at 7:00 p.m. on April 4th at the Colonie Town

Library. If you have a favorite short piece of nature writing, either self-composed or by one of your favorite writers, you are invited to read it to the group. We also welcome listeners so don't feel you have to come prepared to read. If you would like to bring a dessert to share with the group you are more than welcome to do so!

Tropical Birds Do the Coolest Things**Mark Garland****Annual Meeting and Dinner**

Wednesday, April 27, 2011

Century House, 997 New Loudon Road (Route 9), Latham

HMBC MEMBERS will receive a separate mailing in late winter with the details of this event. If you are not a member, please join!

Mark Garland is a free-lance naturalist and founder of a small company that plans, organizes, and conducts nature-oriented tours, classes, workshops, and presentations. He previously worked 4 years as Senior Naturalist for the Cape May Bird Observatory and, before that, for 17 years as Senior Naturalist with the Audubon Naturalist Society. He teaches Elderhostel Birding sessions in Cape May, serves as Nature Editor for the Metro Connection program on Washington's public radio station (WAMU). He taught for many years at the Hog Island Audubon Camp on the Maine Coast. He has led over 200 birding and nature tours to destinations on 4 continents. He is a frequent speaker at birding festivals, clubs, and other venues. He lives in West Cape May, NJ, where he is currently an

Associate Naturalist with the Cape May Bird Observatory.

His program, "*Tropical Birds Do the Coolest Things*" looks at some of the fascinating behaviors and activities of many birds found in tropical regions of the Americas and Africa. It's truly a celebration of the beauty and wonder of birds.

Looking further ahead – details will follow as available.


Victor Lamoureux – Monday May 2, 2011, 7:00 p.m. at the Colonie Library

Birding Namibia with Gregg Recer – Monday June 6, 2011, 7:00 p.m. at the Colonie Library

A Year with Nature in Western New York with Tim Baird – Monday September 12, 2011, 7:00 p.m. at the Colonie Library

Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch with Andy Mason – Monday October 3, 2011, 7:00 p.m. at the Colonie Library

Short-eared Owls with John Polunci – Monday November 7, 2011, 7:00 p.m. at the Colonie Library


Holiday Party, program to be announced – Monday December 5, 2011, Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Delmar, 7:00 p.m. 



As of this writing (mid-November), a pelagic trip out of Freeport, Long Island, is being planned in conjunction with NYSOA and the NYSOA Young Birders Group. The boat will leave early the morning of February 13 and travel in search of birds such as dovekie, murre, jaegers, skua, gannet, gulls, and puffins. A variety of sea ducks like eider, scoter, and long-tails are highly probable, too.

This will be an all day excursion. A workshop on sea bird identification will be given by a local expert the evening prior to the trip. In case the ocean is too rough to go out, excursions to Long Island hot spots will be offered as a substitute. Note that this will be an expensive trip because of the cost of the boat. It is also highly recommended that you plan to spend at least the night before the 13th near the boat dock.

Warm clothes with a waterproof outer layer are required as well as seasickness preventative.

A definite statement about the trip, its timing, and cost will be posted on HMBirds and the Club's website as soon as available, but the deadline for reservations is January 15, 2011. Contact Bill Lee at 374-3426 or bileej@hotmail.com for reservations and details. 

Did You Hear the Myth About the Hummingbird?

I've been keeping a list of bird-related myths for quite a while now.

When I first opened the shop, I'd hear some of these on an almost daily basis. With so much information and so many people observing birds, most of these myths have gone by the wayside, but some still persist.

For instance, less than 20 years ago it would be routine for me to hear someone state that hummingbirds didn't perch.

I'm not sure where that one came from, maybe it's because you can't see their feet all that well when they fly. Or maybe it's because they belong to the order Apodiformes: 'A' meaning without, 'pod' meaning feet. Of course hummingbirds do have feet, but they weren't made for walking. The best they can do is shimmy along a perch if they land too far away from the feeder hole. However they can use their stubby little legs to reach over a wing to scratch their heads. I haven't heard this for years,

but at first I was laughed at when I tried to sell a hummingbird feeder with perches.

Then came the short-lived myth that you had to remove the perches to keep the birds flying while they fed.

The theory was when a hummer drank cold nectar in the morning, it got something akin to a super brain freeze and could die. If hummers had to hover, they would generate heat and wouldn't drink too much, too fast. The biggest problem for me was that the best hummingbird feeders on the market don't have removable perches, so people thought they had to buy more expensive, harder-to-clean feeders, just so they could remove the perches during cold periods. I'm glad this myth has disappeared. I don't miss it.

Did you hear the one about the hummingbirds migrating south on the backs of Canada Geese?

Raise your hand if you've ever believed this to be true. This used to

be a common myth, one I'd often have to politely debunk several times a day. I don't think anyone still believes this but, just in case... It's now the first of September and most of our hummingbirds have left. The geese, however, (except for our non-migratory imported Ontario geese), aren't here yet. I think hunting season starts sometime in October and runs almost until Christmas, when our migrating geese head out, so even if a hummer could hitch one up and ride it south, they don't leave at the same time of the year.

Which leads me to the next myth and the reason I'm writing about myths this week. This one is alive and well. I'm getting a couple of calls a day asking when the feeders should be taken down so the hummingbirds will migrate.

The answer is you don't have to take them down: the birds will migrate on their own even if there is a great source of free nectar, they've been doing it for centuries, it's in their

genes. Hummingbirds migrate in response to the shortening day length, and sunlight sure does dwindle in August. From the first to the last, we lose 1 hour and 45 minutes of light. If that doesn't send all migratory birds on their way, it at least has them packing their bags. So, if your neighbour leans over the fence and says, "Yep, you better get those feeders put away," volunteer to come over and mow down all his remaining flowers. You wouldn't want them to keep the hummers from migrating.

We still have all our feeders out, and all but a handful have left. The next time we clean them, we will only put out a few and later only one or two of our most conspicuous feeders so any late travelers coming through from further north can stop a while and refuel. This is also the time to be looking for any species other than the ruby-throated, as it tends to be quite late in the season when they show up.

There are still some questions around red food colouring in hummingbird nectar.

I think it's agreed on that the new red color isn't harmful, but if you're using a commercial hummingbird feeder and not the kid's hamster bottle, it likely has quite a bit of red on it. If the hummers don't see that, it's unlikely that red nectar is going to make that much difference. The strongest arguments I can come up with for not coloring are: if you spill it in the house or on your deck, instead of a sticky mess you have a sticky mess and a red stain. And if you leave the jug of red nectar in the fridge, your kids will drink it.

Probably the most persistent myth ever is the old "birds choke on peanut butter."

Even though there is no evidence of this ever happening, the myth won't die. It likely lives on because at the end of every mention about peanut butter not being harmful to birds, they say, "But if you're still worried about choking birds, mix in some corn meal."

You don't have to mix it: some birds love straight peanut butter. I've actually seen a nuthatch pick the cornmeal out of the mix and drop it to the ground. I wish birds did like corn meal; it's much cheaper than the other ingredients that go into suet cakes.

Last fall I had the bottom of a container break out and about 20 gallons of peanut butter plopped out on my driveway. For the next week a mixed flock of about 200 blackbirds, blue jays, my dog, some raccoons and I think at least one skunk, feasted. Not even one blackbird required the Heimlich. In fact, the only things I noticed that were different were a very soft luxuriant coat and some interesting bowel movements on the part of the dog.

The resident squirrel did have a mental breakdown trying to get all that peanut butter for himself. I don't think he slept for a week. He still twitches when he walks by the spot.

I still get the "birds feet stick to metal perches" one quite regularly but, fact is, they don't.

I've found a few reasons for this: birds don't have sweat glands in their feet. If they did, why would they be

sweating on a day when their feet would freeze down?

Another reason has to do with birds having natural heat exchangers in their feet to conserve body heat, so the warm foot won't stick to the cold metal. Whatever the reason, it's obvious that their feet won't stick to metal. You see hundreds of birds perched on uninsulated hydro wires, wire fences, metal railings, etc. I had one otherwise intelligent customer refuse to buy a high quality feeder because it had metal perches. But he did buy a four-arm iron hanger. I almost blew it when I asked how he kept the birds from landing on the hanger while awaiting a turn on the plastic feeders.

— Dwayne Biggar

Dwayne Biggar's column appears every Saturday in the Times & Transcript, a newspaper in Moncton, New Brunswick. He can be reached at:

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thebirdgarden@rogers.com.*

It all started with a 50-pound bag of black oil sunflower seed; two bags, in fact. Being short on seed we had decided to take advantage of a sale at the local hardware store, and bought an extra bag. Filling our seed bin with the contents of the first bag we were faced with the dilemma of what to do with the second. Being short on time and long on reasons to procrastinate, we deferred the decision-making process, leaving the second bag of seed in our enclosed porch while we gave ourselves time to consider our options.

Not too many nights thereafter, in the dusky darkness of late autumn, we heard and felt a distinct crunching under our feet as we walked through the porch to bring the day's compost to our bin in the backyard. Turning on the porch light we were appalled (but not completely surprised) to find the floor strewn with the small black shells of sunflower seeds, and two rather large holes in the bag, one near the top and the other near the bottom. Mice? Big mice? Lots of mice? We had been invaded, that much was clear. Now our hand was forced, and our work cut out for us for the next day, Saturday.

Early in the morning, armed with broom and dustpan, we headed out to the porch to sweep and clean the floor and to put our delayed plan into action. Dragging out a large, heavy-gauge plastic yard waste bin, we filled it with the uneaten sunflower seed, carefully sealing the lid to prevent any further invasions. Upon opening the porch door, we were greeted by a large, fluffy gray

tail making a quick exit through a very new and hitherto unnoticed hole in our porch screen. Squirrels! That explained the large holes in the bag and the large amount of seed on the floor!


The enemy being thus identified we sprang into action. As one of us cleaned up the new mess on the porch the other took the breached screen to the hardware store for repair. Satisfied with a job well done, we headed back indoors for a late breakfast.

Over tea and pancakes we peered through our window, scanning the backyard for birds and enjoying the foliage. Our reverie was interrupted by some activity on the patio. Within about ten minutes the adversary had discovered the seed barrel, easily dislodged the fastened-on lid, and was enjoying his own breakfast, with some of his companions.

After a brief strategy session we went to plan B. The lid was placed back securely on the barrel, with a large rock placed in the middle of it. There, we thought. Let them try to push *that* off! There were other tasks that day, and we put our minds to those, glancing out the window occasionally to see that the rock was still holding on the lid of the barrel. It always was. But what was that squirrel doing next to the barrel on the patio? He certainly appeared to be eating. It was then we discovered that the enemy had out-maneuvered us once more! Having chewed a small hole near the bottom of the barrel he was feasting again. Time for the big guns.

Making the most of our superior brain power and opposable thumbs, we first covered the breach with duct tape. Then we reinforced the repair with a cage which we made out of strong screening material, wrapping it all around the barrel, making it quite impenetrable, even to the impressive incisors of our foe. Rock on top, cage all around. This seed might as well be defended at Fort Knox, or guarded under the watchful eyes of the Swiss Guard! Quite satisfied with ourselves we continued to go about our other tasks, when another peek out the back window brought our victorious mood crashing down. With a look on his face that seemed to say "thanks for the handy ladder," the squirrel, having scurried up the cage, was now sitting atop the lid of the barrel, a freshly-chewed hole at his feet, nibbling on the sunflower seed he held in his hands. Finishing that seed, he scurried through the hole in the lid, returning a moment later with another seed.

The barrel, the lid, the rock, the cage, the human ingenuity that devised plan after plan; none were any match for the persistence of this small rodent who, sensing the approach of winter would stop at nothing to fatten up on these prized seeds. We had to admire him. As we transferred the seeds into smaller containers that would more easily fit inside our porch with windows now closed over the screens, we threw a large handful out on the ground of our backyard. A truce, of sorts, and a nod to the best-laid plans.

— Denise Stoner 

It was the evening of June 18, 2010. We planned to do a nice evening birding trip that night, but had grown tired of checking out the area's birding hotspots. We wanted something different. Consulting our atlas, we found a seemingly remote pond not far from us in the rural village of Greenfield Center called Granite Lake (despite the name, this is more of a pond or even a large marsh than a lake). We headed out there that night. Even before we found any birds, we knew we had come across a special place. Granite is your classic Adirondack waterway, with clear water, rugged terrain, and dense forest cover stretching for miles around it. It also has some good birds. We found CEDAR WAXWINGS, GREAT BLUE HERON, and a NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH along the water. In the woods, we noted a host of forest birds, including VEERY,

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE, and GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER. We only stayed a short time, but had compiled an impressive list by the time of our departure.

We returned again on the evening of June 27th, with even better results. We found most of the birds from the last visit again, this time adding COMMON RAVEN, RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD, BELTED KINGFISHER, and a beautiful male COMMON YELLOWTHROAT.

Our third and final trip to the lake was recent, on September 25. We hit it at the height of fall migration, and though there were no warbler fallouts or rarities, this was still our best Granite excursion thus far. We saw and heard a SWAINSON'S THRUSH, along with a lingering NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH and COMMON RAVEN. Several waves of migrants included

the following birds, most of them in numbers: BLUE-HEADED VIREO, EASTERN PHOEBE, BROWN CREEPER, BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER, BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER, and RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET. We finished the day with 25 species, boosting our "lake list" to 40 species over just three visits.

While we have now uncovered a place that has long deserved to be uncovered, Granite Lake still remains relatively unexplored. We've still never spent a good May morning there. Someone else will have to do that, if we don't get to it. Even if you find nothing, Granite Lake is one of the most aesthetically pleasing places to bird in the region, and one that you're sure to remember long after your birding is done.

— Steve and Brett Abrahamsen

Upcoming Field Trips

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DECEMBER

NIGHT OWLS AND HOT DOGS

Saturday, December 11, 3:30 p.m.
Five Rivers Environmental
Education Center

This is a joint trip of Five Rivers, HMBC and the Audubon Society of the Capital Region. Field parties will visit likely owl roosts along Five Rivers trails, then gather at a roaring campfire to compare findings. Complimentary hot dogs and hot drinks will answer the question "who cooks for you?" A hot fire, hot dogs and hot chocolate are always guaranteed; last year the owls were a distinct bonus! Please call the Center at (518) 475-0291 to register by Wednesday, December 8, 2010.

SCHENECTADY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Saturday, December 18
Coordinator: Bill Lee

SOUTHERN RENSSELAER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Monday, December, 27
Coordinator: Philip Whitney

JANUARY 2011

TROY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Sunday, January, 2, 2011
Coordinator: Larry Alden

Feathers

Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club
c/o Five Rivers EEC
Game Farm Road
Delmar, NY 12054

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