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Feathers

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A BIRD IN THE HAND, BY JEFF SCHOONMAKER



The first time I saw a Chickadee fly to a person's hand, I was stunned. I could hardly believe my eyes. How could a small wild creature be that fearless of a giant? I soon discovered that Chickadees are bold and inquisitive birds, and they are one of the easiest birds to coax onto one's hand.

Years passed, a family got raised, a house got purchased with a spacious back yard, and bird feeders got put up. One day my memory was jogged. There were Chickadees frequenting my feeders, and I wondered if I could get one to come to my hand. It only took about 15 minutes. I put some black oil sunflower seeds on my open hand and placed it right next to the edge of the feeder. A Chickadee, surprised by the giant standing next to its feeding place, flew away without stopping a few times. Then it stopped at the feeder a couple of times. Finally, it noticed that there was a supply of its favorite seed right out in the open. It wouldn't have to find one amidst the more abundant tiny, round, tan seeds. So, on its next trip, it landed on my fingertip, grabbed a seed, and flew off. Seeing it that close to my face, hearing its wingbeats, and feeling its tiny toes on my fingertip was extraordinary. The Chickadee returned to my hand many times, each time bringing a broad smile to my face.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

There is no President's Corner column this month.

You, too, can contribute to Feathers!

- Do you have a birding story or photos that might be of interest to other birders?
- Have you led a field trip for HMBC?
- Have you written short prose or poetry on the subject of birds? We're starting a Writers' Page!
- Did you take a birding vacation?
- Do you have a favorite birding spot?

SHARE them with HMBC members by submitting them to:

HMBC Contact Information

BIRDLINE of EASTERN NEW YORK:

E-mail: contact@hmbc.net

HMBC website: <http://hmbc.net>

Please send all **electronic submissions for Feathers** via e-mail to:
Denise Hackert-Stoner at DeniseHStoner@aol.com.

Send all paper submissions to:

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New printing of *Birding New York's Hudson Mohawk Region* is now available

Birding New York's Hudson Mohawk Region, a new printing of HMBC's classic book, is now available. A copy is \$20 for HMBC members and \$25 for non-members. An additional charge of \$5 for postage and handling will be added to the price per book. Contact Gregg Recer gregg_recer@alum.rpi.edu or (518) 899-2678 if you are interested in purchasing a copy. Checks should be made out to ***Hudson Mohawk Bird Club*** and should be sent to:

Gregg Recer

23 Scotch Mist Way

Malta, NY 12020

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

COVID-19 Response Update, September 25, 2020: The HMBC Board has decided to cancel all club field trips until further notice. One possible exception to this may be the 2020 Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). Guidance from the National Audubon Society indicates that the decision whether or not to hold each count is up to the individual count compilers, and NAS recommends waiting until after November 15th to make that decision based on the pandemic conditions at that time. Announcement of the status of the three HMBC CBCs will be made after that date. HMBC virtual programs will continue via Zoom until further notice. We will continue to monitor New York State Executive Orders and guidance related to social-distancing requirements. As the details of orders and guidance are revised, we will re-evaluate whether or not to hold subsequent events. Please check hmbc.net frequently for any updates.

ARTIST PAGE, SNOWY EGRET BY NETTYE LAMKAY

This watercolor was inspired by a photo taken by Gregg Recer

WRITERS PAGE

Great Horned Owl

By: Marilyn Hamecher - 3/25/21

Great Horned Owls are not fussy about what they eat.
They will eat just about anything, all treated as a treat.
They've been documented eating porcupines and house cats,
weasels, hawks, skunks, other owls, bullheads and bobcats.

We are all curious about the extraordinary world of Owls.
They are masterful hunters, with a soft five-hoots howl.
They'll sit motionless in a tall Oak, waiting for their prey.
They never get antsy; they just sit quietly and stay.

Their diversity helps them to live in a wide variety of habitats.
They are clueless about nest building and never use welcome mats.
They select old buildings, barns, cliffs, ledges and large flower pots.
Location means nothing; nesting on bridges and other crazy spots.

The myth surrounding the Great Horned Owl is a head turner.
It can turn its head to look directly behind itself but no further.
She'll lay 2 -3 eggs, incubation begins with the 1st born owlet baby.
Owlets grow fast; eat like pigs, ready to fly at 10-12 wks maybe.

The first year of their life is the most difficult and hardest to survive.
They must rely on Mama to provide them with food that's half alive.
Once they've reached adulthood, survival rates are extremely good.
They have no natural predators in their quiet Owl neighborhood.

GH Owls eyes are so large they cannot move their eye sockets at all.
Unlike humans, this is why they turn their heads around on call.
Their long fluffy neck feathers keep their necks in the shape of an "S".
It makes them look like they don't have a neck, that's my best guess.

Female GH Owls are heavier than the males, I like the way that sounds.
In captivity, Iris a fairly large Great Horned Owl, weighed in at 4.4lbs.
In the wild, the oldest GH Owl was documented at 28 years old.
In captivity, it's noted that a female turned age 50, so we are told.

Great Horned Owl – Hoot..Hoot..Hoot.... Hoot..Hoot

ON NATURE

Winter of Finches, by Scott Stoner

I think we can all agree that this past winter has brought a remarkable irruption of “winter finches” to our area. Some of us have had more luck with them than others, and some sightings are continuing as birds that moved south of us are now passing through on their northbound return.

“Winter finches” is a collective term for Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, Pine Grosbeaks, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Red Crossbills, White-winged Crossbills, and Evening Grosbeaks. Many of these live in the forests of Canada, consuming the fruits and seeds of boreal trees to survive the winter. However, this food supply is cyclical, driving masses of birds south in search of sustenance when there is a major food crop failure. Such an “irruption” occurred this winter, driven by both boom and bust, as high levels of food led to a surge in bird populations in the 2020 breeding season, followed by a crash in winter food supply. More than a typical irruption, with every species of boreal finch pouring out of the forests and heading south in search of food, this year’s event has been termed a “superflight” by finch researchers! (Audubon.org)

My own interest in winter finches began as a child on Long Island, where we occasionally had colorful Evening Grosbeaks at our backyard feeders, and one winter a couple dozen amazingly tame Red Crossbills. I could practically walk up to them at a platform feeder on our deck!



Evening Grosbeak

Folks here in the Capital Region have experienced mixed success with these sought-after finches at their feeders. Denise and I have had exactly one – and only one – winter finch in our yard: a lone Common Redpoll on February 6, 2021!

ON NATURE *(CONTINUED)*

But other lucky birders have enjoyed visits from many species, including Hoary Redpoll, Red Crossbill, and Evening Grosbeak! Non-residential locations have provided opportunities for sightings as well. For example, Five Rivers EEC in Delmar had several Common Redpolls, with a flock of several dozen of this species near the Albany International Airport.



Common Redpoll at Five Rivers, Feb 2021

The Albany Pine Bush has had consistent reports of Red Crossbills at several locations, including the Madison Avenue Pinelands (Trailhead 7) and Blueberry Hill West (Trailhead 5). Flocks of Pine Grosbeaks were viewable in Queensbury, Salem (including a male), and a neighborhood in Saratoga County.



Pine Grosbeak, Queensbury, November 29, 2020

ON NATURE *(CONTINUED)*



Pine Grosbeak, Salem, December 7, 2020



White-winged Crossbill, winter 2018

Many of these great birds have already headed back north, but Red Crossbills remain in scattered locations, and one can always hope for an Evening Grosbeak, so keep watch at your feeders for a bit longer, and please post your sightings!

For much more on this year's superlight of winter finches, tune in to the HMBC's May 3 online monthly program by Matthew Young, founder of the Finch Research Network! Check them out at www.finchnetwork.org or find The Finchmasters on Facebook.

A Bird in the Hand *(continued...)*

Some months later, on a warm October day in the late afternoon, I tried it again. By that time, I had seen a Tufted Titmouse come to a tourist's hand at the beginning of the Beech Forest Trail at Rouse's Point on Cape Cod. On that October day in my yard I had a variety of birds at the feeder, so I stationed myself by it and offered pure sunflower seeds as before. The Chickadees came first. Then a Tufted Titmouse caught on to what was happening and landed on my hand. Wow! But the best was yet to come. I was totally surprised and thrilled when a Red-breasted Nuthatch joined the other two and started making repeated trips to my hand for easy sunflower pickings! That darling bird seemed to look up at me each time, and it always made a faint, short, nasally sound every time it took off. I lingered there for a long time as members of all three species took turns flying to and from my outstretched hand. I'll never forget it.

There was no one to photograph the event that day, but I have since had those and other birds come to my hand as my wife was ready with a camera. Here are two of my favorites, taken in other places.



Review of “Falcon Freeway” by Christian Hagenlocher by Jeff Schoonmaker

BOOK REVIEW by Jeff Schoonmaker

If you read and liked Kenn Kaufmann’s “Kingbird Highway,” you will like Christian Hagenlocher’s “Falcon Freeway,” a title cleverly structured to mirror Kenn’s ground-breaking big year book. Also a big year book, Christian’s 310 pages chronicle his solitary quest to try to see 700 birds in North America in a single year, 2016, at the age of 26 and single. Like Kenn, he would be birding on a budget.

As is always true of such books, the author recounts his travels and the most significant birds he found in places both well-known and never heard of. That would be enough to keep anyone enjoyably reading it all the way to the end. But this book is filled with a number of other fascinating elements which permeate the bird-finding narrative, making it an especially engrossing story.

Since hitchhiking was no longer an option in 2016, Christian drove thousands of miles in his old Subaru, often sleeping in Walmart parking lots. When he had to fly, he flew standby to get the cheapest rates. Parents and friends helped out financially at times, and they occasionally provided a home-cooked meal and lodging as he passed through.

He didn’t start out to do a Big Year. He was paid a modest sum to get video footage of rare birds in January for a wildlife cameraman he’d been working for in 2015. Sometime in February he realized he’d already seen so many birds that he thought he’d have a shot at seeing 700 if he committed himself to doing a Big Year. That bold decision launched him into the birding adventure of a lifetime!

Throughout the book the reader is treated to very well-written accounts of rare and special birds seen at great expense of time and often grueling effort, as well as rare and special birds *not* seen at great expense of time and often grueling effort! In both cases, Christian has a talent for writing suspensefully, leaving the reader never knowing whether each individual quest will turn out successfully or not.

Not wanting his Big Year to be all about himself, he planned it to be “centered around four major ideas.” He wanted to “Engage with the birding community, “Preserve bird habitat in urban and rural areas,” “Inspire and motivate others,” and “Connect people. . . with one other . . . and to birds, using technology in a responsible way.” On social media he called it The Birding Project. Interesting accounts of how he pursued these four goals are woven seamlessly among his bird finding adventures.

It’s not giving away much to divulge that Christian made it to 700 birds. But when he did, and there was still a lot of year left, he wondered, if he kept pushing hard, if he could possibly break the then-record of 749 birds seen by Neil Hayward in 2013 (see “Lost Among the Birds,” copywrite 2016 by Bloomsbury). This review will leave you in suspense about that quest!

Upcoming HMBC Programs

When: Monday, April 12 - Business meeting 6:30PM Program 7:30PM

Location: Via Zoom – watch for email with link to connect

Speaker: Jon Atwood

Annual Meeting Presentation: The California Gnatcatcher Story

In the 1990's, the most publicized debate over the US Endangered Species Act concerned protections for the Northern Spotted Owl, with timber companies and loggers pitted against owls living in stands of old forest located mainly on National Forest lands. Yet there was also a concurrent argument over proposed listing of the coastal California Gnatcatcher. Unlike the owl, this small gray songbird occurs on some of the country's most expensive private real estate, introducing a very different dynamic to the Endangered Species Act debate.

This presentation will explore the background of this contentious issue, including how Atwood's seemingly esoteric study of gnatcatcher taxonomy turned into a conservation discussion that continues to this day. Has protection of the California Gnatcatcher catalyzed a new way of accomplishing the goals of the Endangered Species Act?

Jon Atwood is Director of Bird Conservation at Mass Audubon in Lincoln, Massachusetts. He has been a practicing ornithologist and conservation biologist for 40 years, specializing in integrating behavioral studies of rare and endangered bird species with habitat conservation planning. After completing his Master's and Doctoral degrees in southern California, he moved to the East coast in 1986. While working at Manomet Bird Observatory (now "Manomet") during the early 1990's he collaborated in the analysis of the first 30 years of Manomet's landbird banding effort, spearheaded federal protection of the California Gnatcatcher under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, led a long-term study of factors affecting Least Tern colony site selection, and contributed to early studies of Bicknell's Thrush in New England. From 1998-2011 he directed the Conservation Biology Program at Antioch University, New England, taught classes in Ornithology, Ecological Research Design, and GIS, and mentored over 70 graduate students working on various wildlife studies. During 2011-2013 he was Science Director at Biodiversity Research Institute in southern Maine. He has worked for Mass Audubon since 2014.



Upcoming HMBC Programs *(Continued...)*

When: Wednesday, April 7, 2021, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

Location: Via Zoom (link below)

Speaker: Julie Hart, Coordinator, NY Breeding Bird Atlas

Topic: Breeding Bird Atlas Town Hall

Join Julie Hart (Atlas coordinator), Ian Davies (eBird project coordinator), and the Atlas Regional Coordinators to explore Atlas progress, how to get involved, and how to enjoy breeding birds this spring and summer.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://syracuseuniversity.zoom.us/j/96423839543?pwd=MHlyYjhrSHBOMXFzbzduc3NYV3U4QT09>

Meeting ID: 964 2383 9543

Passcode: 453337

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+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

Meeting ID: 964 2383 9543

Find your local number: <https://syracuseuniversity.zoom.us/u/ax0zvOwUZ>

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Julie Hart

Pronouns: she/her/hers

New York Breeding Bird Atlas III Project Coordinator

SUNY ESF | [New York Natural Heritage Program](#)

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Upcoming HMBC Programs *(Continued...)*

When: Monday, May 3, 2021, 6:30 -8:00 PM

Location: Via Zoom (watch for email with link)

Speaker: Matt Young

Topic: From Finches to FiRN (Finch Research Network)

Matt has been observing and enjoying nature since a very young age. He's lived in Central New York the past 23 years and it was during this time when he really started studying everything from birds to orchids, and bogs and fens. Matt received his B.S. in Water Resources with a minor in Meteorology from SUNY-Oneonta and his M.S. in Ornithology from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry/Syracuse University in 2003. Matt did his masters research on avian diversity in restored wetlands of central New York at the Great Swamp Conservancy. He was a Regional Editor of the Kingbird for 10 years, the state ornithological journal in New York, was an Adjunct Professor in Environmental Studies at SUNY-Cortland, and currently teaches an Intro to Birding class for Cornell University and is the Board Chair at The Wetland Trust.

He worked at the Cornell Lab across 15+ years where he did extensive field work for the Lab's Cerulean and Golden-winged Warblers atlas projects, and was project lead on the Lab's first Finch Irruptive Bird Survey for Bird Source in 1999. He was the Collections Management Leader/Audio Engineer at the Macaulay Library ~12 years where he edited sounds for several Merlin packs around the world in addition to being the lead audio engineer on guides, the Songs of the Warblers of North America, Audubon Society Voices of Hawaii's Birds, and the Cornell Lab's Guides to Bird Sounds, the North America Master and Essential Sets. He's been a tour guide leader for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, written finch species accounts for breeding bird atlases and Birds of the World, has published several papers about the Red Crossbill vocal complex, and is the President and Founder of the Finch Research Network (FiRN).



Evening Grosbeaks

Upcoming HMBC Programs *(Continued...)*

When: June 7, 2021, 6:30 – 8:00 PM

Location: Via Zoom (watch for email with link)

Speaker: Mark Garland

Topic: 101 Great Birds From Around the World

Details to follow!

Feathers

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