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Feathers

ALASKAN ODYSSEY

by Jeff Schoonmaker

This summer my wife and I fulfilled a dream we have had for years. On June 7 we flew to Anchorage, rented a car, and drove 224 miles to the McKinley Creekside Cabins, just 13 miles south of the entrance to Denali National Park.

We stayed four nights in cabin 27 right next to a fast-flowing stream. I walked the trail behind the cabins every morning and on a couple of evenings. Dawn and dusk both last for hours there, making it a challenge to know when the birds might be most active. I was thrilled to see two Boreal Chickadees on one of those walks. On an evening walk I startled a large gray hawk from its perch. It's sudden and noisy departure startled me, too! It flew off a ways, but then stopped while calling repeatedly. I crept up and peaked around a tree. Then I spotted it at the very top of a nearby tree, still sounding off. I watched it through binoculars for a short while before it flew away for good. I checked the call it made on my iPod back at the cabin and confirmed my suspicion. It was a Northern Goshawk! That made 2 fabulous life birds for me right on the trail behind our cabin. That's my kind of birding! (continued on page 81)

PELAGIC BIRDING IN NEW ZEALAND

by Gregg Recer

When Cathy Graichen and I set our sights on a birding tour to New Zealand (NZ for short), we had some preconceived ideas about what the main draws would be: spectacular mountain and coastal scenery, lots of island endemic species (and even endemic families), the namesake kiwis, the famed southern beech forests. (continued on page 85)

Inside This Issue...

Alaskan Odyssey.....	63
Pelagic Birding in New Zealand.....	63
President's Corner.....	64
HMBC Birding Guide.....	66
Reist Sanctuary.....	67
Field Trip Reports.....	69
Upcoming HMBC Programs	71
Upcoming Audubon Programs.....	74
NYSOA Workshop.....	75
Switzkill Farm, Berne.....	76
Writers' Page.....	78
On Nature.....	79
Upcoming Field Trips.....	90

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

HMBC Needs Leadership Volunteers

The main news from the July HMBC Board meeting is that Vice President Ron Harrower and Board Member Carol Blackwell informed the board that, for personal reasons, they had to step down from the Board. On behalf of the Board, I want to thank them for their dedication to HMBC and to Club leadership, and wish them well into the future.

The Club By-laws allows for Board vacancies to be filled on an interim basis by authorizing the Board to directly appoint successors until the next general election is held. So, we are seeking volunteers at least for these interim positions. Beyond that, I am in the final year of the three consecutive years authorized for any one person to hold the Club Presidency, and it is always possible that other Board vacancies may need to be filled next spring.

I want to avoid sounding too alarmist, but I feel like HMBC leadership is at a crossroads. Based on recent past experience seeking board candidates, the prospect of replacing 3 or 4 Board positions, including potentially both the President and VP, is daunting. Many active Club members appear to be unwilling to help out with day-to-day running of the Club. To put it bluntly, we need people to step up or it's entirely possible that this organization will simply not have the leadership necessary to function. I think it's particularly important that we get newer and younger Club members involved in the organization's leadership if it's going to remain healthy into the future.

There is something of a paradox here: HMBC activities continue to be well-attended. Monthly programs are varied and engaging, and they always draw good crowds. We continue to run a large number of successful field trips that are well attended, and really are way beyond what most clubs across NYS support. It's obvious from HMBirds that the birding community in the region is very active and continues to attract new people. But, despite all that positive energy, there appears to be diminishing interest in volunteering to help out with the day-to-day management and leadership needed to keep all this and other basics functions of the corporation going (and HMBC is a corporation; a legally-incorporated not-for-profit). I

know it may seem like a tedious chore, and it's certainly not sexy, but it's really not particularly onerous. We meet six times a year for a couple of hours. We take care of basic day-to-day functions like tracking income and expenses, and assuring regular activities are going smoothly. A lot of what I do is making sure we continue to have the people engaged who we need to make our various activities as successful as they are. As a way to help support the Club's overall mission of supporting birding and bird-related conservation and education in the region, it's really not very much of an effort or a big time investment. And yet, there is a lot of resistance to volunteering for even this modest commitment. I am hoping that I can convince some of you to give it a try.

So, if you're interested in helping out, I'd really appreciate hearing from you. Just drop me an email at: gregg_recer@alum.rpi.edu. As the old recruiting posters said, we really do need YOU! Thanks.

Gregg Recer, HMBC President.

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:

Denise Hackert-Stoner

6 Knob Hill Road.

Loudonville,

NY

12211

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

REIST SANCTUARY NEEDS CLUB MEMBERS HELP

As HMBC members know, the Club owns the Reist Sanctuary in the Town of Niskayuna. The 111-acres includes native hardwoods, a red pine plantation and swampy areas providing habitat for woodland species. If you have not visited, the terrain is relatively flat and crisscrossed with several trails. The Yellow Trail begins at the Kelly Adirondack Center of Union College, with incorporates the former homestead of Adirondack conservationist Paul Schaefer.

Part of the Club's mission is to preserve and maintain the Reist Sanctuary. We need your help. Please visit the Sanctuary. Take a walk through the preserve. Tell us what birds you see and hear. Also tell us about the preserve itself:

- Are the trails in good shape?
- Is maintenance needed for signs, trail markers, bridges or trees?
- What can HMBC do to make the preserve better? (More benches, changes in the trails, additional signage?)

As previous Chairs of the HMBC Reist Preserve Committee and stewards of the preserve, Carl George and Mike Gann did great work! The trails are much improved with greater accessibility and information about the natural features of the property. I don't have their experience and expertise. I need some assistance. If you can you donate some time and energy to help maintain the preserve, or have some ideas on how we can help sustain this treasure, please contact me.

Philip Johnson
(ptjohnson11@gmail.com)

(see Reist Sanctuary map, below)



Watch for site markers and refer to the field guide for interesting information about these Paul Schaefer Yellow Trail sites. Yellow posting signs list Sanctuary rules and regulations.

The H.G. Reist Wildlife Sanctuary
 LANDS OF THE HUDSON-MOHAWK BIRD CLUB, INC.
 111.24 acres

Map by David Kipphut - April 2006

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Normanskill Farm - 5/27/17

Fourteen birders - including me as leader, as well as a few HMBC first-timers - spent a little over 2 1/2 hours at the City of Albany's Normanskill Farm property this morning. I was there about an hour before the official start, and tallied 56 species for the morning, while the official field trip count was 47 species.

It's getting late for through-migrant songbirds, though we did hear a few Blackpoll Warblers (however, on the way to the farm this morning from my home nearby, I saw singing Black-throated Green and Chestnut-sided Warblers, as well as a silent Swainson's Thrush, in a small city park off Whitehall Road). We had good looks at many crowd-pleasing birds that breed at Normanskill, including both local orioles (including a first-summer male and female Orchard Oriole together), singing Willow Flycatcher and Great Crested Flycatcher, both male and female Bobolinks, a Brown Thrasher, many Yellow Warblers, two Bald Eagles, and a hapless Broad-winged Hawk we saw three times, each time being mercilessly harassed by blackbirds.

Before the walk began officially, I heard an Alder Flycatcher singing in the private property gully north of Normanskill Drive, the first time I've observed this species here in two years.

Complete eBird checklist, with a few photos [here](#).

Good birding - and thanks to all who came out!

Tristan Lowery
Albany

Galway Nature Preserve - 6/4/17

A dozen of us spent an enjoyable morning birding at Galway Nature Preserve. The skies were overcast, but we did not get any rain.

Highlights included a trio of Cedar Waxwings at the start of our trip, nice looks at a Chestnut-Sided Warbler, Eastern Wood-Pewees bringing food to a nest, Bobolinks on a farm just outside the preserve boundary, and a pair of Indigo Buntings. The full list is provided below.

Good birding!

Ellen Pemrick

FIELD TRIP REPORTS CONT.

Fox Hill Road – 6/11/17

Six birders met at the Saratoga Airport this morning at 7:30 after which we birded along Desolation Lake Rd. and Fox Hill Rd. for the rest of the morning. Highlights from the airport include Wild Turkey, Horned Lark, Barn Swallow, Eastern Bluebird, Savannah Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Indigo Bunting. Moving on to the higher elevation habitat on Fox Hill Rd. we found 11 warbler species: Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Yellow-rumped, Blackburnian, Black-and-white, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, and Canada Warbler (2). These warblers were mostly heard and not seen. Other species included Ruffed Grouse, Broad-winged Hawk, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Alder Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, Great Crested Flycatcher, Blue-headed Vireo, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Towhee, Dark-eyed Junco, and Purple Finch. Big misses for the trip were Mourning Warbler and Swainson's Thrush which we had earlier in the week while scouting. Counting Killdeer at the airport, the final tally for the morning was 60 species. Further details will be reported soon by other participants on ebird.

John Hershey

Adirondack Tour - 7/2/17

Twelve enthusiastic birders visited four locations in the Adirondack Mountains today, primarily in boreal habitat. We observed a total of 65 species, including 16 warbler species. Unfortunately, we dipped on most of the boreal specialists, such as Black-backed Woodpecker and Boreal Chickadee. Even the normally reliable Gray Jays were absent at Bloomingdale Bog, although it was midafternoon by the time we arrived there.

Our first stop was Circle Rd. outside of Long Lake, where Bog Stream joins Little Tupper Lake. It was quite windy and birding was poor at first, but we managed to locate a few goodies, including a pair of Common Loons, an Olive-sided Flycatcher heard by a couple of birders, and a bittern sp. seen briefly by a few others. At nearby Sabattis Bog, we recorded Ruffed Grouse, Northern Parula, Canada Warbler, and two Broad-winged Hawks in flight, one of which was carrying a snake.

The group searched in vain for the pair of Sandhill Cranes, with two colts, that have bred again this year at Tupper Lake. Joan Collins told us that a fifth crane has joined them as of this morning.

At the Visitor's Interpretative Center at Paul Smiths College, we walked the Boreal Life Trail out to Barnum Pond, and back through the bog along the boardwalk there. There was a Common Loon calling out on Barnum Pond, and a male Black-throated Blue Warbler was foraging no more than ten feet from us, two feet off the ground, along the trail side. In addition, there were singing Winter Wrens, Lincoln's Sparrow, and many Nashville Warblers. Purple Finches were at the feeders outside the VIC building.

Thanks to everyone who attended today's trip, it was a fun day in great habitat with birders young and old(er). We hope to see you on future HMBC trips!

Tom and Colleen Williams
Colonie

UPCOMING HMBC PROGRAMS

Note: Due to the 8:00pm closing of the Colonie Library we have had to find an alternate space to hold our monthly program meetings. Happily, the new visitor center at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center is ready and available. It is a lovely, spacious room which should comfortably meet our needs. The address at Five Rivers is 56 Game Farm Road, Delmar, NY. We will be holding our program meetings there at least for the fall, and will let you know if there are any other changes down the road. Sorry for any inconvenience this may cause.

Speaker:

Gregg Recer

Location of Event:

Five Rivers

Date:

September 11, 2017 – 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Topic: Birding Australia and New Zealand Part I

The common history of the austral landmasses as part of the Gondwana supercontinent is reflected in unique assemblages of plants such as the Antarctic Beech forests. In Australia and New Zealand, the bird life is also strongly influenced by the long isolation of these southern land masses, with 6 bird families endemic to New Zealand, and about another 20 families unique to Australia, or only shared with New Guinea and nearby islands. This two-part program will be based on recent travels by Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen in both Australia and New Zealand. Part 1 will be a travelogue along the entire length of "mainland" New Zealand -- from Stewart Island in the south to the Hauraki Gulf at the north end of North Island -- exploring such highlights as the Southern Alps; penguins, albatrosses, and other seabirds, and the unique and highly threatened endemic landbirds. A common theme will be the extreme conservation efforts being taken to preserve New Zealand's bird diversity.

Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen have been HMBC members for nearly 30 years and over that time have become avid world birders. Gregg is the current HMBC President.



Takahe

UPCOMING HMBC PROGRAMS

Speaker:

Scott Stoner & Denise Hackert-Stoner

Location of Event:

Five Rivers

Date:

October 2, 2017 – 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Topic: Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley

The lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas is one of the top birding areas of the US. With species such as Green Jay, Plain Chachalaca, Great Kiskadee, and Least Grebe, "The Valley" draws birders to species found nowhere else in the country. The habitat (and related avifauna) varies as one goes upriver from the Gulf Coast to Laredo, as the marshes and then moist woodlands become replaced by more arid lands. This program features some of our favorite birds and birding locations from South Padre Island to Laredo!

Scott and Denise are long-time active birders and HMBC members. They enjoy exploring and photographing bird life all over the United States. Scott's first trip to The Valley was a camping trip with a friend during grad school, in the middle of the summer no less! Additional trips were made in subsequent years, two of them on tours, and the most recent was focused on photography in November 2016. Some interesting changes have occurred over this time frame, both to the birding locations and the birds. Tamaulipas Crow and Brown Jay have virtually disappeared, while Clay-colored Thrush has increased from a great rarity to a reasonably reliable resident.



Green Jay

UPCOMING HMBC PROGRAMS CONT.

Speaker:

Gregg Recer

Location of Event:

Five Rivers

Date:

November 6, 2017 – 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Topic: Birding Australia and New Zealand Part II

The second segment of this two-part program focuses on birds, wildlife, and sight-seeing in the Australian states of Queensland and New South Wales. Queensland is tropical east-coast Australia, home to the Wet Tropics World Heritage zone, the Great Barrier Reef, Atherton Tablelands, and the northern end of the Great Dividing Range. The birding and wildlife highlights here range from the odd Magpie Goose, Southern Cassowary, lyrebirds, and a large variety of parrots, honeyeaters and thornbills, to iconic and bizarre mammals including duck-billed platypus, tree kangaroos, wallabies, and flying foxes. In the area around Sydney in NSW, we'll explore the dramatic coastal areas and rainforests of Royal National Park, the historic location of Kamay Botany Bay National Park, and the iconic Sydney cityscape including Sydney Opera House and the Harbour Bridge.

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Rock Wallaby

UPCOMING HMBC PROGRAMS CONT.

Speaker:

Amanda Dillon

Location of Event:

Five Rivers

Date:

December 4, 2017 - 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Topic: Birds and Avian Research at the Albany Pine Bush

Speaker:

Jenny Murtaugh

Location of Event:

TBA

Date:

January 8, 2018 - 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Topic: Bird Migration

Speaker:

John Hershey

Location of Event:

TBA

Date:

February 5, 2018 - 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Topic: Birding Panama

UPCOMING AUDUBON PROGRAMS

There are no Audubon programs currently scheduled.

NYSOA SHOREBIRD WORKSHOP AND FIELD TRIP, AUGUST 26-27, 2017

The New York State Ornithological Association is offering a shorebird identification workshop and field trip on the weekend of August 26-27. Kevin McGowan, former NYSOA president, co-editor of *The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State*, and Project Manager for Distance Learning at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology will conduct a shorebird identification workshop at the Montezuma Audubon Center from 2-4 p.m. on Saturday, August 26th. The workshop is free and open to the public.

In his workshop Kevin says, he will discuss the things to use, and not to use, for shorebird identification (the importance of shape and behavior, and the relative unimportance of spots and streaks). Using photographs, we will go over the ways to approach shorebird ID, and then look in detail at the most commonly seen shorebirds in New York.

On Sunday from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. Kevin and other shorebird experts help us take this information into the field and look at live shorebirds in the Montezuma Wetlands Complex, one of the state's most important inland shorebird stopover sites. Registration is required for the Sunday field trips. Please register by emailing Kathryn Schneider at fallline@nycap.rr.com or calling her at 518 248 8665. Field trip attendees should bring a bag lunch, dress appropriately for the weather, and bring a spotting scope if at all possible.

Because most birders are familiar with the Montezuma Wetlands area, NYSOA has not set aside lodging for this trip. Accommodations are available nearby in Auburn and Seneca Falls, as well as other, smaller communities in the area. We hope to arrange a group dinner after the workshop for anyone who is interested. When you register for the field trip, please let us know if you would like to attend.

For information about lodging in the vicinity of Auburn go to:

https://www.tripadvisor.com/SmartDeals-g29845-Auburn_Finger_Lakes_New_York-HotelDeals.html

For information about lodging in the vicinity of Seneca Falls go to: http://www.tripadvisor.com/SmartDeals-g60997-Seneca_Falls_Finger_Lakes_New_York-HotelDeals.html

For information about camping go to:

<http://www.stateparks.com/montezuma.html>

Directions to the Montezuma Audubon Center can be found at:

<http://friendsofmontezuma.org/visit-the-mwc/montezuma-audubon-center/>

Information about the federally owned Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge is available at <http://www.fws.gov/r5mnwr/index.html#LIST>

Information about the larger Montezuma Wetlands Complex can be found at:

<http://www.friendsofmontezuma.org>

SWITZKILL FARM, TOWN OF BERNE

by Bruce Dudek

The Helderbergs, Hill Towns, and southwestern Albany county have been regular destinations for many birders. Several locations are glowingly described in the "Birding New York's Hudson Mohawk Region" book published by the bird club. One of the attractions of the area is the assortment of diverse elevations, forest types, wetlands, and farmlands. The Town of Berne has recently made public a property that is an exciting potential birding location and it has many of these diverse habitat features in a relatively small area. **Switzkill Farm** was acquired by town with the intention of making it available to the public for recreational purposes. An extensive trail system is marked out. Habitats range from Hemlock-lined ravines with cascading streams and small waterfalls, to a beaver marsh, to small ponds, to hayfields gone fallow with successional growth providing field habitat, to mixed forest, to a small apple orchard. I thank Angelika Stewart for alerting me to this location. Our brief visits, so far, have confirmed its birding potential and it also looks to be a very nice spot for naturalists interested in wildflowers and butterflies/dragonflies. It is a peaceful property that has a different kind of ambiance than other heavily forested Hill Town locations.

The property has an interesting history as Manor Rensselaerwyck farmland, as a game farm, and as a religious retreat. Description of this history and the trail system can be found on the Town of Berne web site (<http://berneny.org/switzkill-farm-information-events/>). In some locations, there are nice views of the Catskill Mountains. Dark sky views also make this a good location for Star Gazing as well as naturalist exploration. One appealing feature of the location is that the property adjoins the section of Cole Hill State Forest that is on the west side of Irish Hill Road. Cole Hill SF has long been favored by birders and trails from Irish Hill Rd lead through the SF to a wetland area of Switzkill Farm. A brochure and a map on the town web site describe 7 miles of marked trails on the 350 acre Switzkill Farm site. The property has some considerable elevation change, but birders can drive the road to accomplish most of this and trails leave the road in numerous places. One trail leads to small ponds with an overlook site and then to a fairly extensive beaver marsh on the east side of the property. Beyond and around the beaver marsh, one can reach the Cole Hill SF. A long time caretaker of the property (and resident of an adjacent few acres) does extensive trail maintenance.

As one turns onto the mile long road into the site (see directions below), there is an immediate climb that parallels two different streams with nice cascades and waterfalls. After about a quarter of a mile the stream on the right provides the substantial hemlock-lined ravine mentioned above (and Louisiana Waterthrush). Approximately half way up the mile long road through the property, a cluster of buildings sits at the old game farm site. A small parking area is available. From this parking area a trail leads to the east and the ponds and beaver marsh and a kiosk can be found within 100 yards at the ponds. Continuing on the road, uphill, it winds through a small old apple orchard and ends in an extensive mixed eastern forest where one also finds the lodge that had been used as a retreat. All along the road, extensive hayfields and other farm fields are found. Some are active and others are not, providing both open fields and scrub brush habitat. Two of the buildings near the game farm site are still leased by the town as residences, but marked trails near those buildings give the public access. West of those buildings, travels lead to an extensive set of open fields before the road turns north to the apple orchard and the lodge. It is a peaceful property that has a different kind of ambiance than other heavily forested Hill Town locations visited by the birding community.

In three separate visits during mid-June and early July 2017, we (BD and Angelika Stewart) found a very nice assortment of bird species. The surveys were not systematic and our list is likely a good bit shy of the true total. The advantage of the site is that within a very small distance, the elevation change and the habitat variety make for pleasant birding. Although the property is a substantial acreage, the access road through the middle of the site eases access for those who dislike climbing hills. During our June and July 2017 visits the trails were a bit overgrown since the caretaker had been unable to operate his machinery. But that was expected to be temporary.

Please consider entering sightings at Switzkill Farm into eBird so that a more extensive bird list for the site can be established. You might also consider writing a note of thanks to the Berne Town Clerk for the town making this site public.

Directions:

The town web site (URL above) gives directions from Rt 443 in West Berne. Another (shorter) approach for those coming from the Albany area is a very pleasant drive through forest and farmland and is as follows: Take Rt 85 out of New Salem until it joins with Rt. 443. Turn right and head SW until Rt 443 diverges from Rt 85 and heads west. Follow Rt 443 through and past East Berne and then take a left turn onto CR2 (Cole Hill Rd). Take Cole Hill Rd south to the first right turn, onto Willsey Rd. Continue on Willsey through Cole Hill SF, past the intersection with Irish Hill Rd, until Willsey ends at CR1 (Switzkill Rd). Take a right on Switzkill road and continue approximately 1.8 miles to Game Farm Rd. Turn right on Game Farm into the town property. A sign at the turn identifies Switzkill Farm. The road uphill into the site is gravel and it is plowed in the winter. For GPS devices, enter this address: 1561 Switzkill Rd, Berne, NY 12023 (approximately 42.591013, -74.129946).



WRITERS' PAGE

The Nationality of Birds

By Marilyn Hamecher 4.23.13

Ms. Chickadee flits close to my head.
 Twittering, while she's flying about.
 What nationality would she be?
 Clearly, I hear her chattering.
"Top of the mornin' to ya!"

Signor Cardinal swoops onto the feeder.
 Hops back and forth, grabs a seed.
 Fanning his red feathered tail.
 In his red suit, politely chirping.
"Ciao! Ciao! Ciao!"

Srta. Junco speed dives to the ground.
 Showing no manners for sharing.
 Flashing her perfectly marked, petite frame.
 Devouring seeds and peeping.
"Buenos días! Buenas días!"

Herr Nuthatch glides to the feeder.
 He comes when food is not abundant.
 Balancing himself, he seems short, like me.
 Snatching food, he pipes in a low guttural tone.
"Guten Tag...Guten Tag!"

Thanks, Marilyn, for offering our first Writers' Page submission! Anyone is welcome to submit any bird-related original poetry or short prose to be featured in a future edition!

ON NATURE

The “Uncommon” Nighthawk By Scott Stoner



Common Nighthawk, Albany Pine Bush

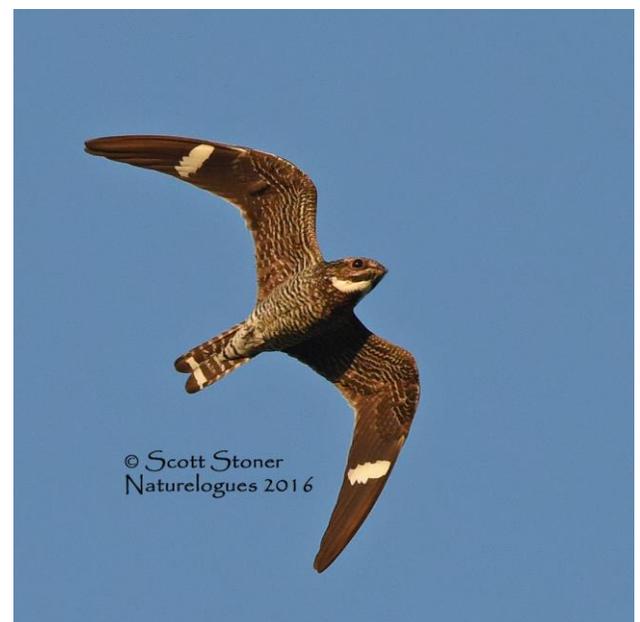
Peent. Peent. Peent. The sound of the Common Nighthawk brings back fond memories. My first sighting was when I was 10, over a large overgrown field on Long Island. A more vivid memory was from central Iowa, where they repeatedly flew low over the outdoor sports courts, feeding on flying insects, while my friends and I were enjoying the many warm summer evenings. We loved seeing and hearing them and it was a great summer memory. What I didn't realize then was their foraging technique, as they feed entirely by flying into insects, mouths wide open, so the insects go “straight down the hatch” to be killed by contact with digestive juices (Laura Erickson, Birdwatchingdaily.com).

ON NATURE

Sadly, they seem to have disappeared from much of their breeding range, which still encompasses most of the continental US. Dubbed by past HMBC President Frank Murphy -(and many others) as the “Uncommon Common Nighthawk,” multiple online sources document a steep decline in North America over the past 50 years. Causes of this worrisome plunge are poorly documented but are suggested to include loss of habitat, use of pesticides which reduce the numbers of insects that are the sole diet of the nighthawks, urban populations of crows which eat the eggs of city nighthawks, and collisions with cars. In urban settings, nighthawks often nest on flat gravel roofs instead of the typical ground locations for this species.

Wintering in South America, and with one of the longest migrations of all North American birds, Common nighthawks get an early start south starting in August. And that is when we mostly get to see them. Most of the southward migration in the Capital Region is from mid-August to early September with the peak around August 24-25th. For the past five years, the HMBC, in collaboration with the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, has been counting common nighthawks from the parking lot of the Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center on New Karner Road. Most nights during the past several years we have seen at least a few passing overhead and sometimes around 100 individuals over a two-hour period. Often they are too high to photograph, but last August one swooped low enough over the parking lot before the light faded affording a chance at close views and a chance to capture some images. It almost took me back to those summer evenings in Iowa so many years ago...

How many will we see this year? Come join your bird club this August, every evening from the 22nd through the 24th, in the parking lot at the Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center, located on Rt. 155 (New Karner Road) Bring a chair and binoculars. We will begin each night at 6:00 p.m. Bring a chair or a recliner, your binoculars, and maybe a snack, and join your fellow nighthawk watchers for some exciting viewing!



ALASKAN ODYSSEY..... (continued)

On the second day we took the 8-hour bus tour that went 60 miles into Denali National Park. The first exciting sighting for me was when the driver stopped and backed up so we could see a Willow Ptarmigan! It stayed put out in the open on the shoulder of the road while the big, noisy bus backed up next to it. Amazing! Besides great views of caribou, grizzly bears, Dall sheep, red foxes, arctic ground squirrels and stunning scenery, a Northern Hawk Owl flew up and perched in a spindly dead pine tree next to the road with a critter in its claws.

After 4 nights in that cabin, we drove 350 miles to Seward for our next 6 days at Angel's Rest on Lowell Point on Resurrection Bay. The Seward Highway south of Anchorage was spectacular mile after mile! While staying on Lowell Point we made a couple of trips back up the highway to various birding spots highlighted in George West's "A Birder's Guide to Alaska." We saw lots of great birds at these locations.

Morning walks by me were rewarded with some wonderful birds: Chestnut-backed Chickadees, a Golden-crowned Kinglet, a Hermit Thrush, Violet-crowned Swallows, Fox Sparrows, and others. We saw tons of Harlequin Ducks every day right in front of our cabin, with a lone Long-tailed Duck in their company. I was able to take close photos of a Wandering Tattler poking around on the rocky beach just below our cabin. Every evening somewhere between 9 and 10:30 p.m., two or three flocks of Common Murre would fly south across the water. I finally got smart and set up the spotting scope to be ready for them.



Wandering Tattler

The best day was our 48th Wedding Anniversary, Wednesday, June 14. That was the day we took the Kenai (KEEN-eye) Fjords Boat Tour on the Glarier Explorer with Captain Sherry at the helm. The weather could not have been more perfect. The seas were calm and the sun was out. It was ideal for taking photographs

ALASKAN ODYSSEY..... (continued)



I sent the captain a 3x5 card with our names on it and a list of 8 birds I especially wanted to see. Meaghan, a delightful crew member, told me I was in luck because Captain Sherry had often taken birders on special boat tours just for birds. The captain took a special interest in my request, going so far as to page us over the boat's intercom to come out on the front deck at one point. She slowed the boat, and she and Meaghan searched both sides for one of the birds. They spotted one and got me on it – a Kittlitz's Murrelet! Later, she pointed out a group of four Ancient Murrelets and a Red-faced Cormorant, the only one of six cormorants in North America that I hadn't seen yet. I was especially stoked to get a close photo of a rock with all three species of Alaska's cormorants on it.



ALASKAN ODYSSEY..... (continued)

With calm seas, Captain Sherry was able to take us all the way down the adjacent fjord to the Aialik Glacier, a large glacier she doesn't always get to visit. It was massive! We got to within a few hundred yards of its face, and we took an excessive number of photos!

Serendipity often plays a role in any successful birding venture. I was birding along the shoreline of Resurrection Bay on our first evening and came upon a close cluster of birders with spotting scopes and top-end binoculars. It was a paid tour group, but the leader was eager to answer my inquiries about local birding hot spots while pointing out to his group that there was a pair of Marbled Murrelets far out on the water. Who knew? I got on them, too! Then he asked me, "Do you know about Ava's place?" "Never heard of it," I replied. He gave me detailed directions and we went the next morning. What a neat place! There were two vans of birders swarming around her house, and the birds were actively visiting an abundance of feeders she had set out all along her porch and in her small front yard. Ava was not there, but she welcomes visitors from around the world to her property. We saw our life Red Crossbill there, plus added 9 more birds to our growing Alaska list.

Two days later we went back. No one else was there, but Ava was outside. We spent an enjoyable half hour talking with her. She told us she loved feeding the birds and hosting birders all year long, but she candidly admitted not knowing what to do with the property when she is no longer able to keep it up. Though that time might not be for another 20 years, I decided to send her Bonnie Paton Moon's recent book about Paton's Feeders in Patagonia, SE Arizona ("Journey Home"). I thought she might like to read about what the Paton children did with that world famous property after their parents died.

On one of our day trips up Seward Highway, I almost passed up a side road because I didn't see on the map that it ended at a lake. I was very happy that Doris led me down Primrose Lane. Kenai Lake contained some significant birds we hadn't seen yet (Surf Scoter, Greater Scaup, Steller's Jay, Golden-crowned Kinglet). Without even the slightest breeze, we made captivating images of the mountains reflected on the glassy water.

After 6 days in Seward we took a leisurely drive up to Anchorage for the last part of our Alaska odyssey. After going around and along Cook Inlet, we pulled off the highway by Potter Marsh just in time to see an Arctic Tern swooping down at a man a few times. We parked to watch the terns and see what else was there. I got out to take a picture of a tern on a sign. After I got my photos, the tern decided it had had enough of me and it flew up and dove at me, too. I made a hasty retreat back into the car. It turns out that it had a nest a few feet in front of our car's bumper! Who knew?

The next morning we met two volunteer guides on the boardwalk at the main Potter Marsh visitors' area. They were incredibly helpful! They told us about Margaret Egan Sullivan Park and Carr-Gottstein Park. At the latter we saw Sandhill Cranes and Northern Pintail ducks. Sonja gave us her email address along with permission to contact her with where to see goldeneyes on a small pond near her house. We got detailed directions from her later and followed them the next morning. There on the pond in the rain were 3 female Common Goldeneyes and one female Barrow's Goldeneye. Seeing them together made it easy to identify the Barrow's.

On my first morning walk from the Comfort Suites in Anchorage, I decided to see if there was a lake behind The Lakefront Hotel which was a short walk from our hotel. My interest was birds, but imagine my surprise to find the entire lake ringed with over 60 float planes! Later Doris and I drove around it. There were a couple of man-made channels with more planes, and we figures there were easily over 100 float planes using the lake. We took a photo

ALASKAN ODYSSEY..... (continued)

of a sign calling it the Lake Hood Seaplane Base and declaring it to be the "busiest and largest float plane base in the world."

We pulled over at one point because we saw a bird we wanted to investigate. We were shocked and thrilled to see a Pacific Loon right there! It wasn't far out, and we were able to get some very satisfying photos.



Pacific Loon

On the afternoon of our last day in Anchorage, I took a long walk around the lake. While standing behind a fence marking off a public parking area, a gull buzzed me raucously a couple of times before flying across the water to the edge of an island. It settled down there, allowing for my last bird photograph. The gull was a Bonaparte's Gull, and I was very glad to finally see one on this trip. It was the last new Alaska bird seen, number 93. Adding 12 life birds for the trip wasn't too shabby, either. An oft-delayed dream vacation came to an end, but vivid memories enhanced by hundreds of photos will last a lifetime!

PELAGIC BIRDING IN NEW ZEALAND(continued)

We knew there was good seabird watching too, but I'd say that part of the trip completely blew away our expectations. NZ certainly has to be in the running for the most productive pelagic bird destination on the planet, especially considering the relative ease of pelagics there, and the numbers and diversity of species to be found within sight of land, or even right on shore.

To maximize our birding success on our trip, we took a guided tour of NZ with Field Guides. Their itinerary covers the entire length of the country from Stewart Island in the south (the "third" NZ island), all the way north to the North Island's Haurau Gulf north of Auckland. North and South Islands are huge, compared to Stewart, both within the top 15 largest non-continental islands on earth by land area. They are about 15 and 10 times larger than the Big Island of Hawaii, respectively. Stewart is roughly one-fifth the size of the Big Island. Despite the area involved, much of the birding throughout the tour was around the island peripheries, and we were rarely far from the ocean. The tour used ferries between each island, which were sometimes good birding platforms themselves, and also included several scheduled boat trips dedicated primarily to searching for seabirds. All told, we took a total of 10 separate boat trips of varying lengths during the tour, and that was actually one short of the original itinerary due to an unavoidable mid-tour change of plans.

South Island and especially Stewart are sub-antarctic in character, and major destinations for migrant and breeding albatrosses, petrels, endemic penguins, and a high diversity of cormorants. Our first boat trip on Milford Sound in Fiordland National Park produced, appropriately enough, several Fiordland Crested Penguins. That was truly just an appetizer. We spent our first full day on Stewart taking a pelagic cruise around the east side of the island. While never very far from shore, we encountered 4 species of albatross (White-capped, Salvin's, Royal, and Wandering), several petrels (Cape, Northern Giant), and shearwaters (Sooty, Short-tailed) more crested penguins plus Little Blue and endemic Yellow-eyed Penguins, Common Diving Petrel, Brown Skua, and 4 species of cormorants/shags including Stewart Island Shag and the very pretty Spotted Shag. Numbers were remarkable, with over two-dozen White-capped Albatross, and almost as many Cape Petrels. Returning to South Island, an in-shore boat from Otago visited the only mainland nesting colony for Northern Royal Albatross, and produced many more shags, Sooty Shearwaters, Giant Petrels and other nesters such as Royal Spoonbill.



Royal Albatross



Brown Skua



Cape Petrel

PELAGIC BIRDING IN NEW ZEALAND(continued)



Little Blue Penguin

We were supposed to take one other dedicated pelagic from the east coast of South Island at Kaikoura. This town has turned pelagic birding and whale-watching into a major industry due to its remarkable location where the continental shelf (an extension of the Kurmadec Trench) intersects directly into the mainland coastline, meaning deepwater conditions can be reached by only a 20 minute boat ride. That same underwater topography is a reflection of the collision between the Pacific and the Indo-Australian plates; a major subduction zone, and highly seismically active. Just 2 days before we were scheduled to arrive in Kaikoura, a major earthquake hit the area. Where we were staying in the mountains, we slept right through the quake, but it did substantial damage to the town, and in particular, caused several major landslides that completely cut the town off from all road and rail contact. According to the Wikipedia account, this was the second-largest magnitude earthquake since European settlement. Amazingly, despite substantial property damage, only two deaths were recorded, which is a testament to the excellent NZ preventative engineering and construction standards.

PELAGIC BIRDING IN NEW ZEALAND(continued)

While missing the Kaikoura boat trip was disappointing, we were very relieved not to have been trapped in town by the quake, as happened to many tourists who had to be evacuated by the NZ navy. Our guides included a local NZ tour operator who quickly re-engineered that part of the itinerary. The result included a bonus experience perhaps even more unique than the Kaikoura trip would have been – a nocturnal hike into the West Coast mountains to observe a Westland Petrel breeding colony. These petrels nest in burrows on forested slopes. Adults spend days and nights at sea foraging for food for the chicks. The colony we visited has a dedicated landowner who monitors the nests, and takes groups of people to a small observation platform where we were able to sit quietly, watching and listening as adults came crashing into the trees from their ocean forays. When the adults were ready to depart again, they climbed up onto a small snag right in front of us and took off into the night. This was really a fascinating experience, and something that was completely impromptu, making it even more special.

Another coastal boat in the Queen Charlotte Sound area at the north end of South Island produced many of the same coastal species, plus large numbers of Fluttering and Flesh-footed Shearwaters. We had a similar mix of tubenoses during the major ferry crossing between South and North Islands. The trip ended with a dedicated full-day pelagic in the Haurauki Gulf off of North Island. Conditions here are more sub-tropical, and the species mix changes accordingly. No albatrosses, but large numbers of Cook's Petrels, Fairy Prions, 4 different shearwaters, White-faced Storm-Petrel, and the top attraction: NZ Storm-Petrel, a species that was thought to be extinct since the mid-1800's, but was re-discovered here in the early 2000's. Despite some fairly rough conditions, we had good luck with the NZ Storm-Petrels, finding a total of 6.



Flesh-footed Shearwater

PELAGIC BIRDING IN NEW ZEALAND(continued)

NZ is not a place to build a huge species list. The trip total was 130, but that included 32 species of seabirds, and another 23 species of shorebirds, gulls, and terns. The pelagic trips were among the most exciting parts of the tour. The birds were present in big numbers, and several boats used chum to bring them in close, making photography a relative breeze. It made for a great complement to the unique, and endemic-rich NZ land birding.

More photos of seabirds, and the rest of the NZ tour will be featured in the first program of the HMBC fall program series – Birding Eastern Gondwana, Part 1, New Zealand – to be presented by Gregg Recer on Monday, September 11, 2017.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

AUGUST

Sunday, August 20, PEBBLES ISLAND 8:30am - 12:00pm

Coordinator: John Hershey 371-3114 hersheyj@nycap.rr.com

The wooded areas of Pebbles Island are good for seeing a variety of songbirds including early migrant warblers. The river area and rocky flats around the island are usually good for Peregrine Falcon, Osprey, Bald Eagle as well as shore birds, herons, egrets, Chimney Swifts and ducks. From the meeting place, we will check out the Cohoes Flats and then consolidate vehicles before proceeding to Pebbles Island since there is a fee for each car entering.

Meet at the NY State Dam Recreation area behind the U-Haul Rental in Cohoes at 8:30 a.m. From 787 going north, turn right onto Route 470 (Ontario Street) in Cohoes. Then turn left onto Clark Ave. and proceed to the end.

Tuesday, August 22, Wednesday, August 23, and Thursday, August 24, 6:00pm - 8:30pm

COUNTING COMMON NIGHTHAWKS AT ALBANY PINEBUSH DISCOVERY CENTER

Coordinators: Tom & Colleen Williams 857-2176 trwdsd@yahoo.com

The Common Nighthawk is an aerial insectivore that feeds at dusk and dawn. It breeds throughout much of North America, although in decline as it is no longer observed during the summer in many urban and suburban areas.

In the Capital Region, the bulk of migration occurs from mid-August until early September with the peak around August 24-25th. Continuing an informal project that was begun in 2012, we will observe the skies each evening (weather permitting) between the 22nd and 24th of August, recording our sightings for a final summary. We will conduct our viewing from the parking lot at the Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center, located on Rt. 155 (New Karner Road) in Albany. Bring a chair and binoculars. We will begin each night at 6:00 p.m.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS CONT.

SEPTEMBER

Saturday, September 2, 2017 - 8:00am - 12:00pm HUYCK PRESERVE/MYOSOTIS LAKE

Coordinator: John Kent 424-2234 jwkent@fastmail.fm

We will walk the shore of Myosotis Lake looking for migrating warblers, vireos, kinglets, and flycatchers in the shrubby habitat of the Lake Trail. Bald Eagles, all three local falcon species, and several species of hawks have been seen on some of the past years' trips. Depending on the water level, the mudflats at the north end of the lake often host migrating shorebirds. It may be necessary to walk through some mud to get a view, so be prepared. From there we will continue through the woods to Lincoln Pond, where we will check for waterfowl and herons. The total walking distance is around 1.5 miles.

Meet for carpooling at 8:00 a.m. at New Scotland Town Hall on Route 85. Parking at Myosotis Lake is limited.

Saturday, September 16, 8:30am - 12:00pm

Hawks & Songbirds at Thacher Park - Overlook/Glen Doone

Coordinators: Gary Goodness 862-9260 goodness@nycap.rr.com

Don Gresens 370-3923 dgresens@nycap.rr.com

We will be looking for migrating Broad-winged Hawks that use the warming air thermals along the face of the escarpment to continue their migration south. Other raptors may be seen using the thermals for similar reasons. Osprey, Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, Sharp-shinned and Coopers Hawks are among those that can be seen soaring over the Helderbergs. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds also migrate over the escarpment very low and fast, sometimes making you feel like ducking down.

Meet in front of the bank at the southwest corner of Routes 20 and 155 in Guilderland at 8:30 a.m.

Sunday, September 17, 7:30am - 12:00pm FALL MIGRANTS AT THE ALBANY PINE BUSH

Coordinators: Tom & Colleen Williams 857-2176 trwdsd@yahoo.com

We will explore the Karner Barrens East unit, via the "yellow" perimeter trail, and "blue" dune overlook trail. We will be looking for warblers, vireos, and kinglets. The dune overlook trail has a moderate climb and descent. This is approximately a three mile loop. Take proper precautions to avoid ticks.

map: <http://www.albanypinebush.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/1-KBarrensEW-2-...>

Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center parking lot, located at 195 New Karner Rd. (Rt. 155) in Albany.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS CONT.

Saturday, September 23, 8:00am - 12:00pm VISCHER FERRY MIGRANTS

Coordinator: John Hershey 371-3114 hersheyj@nycap.rr.com

Fall migrants are the main attraction for this field trip. Species that breed further north or in higher elevations may stop here on their way south. We will search for a variety of waterfowl, raptors, kinglets, wrens, warblers, and sparrows.

Meet at the preserve entrance at Riverview Rd. and Van Vranken Avenue at 8:00 am.

Sunday, September 24, 2017 - 9:00am - 12:30pm SARATOGA NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK AND BATTLEFIELD

Coordinators: Ellen Pemrick 882-9163 lnmp@nycap.rr.com

Marne Onderdonk 269-6199 marne37@icloud.com

This popular trip features beautiful foliage and a good chance to see hawks, woodpeckers, sparrows, bluebirds and late migrants as we walk the woods and grasslands of the battlefield. You never know what will turn up. Please note that a fee is charged to walk the Wilkinson Trail, payable at the visitor center.

Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot near the park's visitor center off SR 32.

Saturday, September 30, 2017 - 8:00am - 12:00pm NUTTEN HOOK

Coordinator: Kathy Schneider 248-8665 falline@nycap.rr.com

Nutten Hook is part of Stockport Flats, a Hudson River Estuarine Research Reserve site in Colombia County. The area includes the remains of the largest ice house on the Hudson as well as a loop trail that borders the river for a quarter mile. The return path cuts inland through oak woods, abandoned farmland, and tidal marshes. Bald Eagles and early fall migrants are expected.

Meet at 8:00 AM in the parking area by the pavilion, which is west of the railroad tracks, and the buildings on Ice House Rd. Ice House Rd. is off Route 9J in Stuyvesant.

See map: [Google Maps](#)

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS CONT.

OCTOBER

Sunday, October 1, 2017 - 8:00am - 12:00pm Woodlawn Preserve

Coordinator: Don Gresens 370-3923 dgresens@nycap.rr.com

The Woodlawn Preserve is located in the Southeast corner of Schenectady County abutting the western edge of the Pine Bush. The area contains a flood control pond, forested sand dunes and general wetland habitat. Trips in prior years have seen migrating warblers and sparrows. The pond may attract various waterfowl.

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in front of Petsmart in Mohawk Commons at the corner of State Street and Balltown Road (Balltown Rd. side). We will carpool the short distance to the Preserve.

October 8, 2017 - 8:00am - 12:00pm Five Rivers Environmental Education Center

Coordinator: John Kent 424-2234 jwkent@fastmail.fm

We'll walk about 2 miles over generally flat terrain with some small hills, passing through a variety of habitats. Migrating sparrows are often abundant at this time of the year, with a good chance of Lincoln's and White-crowned as well as more common species. Both species of kinglet may be present, as well as Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler and Blue-headed Vireo. A late Nashville, Black-throated Green, Blackpoll or Magnolia Warbler might be found. Wood Duck and other waterfowl are possible, as well as Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks and Merlin. Wet grass and muddy spots may be encountered, so waterproof footwear is recommended.

Sunday, October 21, 2017 - 8:00am - 12:00pm Collins Lake

Coordinator: Don Gresens 370-3923 dgresens@nycap.rr.com

We will visit Collins Lake to view late migrating waterfowl from the beach and the east side of the lake. We will also take a walk east along the north side of the Mohawk River for fall sparrows. Fox Sparrows have been seen in previous years. Foliage will be off of the trees to make finding LBJ's (Little Brown Jobs) a bit easier.

Meet at the western end of the Gateway Bridge at Jumpin' Jacks in Scotia at 8:00 a.m. Bring a scope if you have one.

Feathers**Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club****c/o Five Rivers EEC****56 Game Farm Road****Delmar, NY 12054**