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Bird Club, Inc.*

Feathers

INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO BIRDWATCHING: PROJECT FEEDERWATCH IN THE CLASSROOM **By Jennifer Ford**

A great way to introduce young people to birdwatching is through Project FeederWatch. Project FeederWatch is a citizen science project where participants submit data on the birds visiting birdfeeders from November to April.

I have been using Project FeederWatch with my 8th grade science class for 4 years. Students who choose to participate watch birds visiting our birdfeeders from our classroom windows. When students first start the program, I show them how to use binoculars, and how to use a simple field guide to identify birds. For the first month or so I work closely with the students, teaching them about the different birds visiting the feeder, and how to accurately collect data. Gradually, the students take on more and more of the responsibility of identifying and recording the visiting birds, and then submitting this data to Project FeederWatch. This year, so many students were showing up during study hall, lunch, and after school that I had to start a sign up sheet to make sure everyone was able to have space at a window to watch the feeders.

I hope that by taking part in this project, students will develop an appreciation of birds and birdwatching that will last their entire lives!

For more information on Project FeederWatch: <https://feederwatch.org/>

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

There is no President's Corner 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:

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

Field Trip Reports

Tomhannock Reservoir – November 6, 2017

Eleven birders set out around the Tomhannock Reservoir on a perfect late-fall day, with blue sky, crisp air, and barely a ripple on the water. We started at the south end where we had distant looks at Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Ducks, Common Goldeneye, Buffleheads and Wood Ducks. Better views were had at various vantage spots along the way. An interesting non-avian sighting was a (very) dead Fisher on the edge of the road. I think these secretive mustelids are more common than people believe, as often all that's seen is tracks in the snow.

At various stops along the shore we saw or heard Pine Siskin, Purple Finch, YB Sapsucker, Brown Creeper and GC Kinglet. At the Island, several flocks of Common Grackles flew over and a kettle of Turkey Vultures rose up and drifted southward. About 30 lingering Tree Swallows hunted over the water, probably eating the gnats that landed on us.

Given the scarcity of waterfowl, we drove up Croll/Johnsonville/Otter Creek roads east of the reservoir. This is the area where the Golden Eagle hung out for several days in February. A sharp-eyed birder spotted some Ring-necked Pheasants skulking in a cornfield and we stopped to look. Eastern Bluebirds and Red-winged Blackbirds sang from a marsh. We had already seen a half-dozen Bald Eagles of various ages that day so when another large dark bird flew over, it took a while and some lucky photos to realize this one was different. A Golden Eagle - definitely the highlight of the day! It pays to scrutinize every bird!

Our last long stop was at the Otter Creek delta, where Killdeer and three Greater Yellowlegs still foraged in the muck. A little down the road we had a small flock of Wild Turkeys.

We finished up with a respectable (for November) 52 species plus an unknown accipiter - not bad for a day when the target waterfowl were scarce. Thanks to all participants for a great trip. See you next year!

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40306077>

Naomi Lloyd

Field Trip Reports (continued)

Vischer Ferry - November 12, 2017

The HMBC Vischer Ferry field trip this morning was scheduled to maximize fall waterfowl sightings at the Preserve, and a pretty good selection of dabbling ducks had been seen during the previous week. However, this morning it was below freezing and the ponds were mostly frozen solid allowing for only a limited number of ducks and geese concentrated in a very small area. We had 6 birders including a new member who was proudly attending her second HMBC field trip. In the small unfrozen area about a half mile west of the Whipple Bridge we did find 5 Northern Pintails and about 50 Green-winged Teal along with some Canada Geese, Mallards, and American Black Ducks. One species seen by the leader before the field trip began was a Rusty Blackbird near the Whipple Bridge and a Wood Duck. In my opinion, the best bird of the morning was a Marsh Wren which we heard calling in the reeds just past the Whipple Bridge. After first hearing the bird, we then spotted it hiding in a bush. Our lone photographer then began clicking away with her camera after which the bird began to slowly climb to the top of the bush where we eventually got a full view of it. It dawned on us that it most likely was the camera's repeated clicking resembling the bird's call notes that prompted the bird to come out of hiding. We also enjoyed watching a Swamp Sparrow show itself in a similar way.

The group then drove a couple miles to a parking spot directly under the Twin Bridges in Halfmoon. We then walked west on the new Halfmoon Connector trail behind Wager's Pond and into the Preserve from the extreme eastern side. No doubt our group was the first HMBC field trip to bird on this Connector trail. It is a beautiful trail providing great views of the Old Erie Canal, marsh habitat, and the Mohawk River, not to mention the impressive Twin Bridges. Unfortunately we didn't have a lot of birds on this trail this morning but we did spot 2 adult Bald Eagles soaring above and heard a Belted Kingfisher and Fish Crow. Eventually getting back to the main entrance on foot we compiled a very modest list of 29 species but a good time was had by all.

John Hershey

Upcoming HMBC Programs

Speaker:

Amanda Dillon

Location of Event:

Five Rivers

Date:

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

Topic: Lessons Learned from Bird Research in the Albany Pine Bush Preserve

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve (APBP) protects an inland pitch pine-scrub oak barrens ecosystem, which is home to 76 New York Species of Greatest Conservation Need, of those, 43 are birds. The rarity of species that call this place home along with the high quality habitat and diversity of bird species that breed here have earned the Preserve designations as both an Audubon Important Birding Area and a NYS-DEC Bird Conservation Area. To learn more about APBP birds and bird communities, the Conservation Science Team conducts bird point count surveys at 57 points located around the Preserve, works with citizen scientists to conduct singing ground surveys of American woodcock and Eastern whip-poor-will, and runs multiple bird banding stations. The banding data are used to study demography and migration of Prairie warblers (a barrens specialist), migration patterns of fall migrants, and avian

Upcoming HMBC Programs (continued)

productivity and survivorship during the breeding season. The information gathered from this work has helped guide restoration and management efforts within the Preserve and continues to inform us about the efficacy of these techniques in preserving this globally rare ecosystem.

Amanda Dillon is the Field Ecologist and Entomologist at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve. She earned her Bachelor and Master of Science degrees at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Dillon is an entomologist by training and specializes in native solitary bees and wasps. Since she began working at the Albany Pine Bush in 2010, her interests have expanded to include birds and she now conducts bird point count surveys, assists in re-sighting color-banded birds and helps run the bird banding stations.

Note: This being HMBC's Holiday party as well as the December program meeting, members are invited to bring a treat to share tonight. Desserts and non-alcoholic beverages will be enjoyed by the group both before and after the program.



Field Sparrow

Speaker:

Jenny Murtaugh

Location of Event:

Five Rivers

Date:

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

Topic: The Marvels of Avian Migration

Why do birds and other animals migrate? Which birds migrate at night and which by day? Did you know some species travel 700 miles per day during migration? Or that the Arctic Tern migrates as many as 22,000 miles each year (and to the moon and back over the span of its lifetime)? During this program, you will learn about different migration strategies and mechanics, the advantages and disadvantages migration, and the techniques used to study these marvelous travelers. The particularly impressive migration feats of some species will also be covered. Current techniques relating to the “why’s” and “how’s” of migration study are highlighted (e.g., birdbanding, radio telemetry, moon watching, radar tracking, and night flight calls), among other featured topics that provide an overview of the latest news and information relating to the always-evolving study of migration.

Upcoming HMBC Programs (continued)

Jenny Murtaugh is a Biologist with the NYS DEC. She began working for DEC during her senior year of Wildlife Management at SUNY Cobleskill in 2009. She has done research through DEC, the NYS Museum and SUNY ESF related to coyote genetics and ecology, fishers, Karner blue butterflies, frosted elfin butterflies, grassland and marsh birds, and wintering raptors like the state-endangered short eared owl and state-threatened northern harrier. She also worked extensively in the development of NY's current State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

Jenny's current work is focused on coordinating the review of large scale energy projects throughout the state for fish, wildlife, and wetland impacts. During the breeding season, she is a bander at DEC's Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship Program (MAPS) station here at Five Rivers. She also recently began banding at the Albany Pine Bush MAPS station, as well as at their fall migrant banding station. She is currently researching the declining eastern whip-poor-will with the goal of developing Best Management Practices (BMPs) that could be used to benefit the species in NY as part of her graduate work in SUNY Albany's Biodiversity, Conservation and Policy program. In her free time, she trains and competes in the sport of dog agility with her border collie, Fly, and enjoys hiking in the Adirondacks.



Speaker:

John Hershey

Location of Event:

Five Rivers

Date:

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

Topic: Birding Panama

Save the Date!! HMBC Annual Meeting, Dinner, and Program

Speaker:

Katerina Paleckova

Location of Event:

Century House, 997 New Loudon Road, Latham

Date:

April 11, 6-10pm

Topic: Albatross Up Close

Observe the beauty and life of Laysan Albatross and other bird species, which inhabit the islands of Midway Atoll, thousands of kilometers from any continent, in the middle of the northern Pacific Ocean. Laysan Albatross are large seabirds with a wingspan of nearly 7 feet. They are able to fly and soar large distances. This collection of photos and videos was collected during a volunteer trip to conduct an albatross nest census. Photographing a large and dense bird colony during breeding and nesting season is an experience unlike any other and the opportunity to be within few inches from these non-threatening birds is exhilarating.

Katerina's curiosity about animals and nature was instilled in her in her grandparents' backyard in the Czech Republic, where she grew up playing with domestic animals while helping tend to the orchard and vegetable patch. She also hiked the nearby mountains since she was 5 and vividly remembers when her father threatened to leave her to the wolves if she didn't keep walking when she got stuck in high snow. She enjoys extreme weather like snowstorms and loves exploring and photographing birds and other wildlife near and far. Katerina hopes to inspire love for nature in others. As a professional she is a graphic design/art director in the brand and package design field. She also frequently works with nature organizations to create logos or signage and enjoys volunteering for bird conservation.



UPCOMING AUDUBON PROGRAMS

Owl Prowl at Schodack Island - December 1, 2017 : 7pm

Join bird experts from the Audubon Society of the Capital Region for a family-oriented introduction to the owls of Schodack Island State Park. The program will begin at the pavilion with a show-and-tell briefing on owl natural history. Thereafter, field parties will prowl Schodack Park trails to listen for owls. Bring a flashlight for safety. Afterwards, field parties will re-group at the pavilion to compare notes and enjoy complimentary hot chocolate and coffee.

Program is FREE but Registration is limited and required. Please call 518-732-0187 by November 29 to sign up.

Owl Prowl at Five Rivers - December 2, 2017 : 4pm

Owls are often heard calling around dusk at this time of year in the deep pine woods at the Five Rivers Environmental Education Center. At 4 pm we will meet at the new visitor center at Five Rivers for a brief introduction. We will then walk into the woods to listen for owls. Please call the office at 518-475-0291 to reserve your spot by December 2, as space is limited. This is Free and Open to the Public. This event fills up quick, so reserve early! Address: 56 Game Farm Rd, Delmar, NY 12054.

This is a joint program with Five Rivers Environmental Education Center.

A Beginner's Christmas Bird Count - December 16, 2017 : 9am - 10am

Join bird experts from the Audubon Society of the Capital Region for a family-friendly introduction to the National Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count. On this outdoor foray, beginning birders will learn all about the Count's history, methodology and contribution to conservation science. Schodack Island State Park is well positioned for open-water winter bird specialties such as Bald Eagle and Great Black Backed Gull, large and common residents which even novices can easily identify. Oh, you'll learn plenty of cool birds, too! Afterwards, field parties will re-group at the pavilion to compare notes and enjoy complimentary hot chocolate and coffee.

The Schodack park property falls within Audubon's *Albany County Count* circle, which Count teams will more formally census on Sunday, December 17.

Program is Free but you must call the Park Office to register by the end of December 16.

In case of inclement weather, this program may be cancelled. Please call the Park office to check the day before.

Schodack Island Park office number: at 518-732-0187.

New Year's Day Bird Count at Five Rivers EEC - January 1, 2018 : 9am

Join bird experts from the Audubon Society of the Capital Region and the Hudson Mohawk Bird Club for Five Rivers Environmental Education Center's 40th annual bird survey. Field parties will scour the trails to record First of Year sightings of our fine feathered friends. Afterwards, field parties will re-group to compare notes and enjoy complimentary coffee and hot chocolate. In the 40 years of this annual census, 74 different bird species have been found on New Year's Day. We will meet at the new visitor center at 56 Game Farm Rd, Delmar, NY 12054. In case of severe weather, this program may be cancelled. For more information, or to check for cancellation, please call Five Rivers at 518-475-0291. Don't forget to bring your binoculars and dress warmly!

WRITERS' PAGE

Where Silence Waits
by Denise Hackert-Stoner

The frosted field shimmers with foragers:
Bluebird and Goldfinch rise and fall in waves among the frozen seeds.
White-tailed deer browse warily, disappearing into the safety of the hedgerow.
Between the field and heatless sun a Red-tailed Hawk dips and glides, his eye on vole or deer mouse.
Below the ridge the forest waits, silent and bright.
Hemlock branches, caught in winter's sun, bend over a little brook,
And dazzle its icing water with emeralds ablaze.
Here there is no breeze, no bird, no bustle.
Here, on this shortest afternoon,
Nothing moves but the dancing water.
Nothing sings but the jeweled stream.

ON NATURE

Shift Change on the Grasslands

By Scott Stoner

We spend a lot of time in Fort Edward. Specifically the 13,000 acre Fort Edward Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA) in Washington County. This critical area for grassland birds is largely in the towns of Fort Edward, Kingsbury, and Argyle, just east of the Champlain Canal. Early memories were from winter around 1990, of bitter cold visits for hawks and snowy owls, and even a Northern Hawk Owl! More recently, spring/summer visits have yielded views of Clay-colored and Savannah Sparrows, and other breeding grassland species. But our favorite time remains the dead of winter, for the chance to observe and photograph the wintering raptors that often frequent the area.

Northern Harriers and Rough-legged Hawks are virtually guaranteed, and Snowy Owls are at least a good possibility. What we most seek however are the stars of the twi-night game – the state endangered Short-eared Owls which come off their roosts in the late afternoon and actively patrol the grasslands in search of food. Short-eared owls generally arrive in late fall to early winter, and often stay into March. Their presence is highly variable though. We recall one winter about a decade ago when we saw 17 of them around Fitzpatrick Road. Some years we see very few, and at times even none. Sometimes they stick around all winter, and sometimes they show up early in the winter and then leave, perhaps when the snow or ice becomes too thick to easily reach the meadow voles and other small mammals that are the mainstay of their diets.

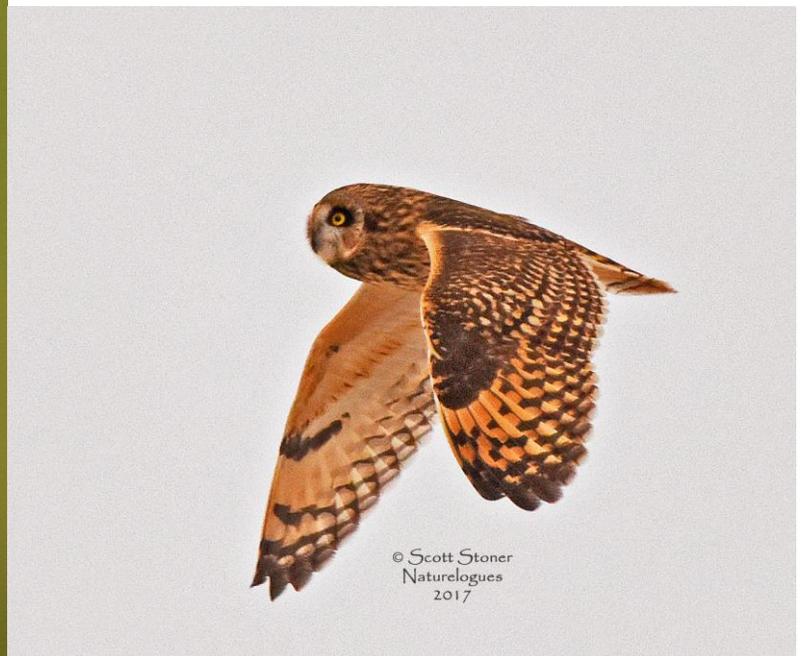
Last winter was a great season for owl viewing. Fitzpatrick Road became a very popular spot in the late afternoons. The NYSDEC, which manages the Fort Edward Grasslands Wildlife Management Area on the east side of the road, restricted access into the grassland to prevent disturbance of the owls. We often saw a half dozen or more Short-eared Owls from Fitzpatrick Road, which often flew close enough to afford the opportunity for many people to observe and photograph them.

Denise and I have often observed a distinct “shift change” late in the afternoon. Diurnal Northern Harriers go to roost and are “replaced” in their grassland flight-hunting niche by crepuscular Short-eared Owls. Sometimes they overlap, but the disappearance of the harriers at the end of the day signals the time to keep a lookout for the start of short-eared owl show!

Over the 25 plus years that I have been birding there, significant change has occurred, both positive and negative. Much of the grassland has sprouted For Sale signs, and some additional structures have gone up. But some has been preserved too. Although the designation of the 13,000 acre IBA carries no protection, it does provide exposure of the value of the area and the need to preserve it. The abovementioned WMA preserves and manages nearly 300 acres. Access is from a small parking lot on Blackhouse Road (trail access out to a new viewing platform, about 0.9 miles). This WMA can also be viewed from Fitzpatrick Road (park along the road). The Friends of the IBA owns some land along with a viewing blind along Rte. 42, about a half mile north of Rte. 197. It is imperative that we preserve additional lands to protect the grassland species that depend on them. Other good places to check still are Swamp Road, Plum Road, and Cary Road.

ON NATURE..... (continued)

This winter we'll be up there, checking favorite spots along Fitzpatrick, Blackhouse, Plum, Swamp, and Cary Roads, along with Rte. 42 and other routes. How many owls will this winter bring? Whooo knows, but we'll be out there looking, and hope all of you will too!



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Wind up the birding year by joining the long tradition of counting birds during the Christmas season! If you are interested in getting involved in one of HMBC's three counts, contact the coordinators, listed below.

Schenectady Christmas Count:

Coordinator:

Larry Alden

Location of Event:

Schenectady & Vicinity

Date:

December 16, 2017 – 5:00am – 6:00pm

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

Southern Rensselaer Christmas Bird Count:

Coordinator:

Naomi Lloyd

Location of Event:

Southern Rensselaer County

Date:

December 23, 2017 - 5:00am - 6:00pm

Contact: Naomi Lloyd - naomi_kestrel@yahoo.com, 518-596-5964

Troy Christmas Bird Count:

Larry Alden

Location of Event:

Troy & Vicinity

Date:

December 30, 2017 - 5:00am - 6:00pm

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

Upcoming Field Trips

DECEMBER

Saturday-Monday, December 2, 2017 - 6:00am - December 4, 2017 - 5:00pm - Niagara Falls, Ontario

Coordinators: Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen 899-2678 gregg_recer@alum.rpi.edu

***Note: Reservations for this trip were due on November 7.

Christmas Bird Counts: December 16, 23, and 30, 2017: For details and contact information please see Christmas Count information, above.

JANUARY

Monday, January 1, NEW YEAR'S DAY BIRD COUNT AT FIVE RIVERS EEC

Coordinators: Ray Perry 518-475-0291 (daytime) raymond.perry@dec.ny.gov ~and~ John Kent 518-424-2234 jwkent@fastmail.fm

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, located on Game Farm Rd., in Delmar, NY, is a large area of fields and forest and is one of the premier birding locations in the Capital District.

This year marks the 37th Annual New Year's Day Bird Count at Five Rivers. The goal of the count is to identify all the bird species present on January 1st. This also marks the start of Five Rivers' annual bird list. HMBC joins the event again this year and encourages members to participate. Groups will go out at 9:00 a.m., but birders are welcome to come earlier to get a head start. Everyone will meet up at the Visitors Center for a compilation of species-observed at 11:00 a.m.

The *new* Visitors Center is open. We will have access to the building during the morning for those who wish to observe the bird feeder area in comfort. Call ahead to Five Rivers in case of inclement weather.

Meet at 8:45 a.m. at Five Rivers EEC in Delmar.

Saturday, January 13, ANNUAL STATE WATERFOWL COUNT

Coordinator: Gary Goodness 518-862-9260 goodness@nycap.rr.com

On the local segment of this statewide event, participants will count waterfowl and other birds on the Hudson River between North Troy and Hudson Falls.

Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the Hannaford parking lot on the east end of the North Troy-Waterford Bridge (NY Route 4). Please call coordinator to participate and confirm date.

Sunday, January 28, DEADLINE FOR RESERVATIONS, CAPE ANN & NEWBURYPORT/PLUM ISLAND out-of-area trip, February 17-19

Coordinator/Leaders: Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen 518-899-2678 gregg_recer@gmail.com

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED. Contact Gregg Recer by January 28th to reserve a spot and for hotel reservation information.

Upcoming Field Trips (continued)

FEBRUARY

Thursday, February 1, DEADLINE FOR RESERVATIONS, FORT EDWARD GRASSLANDS

Coordinators: Scott Stoner & Denise Hackert-Stoner 518-785-6760 scottjstoner@aol.com

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED. Contact the coordinators no later than **February 1st**, to sign up and get the meeting time and place. Space is limited, and carpooling will be necessary.

Saturday, February 3, FORT EDWARD GRASSLANDS (Washington County; afternoon through dusk) **Snow date: Sunday, February 4**

Coordinators: Scott Stoner & Denise Hackert-Stoner 518-785-6760 scottjstoner@aol.com

Short-eared Owls are seen most winters in the Fort Edward Grasslands, an Important Bird Area in Washington County. This area is also known for other wintering raptors such as Rough-legged Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, and Northern Harriers. Wintering field birds including Horned Lark, Snow Bunting, and Eastern Bluebird are good possibilities, while Lapland Longspur and Northern Shrike are less likely. If Snowy Owl has been reported, we will make a special effort to see it.

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED. Contact the coordinators no later than **February 1st** to sign up and get the meeting time and place. Space is limited, and carpooling will be necessary.

Saturday, February 17- Monday, February 19, CAPE ANN & NEWBURYPORT/PLUM ISLAND (out-of-area, multi-day trip)

Coordinator/Leaders: Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen 518-899-2678 gregg.recer@gmail.com

The Cape Ann and the Newburyport/Plum Island, MA, areas are prime winter birding locations. We will spend Saturday on Cape Ann's shoreline looking for white-winged gulls, wintering sea ducks such as Harlequins, scoters, eiders and loons as well as other winter visitors like Purple Sandpipers and Guillemot. Sunday will be spent at Newburyport and Plum Island searching for more sea birds, Harriers, Snowy Owl, etc. Monday morning is make-up time where we will pick up any spots and target species missed. Plan 2 to 3 nights in a motel. By Club policy, this overnight trip is for members, with non-members accommodated if room is available and with the leader's approval.

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED. Contact Gregg Recer by January 28th to reserve a spot and for hotel reservation information.

Saturday, February 24, BIRDING BY SNOWSHOE AT FIVE RIVERS EEC (Albany County; morning)

Coordinator: Ray Perry 518-475-0291 raymond.perry@dec.ny.gov (Joint trip with the Audubon Society of the Capital Region.)

Join Ray for a special outing of birding by snowshoe. Meet at the Visitor Center at 9 a.m. for a brief introduction to snowshoeing, then strap on the waffle stompers and go over the meadow and through the woods in search of winter specialties. The program is geared for the birding/snowshoeing novice and is open to the public, but space is limited. The snowshoes are provided through the Friends of Five Rivers; please call in advance to reserve. If there is insufficient snow, we will go on foot. In the event of severe weather, this program may be cancelled.

Please call Five Rivers at 518-475-0291 by Wednesday, February 21st to register.

Feathers

Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club

c/o Five Rivers EEC

56 Game Farm Road

Delmar, NY 12054