

Feathers

Bi-monthly publication of the
Hudson-Mohawk
Bird Club, Inc.

Birding Japan in Spring: Scenery, Food, and Endemics By Bernie Grossman

(Note: A version of this article was first published in the July, 2019, issue of *The Limpkin*, the news letter of the Appalachian Audubon Society, Tallahassee, FL)

It's been two years since Chris and I moved to Tallahassee, FL, joining our son, Zack, and his family. In this time, we have learned that the weather is very different from NY's Capital District and that the birding is quite different, too. Common species such as Goldfinch, American Robin, and Mallard are uncommon winter visitors here. However there are some pretty nifty new ones such as Limpkin, Clapper Rail, and Swallow-tailed Kite. Note that summers here are long and hellish.

Tallahassee is much different than southern Florida. It is hilly and quite wooded with a very different flora. Tallahassee has an extensive park system that we enjoy for walking, birding, and butterflying. The St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is about twenty miles south of us. Its southern edge is the Gulf.

Last spring we traveled to Israel in late March to take in the vast northward migration from Africa to Eurasian as well as local residents. This year we took a 17 day birding trip late May to mid-June to Japan that was offered by Field Guides, Inc., Austin, TX (www.fieldguides.com). Both of these were inaugural trips for FG. This was our second trip to Japan. The first in February, 2014, had the goal of seeing the wintering migrants such as the White-naped, Hooded, and Red-crowned Cranes, and the Steller's Sea Eagle as well as regular residents. The second trip was pointed more at breeding residents as well as some unusual and rare endemics. Except for northeastern Hokkaido, the trips covered different locations. Our guides on both trips were Phil Gregory and Jun Matsui.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Cassandra Davis

As a child, I collected nature books and wildlife documentaries on places around world. I was fascinated by neotropical parrots, penguins in Antarctica, and emus of Australia. Before I started bird watching, most the birds I saw belonged to the following groups; songbirds, blackbirds, hawks, owls, and waterfowl. It wasn't until I took a course at Hudson Valley Community College called Biology of the Birds, that I realized the birds in my backyard were just as unique and interesting.

As part of the class, I put up a feeder in my lawn and patiently waited by the window with a pair of hand-me-down bulky marine binoculars for the birds to come. For some time, it seemed my only visitors were squirrels. And then it happened, not *on* the bird feeder, but below, a lone songbird hopped through the snow to pick up a fallen seed the squirrels had missed. There it was! My first bird. I quickly flipped through my field guide and discovered it was a Dark-Eyed Junco. On February 12, 2012, I logged into my eBird account and entered it. From there I was hooked, I looked forward to eating breakfast and recording the birds I saw out the window. I added suet to draw attention to the local woodpeckers. Soon my family became involved and we kept a notebook of the birds we saw at the bird feeder. Even my Mom whose prior perception of birds can be depicted in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, enjoyed the bird feeder and began to go bird watching with me regularly.

After the course, I periodically went birdwatching on my own during college and after. I enjoyed the calmness and solitude of bird watching, excitement and challenge of seeing a lifer.

I spent a year in Knoxville, Tennessee and relished exploring new places and seeing many new birds. It became a weekly hobby and I re-found my love for birdwatching. When I returned to New York, I wanted to keep up my pace of birdwatching. I googled "bird watching Albany NY" and the Mohawk-Hudson Bird Club was the first website to pop up. I hadn't thought about joining a club, since birding to me was at that time a solo adventure. I was curious and went to on my first field trip to a place I had been many times on my own, Vischer Ferry Nature Preserve. Birding with the club, I saw more birds I had not had the expertise or equipment to see/hear on my own, listened to amusing stories, and was able to share my enthusiasm in seeing life birds.

After several field trips and programs, Scott Stoner asked me to join the team of board members and I eagerly agreed. I wanted new birders to experience the same warm welcoming that I was given to the birdwatching community. The field trip leaders make it possible for everyone, at any birding skill, to appreciate and pursue birding. Since joining the club, I had the opportunity to table the Five Rivers Fall Festival and the Ballston Spa Birdhouse Festival as outreach events aimed at introducing new individuals to the club. I hope to continue to recruit younger birders into the club so that the knowledge of current members can be passed down to the next generation of birders.

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

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Sunday, September 8, 2019 – Hand Hollow, New Lebanon

There were 6 people - 2 from Alan Devoe and 4 from Hudson-Mohawk. This is a Columbia Land Conservancy Property with a mix of habitats and a two mile trail which connects two parking lots. As always, the best birds were found within a hundred yards of the parking lots. There are two small ponds at one end which house a small heronry plus some Grasslands, the middle are mostly deciduous woods with a stream running through which connect to a larger lake.

We were able to find Wilson's, Bay-Breasted, Magnolia, Chestnut-sided, American Redstart, Tennessee, Common Yellow Throat and Black-throated Green Warblers close to the eastern end of the property. The lake at the other end had Great Blue and Green Herons. On returning to the original parking lot we passed blue-gray gnatcatchers. Best birds were two Olive-Sided Flycatchers on our return to the starting parking lot. The two birds were alternating position on a snag as they chased insects and each other.

Marian Sole

Saturday, September 28, 2019 – Nutten Hook

We had a spectacularly beautiful fall morning for our joint HMBC/Alan Devoe field trip at Nutten Hook in northwestern Columbia County. The fifteen participants were had about equally divided between the two clubs. During the trip we walked all the trails at the preserve and visited two little known coves and viewpoints. Some of us, who arrived early, saw a Blue-headed Vireo in the parking lot. When the group had assembled we walked to the river and then followed the trail from the old ice house through the woods along the river to Ferry Road. We encountered Bald Eagles everywhere along the river, flying overhead, perched on sticks in the water, and sitting in trees. By the end of the trip we had seen ten along with several Double-crested Cormorants, and dozens of Ring-billed Gulls, many of the latter following a cement tanker making its way down river. Gray Catbirds were still around and we were surprised to find good numbers of Tree Swallows still feeding over the river so late in the season. With the tide nearly completely out, the mudflat at Ferry Road produced a Great Blue Heron and a Great Egret. The trail back along the marsh had a Common Yellowthroat. A small group stayed to take the trail north to the inlet where we saw our third Eastern Phoebe, a flock of Cedar Waxwings, and a very close fly over Pileated Woodpecker. Two people at the back of the group also picked up a Chestnut-sided Warbler on this trail. We saw or heard all six of the common woodpecker species during the trip. The cumulative list for the morning was around 35 to 40 species.

Kathryn Schneider

Field Trip Reports *(continued)*

November 9, 10, 11, 2019 – Rhode Island Coast

After a layoff of nearly four years, we had a very successful long-weekend excursion on the HMBC RI Coast trip. The trip got off to a cold, but sunny, start on the Saturday morning of Veterans' Day weekend with temps in the 20sF at Trustom Pond NWR. The core group of seven of us (later joined by two more) covered most of the trails there with highlights including both scaup, many ruddy ducks and American coots, great cormorant, and a good mix of late songbird migrants including palm warbler, ruby-crowned kinglet and hermit thrush. A couple of us had brief glimpses of a barred owl in the woods. We were unable to locate a female tufted duck that had been present there for weeks, or a possible Eurasian wigeon found earlier that morning, but not for lack of trying. The remainder of the first day provided our initial sea-watching opportunities at Moonstone Beach and Pt Judith. Highlights included one red-throated loon, numerous gannets at Pt Judith light, distant looks at all three scoters and a surprising fly-by of an American oystercatcher in great late-afternoon light.

We spent a full morning the next day at Sachuest Pt NWR, one of the premier coastal birding locations in New England. It took some time, but eventually we caught up with plenty of harlequin ducks, as well as better-quality views of all the scoters, long-tailed duck, and lots of opportunities to compare and contrast various plumages of double-crested and great cormorants. We had big numbers of sanderlings both on the beach and out on the exposed rocks, and a bit of a surprise was a very extroverted male ring-necked pheasant. Nearby Purgatory Chasm provided, as always, a very scenic short stop with more good views of harlequin ducks, and a large raft of black scoters, many of which posed on the water with their tails cocked up like ruddy ducks -- a posture I had not appreciated before.

One of the themes of the weekend ended up being repeated tries for two vagrant waterfowl that can be relatively regular in the area -- tufted duck and Eurasian wigeon. We tried for the wigeon at a spot we hadn't covered before -- Broad Cove just over the line in Somerset MA. It had been reported a number of times over the previous couple of weeks, and we scoured a group of American wigeon for quite a while, but no luck (making us 0-for-3 at that point!). Meanwhile, the female tufted at Trustom had been relocated, so we were starting to consider how that would affect our return travel plans on Monday. We ended Sunday at Watchemoket Cove, adding killdeer and belted kingfisher, but no unusual gulls or waterfowl.

Checking ebird reports that evening, a male tufted duck had been re-found on Easton Pond, in Newport just a few minutes from our hotel, so we headed there first thing Monday morning. This used to be a challenging place for viewing with no real public access. After great looks at a large raft of ring-necked ducks, hooded mergansers, and a smattering of other waterfowl on the far east side, we traveled around to the opposite side where there is now parking and a public path on top of the reservoir dike. We walked most of the path scoping several different rafts of ducks, mainly ruddies, but also a big distant scaup raft. Cathy picked out a female canvasback with the scaup, but still no tufted. Time was starting to get short and so we began to head back. I stopped momentarily to scan a nearby group of ruddies where one bird seemed to show bright white flanks. Sure-enough it was the male tufted. It kept its head tucked the entire time we studied it, but the white flanks, black back, and somewhat messy incomplete tuft were all easy to discern at close range. A lifebird for several people. Yay!

We finished the trip with stops at Brenton State Park on Newport Island and Beavertail State Park on Jamestown Island -- both places for great coastal scenery as well as good birding spots. We added a pair of snow buntings at Brenton. At Beavertail we took a relaxed lunch break followed by a walk around the light. There wasn't much new until Scott Stoner located an interesting sparrow. The group had gotten spread out, but we converged on the spot and had an extended experience following the bird in and out of the road-side bushes. It clearly had the flat-headed profile of an *Ammadramus* sparrow with extensive buffy in the face, chest, flanks, and undertail. The most striking feature was a very prominent complete eye-ring. The best possibilities were grasshopper or Le Conte's (the face pattern was wrong for Nelson's/saltmarsh) -- either a good migrant rarity there. We eventually had enough good views to be fairly sure that Le

Field Trip Reports *(continued)*

Conte's could be ruled out. Denise Hackert-Stoner got some excellent photos of the bird confirming it to be a fresh fall grasshopper, which the Geo guides notes can be more extensively buffy than typical breeding plumage.

We had a great time leading this trip to an area we really enjoy visiting. This was a somewhat earlier fall time-period than we've done this trip before. While almost all the expected wintering birds were present, it was clear numbers were below those expected mid-winter, and it was apparently a little too early for purple sandpipers, white-winged gulls, or alcids. On the flip side, temperatures were mostly quite pleasant, and we had more lingering migrant opportunities to keep things interesting. Thanks to all the participants for making it fun and a very successful trip.

Gregg Recer

Cathy Graichen



Lesser Scaup



Tufted Duck



Ring-necked Pheasant



Grasshopper Sparrow

Field Trip Reports *(continued)*

Sunday, November 3, 2019- Vischer Ferry Preserve

It was my pleasure this morning to be the coordinator for the HMBC Vischer Ferry Preserve field trip. It was not exactly the best day for a field trip at Vischer Ferry because nearly all trails at the Preserve were flooded in different spots; and even before the flooding began there was a pronounced dearth of waterfowl, usually the main target for this trip! Cancelling was an option but I decided that we could have a pleasant walk from Ferry Drive going east on the towpath as far as the trail was clear and dry for us. We had an especially large turnout of 20 birders, all very congenial, including several beginners and several newcomers to HMBC field trips. After carpooling to Ferry Drive from the main entrance we had a very nice walk along the river and the west pond for almost 2 miles until we encountered some high water just $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from the main entrance where we had cars parked. So then we were faced with just two choices: either walking through a very short stretch of ankle-high water or walking 2 miles back to Ferry Drive. We all chose the ankle-high water and some of us got a little water in our boots!

Birds for the morning were a little scarce. Perhaps the best bird was a lonely Gadwall that we found among a small group of Canada Geese somewhere west of the deep water. Just after the high water we had good looks at 4 or more Eastern Bluebirds. We had many Pileated Woodpeckers and a total of 5 woodpecker species for the morning. A little east of Ferry Drive we found a very cooperative Golden-crowned Kinglet and a Yellow-rumped Warbler. We also had several good looks at White-throated Sparrows. The trip leader spotted a Pied-billed Grebe from the Whipple Bridge before any of the other participants arrived, and the group spotted a flock of 8 Wood Ducks overhead while we were gathering in the parking lot. The final species count was 33. Thanks to all who made this morning walk so enjoyable! We hope to see all the beginners and newcomers at HMBC field trips and programs in the future.

John Hershey



Birding Japan in Spring *(continued)*

We all know that Japan is an industrialized, first world country made up of several islands off the coast of Asia. Most of us don't realize that these islands are quite mountainous and forested with the population concentrated in a relatively small portion of the land. There is an extensive intra-country air system and excellent highways, so travel is easy. The nine of us (7 clients, 2 guides) traveled in small buses and by air. In one case, we took an overnight ferry to an island. We stayed mainly in western style "business" hotels with one memorable night in a traditional Japanese inn.

Most mornings started early, so breakfast was delayed or eaten on the road. To do this, we often had to buy breakfasts the previous night at convenience stores such as Family Marts or Seven-elevens. This isn't as bad as it seems, since the stores had a wide range of both Asian and western foods. Much of it was quite good. The Japanese Seven-elevens did not offer Slurpees. Lunches came from convenience stores or restaurants, while dinners came from restaurants or at the hotels.

We had wonderful traditional Japanese dinners and breakfasts a few times. These consisted of an array of small portions of traditional items with sauces or soups. Each place had a little brazier that cooked meat and vegetables in a broth heated by a candle. It was a delight.

Our first stop was the area near Kochi, Shikoku Island southwest of Tokyo. The island is Japan's fourth largest, and the goal was the Fairy Pitta, an elusive, but beautiful bird. It was so elusive that we spent hours looking for it, but only heard it call distantly twice. Other birds were also scarce causing frustration. The most interesting sighting was a couple of foot or more long, fluorescent purple earthworms, Siebold's Earthworm (Google it).

The next stop was the slopes around Mt. Fuji. We saw the mountain thrusting through the clouds as we flew to and from Shikoku. The mountain's lower slopes are forested and are the home of several thrushes, Again we were frustrated by seeing only one of the several possible birds. We had a great morning at a small nature center which had a pool reached after a walk in through the woods. Along the path, we had sightings of two different Old World Warblers as well as a Goldcrest and a Red-flanked Bluetail, a flycatcher. The Old World Warblers are a real challenge for most American birders, because they have only small differences in plumage within a family. They are best identified by call, which is why we pay the big bucks for guides.

Returning to Tokyo, we boarded the overnight ferry to Miyake-jima, a volcanic island about 100 miles south of Tokyo. The volcano is active with an eruption cycle of about 20 years. All the residents live along the shore near a road that circles the island. After a convenience store breakfast, we drove to the Miaki Nature Center located in a wooded area off the highway. From the parking lot, we spotted a Gray-breasted Bullfinch, which is now separated from the more western Bullfinch. The latter has a much more completely rose-colored breast. The walk in revealed the call of a shy Ijima's Leaf Warbler (*phylloscopus*). After some searching, the group found an Owston's Tit, a recent split from the Varied Tit. The nature center itself had a wet area that finally attracted our target, a beautiful Izu Thrush (*Turdus*), endemic to the small group of Izu Islands that includes Miyake-jima. Finally, we drove to a lookout on a cliff on the shore. A fierce wind was blowing, but in a

Birding Japan in Spring *(continued)*

birding miracle, our target, Pleske's Grasshopper-warbler (*Locustellus*), popped up onto a grass stalk about twenty feet from the van and sang loudly enough to be heard over the wind.

We had only 4-5 hours on the island and returned on the ferry to Tokyo. The next morning, we flew to Amami Island in the Ryukyus south of the main Japanese Islands. Ryukyus are sub-tropical. The birding goal here was a unique set of endemics found only on Amami and Okinawa further south. Walking through a reserve, we were able to get a glimpse of a Ryukyu Robin, one of a split of the robin group into Eurasian, Japanese and Ryukyu. The latter has two sub-species, one on each island. Endemics also seen were the Owston's Woodpecker and the Lidth's Jay. Only a very few hundred of these two species exist.

Two unusual endemics are the Amami Woodcock and the Amami Black Rabbit. Both are nocturnal. We drove slowly up a forest highway after dark and soon spotted a trio of the strange looking Woodcock walking ahead of us along the paving. Like many island endemics, the Woodcock is flightless and fearless. We were able to approach them closely. Several more were seen as we drove along. Later we saw the Rabbit grazing at the road's edge. It was a strange looking creature: longer bodied and chunkier than an Eastern Cottontail and having a dark brown coat and small rabbit ears. The highways all have signs posted warning drivers of woodcock and rabbit areas.

Okinawa was a short flight south of Amami. It is physically larger and more heavily settled due to the big American military presence around the island's southern end. The northern end is mostly protected by a national park with most of the settlement along the coast. Both the islands are inhabited by the Habu, a venomous pit viper feared by the residents. Indian mongooses (mongeese?) were introduced in the early 1970s as a control measure, but those in charge failed to realize that the snake was nocturnal, while the mongoose was diurnal. As a result, the mongoose went after the local animals and nearly wiped out several endemics.

A control program was put in place that included building three fences across the narrow point of the island, and then instituting a strong elimination program. We saw several traps in the woods along the roads and paths we walked. The mongoose population has been reduced significantly in the park and wildlife is recovering.

Okinawa is a stopping point for many migrants, but there are only 14 species considered breeders. Two of the most interesting are the Okinawa Woodpecker and the Okinawa Rail. We spent a considerable amount of time walking a woods road in the park looking and listening for the woodpecker. Finally a pair responded to recorded calls and made brief, but satisfactory appearances in the foliage. We later got a very brief look at a third bird. Only a very few hundred of these remain.

The rail is another flightless endemic. One was spotted as we drove along a yard one morning.

Birding Japan in Spring *(continued)*

The trip technically ended with our flight back to Tokyo, and two of the group flew home. The remaining five continued on an extension to Hokkaido along with the guides. Hokkaido is the northern-most Japanese island that is sparsely settled and home to big fishing, timber, dairy, and tourist industries. The island's position close to northeastern Asia exposes it to fierce winter weather. A very severe winter in 2014 almost blocked our first attempt to visit. Permanent snow fences and lighted, downward pointing pole-mounted arrows on road edges are needed for winter travel. This time in contrast to the southern locations, the weather was quite pleasant.

We spent the first night in Kushiro, and then visited the nearby Kushiro Nature Park. Walking the wooded paths, we saw Eurasian Nuthatch, Pygmy Woodpecker, three different Tit species, and, after a lot of work, a Sakhalin Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus*) hiding in the tree tops.

We then spent the afternoon driving along the northeast coast toward Rausu on the Nemuro Peninsula. Along the way, we spotted several Red-crowned Cranes. We diverted onto the Netsuko sand spit, a long finger into the ocean. Netsuko is a wild, wind-swept peninsula now primarily used by the fishing industry. It does have a nice little visitors' center where we stopped for some birding. Along the spit, we spotted several White-tailed Eagles, a Red-necked Grebe, a Rhinoceros Auklet, and a Middendorff's Grasshopper-warbler (*Locustellus*). My favorite bird was lovely Siberian Rubythroat that was spotted at a distance and who responded nicely to recorded calls. It perched up quite near us and sang.

Netsuko was followed by the trip's high point for me. We drove on to Rausu where we spent the night at a traditional Japanese inn complete with sleeping mats spread on the floor of our rooms. The inn was located at the base on a wooded hill and next to a flowing stream. A Eurasian Dipper was working the stream when we arrived. The inn had built a small pool out of rocks in the stream and it was stocked with fish daily. After a wonderful traditional Japanese meal, the guests left the table to look out at the spotlighted pool through the dining room windows.

Blakiston's Fish Owl is the world's largest owl with a wing span of almost 6 feet and with large females weighing as much as 10 pounds. The bird is listed as endangered with a very few hundred thought to remain. The *blakistoni* sub-species is found in the Russian islands north of Hokkaido as well as the northeastern portion of the latter. Another sub-species is found in the Russian and Chinese far east. Heavy snows in 2014 blocked our access to the inn, and while we heard an owl near our substitute inn, a Eurasian sable hung around the fish pond blocking the owl's approach.

The staff reported that the owl pair was calling in the woods behind the inn. The pair dueted with the male calling with a deep *boo-boo* and the female completing with a *hu*. After a tense half hour's wait, we saw a large shape swoop in to land on the pool's edge. Leg bands told us that it was the female who clomped around the edge. Suddenly she jumped in the water and emerged with a fish in her talon. It was maneuvered to her mouth and swallowed in one gulp. Two more fish were caught and then she left. The male appeared shortly after the group had gone to bed.

Birding Japan in Spring *(continued)*

After a traditional breakfast, we drove into Shiretoko National Park and the Shiretoko Pass with hopes of more high altitude birds. Fog limited visibility, so the only one of interest seen was a single Pine Grosbeck. We left the pass to go back to Notsuka. Here we had the best looks at the Middendorff's Warbler and the Rubythroat. Rain ended the day, and we drove to Nemuro further south along the coast.

Our last full birding day started early with a walk through a beautiful park in Nemuro. Most of the time was spent trying to lure out a Sakhalin Grasshopper-warbler (*Locustellus*) from a hedge row. The bird responded to recorded calls by moving back and forth through the hedge while refusing to provide more than a very brief glimpse as it moved.

Later in the morning we went out on a 2+ hour pelagic cruise. The ocean was quiet bird-wise with Rhinoceros Auklets being the most common species. Several Ancient Murrelets were present along with many Pelagic Cormorants. As we approached a rocky island, the boat guide pointed out a few nesting Red-faced Cormorants. These are much more common in the Aleutian and Pribiloff Islands off Alaska. Finally we got close to two or more Sea Otters.

After lunch, we drove to Kiritappu Meadows and its nature center where a Lanceolated Warbler (*Locustellus*) was lured up and out of the marsh grasses by recorded calls. This is another difficult to see species that prefers to creep mouse-like through the grass rather than fly place to place.

Our last morning started early as usual with a return to the Nemuro park for another crack at the Sakhalin Grasshopper-warbler. It frustrated us just as it did the previous morning. A pair of lovely Long-tailed Rosefinches made up for the frustration. After our final Seven-eleven breakfast, we drove to the Kushiro airport for the internal flight to Haneda Airport in Tokyo. Along the way to Kushiro, we spotted a Red-crowned Crane pair caring for their chicks. A bus drove us from Haneda to Narita, Tokyo's international airport where the group dispersed for their flights home.



Siberian Rubythroat



Fish Owl



Red-flanked Bluetail



Izu Thrush

Upcoming HMBC Programs

Date and Time: January 6, 2010, 6:30-8:30 PM

Location: William K Sanford Library (Colonie)

Speaker: Joe Corra

Topic: Aerial Insectivorous Birds

Aerial insectivorous birds – a guild comprising swallows, nightjars, swifts, and flycatchers – have experienced alarming population declines in North America in recent decades. Declines across diverse species in the guild suggest that changes in flying insect prey are likely a common factor. Aerial insectivores breeding in urban areas face multiple environmental changes, as urbanization is associated with shifts in local climate, habitat structure, water quality, and both terrestrial and aquatic insect prey. Joe Corra will present his MS thesis research which investigated links between aerial insectivore population declines and insects, water quality, and urbanization.

Joe Corra is a 2019 graduate of The Ohio State University, where he earned his Master of Science in Environment and Natural Resources. His thesis research constitutes part of a broader project exploring linkages between terrestrial insectivores and aquatic ecosystems in Dr. Mažeika Sullivan’s Stream and River Ecology Lab (<https://u.osu.edu/strive/>). He is an active volunteer with the Audubon Society of the Capital Region and currently works as an environmental analyst for New York State.

Date and Time: February 3, 2020 6:30-8:30

Location: William K Sanford Library, Colonie

Speaker: Paul Novak of NYSDEC

Topic: DEC’s Grassland Bird Monitoring

Paul Novak is the Wildlife Diversity Biologist for NYSDEC Region 4, based out of Schenectady. He leads and coordinates regional activities for various songbird, marsh bird, and raptor species, as well as work on the New England cottontail, and Endangered/Threatened species project review, and serves as the Region 4 representative on the Bureau of Wildlife Bird & Mammal Diversity Team and the Reptile and Amphibian Team. Following graduation from SUNY Morrisville and Cornell, Paul began his career as a seasonal wildlife technician in Stamford, then the Endangered Species Unit, then returned to school where he earned his MS in Wildlife from Cornell. Paul worked as Director of Science & Stewardship with the Lower Hudson Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and as Zoologist with the New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP), before coming to DEC in his current role.

Date and Time: March 2, 2020 6:30-8:30

Location: William K Sanford Library, Colonie

Speaker: TBA

Topic: TBA

UPCOMING ASCR PROGRAMS

No Programs listed at this time

ARTISTS' PAGE

No Submissions for Artists' Page for this issue

WRITERS' PAGE

Morning Walk

By Eric Molho

It wasn't a lifeless silence.
 More like a soft, relaxed hush.
 Every splintered edge, each angular branch,
 Every clod of upturned earth,
 All the discarded remnants of living
 Were set in pale relief.

Every echo of our world
 Dampened by a pure scintillant dusting.
 Until the sound of my breath and
 The sound of the falling snow
 Were indistinguishable.

Captured by One Note

By: Marilyn Hamecher

You hear a loud piercing note coming from somewhere.
 Singing "Birdy, birdy, birdy,..What cheer, cheer, cheer."
 You think you know what it is, your eyes search for his perch.
 Listening to one note, a Cardinal, out on a limb, in his red suit.

Drawn in by one note that changes your morning routine.
 It's not the first time a bird has twisted you around.
 A note yanking your curiosity making you wonder.
 Your morning turns into a hunt for the source of one note.

You listen to the lyrical unity of the Black Capped Chickadee.
 Chick-a-dee-dee-dee... Fee-bee-ee coming from the pine tree.
 His animation matches his chirrups...Chick-a-dee-dee-dee.
 Happy, cheerful, bouncy...this little bird makes you smile.

Trills and twitters float through the air.
 You listen and label the bird grabbing your attention,
 You were trying to concentrate on another subject,
 When you were hi-jacked by one note.

The gravity of one note, hits you.
 Now silent, you realize, the morning flew by.
 Captured by one note.

ON NATURE

“Time to Bird”

By Scott Stoner

Being retired has also given me the time to finally input some of my older bird records into ebird. As I went through my paper life list, bird by bird, and entered each one, I’m reminded of all the experiences that went into this list.

My first records were as a child growing up on Long Island, in a small hamlet that was at the suburban/rural interface, with extensive open spaces within a few minutes’ walk. Our own yard (including extensive bird feeders), a nearby meadow, a marsh, the Great South Bay, and two flowing waters were my birding universe, a perfect location for a 10-year old wholly intertwined with nature. Early entries on my list included 16 life warblers, scarlet tanager, rose-breasted grosbeak, indigo bunting and more, mainly with my mother who loved these forest birds. Many birders have a specific species that piqued their lifelong interest. I can’t tie it to any one bird, but certain avian visitors to our own yard were significant: A red-headed woodpecker that spent a week in 1964; evening grosbeaks that brashly filled the feeders with color, and an Eastern Screech-Owl that spent several weeks in an owl box! Perhaps especially memorable was a visit one year by a group of Red Crossbills that were initially so unafraid of humans that I could walk right up to them at a feeder on our deck and take photos with a standard lens. To date, Red-headed is my favorite woodpecker and Red Crossbill and Evening Grosbeaks among my favorite birds, so they must have made a subconscious impression!



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Evening Grosbeak

Forays farther afield, largely with my father, and sometimes the Moriches Bay Audubon, took me to new habitats and hotspots, including barrier beaches, a variety of bays and ponds, and Montauk Point in the winter. Snow buntings, Snowy Owl, shorebirds, alcids, and a variety of waterfowl were soon added to my list, along with a Varied Thrush at Southaven County Park, a bird that Bob Budliger, then living only about 10 miles west of us, would also go and see, but our paths would not cross for several decades.

High school brought Ornithology and Advanced Biology classes, and additional after school and weekend opportunities to go birding. From shorebird trips to Cupsogue County Park, more early morning trips to Montauk, and a walk to see a rare Prothonotary warbler just a few blocks from the school!

However, the highlight of my high school birding was a ride for two of us up to Newburyport, MA to see the bird of the century, a Ross’s Gull, reportedly a life bird for Roger Tory Peterson. It also cemented a lifelong friendship with my buddy

ON NATURE *(continued)*

Steve, with whom I would take many birding trips and tours over the years. It also turned out that Bill Lee traveled from Schenectady to see that bird, but, like Bob, we would not actually meet until many years later!

Birding took a back seat to college, with a few notable exceptions. One June, my mother and I boated into a favorite wetland in Maine, and after excitedly finding my life Black-backed Woodpecker, the action picked up! A large cow moose emerged from the woods and blocked our egress from the dead-end waterway. Concerned that she might have a calf nearby and might not take kindly to our presence, we climbed onto the roof of an old cabin, and even practiced going higher, up a tree next to the cabin, in case she charged! This led to a remark in the life list, "Mom and I subsequently treed by a moose"! The other was one April, when my buddy and I took a road trip from Maine to the Everglades, our own form of "Spring Break." As we camped and fought off voracious mosquitoes, we birded south Florida, seeing lifers such as Black-necked Stilt, White-crowned Pigeon, White-winged Dove, Swallow-tailed Kite, and Gray Kingbird (right there in the campground).

Moving to Tucson, AZ in the 1980s provided both a resurgent interest in birding, and the chance to see a hundred or so new birds, from the Inca Dove that is common in the city, the Cactus Wren whose vocalization will always remind me of the lovely Sonoran Desert at Saguaro National Park, to a variety of both specialties and rarities in the diverse and heavily birded habitats of southeastern Arizona. Ventures to find birds such as Spotted Owl, a dozen hummingbirds, Elegant Trogon, Red-faced Warbler, Aztec Thrush, Crescent-chested Warbler, Flame-colored Tanager and more are forever held in my mind and on my life list!



Cactus Wren, Arizona

I also began venturing to other major US destinations for birds. One of these is the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, where my Ross's Gull buddy Steve and I camped in the stifling heat and humidity of mid-summer to track down its many specialties. Despite a major vehicle breakdown and a bout with intestinal illness, we lugged the scope and the Gatorade to key hotspots along the border and got to know the region's beautiful and plainer species from Green Jay to Olive Sparrow. Ringed Kingfisher proved elusive for a while, as the one we kept seeing would not cross the river from Mexico! The next day, one crossed to an island seemingly in the middle, and we went to the visitor center at Falcon Dam and ascertained that it was, in fact, in US territory!

ON NATURE *(continued)*

In the late 80s (and finally with a “real job”) I began going on birding tours to key areas of the US. Impressed with their ability to take us right to the species we were seeking, tours to Idaho, California, Colorado, Texas, Churchill, and Alaska filled major gaps in my list, and provided any easy and fun way to see both birds and places. Some involved a bit of adventure, such as the missed approach flying into the Pribilofs in Alaska’s Bering Sea, an unplanned several day “extension” in Nome due to fog, and sitting in deep cold in the middle of a grouse lek in Colorado waiting for the birds to start, and finally finish, their courtship! And the very, very rough road to California Gulch in Arizona, to see the Five-striped Sparrow! Another memory was in February 2005, when a long-planned tour fortuitously coincided with a super-outbreak of rarities in the Rio Grande Valley, including Crimson-collared Grosbeak, and a both White-throated and Clay-colored Thrush in the scope at one time!



Greater Prairie Chicken, Colorado

Also in the late 80s, I made the great decision to take a job up in Albany, and immediately joined the HMBC. Along with the friendship and tutelage of many great birders, I added a few life birds including Winter Wren, Northern Shrike, Northern Hawk-Owl, Ivory Gull, and even a Fork-tailed Flycatcher!

Denise and I have also picked up a few life birds on the many trips we’ve made on our own, generally with dual goals of birding and photography. Two of the most memorable were my all-time nemesis bird, Dovekie, which we got on the New Hampshire coast on Christmas Day in 2010, and the Amazon Kingfisher we chased to Laredo, TX while on a trip to the Valley in 2016.

Now, my records are in order, and it is time to bird!-Scott Stoner

Atlas Corner: Owls

By Julie Hart

In the last issue I presented the Confirmed breeding codes. This was part 1 of a two-part series, but since the breeding season is over, I am going to postpone part 2 on the Possible and Probable codes until spring 2020. Instead, I thought it would be best to present additional details on how to atlas. The atlas kicks off in January 2020, which is right around the corner, and some of you may want to get out right away and record breeding Great Horned Owls or crossbills!

Fly on Over to the Atlas Website

The atlas website is full of useful information to help you get started atlasing. You'll find information on why we are conducting a third atlas, how to atlas and submit data, block maps, a full listing of upcoming events, and the latest news. You'll also find online tutorials to help you get started using eBird and a list of recommended books and apps to boost your bird identification skills and increase your understanding of bird behaviors and natural history. Starting January 2020, this is where you will be able to sign up for blocks and view data submitted to the project. Bookmark the website at ebird.org/atlasny.

Navigate Atlas Blocks

The atlas is designed to provide a statewide view of where each species breeds. In order to make this monumental task more manageable, we break the state up into smaller blocks and ask people to thoroughly survey each block. The tricky thing is to make sure that you stay within block boundaries when you are in the field. The traditional way to do this is to bring a printed map of the block in the field with you. You can download block maps from the website. If you use a smartphone or tablet in the field, you can download the map to your device and refer to it in the field. A more precise way to know your location within a block is to use a GPS or mapping app on your smartphone. You can download the block boundaries to your device from the website and import them into the app you prefer to use. Google Earth is free and popular, but you should use whatever program you are most comfortable with.

The PDF maps include public spaces like national wildlife refuges, state parks, state forests, and wildlife management areas. You will probably want to target these areas first since in most cases you don't need to get special permission to access the land. For some lands we will work to arrange special access for atlasers, but it is ultimately your responsibility to make sure that you are not trespassing. To aid in this process, we will be providing introductory letters you can take to landowners to request access, including a thank you letter and a placard to place on your windshield while you are surveying. If you discover that much of an atlas block is on private land and you are unsuccessful in gaining permission from the landowner, please contact me or your local regional coordinator.

Check out the blocks and maps on the website: <https://ebird.org/atlasny/about/atlas-blocks>

January Atlasing

January is cold and snowy. Many of us are busy doing Christmas Bird Counts. The last thing on our mind is trying to find breeding birds. But some birds will be settling into their cozy nests even in the middle of winter!

Three species come to mind, Great Horned Owl and Red and White-winged Crossbills. Great Horned Owls were documented incubating eggs as early as January 22 during the previous two atlases. This means that they began courtship and nest building perhaps as early as December! Crossbills, on the other hand, will breed year-round. They are nomadic and move around from one area with lots of cones to another. If they find a particularly high number of cones, they settle in to breed.

While it doesn't look like this winter will be a good finch invasion year, there are a lot of cones in the Adirondacks and Red Crossbills are currently breeding. It's possible they will stick around this winter for a second brood.

Who among you is going to report the first confirmed nesting record for the atlas and what species will it be? The Calendar of Early Breeders gives some idea of the birds you are likely to find in the early months of 2020. By early breeding, I mean species that breed before the heat of the summer when most songbirds are busy raising young. You'll notice that all the owls that live in NY are likely to be nesting by the end of April. Owls and other nocturnal species are notoriously underreported in atlas projects, so let's get out there early to look for them!

Finding Owls

Owls are nocturnal birds and it's easiest to find out which patch of habitat they call home by listening for them at night. You'll want to head out on a calm night during the peak breeding time for each species (see the Breeding Season Table for Owls) and target their preferred habitats (see the Owl Habitat Preferences chart). If you have limited time, aim for the first part of April, which falls in the breeding period for all the owls except Great Horned. Owls tend to call more frequently in the first half of the night, so try to be out between 30 minutes after sunset and midnight. Stop along roads or trails every half mile and listen quietly for 5 minutes. *We do not recommend using playback.* Playback disrupts courtship, foraging and nesting activities, and increases the risk of predation. If you don't hear any birds with passive listening, move on to another stop and try again. Owl calls serve the same territorial and advertising purposes as songs from songbirds, so record them with the S code on your eBird checklist.

The easiest way to upgrade the S code is to return a week later to the same places you heard owls on your first visit. If you hear a bird calling from the same place a week or more apart, use the S7 code to raise the species from a Possible to a Probable breeder. *We do not recommend seeking out the birds or their nests.* You may be able to upgrade the code further if you learn to distinguish the calls of males, females, and young birds. Use your favorite free app like Merlin or Audubon to familiarize yourself with owl calls. Use the P code when you hear a pair of birds duetting and the C code for non-vocal courtship sounds. Later in the season, the young birds become very vocal and you stand a good chance of upgrading to FL (recently fledged young) or NY (nest with young) if you recognize owlet calls.

While out atlasing during the daytime, listen for upset groups of songbirds and try to find the animal they are mobbing; it often turns out to be an owl. The other way to discover owls during the daytime is to keep an eye out for what looks like white paint dripping down a tree trunk and nearby vegetation. This is concentrated waste called whitewash and signals a roost or nest site. There are often undigestible pellets of regurgitated hair and bones on the ground as well. Even if you don't see a bird, you can usually identify the species from the pellet with the help of a field guide.

It is very important to minimize disturbance to nesting owls. Always keep your distance. Stay as far away as possible and minimize the amount of time you spend in the area. Refrain from spreading the word widely about the nest location. For some of the more sensitive species (Short-eared Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Barn owl), we have hidden all breeding records from public output on eBird. For other species, if you are concerned that entering your data in eBird would put the birds at risk, you can hide your checklist from public view, refrain from entering the observation until after the birds have left the area, or enter the data at a larger scale (for example, make a new personal hotspot in the center of the atlas block). The only thing we ask is that you *unhide* your data at a later date and/or report the details of your observation to the New York Natural Heritage Program (<https://www.nynhp.org/report-rare>).

Expect to hear other species on your nighttime surveys, including Wilson's Snipe, American Woodcock, Killdeer, Common Loon, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Yellow Rail, Black Rail, Northern Mockingbird, Veery, Swainson's Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Wood Thrush, American Robin, Ovenbird, and Yellow-breasted Chat. Be sure to start a new eBird checklist for nocturnal visits (eBird defines this as 20 minutes after sunset to 40 minutes before sunrise) and record everything you can identify. Submit your checklist even if you hear no birds. The atlas wants to know where species are and

where they are not. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, I recommend bringing a thermos of hot tea or cocoa to keep warm!

Owl Habitat Preferences

Species	Habitat
Barn Owl	Open habitats
Eastern Screech-Owl	Open deciduous forests, woodlots, orchards, residential areas
Great Horned Owl	Wide variety from forest to farmland
Barred Owl	Moist woods, wooded swamps, bottomlands
Long-eared Owl	Coniferous and mixed forest
Short-eared Owl	Grasslands
Northern Saw-whet Owl	Mixed moist woods with conifers

Breeding Season Table for Owls

Species	Information from Literature			Breeding Dates for NY		
	# Broods	Incubation	Nestling Period	Eggs	Nestlings	Fledglings
Barn Owl	1-2	32-34	Fly at 60, indep at 70	all months		
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	21-26	Lv nest at 35	3/23-7/8	4/9-7/15	3/25-9/18
Great Horned Owl	1	30-35	Lv nest at 31-35	1/22-7/24	2/15-7/9	3/25-12/21
Barred Owl	1	21-28	Fly at 6 weeks	3/20-5/4	4/14-7/4	5/4-9/11
Long-eared Owl	1, occ 2	21-30	Lv nest at 23-24	3/21-5/23	5/5-6/24	6/1-8/8
Short-eared Owl	1, occ 2	24-28	Lv nest at 12-17, fly @ 22-27	4/2-5/19	5/7-6/19	6/11-7/13
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1	26-28	Lv nest at 36, occ longer	3/31-6/11	4/21-7/16	5/9-8/29

Calendar of Early Breeders

January: Great Horned Owl, Red Crossbill, White-winged Crossbill

February: Horned Lark

March: Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, American Woodcock, Mourning Dove, Eastern Screech-Owl, Barred Owl, Long-eared Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Canada Jay, American Crow, Fish Crow, American Robin, House Sparrow.

April: Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Snowy Egret, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, American Black Duck, Hooded Merganser, Northern Harrier, Osprey, American Kestrel, Ruffed Grouse, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, Clapper Rail, Sora, American Coot, Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe, Upland Sandpiper, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Barn Owl, Short-eared owl, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Hairy Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, Northern Mockingbird, Eastern Bluebird, European Starling, Louisiana Waterthrush, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Northern Cardinal, House Finch, Pine Siskin.

This article first appeared in *New York Birders*, a publication of NYSOA. Written by Julie Hart, NY BBA III Project Coordinator.

Red Phase Eastern Screech-owl: Owls and other nocturnal birds require extra effort during the atlas. © Ian Davies

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS - 2019 CHRISTMAS COUNTS – CONTACT COORDINATORS/COMPILERS TO JOIN A COUNT!

Saturday, December 14, SCHENECTADY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Coordinator/Compiler: Larry Alden 518-861-6087 overlook@nycap.rr.com

Sunday, December 15, Albany County Christmas Bird Count

Coordinator/Compiler: Alan Mapes alanmapes@gmail.com Scott Stoner scottjstoner@aol.com

Saturday, December 28, SOUTHERN RENSSELAER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Coordinator/Compiler: Naomi Lloyd 518-596-5964 naomi_kestrel@yahoo.com

Saturday, January 4, 2020, TROY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Coordinator/Compiler: Larry Alden 518-861-6087 overlook@nycap.rr.com

Feathers

Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club

c/o Five Rivers EEC

56 Game Farm Road

Delmar, NY 12054