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Feathers

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NOTES FROM RETIREMENT, PAT DOLLARD

Saturday, October 2, SARATOGA BATTLEFIELD (Saratoga County; morning)

Greetings from the retirement world. Like a lot of other people in these times I've been able to spend more time in excellent outdoor locations observing and learning our natural world, wildlife and focusing on birds. Sharing and comparing these adventures with other birders is quite enjoyable. Photography has become a large part of these adventures. I always feel that a sighting of a new species isn't quite complete without a clear recognizable image. Having started recording and reporting bird sightings at about the same time as my retirement I feel almost a novice but have a great desire to learn from more experienced birders and the enormous resources that the electronic worlds offer. I've been able to add a few new birds to my "Life list" this year which I'm proud of due to limited travel abilities due to Covid.

1-Short-billed Dowitcher

2-Common Goldeneye

3-Dunlin

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

It's difficult to believe that the year is nearly over. Everyone was so looking forward to 2021, with 2020 being the year nobody could wait to put behind us – and now we're already through all but one month of the former, which will surely fly by just as swiftly as the first eleven. And while life isn't quite back to what it once was, 2021 did fulfill much of its promise of some return to normalcy – even as it concerns the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club and birding life in our area.

As I've mentioned in previous posts, the Club resumed field trips this year thanks to our many excellent field trip leaders and enthusiastic participants. The field trip committee recently completed and submitted a schedule for 2022 that even includes some out-of-town excursions, along with a local mix of old favorites and new, emerging hotspots. For now, our program series managed by is still being held online thanks to remote viewing technology that has largely become part of daily life for most of us thanks to public health lockdowns. And while we remain optimistic about the possibility of in-person gatherings in 2022, we'll likely continue to harness the access and convenience the online program format offers, even after we're all able to meet face-to-face once again.

I'd also like to acknowledge Doug and Maria Conklin for their dedication to the stewardship of our H.G. Reist Wildlife Sanctuary and all the hard work they've done there over the years, especially with increased visitorship during the pandemic. In addition to keeping a watchful eye on the sanctuary, Doug and Maria have provided an invaluable service to the Club in mending all the wear and tear to our trails and bridges there – thank you!

While field trips, programs, and the Reist Sanctuary cover much of what we do as a Club as far as the public is concerned, there's a lot going on behind the scenes that I haven't recognized in previous posts. In particular, Denise Hackert-Stoner continues to do an outstanding job publishing our newsletter *Feathers* six times a year, and we have John Kent to thank for tending to our website and other matters on the technology front. I'd also like to thank all my fellow officers and board members on the club board of directors, as well as our committee chairs; it's been a pleasure to work with all of you to keep the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club running smoothly.

And if you're reading this, thank you, no matter what your level of involvement or contribution to our club is. We're looking forward to seeing you all in 2022.

Happy holidays and good birding!

Tristan Lowery
President, Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club
president@hmbc.net

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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6 Knob Hill Road.

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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

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS *(continued)*

Christmas Bird Counts 2021

Saturday, December 18, SCHENECTADY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (all day)

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

Sunday, December 26, SOUTHERN RENSSELAER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (all day)

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

Sunday, January 2, 2022, TROY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (all day)

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

New Year's Day Bird Count

Date: Saturday, January 1, 2022 9 AM -12 PM

Location: Five Rivers Environmental Education Center

Coordinators: Five Rivers EEC 518-475-0291 (daytime) ~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 40th 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.

Call ahead to Five Rivers in case of inclement weather.

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

WRITERS PAGE



Out on a Limb

By: Marilyn Hamecher 11/15/21

Imagining, what would the Birds talk about?
 It's just a normal day for the Birds in their lives.
 We haven't had a normal day in about 4 years.
 Birds aren't defined or divided by red or blue.

Hummmmm... Ms. Hummingbird buzzes,
 "Hey Blue, out there on the end of the limb, how's it going?"
 Hello Cardinal, "heard you singing this morning, why so happy?"
 Hi Goldie, "are you getting ready to leave the long cold winter?"
 Hey Robin, "had your fill of those plump earthy worms yet?"

Hummmmm... Ms. Hummingbird buzzes again,
 "Very soon, my flock is flying to Mexico for the winter."
 Red pipes up, "we're sticking around in our normal range."
 Blue peeps, "we're heading for Georgia in a few days."
 Goldie chirps, "my flock is charting a course for the lower 48."
 Robin sings out, "I'm heading for Texas, with all my X's"

Hummmmm Ms. Hummingbird buzzes once more.
 "Humans should listen to our songs and sing more!"
 "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood..."
 A beautiful day in the neighborhood..."

ON NATURE

A Heron Out of Water, Scott Stoner

We generally expect to find Great Blue Herons in a marsh or at the edge of a pond or river, standing silent and motionless, watching the water for some unsuspecting fish or other aquatic creature to come within range of its spear-like beak.



However, this fall, visitors to the Five Rivers Environmental Education Center were treated to some up-close views of a Great Blue Heron feeding on meadow voles and snakes around the visitor center!



ON NATURE (CONTINUED)

Beginning in late September, this unafraid and omnivorous heron frequented the bird feeding area, walkways, roadways, parking lot (even on top of cars), and grounds around the visitor center and new picnic pavilion. I had no idea meadow voles were *that* common at Five Rivers. I'd maybe seen a grand total of two over recent years, brief glimpses as they ran across a mowed path into the higher grass, plus one more in the clutches of a Red-tailed Hawk near the visitor center. But this heron was finding them everywhere, seemingly every time it needed to eat. Denise and I, over multiple days, witnessed it catch and consume meadow voles in multiple areas including just feet from the front door of the visitor center! Five Rivers' staff even video recorded it catching and consuming a meadow vole right under the bird feeders!



The heron used a combination of walking, then standing and waiting, then walking some more. When it spotted one, it struck with such speed and intensity that the unsuspecting little mammal had no chance. Moments later, it was down, another meal for the heron. This feeding technique is appropriately termed a “bill stab” (Sci Am blog). It also fed on what appeared to be insects, perhaps grasshoppers. These it probably caught between its upper and lower mandibles, as they typically do for smaller prey (Cornell Lab).

ON NATURE (CONTINUED)

Perhaps most dramatic was when it caught a snake! We watched the heron hunt for about an hour one afternoon, working its way through short and tall grass from the visitor center to the area of the pavilion. In the taller grass it suddenly struck and came up with at least a two-foot long garter snake. Initially squirming and struggling, the snake eventually stopped moving, and four minutes after capture, was fully consumed, in one pieces, head first. As with the meadow voles, we knew that garter snakes lived there, but had no idea they were that common. Another visitor had seen the heron eaten two of them in that same general area several days earlier!



The heron was also foraging at the edge of the parking lot, and even observed by multiple visitors standing on the top and hood of cars! Perhaps it was using the high ground to better survey for food!



ON NATURE (CONTINUED)

So how common is this land-feeding behavior? And why did this bird stay in the visitor area for several weeks, when there are multiple ponds within a quarter mile?

This was not the only report of a land-feeding great blue this fall. Anecdotally, there were reports online of herons feeding in fields, and even one frequenting someone's yard and eating multiple chipmunks! Consuming snakes and small mammals is not uncommon, just not typically the mainstay of their diet.

A search of several sources (Audubon, Cornell Lab and Scientific American) revealed the breadth of this species' diet. While it can be almost exclusively fish, great blues also eat amphibians, reptiles, small mammals including voles and gophers, insects, and other birds including rails and other water birds. Their hunting behavior in terrestrial environments including agricultural fields and grasslands for rodents was specifically noted.



Upcoming HMBC Programs

Date: December 6, 2021, 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM

Location: Zoom (Watch for email with link)

Presenter: Gregg Recer

Topic: Birding Kenya: A tented –Camp Safari

The idea of 'going on safari' is arguably most closely associated with East Africa, and Kenya is one of the classic East African destinations. A country roughly the size of Wyoming and Colorado combined, Kenya has the most bird species reported in eBird (1100) of any country on the continent. Its habitats range across desert, rainforest, ocean coast, montane forest, alkaline lakes, and classic East-African savanna. This talk will take in a sampling of many of them, highlighting both the outstanding birding and the great diversity of large mammals to be seen.

Gregg Recer is a former HMBC president. He and his wife, Cathy Graichen, have been HMBC members for 30+ years and over that time have become avid world birders.



Upcoming HMBC Programs *(continued)*

Date: February 7, 2022, 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM

Location: Zoom (Watch for email with link)

Presenter: Nathan Pieplow

Topic: The Language of Birds

All around us, the birds are constantly telling us who they are and what they are doing. In this talk for any audience, Nathan Pieplow unlocks the secrets of their language. You'll listen in on the pillow talk of a pair of Red-winged Blackbirds, and learn the secret signals that Cliff Swallows use when they have found food. You'll learn how one bird sound can have many meanings, and how one meaning can have many sounds—and how, sometimes, the meaning isn't in the sounds at all. This talk from the author of the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds* is an accessible, entertaining introduction to a fascinating topic.

Nathan Pieplow is the author of the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds*, published in two volumes, Eastern (2017) and Western (2019). An avid bird sound recordist and videographer, he is the author of the bird sound blog Earbirding.com, a board member of the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, an author of the Colorado Birding Trail, and former editor of the journal *Colorado Birds*. He teaches writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

Notes From Retirement *(continued)*



4-Blue Grosbeak

5-Mississippi Kite



6-Semi-Palmated Plover



7-Solitary Sandpiper



8-Fox Sparrow



10-Summer Tanager

The Region 8 Fun Run -2021 Year-end Summary, Gregg Recer

The Region 8 Fun Run (FR) is a very informal listing activity where birders keep track of all the species they've seen during the year in Kingbird Region 8 -- the 11 county area centered on the Capital District. The FR started in 2009 and is wrapping up its 13th year. The idea is to have active field birders in the area cover the entire region to get a more comprehensive sense of the birding potential throughout Region 8, while having a bit of very low-key listing competition. The FR keeps everyone's running list for the year in a common online database that all the participants can see, giving everyone a sense of how they stand for the year, and where they might want to focus more of their birding effort. Participants can also track county "ticks" to get a feel for how their birding coverage compares across each of the 11 Region 8 counties.

Long-time HMBC member and professional ornithologist Ken Able once famously described the Capital District -- somewhat tongue-in-cheek -- as "a birding desert." True, we don't have quite the diversity and vagrant potential of other parts of NYS like Long Island, or parts of Central NY. Nevertheless, the results of 13 years of aggressively scouring the entire region for birds and recording the results in the group database has produced an impressive list. The cumulative species total is currently 305, with annual totals for the group ranging from 233 - 250 (2021 currently stands at 244). 42 people have contributed to those totals over time, with annual participation varying from 10 - 18 birders. The leading individual species total has varied by year between 208 and 229 (Tom Williams and Naomi Lloyd are currently tops this year at 216 and 215, respectively). Considering that 300 species in a year for all of NYS is a difficult goal to achieve, it's notable that 70 - 75% of that total is achievable just here in Region 8.

New species continue to be added to the running cumulative list. In 2010, 19 species were recorded that were not found during the inaugural FR year. Every year since has added at least one species not previously seen, and more than half have added 4 or more. As of the end of 2020, the cumulative species total was 299, poised to cross the 300 threshold in 2021. This year we added #300 (hoary redpoll) early on, and blasted right past that threshold by adding 5 more new species to the list. The birding potential of the region has apparently yet to be exhausted!

That's really the FR take-home: there are always interesting birds to find out there. Participating in the FR provides a little extra boost of motivation to keep getting out there and looking.

FR participation is open to all. If you'd like to join us, please send me an email at gregg.recer@gmail.com -- put "fun run" in the subject line. See you out in the field.

Feathers

Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club

c/o Five Rivers EEC

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