



The Fledgling

Newsletter of the
Southern Adirondack Audubon Society

Vol. 20 No. 2 Dec 2002- Feb 2003

From your President:

Follow That Crowd!

-Linda Hoyt

No doubt many of you have tried to locate an owl or hawk by finding the noisy mob of birds surrounding it. My first Great-horned Owl sighting occurred when I found a mixed mob of Blue Jays and Black-capped Chickadees accosting it. Despite the noise, the owl perched like a statue. The owl only turned its head when a lone jay actually dove into it. When, after a second dive bomb attack the owl would not budge, the Blue Jay resumed shrieking from a close branch.

Mobbing is an attack by a group of birds on a predator, often an owl or hawk. It occurs most frequently during the nesting season, and is common among crows, blackbirds, swallows, jays, chickadees, gulls and terns. Why does a smaller bird place itself at risk by mobbing a predator? It may be an attempt to lure the predator away from the nest site, especially if the birds doing the mobbing are group or colony nesters. Possibly mobbing done by a mixed group of birds might also be used to teach young birds how to recognize predators.

One early June morning I heard the calling of Common Grackles as I was walking from the woods toward a field. I located them in a small tree about fifty feet into the field. Ten agitated grackles were lined up the right side of the tree, across the top, and partway down the left side. All faced left except for two flying to the right of the tree. The first two grackles at the left swooped down toward the ground, low over the tall field grass. One by one the grackles in the tree all advanced to the left. As the flying grackles returned to the tree, two more launched themselves toward the grass and the line advanced again. The birds in the

tree never stopped calling while pairs repeatedly took turns swooping further out over the grass.

Finally the object of their distress appeared through the grass: a tiger cat. The grackles had been successfully herding it away from the tree. Had the cat actually disturbed a nest or a feeding area? I don't know. The grackles obviously saw the cat as a threat and reacted by mobbing it.

Mobbing can provide some very interesting bird activity. So, follow that crowd and see what's going on. It is another great way to observe birds in action.

SAAS Calendar

Monthly chapter meetings are held at the Crandall Library, on the fourth Wednesday of the month, except as may be noted below. For changes and updates, please check this column in each issue. Meetings are also published in the Post Star, on the SAAS website and on the Post Star online Events Calendar. Mark your calendar and join us for some exciting presentations by guest speakers featured below. The meetings start promptly at 7pm. Guests are always welcome so please bring your friends with you!

December	no meeting "Happy Holidays"
January 22	Bill Gorman "Eastern Owls"
February 26	Joan Robertson & Linda White "Spring Wildflowers and Migrants"

If you are interested in owls, you'll be fascinated by Bill Gorman's close up movies of eastern owls.

Sharpen your skills and dream of warm spring days as SAAS members Joan Robertson and Linda White introduce us to the spring wildflowers of the area and the bird migrants that arrive with them.

You won't want to miss either of these exciting programs!

**From the Membership
Chair**
Claire Hunter



HOLIDAY GIFT TIME:

Avoid the mall "Holly Daze". Audubon membership is a great gift choice. Select from a gift of National membership at \$15.00 or \$20.00 or a Chapter Only membership at \$10. Both memberships include the *Fledgling* newsletter with local information and meeting schedule. National dues also include the *Audubon* magazine. Both gifts help support Audubon goals. Your \$10 local dues stay in the SAAS area to help finance local activities like the newsletter and the monthly programs held at Crandall library. As the local chapter becomes more active these funds are increasingly valuable. A gift card will be supplied by SAAS, to be sent to you for forwarding or directly to your gift recipient, at your choice. A supply of suncatchers is also on hand and one of these will accompany your gift card if you wish.

THANKFUL TIME:

Renewing memberships are 46 special people who support the grassroots chapter base of Audubon. Any question about renewal notices from National Audubon should prompt a call to me; people contact is one of the benefits of being Membership Chair. Lots more fun than computer printouts! You may renew by getting a Chapter Only membership if you choose. Again, a call or note is welcome.

Thankful Time – for the varied and stimulating programs we've had this year. Also, for the exchange of "bird info" at our meetings and for the local tips on "what bird is where." SAAS experiences - cause to be thankful.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:

Credited to our SAAS Chapter recruiting efforts are three new members: Jerry Loftus of Queensbury, Pat Santora from Chestertown and Linda Webb of Lake George. Also 23 new members who have been assigned to our chapter by National are most welcome. We hope to welcome you in person at a program meeting.

**New Directors Take Office
- New Bylaws Approved**

Two members that have been active in the chapter in the past have once again stepped forward to fill vacant positions on the Board of Directors. Bob Kirker will fill the 1 year term expiring in 2003 and Joan Dobert will assume the position which was vacant until 2004. At the November 20th meeting of the members, the currently expiring Board positions were voted on and Claire Hunter, Linda White and Jim Britell were elected to fill terms that run until 2005.

Also, the recently revised bylaws were approved with all proposed changes. Any member who requests it may have a copy of the SAAS bylaws mailed to his home. Simply contact the editor of the *Fledgling* with your request.

Need A Special Bird Book?

Are you planning a birding trip to Florida, Arizona or Alaska? Have you been trying to sharpen your skills with raptors or Shorebirds? Perhaps your chapter can help. SAAS has a collection of over 250 books all relating to birding. The books have recently been inventoried and catalogued by Barb Putnum and are available for loan to members. From Eastern North American field guides to specialized species accounts and bird finding guides for many areas of the world, this collection is varied and there must be something here you haven't read yet - unless you are Bob Kirker, who generously



donated these titles for the use of the chapter. The list of available titles is much too large to print here, however it is available at monthly program meetings, on the SAAS website at www.audubon.noncommercial.org or you may contact Barb Putnum who has kindly offered to act as caretaker of the collection. You may reach Barb at barbolink1@earthlink.net or 792-7542 to make arrangements for a book loan.

Editor's Ramblings...



I'd like to begin this column by thanking the participants of the Vischer Ferry field trip and Joan Robertson for stepping in when trip leader Ginny Vogel was unable to join us due to a broken ankle. Although the birds weren't numerous we all had a fun day, learned together and enjoyed each other's company. Unfortunately, the November raptor trip was cancelled due to nasty weather. [See the Field Trip Calendar on this page for the reschedule date.]

I was thrilled to see my first Golden Eagle on Town Line Road this October. Birding with SAAS member Carol Fischer - on a day that we nearly cancelled due to cold and snow - proved to be one of the most productive I've had in a long time. Also, I've been surprised and pleased to host a Fox Sparrow over the last month. I've enjoyed watching this new yard visitor do his "scratch dance" in the leaf litter in my garden and hope that perhaps I can provide a yearly stop for this interesting species. While visiting the Dead Creek WMA in Addison, Vt. to see the yearly spectacle of the Snow Geese with President Linda Hoyt, we read the numbers on a couple of the collars worn by the geese. I reported them and recently was notified that one of the geese was banded near Southwest Bylot Island in Nunavut Territory, Canada in August 1997. The bird banding program is an important one and if you recover a banded bird you can report it to 1-800-327-BAND. You'll be doing an important service for those who operate this program as well as receiving interesting information about the recovered bird.

In the interest of a more varied newsletter, I'd love to have someone step forward to contribute articles on mammals, insects, butterflies or anything of general environmental interest. Book reviews on natural history subjects would be welcome, too! If you have an interest in any of these topics and would like to offer something for use in the newsletter, please contact me by phone or email.

If you would like to play Santa do something for the chapter but don't have the time to give, the mailing committee would surely appreciate an electric stapler. It would make assembling this newsletter much easier!

Finally, it was a pleasure to read that the DEC has designated Carter Pond in Greenwich as the newest state Bird Conservation Area. This 446 acre wetland supports a diverse population of wildlife and as a BCA the area will be considered for trail upgrades and possible conservation programs. Unfortunately, the news outside New York state isn't as encouraging. With the Bush administration's regression in the Clean

Air Act and the targeting of the national monuments and national forest roadless areas for oil and gas exploration, I shudder to think of what lies ahead and the damage that will be done to our fragile lands.

We recently mailed an Audubon Alert to all our members about the Bog River UMP. We hope that many of you responded to our request to send letters and faxes. You'll be hearing about more of these issues as they arise; problems are many right in our own backyards. The UMP for the Lake George Forest lands is on the current slate and will affect many of our members. If you care about the future of our environment, please stay informed and take an active part. It's your world - help protect it.

-Mona Bearor

"THOUSANDS OF TIRED, NERVE-SHAKEN, OVER-CIVILIZED PEOPLE ARE BEGINNING TO FIND OUT THAT GOING TO THE MOUNTAINS IS GOING HOME; THAT WILDERNESS IS A NECESSITY; AND THAT MOUNTAIN PARKS AND RESERVATIONS ARE USEFUL NOT ONLY AS FOUNTAINS OF TIMBER AND IRRIGATING RIVERS, BUT AS FOUNTAINS OF LIFE!"

-John Muir

Winter Field Trips

January 26 - Fort Edward Raptors with Joyce Miller

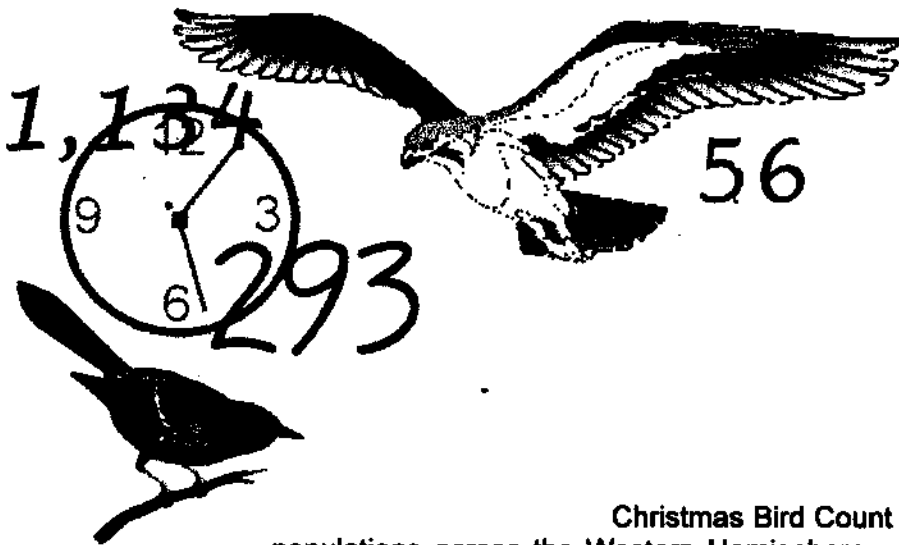
This auto-based trip will introduce you to the importance of the Fort Edward Grasslands - a designated Important Bird Area. We hope to locate several species of hawks and perhaps an owl or two! Time permitting, we will also check the Hudson river for waterfowl. We'll meet at 1pm at the Ft. Edward Agway parking lot and form carpools for this approx. 3 hr. trip. Please bring binoculars & field guides.

February 2 - Beginning Animal Tracking with Gary Hill

We are excited to be able to offer this half-day workshop. Mr. Hill will lead this hike and instruct us on how to recognize the movements of animals of our area. We will meet at 9:30am at Moreau State Park. Snow cover permitting, we will be able to rent snowshoes from the park.

To register for either of these trips please call Mona at 745-8637 or email ramonabearor@adelphia.net.





SAAS Christmas Bird Count scheduled for January 5, 2003

What is the CBC?

The primary objective of the Christmas Bird Count is to monitor the status and distribution of bird populations across the Western Hemisphere. More than 50,000 observers participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count, or "CBC", is citizen science in action. Last year in the SAAS Hudson Falls CBC circle, which extends from the Harrisena Church in Queensbury south to Thompson's Island in the Hudson River, west to West Mountain, and east to Adamsville, the bird tally was 54 species and 8780 individuals. New York state totals were 1,438,480 birds of 204 species.

How did the CBC begin?

On Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the Audubon Society, called for an end to the yearly slaughter of birds known as the Christmas "Side Hunt". At that time, people commonly engaged in a practice of choosing sides, going afield and shooting as many birds as possible. The indiscriminate slaughter of wildlife, and resulting declines in bird populations were alarming conservationists of the period and it was suggested that birds be counted instead of being killed. The first Christmas Bird Count on December 25, 1900 involved 27 participants, 90 species and 18,500 individual birds.

What does the CBC teach us?

The count period, which is from December 14th to January 5th, in North America is referred to as "early winter," because many birds at this time are still in the late stages of their southward migration, so it is not "true" winter. When we combine these data with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, we begin to see a clearer picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years. The information is also vital for conservation. For example, local trends in bird populations can indicate habitat fragmentation or signal an immediate environmental threat, such as groundwater contamination or poisoning from improper use of pesticides. Data currently being gathered will be of great value well into the future.

How do you participate?

Simply call Linda White, our local CBC compiler, to register at 792-4446. Linda will assign the territories and groups. All those who participate are welcome to join the rest at Linda's home at the day's end to join in a pot luck dinner and the formal results tabulating. Each participant should bring a dish to pass. This is a fun day, a learning experience and a valuable service. From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition -- and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

National Audubon requires that each field participant on all Christmas Bird Counts pay a participation fee, which is \$5.00 per person. This helps defray the program costs and publication of the annual results and without it we would be unable to complete this crucial task. In the past, in addition to all her work on the project, our CBC chairperson has had to pay costs out of pocket for those that didn't offer their fee. \$5.00 is not a lot to ask for being a part of the most popular, fun, and rewarding bird census the world over so please offer your \$5.00 to the CBC chairperson or we will not be able to include your data in the tally.

Ah, the Thrushes Sing Still!

-Liza Porter



I walk as often as I can, four miles on a nearby rural road. It is a lovely walk, which I have repeated several times a week for the last ten years or more, as my neighborhood changed from second growth forest into mild, light development. I am happy when I am walking, whatever else is going on. It doesn't change my life circumstances, but it does.

Up until a few new houses ago, I often shared the June air with thrushes, hermit thrushes or wood thrushes. I often felt I was running a sweet gauntlet of music in the spring and early summer, as the "thrush wars" on all sides of me went on. If only humans could be satisfied by such wars! My husband says that the Zulu used to have singing wars, in which two bands of warriors would sing boldly at each other and at the end it would become apparent who had won without shedding a drop of blood. Not a bad way to fight.

Those who understand these things say that thrushes sing to establish territory and attract members of the opposite sex. Well, maybe. Partly. But they also sing to add to the spiritual sustenance of the world. They sing to praise their creator and creation. In the old days it was impossible for me to imagine how it would be to have spring without thrushes. They seemed to express a particular longing, a special uplift. Some humans think we are the only species with this special uplift, but thrushes have it too. The last few springs there have been fewer and fewer hermit thrushes, and no wood thrushes. So I get to see how it is without thrushes. And yes, we can go on, but how sad to have to go on without them because of our own bad decisions and shortsightedness.

Then one year just before the summer solstice, as I reached the extent of my walk and started to turn back, I heard two low notes, "Yoo-hoo..." Could it be? I cupped my ears towards the woods. Yes! Yes, it was a wood thrush! I stood enchanted. I followed slowly down the road and into the next house's parking lot. They won't mind if I just listen here a few minutes. I stood raptly listening to the wood thrush's conversation with himself. "Yoo-hoo...There you are...Oh, Ho...How are you...Well, toodle-oo..." The low chatter at the end of each two phrases was even audible, so he must have been very near but I didn't see him. When my eyes searched the treescape, he would stop singing, so I stopped looking. As long as I stood quietly listening, he continued, a fairy flute in the moist half-light of the woods.

Ahhh. They still exist. If only they can hold on. Things are going to get worse before they get better, but if I can only believe that somewhere, some wood thrush is singing praise and contentment to the early summer air, I can be happy even if I'm not the one hearing.

© 2002, Liza Porter, from "Essays for Our Time".

The Importance of Roost Boxes

Mona Bearor

Providing food and water in all seasons is a great way to help your backyard birds. Adding nest boxes to your yard gives the birds a place to raise their young. But many of us forget that although birds aren't nesting in winter, they do need safe, dry places to roost where they can be out of the wind and stay warm. Birds may roost in stands of evergreens, in heavy shrubs, or in vines that are close to buildings. Some cavity nesters will roost together - sometimes several layers deep! - in a previously used nest site. The loss of natural cover is felt intensely by birds in the cold months and we can help by placing roost boxes on our property.

Roost boxes differ from birdhouses in that they are larger, have perches inside on which birds can sleep

and have the entrance hole at the bottom, allowing the heat from the bird's bodies to rise and be trapped inside. They have no open air vents. A good roost box should be about 9-12 inches square and 2-3 feet high. Dowels inserted through holes in the sides of the box will serve as perches. Alternating them will allow several birds to roost without piling up on one another. The opening should be only about 2" above the base of the box and the box can be mounted 8-10 feet above the ground with the opening away from the prevailing winds.

Many urban areas have laws requiring the removal of dead trees and limbs which lessens the number of natural roosting places. The addition of a few roost boxes to these areas would benefit the local bird population greatly.

Northern Cardinal

Barb Putnam



One of the most recognized birds in our area, the male cardinal is a brilliant red bird with a black face, and prominent crest. The female is much less colorful but nonetheless, a pleasing golden brown with red highlights. Like her mate, she also sports a crest and large reddish-orange bill. You can tell the young birds by their dark bill; they otherwise look like the female.

Although in many species only the male sings, the female cardinal does her share of vocalizing year round but she mostly sings early in the breeding season. The female builds the nest and does all the incubation, however the male "stands guard" and feeds the female while she is on the nest. She may begin a second nest during which time the male takes care of the young from the first brood. Cardinals mate for life and stay together through out the year. During the winter, they may band together into feeding groups, sometimes with other species forming flocks.

"Redbirds" have a varied diet of seed, insects and berries. They are especially fond of sunflower and safflower seeds and are a favorite backyard feeder bird. You can often tell they are around before you see them by hearing their familiar calls.

Male cardinals are famous for defending their nesting territory against real intruders as well as assumed intruders such as their own reflection in a mirror or glass window. They have various songs and calls. Most of the songs consist of rich repeated slurred whistles. Their calls remind me of a husky "ping" that is given by both sexes.

Cardinals can raise and lower their crests at will. These birds love to bathe and are attracted to backyard birdbaths. The adults will bring the young to yards to feed and bathe. They are sometimes victims of brown-headed cowbirds who lay their eggs in another species nest for the unsuspecting parent to raise.

The Northern Cardinal is so well liked that it is the official state bird for seven states. It is very common in the east and has been gradually extending its range northward. They are in the Tri-county area all year.



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Citizen Science Projects
Sponsored by Audubon
and Cornell Lab of Ornithology

The Great Backyard Bird Count

Feb 14-17, 2003

For more information go to:
http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/toc_page.html

Project Feeder Watch

For more information go to:
<http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>

If you love birds and are concerned with their future, one of these may be for you. Data gathered by those working on these important research and education projects will be valuable well into the future. Please get involved - you'll be glad you did!

You Gotta Have Heart!

Here are the resting heartbeat rates of some of our bird friends. Compare these to the average for man - 72.

Mallard	118
American Crow	342
Blue Jay	307
Northern Cardinal	375
Black-capped Chickadee	480
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	615

The Grapes of High Island

Bob Kirker

Well, I finally arrived after nearly of 30 years of reading about High Island, Texas - the spring migrant trap along the Gulf Coast. High Island is located about 30 miles from Galveston along the Bolivar Peninsula.

I was staying in Houston about a two hour drive away. The quickest route from my motel was south to Galveston, by ferry to the peninsula, then to High Island. The ferry ride was free and the facilities were new; the breeze felt good and to top it all off the eleven minute ferry ride gave me a chance to see the oceangoing ships from all over the world. Also the chance to see pelagic birds.

Traveling northeast along the peninsula, to my right was a continual line of new homes built on 12-24 foot pilings. The Galveston Hurricane of 1900 officially claimed 6000 lives. Some local people claim the unofficial figure was much higher. After drowning, the next highest cause of death was snakebite. On the other side as I traveled was rather decrepit housing. A lot of it was old, rusted corrugated metal housing built in the 1920's by the oil companies to house their employees. This is right in the center of our country's petrochemical heartland.

Just past the turnoff to High Island, the roadway was washed out. I was there 10 years ago and there are still no plans for it to be rebuilt. I had wanted to go to Port Arthur, another 30 minutes up the coast, to Sabin Woods. The alternate route would take almost two hours so I chose to stay all four days in High Island.

High Island itself it a 2 mile diameter upthrust of oak woodland with Amoco wells still working the faultline. Still more rusty, abandoned shacks lined the side streets. The "downtown" area consisted of a new Post Office and a Citgo gas station, stocked as a general store, period. Abandoned gas stations, restaurants and motels lined the main street, Texas Rt. 124. I expected to see Henry Fonda drive by with his family!

You want to eat? Winnie is 11 miles north or Gilcrest is 15 miles back toward Galveston! Oh, yes, I had lunch one day in Winnie. The tables were glass covered over local pictures. I had my elbows on the previous Texas Governor who now lives in that big, white house in Washington, DC.

Finally, let's get to the birding... I spent four days in the area trying purposefully to run up a big list. Having Anahuac Wildlife Refuge and the Bolivar Peninsula to draw from, I saw 161 birds. There are four preserves at High Island - the Louis Smith Woods Sanctuary has dual bleachers with bathrooms,

boardwalks, benches, information booth and a gift shop with very helpful volunteers. I was initially surprised to find all the birdwatchers from foreign countries there. The Canadian and British visitors were to be expected; however, the many Germans and French were not. Of the 3 dozen or so daily watchers in the bleachers when I was there in mid-April, about half were non-American. I found almost all of them to be excellent birders. The second to last night I was there I stayed later and was rewarded by seeing a Texas casual - a Western Spindalis. The final night, Stu Tingley showed up with a special Nova Scotia Wings tour looking for that bird. Stu and I had done birding together almost 30 years ago. I remarked that we both had brown hair then - we both laughed!

Another excellent sanctuary is northeast of the village. This area is a pond, a rookery with egrets, Little Blue Herons, Tri-colored Herons, Roseate Spoonbills, etc. The Bolivar Flats has many locations to observe both wading birds and shorebirds. At Rollover Pass, avocets, skimmers, and oystercatchers were seen together. Several small islands contained Great, Snowy, Reddish and Cattle Egrets. Black-crowned Night Herons, Royal, Sandwich, Forster's Terns were all seen.

If I were to rate the High Island area, I would give it an A+ for birding but only a D- for services and sightseeing.



SAAS mourns the passing of Donald Dilatush, 83, of Hartford, NY on Oct. 7, 2002. Don was a very active longtime member of SAAS. By presenting programs on wildflowers and hosting visits to his personal property he showed how farmland could be conserved as a natural habitat. Don continued to be an active member even when in poor health; his wife Marian remained an involved member as well. When Don's health kept him from attending meetings he issued an invitation to all SAAS members to visit him and enjoy the natural beauty of his land. He will be missed by all those who had the pleasure of knowing him or attending his programs.

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National Membership in the Audubon Society includes the quarterly magazine, *Audubon*, and the SAAS newsletter, *The Fledgling*. The cost is \$20 for regular memberships and \$15 for seniors or students. Make check payable to "National Audubon Society" and send with name, address and phone number to address below. Chapter Membership is \$10 annually and includes a subscription to *The Fledgling*. Make check payable to Southern Adirondack Audubon Society and send with Name, Address, and Phone number to:

Claire Hunter, 3 Edgewood Dr., PO Box 1382, South Glens Falls, NY 12803-1382

Newsletter Submission Policy

We welcome submissions to *The Fledgling* and will utilize them as space permits. Please email your articles to the editor if possible and include your name and contact information. We reserve the right to edit as necessary. If you cannot e-mail, please submit to Barb Putnam at 190 Palmer Ridge Rd., Gansevoort, NY 12831. Please be sure to include your phone number and call her at 518-792-7542 before sending material.

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