



The Fledgling

Newsletter of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society
www.audubon.noncommercial.org

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March – May 2006

President's Message

As I enter my second month as President of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society, I am beginning to see how involved this chapter is. My initial impression of the Audubon Society was its involvement in birding and bird related projects. I have since become aware of the Audubon mission, which is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats.

The current monitoring project of the Fort Edward Grasslands IBA is a prime example of this chapters' adherence to that mission. Members of the SAAS Board of Directors, with the assistance of Sean Mahar, Associate Director of Conservation for Audubon NY, have worked hard to obtain a Chapter Collaborative Funding Grant. I am happy to report that the funding has been approved. It will be used to implement a monitoring project to identify and record all resident and migratory species that can be found throughout the Fort Edward Grassland IBA and surrounding area, which will support work to secure protection of the IBA, through local land trusts and local concerned citizens groups. The survey will take place in both the winter and spring seasons.

Last January a group from Audubon New York led a training session covering the survey route. My wife and I took part in the training and we were delighted to spot a Northern Shrike along the route. This was a "life" bird for us. Later that week we went along the route and spotted two Northern Harriers hunting over a field. We sat in our vehicle and watched them for quite some time. At one point we observed what we thought was one flying towards our vehicle. As it came closer we realized it was a Short-eared Owl! It flew to a fence post near our vehicle then turned to look right at us! Had we not volunteered for this survey, we would not have experienced these wonderful events.

Volunteers are still needed for the survey. If you are interested please contact me at my e-mail address or home phone listed in this newsletter.

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SAAS Calendar

Monthly chapter meetings are held at the Crandall Library, on the fourth Wednesday of the month, except as may be noted below. 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 the presentations by guest speakers listed below. The meetings start promptly at 7pm. Members are encouraged to bring a guest!

March 22 - Warren Greene "Flora and Fauna of the Adirondacks"

April 26 - Sean Mahar "Audubon at Home"

May 24 - public program to be announced

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This chapter has also voted to support a project to establish a Riverfront Heritage Corridor Park in the Thomson-Clarks Mills area of the Town of Greenwich. This proposed park would also conserve and protect birds and other wildlife indigenous to our area.

I encourage you to attend our Board of Directors meetings and wonderful programs at Crandall Library. Your President, Don Polunci

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From the Membership Chair

Claire Hunter



March Memories: Twenty-three years ago, in March of 1983, a group of about 50 members of National Audubon met in Glens Falls to initiate the organization of a local chapter. Goals to be met included recruiting at least 60 new members, starting a newsletter and choosing a name. As the year progressed, meetings moved to Crandall Library, "The Fledgling" newsletter took flight, and Southern Adirondack Audubon Society was on its way. The name "Fledgling" reflected the status of our chapter at the time. We hoped that SAAS would grow in numbers and strength and survive its nestling phase.

SAAS has survived and proven a source of fellowship and knowledge over the years. Many charter members are still active; five are board members.

New memberships providing chapter support were a welcome part of the Holiday Season. We extend a warm welcome to: Kathleen Bartholomay, Greenwich; Melinda and James Durrler, Fort Edward; Marilyn and Chad Whitney, Granville. Donations of local support were also very welcome; renewing members of National Audubon, who realized that the chapter no longer receives a share of National renewals, generously remembered us; we heartily thank them. National Audubon assigned 30 new members to us since the last newsletter.

GREEN NOTES – GOOD NEWS: Sincere thanks to the Chapter Supporting members who have renewed in response to the green notices inserted in the newsletter on expiration. The system has been working smoothly and I really enjoy the notes that come with some of the checks. Snow Buntings and a Brown Thrasher have been mentioned this month.

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS were popular during the winter holidays. What better way to remember a friend than with a chapter membership? On request, your recipient will receive a card reflecting best wishes for birthday, Easter, Passover, Spring or a super report card!

Your calls and notes are always welcome. Membership is a people job and contact with members is the most enjoyable facet of the work.

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Editor's Ramblings



The months since the last newsletter have been packed with activity; the IBA monitoring project is in full-swing – see page 4 – and work is progressing on several other new chapter projects. New board members and officers are providing much needed direction for the chapter; however, we still need more hands to help implement new ideas. If you can offer even a little time and effort, please contact a board member or officer or attend the next board meeting and join those of us who work to realize the chapter's goals. The schedule is on page 3.

In this issue you will find the first of a series of articles by a new board member, Drew Monthie. Drew is an avid gardener, native plants landscape designer, and plant historian. He owns and operates Ecologic Consulting, a local business specializing in landscape design, botanical surveys, open space planning and educational programs. Drew is passionate about using native plant material and is well qualified to help us learn to use species in our home landscapes that are suited to this area's climate. Drew's article on genotypes can be found on page 3 and will be of interest to any member who studies the natural world.

I hope this issue will provide something of interest to each reader - the President's message, membership notes, and information on the upcoming Birdathon all present chapter news. An exciting proposal has been made for a new park in the town of Greenwich. For those looking for a "good read" for those last few winter days to come, see the review of "City Birding."

In the last week I've heard cardinals whistling, chickadees, titmice and house wrens performing some spring songs and a downy woodpecker drumming. Those are music to my ears and I now know it won't be long till the redwings return once again!

-Mona Bearor

Spring is nature's way of saying, "Let's party!"

-Robin Williams



Genotypes, Genetic Hardiness and Plants by Drew Monthie

Its spring and you've just come from shopping at a big box store. While you were there you found a great deal on a tree: An American Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) 5'-6' tall for \$21.00. You bought the tree and took it home and planted it. It grew well all season and seemed pretty happy. Winter rolled around, then spring again. Your \$21.00 tree is dead above where the snow line was. What did you do wrong? In all probability nothing. The tree lacked genetic hardiness because of its genotype. Many of the plants sold by giant retailers come from the southern states where there is a long growing season and plants are cheaper to produce. Had you purchased the tree from a local nursery that carries hardy stock, the same species of tree would have cost you about \$39.00. The local nursery probably purchased their Redbud trees from a source in Northern Wisconsin or Minnesota.

To understand genotypes of plants we have to look at them from a historical perspective. Although our example, the American Redbud grows in the southern and Northern parts of the United States and is the same species, there are differences. After the last Ice age many species that had survived only in what is now the southern U.S. began to expand their range northward again. Over thousands of years the northern populations adapted by becoming more cold hardy than their southern cousins. Each population became genetically adapted to its climate.

This genetic diversity is important to local plant populations not only in terms of winter hardiness, but also adaptability to local climate patterns such as rainfall as well as soil ph and pest resistance. It is this tremendous pool of genetic diversity that allows species to survive (or fail) when confronted by natural catastrophe or climate change. When we alter this mix by adding different genetic lines to it, we can expect several different possible outcomes: An introduced genotype may add desired or beneficial genes to a population such as increased cold hardiness or pest resistance. It may have no effect at all if the genotypes are similar to begin with or it may add an undesirable trait to the population such as decreased winter hardiness or lack of drought resistance for example.

It is important to understand the importance of genotypes not only to the ecology of an area, but also the economic impacts they may have. Poor or undesirable genotypes in crops may lead to crop failure or loss resulting in economic hardship or starvation in some areas of the world. All of this leads us back to the Redbud tree: which is the better bargain, the southern tree genotype from the big box store that cost you only \$21.00 and died or the northern genotype tree from the local nursery that cost you \$39.00 and lived?



President sets Executive Board Meeting Schedule

The SAAS Board of Directors, Officers and Committee Chairs will meet on the following dates:

March 12	2-4pm
April 9	2-4pm
May 21	2-4pm

Members are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please come and let us know what your interests are, what direction you'd like to see the chapter heading in 2006 and offer us suggestions for improvement!

All meetings will be held at the Lake George Association offices located on Rt. 9N, exit 21 of I-87, the log building directly across from the southbound exit.

THE BOOK NOOK



“City Birding – True Tales of Birds and Birdwatching in Unexpected Places”

Reviewed by Mona Bearor

Many volumes have been written about finding birds in exotic places. It seems that everyone wants to share their experiences of expanding their life lists in places far and wide. This book does something new – it relates the experiences of finding birds in some of the most common, and, in many cases, inhospitable, urban areas. It also illustrates one of things I that drew me to watching birds in the first place – it is a life study that can be pursued in any place you happen to find yourself – even a sewage lagoon!

Eighteen essays by widely known ornithologists and birding authors, such as Clay Sutton, Paul Kerlinger, Julie Zickefoose and Kenn Kaufman, edited by Mark Allison, comprise this book. Some of these stories have been previously published elsewhere; but, no matter, they could have been written expressly for this collection and together they comprise an anthology that will entertain the reader while he waits for that doctor appointment or wiles away a lunch hour in the city park.

Urban landscapes become places of wonder as some of America’s premier birders extol the virtues of birding these places that show an unexpected diversity of avian species. Only Kenn Kaufman could convince you that you haven’t birded until you’ve visited an IBPL – Important Bird Parking Lot; Judith Toups will persuade you to spend time at the nearest sewage lagoon!

Perhaps you lament, as I do from time to time, the fate of metropolitan birds and birders alike, feeling a bit superior living in the foothills of the Adirondacks and having easy access to dozens of productive birding spots. This book may well erase those feelings and have you scheduling your first birding trip to a major city in hopes of seeing your next life bird! Hopefully, it will also leave you thankful that birds continue to adapt to the less than perfect habitats to which we humans subject them.

Publisher: Stackpole Books; ISBN: 0811700275

A Tribute to Dr. Helen Brody

Sadly, we received a note from Dr. Brody’s son in Venice, Florida, that Helen passed away last September. Helen was a vital part of SAAS. She was the founder and editor for more than 10 years of our newsletter, “The Fledgling,” and was also chapter President for two terms. She and her husband Abe were dedicated North Creek birders and environmentalists. Their annual picnics for the SAAS Executive Board will remain fondly in our memories. She was a very important part of our formative years and remained in touch after retiring to Florida. She will be greatly missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing her.

SAAS Members Monitor IBA

The Fort Edward Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA) is under tremendous pressure for development. Currently before the town board is a proposal for the construction of up to 397 homes on 200 acres of prime grassland bird habitat – habitat which supports the following species of endangered, threatened, or of special concern status: Henslow’s Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Horned Lark, Northern Harrier, Upland Sandpiper, and Short Eared Owls. Other development projects await approval of this project to move ahead, thereby increasing the threat to this important area.

With the leadership of Audubon New York’s bird conservation department, a monitoring plan to conduct a survey of bird species throughout the Fort Edward Grasslands IBA and surrounding areas has been developed and implemented. Three routes are currently being covered for wintering raptors and other species. The same routes will be monitored in spring and early summer for breeding species of grassland birds. SAAS members have recorded observations and behavior for over twenty years that will be valuable for comparing trends and distributions. New data will support advocacy for increased protection with the town, or through a local Land Trust or other land conservation/farmland preservation organization. A Chapter Collaborative Funding Grant was awarded by Audubon New York to aid in completing this important project.

Routes must be covered multiple times each month; some in the morning, some in the afternoon. Whether you feel confident to monitor on your own or as a second pair of eyes along with another chapter member, *we can use your help*. If you would like to help with this important chapter project, please contact any officer or board member on the back page of this newsletter.

It's Time for Birdathon!

by Joan Robertson



Wednesday, May 17 through Sunday, May 21, 2006 has been designated as Birdathon 2006

Birdathon is one of the more important and most interesting activities of Southern Adirondack Audubon. During this period of peak migration we try to cover all the territory in our SAAS chapter to seek out birds coming to nest or passing through on their way north. It is an ongoing attempt to learn how each of the species is doing and which ones seem to be getting more scarce. Climate changes are having a definite effect on bird populations and this annual count provides valuable input to continuing studies.

We know that some traditionally "southern" species are moving into the area and becoming breeding species, such as the Red-bellied Woodpecker and Carolina Wren; some choose to winter with us as well. SAAS members, Dorothy and Phil Bentley have hosted Carolina Wrens all winter at their feeders! Will we find as many of the warbler species as in years past? Is the general population stable or declining?

Pick the day and times that are most convenient for you and ENJOY some time in the field in search of birds. The event is open to all, no matter

what level of birding you do. Half a day is fine or if you are more energetic, you can bird from dawn to dusk. So fix a picnic, invite your neighbor or your best-birding-buddy and help us with this annual attempt to gauge the variety of our bird population. We ask that you stay within chapter boundaries - Warren, Washington, Northern Saratoga counties.

It would be helpful to the tabulator to know the general places you covered and the weather/temperature. You should make a note of each species and compile a list for the day. Remember, in this survey we are counting species, not numbers of individual birds as in the Christmas Count. In 2004 we counted 133 species; on a cold and windy day in 2005 it was 114.

I am hoping for good weather, lots of participation and interesting results for this year.

Lists should be sent to Joan Robertson, PO Box 51, Cleverdale, NY 12820.

Residents Committee Seeks Support

The Thomson-Clarks Mills Residents Committee for a Heritage Corridor Park hopes to establish a passive, public park on riverfront lands currently owned by Georgia-Pacific in the town of Greenwich. Rich in history, these lands have been used by Native Americans as part of the Great War Trail along the Hudson River and by armies in both the French and Indian War and the Battle of Saratoga in the American Revolutionary War. The committee envisions the park as a place for people and nature; a place where individuals and families would pursue recreational activities while learning about area history.

The Board of Directors of Southern Adirondack Audubon supports the Thomson-Clarks Mills Residents Committee in its efforts. If you are interested in taking an active part in making this dream a reality, please contact:

Kathleen Bartholomay
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518-695-4734
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A sponsored project in the Citizen Action Program of the Open Space Institute.

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APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

National membership in the Audubon Society includes the magazine, *Audubon*, and the SAAS newsletter, *The Fledgling*. The cost is \$20 annually for regular membership and \$15 for seniors and students. Make checks payable to "National Audubon Society" and send with name, address and phone number to address listed below. Membership as a "Chapter Supporter" only 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., South Glens Falls, New York 12803.

Newsletter Submission Policy

We welcome submissions to *The Fledgling*. 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 email, please submit to Barbara Putnam at 190 Palmer Ridge Rd., Gansevoort, NY 12831. Please be sure to include your phone number and call Barb at 518-792-7542 before sending material.

**The
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