



# The Fledgling

Newsletter of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society  
[www.audubon.noncommercial.org](http://www.audubon.noncommercial.org)

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## A Message From your President:

Spring finally arrived in the North Country. When the snow melted, girdled trees and shrubs, and tunneled lawn and flower beds made it evident that hungry rodents were plentiful over the winter. The girdled young maple has begun producing leaves, though later than its neighbors. It may die, but it won't give up easily. Raking evened out the lawn. As for the flowers, I admit they needed thinning, but the rodents thinned the wrong ones, so I must finish the job myself.

Last weekend our grandsons visited. The four-year-old, watching birds at the feeder, called us to come see the 'wed-winged blackbirds'. Their mother does a good job teaching them about birds and animals. Last winter they learned to identify animal tracks and scat. The five-year-old and I watched a hummingbird at a feeder. He knows the hum is made by the wings. He helped me take down an empty feeder and discovered ants in it. Now he knows ants like sugar water, too. He suggested that I hang the cleaned and refilled feeder on the opposite arm of the pole so 'maybe the ants won't find it'. That's just what we did. This is a wonderful time of year to share nature with children. I hope you have a chance to expand a child's knowledge and respect of nature.

Of course, the boys played on the grass, too. I am glad we never apply pesticides or weed killers to our lawn, for they pose significant health risks, especially to children. At our April public program, Sean Mahar from Audubon New York spoke about the risks of herbicides and pesticides, including several types of cancer, and about organic alternatives. If you missed the program and Sean's informative handouts, you can visit the following websites for information: [www.pesticide.org](http://www.pesticide.org) Click on "Publications and Information" and go to the desired link; [www.beyondpesticides.org](http://www.beyondpesticides.org) Click on "infoservices" and select choice from pulldown menu; [www.pesticideinfo.org](http://www.pesticideinfo.org) Click on "Open Database" button and enter pesticide name  
*con't. col. 2*

## 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 the presentations by guest speakers featured below. The meetings start promptly at 7pm. Guests are welcomed so please bring your friends with you!

**June 25 Drew Monthie "Coping with Deer"**  
Drew, an SAAS member and local environmental landscape consultant, will present slides and strategies that will help protect our yards and plantings from the deer population.

**July and August - no meetings**

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in "search" box under #2. For non-toxic alternatives and a list of organic landscapers in your area, go to [www.grassrootsinfo.org](http://www.grassrootsinfo.org).

As though corn genetically engineered to include pesticides was not enough to make us worry about the environment (remember the dead butterflies?), there are new experiments already underway which involve adding extra genes to plants to produce drugs. Molecular farming has already occurred in open air trials in 14 states according to the article in the May 26, 2003 issue of Time magazine. Vegetable hosts include corn, tomato, potato, tobacco, and rice. While I am not against the search for possible new treatments for illness, or a less expensive way to produce drugs, I am very concerned about the open air experiments. The possible entry of these crops into the food chain and their impact on wildlife is a serious issue. I expect we will be seeing more on this matter.

I hope you are all enjoying this season in your favorite ways.

*-Linda Hoyt*

## From the Membership Chair

-Claire Hunter

The 20<sup>th</sup> Summer Issue brings more wonderful memories of our founders.

### SALUTE TO THE FIRST EDITOR:

Helen Brody, now living in Florida, launched our "Fledgling" immediately after chapter organization in 1983. From her beautiful Adirondack home in North Creek, Helen edited the newsletter for 12 years. Publication of a newsletter was one of the requirements to obtain our chapter charters. In a welcome note received recently, Helen wrote, "It does not seem like 20 years since we started the chapter, but I remember well that first meeting. At that first meeting I volunteered to do the newsletter, something that I had not done before, so it was a great learning experience. I see how the "Fledgling" has grown and blossomed into a first-rate publication and I enjoy each issue." Helen also served as President for four years, while continuing as editor.

Abe Brody, Helen's husband, was a vital, learned, humorous man who served as vice-president and in any capacity in which help was needed. In 1993, Abe was elected president. I found a copy of his president's Message written in December 1993, as he took over the leadership. Abe's wry humor is evident: "I will not let the fact that I am married to the Past President deter me from expressing my admiration for the excellent job Helen has done during the last four years." Sadly, illness prevented Abe from finishing his term. His Audubon friends were saddened when he did not recover after a courageous battle.

**HAPPY NEWS:** In this our 20<sup>th</sup> year, our chapter has been strengthened by five new members to whom we extend a warm welcome: Heidi Podnorski, Glens Falls; Diane Pepe, Gansevoort; Charles and Alice Huppert, Queensbury; Susan Stewart, Burnt Hills; and Aurelie A. Massimine, Warrensburg. These local memberships rejoice our hearts because they show interest in our chapter goals, AND the local dues are all kept here to finance our activities. From National, we have received word of 31 renewals. We thank these loyal friends for their continued support.

**GIFT MEMBERSHIPS** are a thoughtful choice for a graduate, for an honor roll achiever or for the young person who loves birds and nature. Roger Tory Peterson, field guide author, joined a bird club in Jamestown when he was 10 years old. He is noted at National as our longest term member, over 70 years. At your request, we will be happy to supply a gift card.

Membership is a people job. Your calls and notes are always welcome - and I usually learn something exciting about nature.



## THE BOOK NOOK

Reviews of books on Natural History Subjects



This review written by Phillip Bentley

*North American OWLS*, by Paul A. Johnsgard, 2002. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Smithsonian Institute Press, Washington, D.C. ISBN 1-56098-939-4. \$49.95.

Crandall Library 598.97 Joh.

The author of this volume is a much-respected student of birds who has published 40 volumes on these animals, several volumes of which are the standard reference on the subject group.

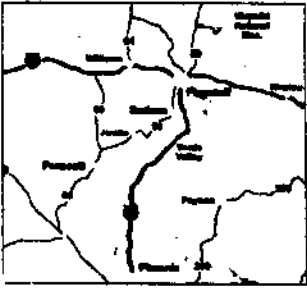
Part One contains 6 chapters describing the comparative biology of owls, that is, their evolution and classification, their ecology and distribution, morphology and physiology, behavior, and reproductive biology.

Part Two deals with the natural history of each of the species of North American owls. This totals 27 species including those found in Canada, United States, and Mexico. There are 42 color plates that include 10 watercolors by Louis Agassiz Fuertes, plus 32 excellent color photos. Each species treatment is 7 to 10 pages long and gives us details on range (with a large map), subspecies, measurements, identification, vocalization, habitat and ecology, movement, behavior, breeding biology, evolution, and conservation status.

The volume concludes with three appendices, one, is a key to identification; two, is a key to vocalizations; three, is a note on owl names; a glossary of terms follows; there is a comprehensive and up-to-date reference list (27 pages); and finally there is an index to all species of animals mentioned in the volume.

This is a terrific volume and in it you will find almost everything you ever wanted to know about North American owls.

*The Fledgling is printed on acid free paper containing 30% post-consumer fiber as defined by the EPA*



## **Sedona Elderhostel**

Alan Koechlein

From September 28 to October 5, 2001, Margaret and I went on our first Elderhostel to the beautiful red rock country of Sedona, Arizona. The beauty of the rock formations, their color and texture is outstanding and down right beautiful too. I will assume you are familiar with Elderhostel to avoid describing the program - if not, see [elderhostel.com](http://elderhostel.com). The Elderhostel we chose had a focus on bird watching. A typical day included a field trip in the morning to an area chosen by the leaders,

and an evening program, which might be a lecture with a show and tell format, or on one occasion a husband-wife team performed and sang music reflecting the history of the west.

Our Elderhostel program was one of many offered through Yavapai College. Our guides (a husband and wife team) participate in many Elderhostel Programs and intimately knew the Sedona area, its birds and haunts. On the first day we gathered to get acquainted with the other hostellers and our guides. After introducing ourselves, our guides asked us to identify one species we would like to see if the planets were properly aligned. A few of us, myself included, said a California Condor. We all laughed, since the only ones likely to be seen were those released to the wild and subsequently seen as they were being captured for a physical check and to replace their radio transmitters. The chances were slim to none.

Our birding trips through the week concentrated on the riparian habitats where water and edge could be found. Among the many species we observed include the Green Backed Heron, Great Blue Heron, Cooper's Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, White-throated Swift, Anna's Hummingbird, Gila Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Say's Phoebe, and Lesser Goldfinch. Our second to last day was a long one. Following an early breakfast at 7am, we headed by van toward the rim of the Grand Canyon. Having been to the Grand Canyon in 1983, we knew the breathtaking beauty that can never be described but must be seen to be appreciated. It was with anticipation that I watched the faces of others traveling with us to see their expression of awe when first seeing the canyon.

Entering from the south rim, we traveled northeast along the canyon rim road toward one of three hawk watch locations. A haze affected the view across the canyon caused by smoke from forest fires beyond the north rim. Our guide described the conditions that the hawks experience to explain why these sites become focal points for hawks crossing the Grand Canyon during migration. At this time of the year, October, hawks are migrating south. They approach the North Rim at locations with the shortest distance across. Wind currents force them down to the bottom of the canyon where its warmer and they move across the canyon to locate updrafts along the South Rim. They begin to spiral upward until they gain enough thrust to move beyond the rim and head south. Our guide described them as being tired birds by the time they finish their lift out of the canyon. Among the species we observed were red tailed hawks, sharp shined hawks, peregrine falcons, prairie falcons, and American kestrels. Ravens would circle and play games among themselves and even appeared to ask some of the other birds to play. We would cautiously peer down into the canyon and watch a hawk or vulture begin its spiral in the air currents to lift itself out of the canyon. It was so windy that day, that some of the hawks came right across the canyon, sailing just above our heads. At one point I looked up and shouted, there it is! Soaring over us with wings not fully spread was a bird that seemed to be the size of a B-52 bomber compared to all other hawks. It was a California Condor. Some of the birders tried to identify its wing tag number (it was that close) while I pointed my camera and took two quick shots, hoping for a decent photo to share. We were all excited. When the photos came back from being developed, there was no Condor to be found. Oh well, the memories make the trip worthwhile every time.

### **We Thank You**

The SAAS Board of Directors would like to extend their sincere thanks to all who responded to the recent request for financial support. In these uncertain times it is encouraging to know there are so many who care deeply about the environment and the continuance of SAAS programs and the newsletter. Many of you included notes with your gift and we truly appreciate hearing that you are pleased with how the chapter is functioning. Your gift will help ensure that we can continue to provide services to members and to the local community which will further the cause of environmentalism.

## Editor's Ramblings



Since I am still in "Birding Kindergarten", the spring is a very exciting season for me. I find myself searching for new species - only to be frustrated that I can't identify those that I do find. So I try to be satisfied with seeing them, learning what I can of behavior, nesting habits etc. even if I can't get a positive id - knowing that what I learn will aid me the next time. Often, if I can narrow the sighting down to a family without actually pinpointing the species, I feel successful. I find the more I see and learn, the more I want to see and learn. Ah, spring...it truly is a wonderful time of year.

In my search for knowledge of the birding world, I have joined several mailing lists on the internet. For those who may not be familiar, mailing lists bring together groups of subscribers interested in a common subject. All messages sent to a mailing list are sent to all subscribers of that list. It is a great way for information to be circulated to all those who have a common interest. However, in addition to gaining a lot of information and knowledge of birds, I keep seeing a recurring thread in the messages I receive, and that is the chronic lesson of the loss of habitat and the effect it has on bird populations. In a report from Worldwatch Institute, "Winged Messengers: The Decline of Birds", author Howard Youth says that declining bird populations mark the "unraveling of delicate natural balances." He writes that bird species today face a wave of extinction not seen on Earth since the dinosaurs and there are implications beyond the immediate one for those species in decline. Youth explains that birds are "valuable environmental indicators," since the decline of bird species can offer early warnings of environmental problems. Habitat loss stands as the single greatest overall threat to bird species. Many species now have only small pockets of natural habitat remaining. As I drive around the local area and see the alarming rate of development, I wonder how many more springs will see the return of the bird species who call our area home.

When we cleaned and filled the garden pool and started the water flowing down the waterfall a few weeks ago, I was reminded how important water is to birds. No sooner had the water begun to tumble over the rocks, than several white-crowned sparrows came to investigate. White-throated sparrows also visited that evening, as well as the robins, jays and goldfinches - all thankful to have their swimming hole open for the season. The following morning the male eastern towhee made an appearance followed shortly by the rose-breasted grosbeak male in his beautiful spring colors. I believe adding a water feature to your backyard bird habitat is the single most important thing that will entice birds to visit you.

This issue brings you material from two new contributors - Alan Koechlein and Phillip Bentley. Readers with an interest in owls will appreciate Phil's review of "North American OWLS" and Alan's travelogue of an Elderhostel trip will entertain you. I'd like to thank both Phil and Alan for their contributions. Also be sure to read the comical yet tender essay by returning author, Liza Porter. Liza's work has become a favorite of many and I am pleased to offer it for your enjoyment. I'd like to encourage all members to submit work for inclusion in the Fledgling. It's your newsletter and will benefit from a wide range of authors. I hope the variety in this issue will please you and that a small part of your summer will be spent with SAAS through this newsletter. We'll be back in the fall - until then, enjoy the birds, appreciate nature and treasure life itself.

-Mona Bearor

## Wandering the Web Mona Bearor



If you find yourself a shut-in on a rainy afternoon this summer and need something to pass the time, grab your mouse and head for [www.hummingbirds.net](http://www.hummingbirds.net). This website will satisfy the curiosity of anyone interested in these tiny birds and is comprehensive enough to be considered THE source for hummer information on the net.

The homepage has a news column on the left with links to events scheduled to celebrate these little creatures and any other current items of note. On the right is a column with the most frequently asked questions and the corresponding answers. The rest of the page holds a letter from the site owner, Lanny Chambers, a long-time humminbird watcher, bander and collector of data.

There are four main links to other pages and they are located at the top of the homepage. "Answers" will provide you with pages that are packed with answers to every hummingbird question imaginable in addition to information on attracting hummingbirds and an in-depth look at feeders. "Species" provides a link to accounts of the seventeen species of hummingbirds that breed in North America as well as a species listing by state. Clicking on the "Science" link will lead you to my favorite page, which has the migration map. Each spring as sightings are posted to the map, Ruby-throat migration north may be tracked on the map. This section also has links to research and the site bibliography. The "Community" link will take you to a gallery of photos, feeder reviews, essays and organizations.

This website has been carefully prepared to present the information in a logical manner. It is easy to navigate and find the information you seek. I'm sure you'll find a visit well worth your time and I suspect you'll return again and again.

## Who's Watching Whom?

Liza Porter

We moved into our new (old) house one September. The next spring we began to discover all sorts of wonderful bird delights. One late May morning, I heard a screech from the top of the spruces out front, not a call I had ever heard before. I ran for my binoculars, but though I could see motion inside the tree, and hear the mind-penetrating screech, I couldn't get a bead on the bird. Throughout the next month, I heard our visitant daily but could not identify him. When I wasn't looking closely, he would flutter out of the tree and back, like a flycatcher, but when I would stare and try to see him, or turn the binoculars his way, he would get very cagey, and would fall silent or switch to a quieter alarm cry, so I wouldn't know where to look. How do little birds know when a potential predator is looking at them? One of the miracles of small lives is that inborn vigilance and instinctive knowledge that makes life itself possible for them.

The second spring, the same thing happened. I couldn't identify the screecher. After a few springs, fact that the bird had me beat, despite all the work recommended by Audubon. It was like the picked and put into bouquets, but has to be lavished on the roadside in midsummer. Then one the vegetable garden, sitting not more than ten feet could only stare and try to make mental notes of the head. Compact flycatcher body with a gray throat and greenish back. He sat calmly and studied me as well. bird-brain. "Large head, too large for the skinny neck. Long, soft, no good for catching flies. Good eyes but not quick enough to see into the spruces and from the topmost branches came the sharp, severe guide suggested a Great Crested Flycatcher, but my bird seemed darker and less rufous than the drawing in the book. Then I read the description of the voice: "Sharp, penetrating whistle." Yup, it had to be him.

Every spring he or his offspring come back to our trees, and starts the screech about 4am every morning around the solstice. "Hey! Hey! Up! Up! Preet! Preet! Up! Up!" Throughout the day and especially in the evening, he repeats the performance. It was good of him to come right down into the garden in front of me so I could identify him and end the mystery. ("Poorly endowed human. I'll take pity on her.") And it is good of him to be our alarm clock during the longest days each year, getting us up and out into the most beautiful part of the day.

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



searched the trees until my eyes teared up but I gave up and began to enjoy not knowing, to enjoy the of my clever human brain and the binoculars beautiful blue of the chicory flower, that cannot be appreciated completely on its own terms, day, a bird I did not recognize accosted me in away from me. Without my bird book, I field marks. Large, slightly crested brownish yellow underparts. Yellowish sides and I wonder what field marks go through the slender wings useless for flying. Mouth too me in the treetops." After a time he flew off "Preet" I had heard so often. The field

*"The love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only paradise we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need -- if only we had the eyes to see ... No, wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit, as vital to our lives as water and good bread."*

*-- Edward Abbey, Desert Solitaire, 1968*

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## APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

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.*

The  
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