



The Fledgling

Newsletter of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society, Inc. (SAAS)

Vol. 36 No. 2, December 2018 — February 2019

Visit SAAS at: <http://www.southernadirondackaudubon.org>

Spruce Grouse, forests and fungi this winter

SAAS's next monthly program will be held at 7:00 p.m. on **Wednesday, Jan. 23**, at **Crandall Library** in Glens Falls. Dr. Angelena Ross will present "**Sprucing up the Adirondacks: Managing the Spruce Grouse, One of New York's Rarest Birds.**"

Dr. Ross is a Senior Wildlife Biologist for the N.Y.S. Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). Spruce Grouse are endangered and declining in New York due to loss of habitat and low genetic diversity.

Dr. Ross will discuss the NYSDEC's management efforts for Spruce Grouse. In 2008, her team managed habitat in lowland boreal forests to improve conditions for the species. From 2013 to 2018, they captured grouse from Maine and northern Ontario and translocated them into New York to increase numbers and improve genetic diversity of the remaining Spruce Grouse in New York.

They are currently monitoring translocated grouse with radio telemetry. They'll determine project success by evaluating home range sizes, annual survivorship rates, and productivity of translocated grouse and determining similarity of these metrics with those of resident Spruce Grouse. If translocations are successful, they will be



A male Spruce Grouse. Photo from Wikimedia Commons, by Michael Woodruff (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/217669121/>, CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4285213>).

continued to help improve numbers of birds to promote breeding and boost genetic diversity of resident populations.

Visit Arizona in September with SAAS!

SAAS will host a birding trip to Tucson, Arizona, from September 7 to 13, 2019. The trip will visit the American Museum of Natural History's Southwestern Research Station in the Chiricahua Mountains of southeastern Arizona. The Southwestern Research Station (SWRS) is a year-round field station under the direction of the Science Department at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

This tour will focus on birds as well as the abundant flora and fauna from the summer monsoon rains. Many plants and insects can only be seen during this time of year in the desert.

The SAAS board is working on final costs and details.



Dr. Ross earned a bachelor's degree in biology and geology at SUNY Potsdam and a Master of Science degree in Conservation Biology at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF). She earned a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Bioscience and Biotechnology at Clarkson University in 2018. This Spruce Grouse research is part of her Ph.D. work.

On **Wednesday, Feb. 27** at 7:00 p.m., Dr. Kurt Smemo will present "**Trees, Fungi, and Climatic Dynamics in the Adirondacks**" in the H. Dutcher Community Room of the **Saratoga**

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Southern Adirondack Audubon Society

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Board and Committees

Officers:

President: John Loz
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Vice-President: OPEN

Treasurer: Sharon Charbonneau

Secretary: Margie Amodeo

Board of Directors

2019-2021 Joyce Miller

Rob Snell

Margie Amodeo

2018-2020 Kim Atkins

Board meetings are held monthly except July, August and December.

Members are invited to attend.

Contact John Loz for details.

Committees:

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Membership: Lori Barber
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Southern Adirondack Audubon Society (SAAS) is a certified local chapter of the National Audubon Society, which has more than 530 members in Warren, Washington, northern Saratoga and southern Hamilton counties in New York State. SAAS's primary goal is to protect the environment by preserving natural habitats and promoting environmental education. Contact a board member to learn about SAAS volunteer opportunities.

President's Message

Thoughts about the new year

By John Loz, SAAS President



I always find wintertime a season of reflection and transition. With the changing of the calendar year, other changes are in the air — not only with the types of birds I see, but with how Southern Adirondack Audubon can continue to advocate and protect them in this changing climate.

After more than 12 years of keeping our annual chapter supporter dues at a bargain rate of \$10.00 a year, the board has decided that we need to increase the annual dues to sustain our operating costs and to grow our chapter with new initiatives that will have more impact in the community and the environment.

The annual dues will go up in two stages. Starting with this renewal year on January 1, 2019 the annual dues will increase to \$15.00. The second and final dues increase to \$20.00 a year will happen in two to three years' time and will remain at that level for the foreseeable future. Our officers and directors thank you for your continuing support of our Audubon chapter. We could not do any of our "Conservation Through Education" work without it. You are part of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Team in our efforts to protect birds and bird habitats in our region. We are most grateful to have you on it!

Meet our Board Members

Margie Amodeo

Margie Amodeo joined the board this fall as board secretary.

Time spent at her grandparents' summer home on Lake George and the exploration it encouraged instilled a great love and respect for the Adirondack region and what it represents.

Amodeo is the coordinator of the [Kelly Adirondack Center](#) (KAC) of Union College. Located in Niskayuna, the KAC includes the former home of Adirondack conservationist Paul Schaefer. It works to engage Union's campus community and the public in discussions surrounding the Adirondacks and the complex relationships between nature and society. She curates exhibits and plans programming, events, and community outreach.



She also assists students and researchers at the Adirondack Research Library. The library's collections are focused on the 20th century environmental movement in the Adirondacks.

The KAC is surrounded by the 111-acre H. G. Reist Wildlife Sanctuary, which is stewarded by the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club. It provides Amodeo with regular opportunities for birding.

Amodeo and her husband David live in Niskayuna and have two grown sons, Zachary and Benjamin.

Christmas Bird Count set for Sat., Dec. 15

SAAS's annual Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, Dec. 15.

Area birders will follow specific routes in an established 15-mile-wide diameter circle in the Glens Falls region. Every single bird is counted, as well as every species.

Most of the birding is done from a car, but some teams may walk along trails or in area parks. The many diverse habitats within the SAAS count circle make for interesting observations. It's also a fun way to get to meet area birders and increase birding skills.

Beginning birders can join a group that includes at least one experienced birder. New birders do not need to be bird identification experts to participate, and can help spot birds or keep team records.

SAAS has held a count every year since 1983.

To join a count team for a whole or partial day, contact SAAS count compiler Linda White at 518-222-5675, preferably a week before the count. For details, see the SAAS website.

Tens of thousands of volunteers will participate in more than 2,000 individual counts across North America, with some in Central and South America. Counts are held between December 14 to January 5.

The Christmas Bird Census started in 1900 when ornithologist Frank Chapman suggested it as an alternative to Christmas "side hunts," competitions to see which teams could shoot the most birds and other



Northern Cardinals are commonly seen on the Christmas Bird Count. To learn more about these birds, see the Special Spotlight column on page 5. Photo by Gordon Ellmers.

animals. Instead, birders count every bird they see in the designated count areas. It is now considered the world's longest running citizen science project.

For a map of area count circles and more information about the CBC, see: <http://www.audubon.org/join-christmas-bird-count>.

Grouse, forests, fungi

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Springs Public Library on Henry Street in downtown Saratoga Springs. Dr. Smemo is a professor in the Environmental Studies and Sciences Program at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs.

Dr. Smemo will describe how the mycorrhizal relationships between trees and fungi influence how much carbon dioxide trees can absorb and impact climate change.

Fungi and tree roots form a mutually beneficial relationship that provides food to fungi in return for helping trees gain access to soil nutrients.

Forest ecosystems are globally important due to their biological diversity and influence on carbon and nutrient cycles. The Adirondack ecosystem provides an outstanding natural laboratory for exploring these dynamics.

Dr. Smemo is an ecosystem scientist with more than 23 years of experience in forest and soil science. He holds a B.S. in Forestry from the University of Montana, an M.S. in Environmental Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a Ph.D. in Natural Resources from Cornell University.

SAAS does not hold a monthly program in December.

Please avoid wearing fragranced products, to avoid triggering allergies, asthma and migraines in those attending the programs.

Production of this issue of *The Fledgling* newsletter is provided by Edward Jones, 34 Congress Street, Suite 102, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Edward Jones
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

Natural holiday gifts

Here are some holiday gift ideas to benefit the natural world:

- Give a SAAS chapter membership. See page 8 for details.
- Although we fully support shopping locally whenever possible, for those times when you shop online, you can donate to our chapter by shopping on the AmazonSmile website. Log in with your existing Amazon.com account or sign up for a new account by clicking on the AmazonSmile logo. Choose *Southern Adirondack Audubon Society, Inc.* from the dropdown menu and Amazon.com will donate .5% of your purchase price to SAAS.
- Buy Duck Stamps. A \$15.00 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (“Duck Stamp”) serves as an entrance pass for National Wildlife Refuges. Ninety-eight cents of every dollar from the stamp sale goes to purchase or lease habitat in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Visit <http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps/stamps.htm> or any post office.
- Sponsor a loon to support the research of the Biodiversity Research Institute's Adirondack Center for Loon Conservation in Saranac Lake. See <http://www.adkloon.org/sponsor-a-loon>.
- Offer to take a friend on a local nature walk to observe and enjoy the beauty of the winter landscape. There's a lot to see year-round!

Palm oil demand

Demand for palm oil is resulting in deforestation, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia. Global production of the oil has doubled in the past decade and is set to do so again by 2020, according to an article by <http://www.audubon.org/magazine/fall-2016/as-global-demand-palm-oil-surges-indonesias>.

About Wildflowers

Skunk Cabbage

By Diane Collins

They say that Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) is the first wildflower of winter. The flowers are tiny and inconspicuous, born on the knoblike spadix and hidden and protected by the mottled leathery spathe.



As the plant first emerges in winter, it produces enough heat to melt snow. The process is called thermogenesis, the ability to metabolically generate heat. The mitochondria in the spadix can maintain a temperature of around 22 to 26 degrees centigrade (72 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit). The warmth protects the tiny flowers from outside freezing temperatures and intensifies the fetid odor that attracts the carrion fly pollinators. All of this takes place before most of us

take our first spring walk in the woods. After the plant is pollinated, the leaves uncurl and grow to two feet or more in width.

The species name means “evil smelling” but despite the skunk-like odor of crushed leaves, it had many medical uses among Native Americans. Skunk cabbage was listed in the U.S. Pharmacopeia from 1820 to 1892 and was used for contraception and to treat bad coughs, asthma, lockjaw, epilepsy and rheumatism.



Another common name for this strikingly unusual plant is “hermit of the bog,” but it is far from solitary. Skunk cabbage has a massive root system and is seen throughout spring and summer carpeting the marsh areas throughout Cole's Woods, pictured above.

Wildflower photographer Diane Collins is the author of “Trailside Wildflowers in Cole's Woods,” available through <http://www.wildflowersinyourownbackyard.com>. Diane sells her booklet at SAAS monthly meetings for \$10: \$5 goes to The Friends of Cole's Woods, and \$5 is donated to our Audubon chapter. Cole's Woods is located in both the City of Glens Falls and the Town of Queensbury, next to Crandall Park.

Some environmental groups suggest checking product labels and avoiding those with palm oil, to reduce the demand and consumption. The

World Wildlife Fund offers this list of items with palm oil: <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/which-everyday-products-contain-palm-oil>.



Cornell's illustration shows the relative dominance of six species at feeders.

more dominant relative to the others. The higher a bird's score, the more swagger it has at the feeder. [Check out the FeederWatch interactive graphic showing dominance relationships for 13 species.](#)

Winter finch irruption

Vermont naturalist Bryan Pfeiffer's latest blog post, "The Forecast Calls for Finches: The 'Irruption' Begins," describes what could be an exciting winter. High numbers of northern bird species are flooding into the northeastern U.S. for the winter.

"Already migrating and mobbing are Bohemian Waxwings, Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, Pine Grosbeaks ... and the vanguard of what could be waves of Common Redpolls. These songbirds are, in large part, refugees driven south by a lack of

food in their customary wintering grounds. These irruptions aren't usually a sign of crisis or anything amiss. Food supplies vary, after all, and birds do have wings. Good for us." See his full blog post for more: <https://bryanpfeiffer.com/2018/11/10/the-forecast-calls-for-finches>.

Species Spotlight

Northern Cardinal

By Joyce Miller, Newsletter Editor

Even by world standards, the Northern Cardinal is a stunning bird. The male's rich red body, jaunty crest and black facial markings are breathtaking. The duller colors of the female help camouflage her on a nest.

Northern Cardinals are permanent residents in our area. They do not migrate because their food sources — seeds, fruit and some insects — are available year round. Cardinals are members of the grosbeak family. Seven eastern states have chosen it as the state bird.

Through range expansion, they moved from southern states into the northern United States. They were discovered nesting in Massachusetts in 1958 and are now found throughout eastern North America and most of Mexico.

Their nests are often placed in shrubs: honeysuckles, rose bushes, vines. The female lays two to five eggs per brood. They raise one to two broods (nest-fuls) a year.

During the breeding season when hormone levels are high, a male Northern Cardinal will often fight its own image in car mirrors or windows, trying to drive that handsome bird out its territory!

To learn more, see All About Birds: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern-Cardinal/overview>.

Male Northern Cardinal, by Gordon Ellmers.



Join Project FeederWatch!

The 2018-2019 Project FeederWatch season started on November 10 and runs through April 5.

For more than 30 years, people who feed wild birds have been reporting their observations to Project FeederWatch at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Participants turn their hobby of feeding birds — a hobby more than 50 million strong in North America — into scientific discoveries. Their reports help scientists better understand what happens to birds facing challenges such as climate change, habitat loss and disease.

Registration costs \$18.00, and may be given as gifts. New participants receive a Common Feeder Birds poster, a handbook, instructions booklet, Bird-Watching Days Calendar and a tally sheet. To learn more, visit FeederWatch.org or call toll-free at (866) 989-2473.

The graphic above by Cornell Lab of Ornithology science illustrator Jillian Ditner, shows which of six species is

First Saturday bird walks start Dec. 1

SAAS is offering a new "First Saturday" monthly bird walk series along the paved Spring Run Trail in Saratoga Springs. Walks will be held Dec. 1, Jan. 5, Feb. 2, and March 2.

The walks will be led by Ray Perry, past Director of Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, and SAAS President John Loz. This bird walk series will follow in the footsteps of some of the more noted 19th century naturalists and ornithologists who would regularly walk the areas around their homes or along a country road, recording what birds, animals, and plants are seen, how habitat changes over the seasons, and how each interplays with one another. Seeing the same area over time and the change of seasons can be quite instructive. The Spring Run Trail offers a variety of habitats.

All skill levels are welcomed. The bird walk will start at 8:00 a.m. sharp, so please arrive a little early.

Meet at the Spring Run Trail parking area, located on East Ave. near the corner of Excelsior Avenue. If the parking area is full, you can park just slightly down the road on Excelsior Ave. in the EBI Beverage Center parking lot, which is adjacent to the Spring Run Trail.

"Birding and Breakfast" set for Feb. 16

Please join SAAS at the Kelly Adirondack Center in Schenectady for "Birding and Breakfast" on Saturday, Feb. 16 from 9:00 a.m. to noon.

Attendees will contribute to citizen science by participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count, identifying, tallying, and reporting birds with the assistance of John Loz, President of Southern Adirondack Audubon.

The GBBC was launched by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society in 1998 to collect data on wild birds worldwide. Last year over 190,000 people re-

ported on more than 6,000 species of birds. These statistics provide scientists with documentation that would be impossible for them to gather on their own. This information, along with the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch and eBird give researchers a better understanding of the broad implications of climate change, migration pattern changes, and biodiversity for bird populations around the globe.

Weather permitting, Loz will also bring interested visitors into the Reist Sanctuary to learn more about spotting and identifying woodland birds.

What birds are at your feeder?

Cornell Lab of Ornithology offers an interactive website to help you learn about the birds most likely to visit your backyard feeders. Click the Northeast Winter Region and have fun!: <https://feederwatch.org/learn/common-feeder-birds/>.

Flying Squirrels in Queensbury

Don Polunci spotted these two Flying Squirrels in a dead tree in Queensbury this fall.

They parachute between trees, using the loose flaps of skin between their front and back legs. This membrane is called a patagium.

These large-eyed nocturnal animals are rarely spotted, but occasionally heard if they get into attics.

To learn more, come to SAAS's May 22 program by Charlotte Demers on flying squirrels. Details about the program will be in the March 2019 newsletter.





Wildlife rehabilitator Marki holds a Red-tailed Hawk during the October SAAS monthly program. Photo by Joyce Miller.

Bird program attracts large crowd

A rapt audience of 80 people listened to wildlife rehabilitator and educator Trish Marki talk about raptors (birds of prey) at SAAS's October program at the Saratoga Springs Public Library.

Marki used humor and stories to relate her message of protecting the environment. The crowd was fascinated with the many birds, from a rare Aplomado Falcon from South America to a tiny red-phase Screech Owl. On cue, a Eurasian Hawk-Owl

flew across the room to a perch and hooted. Because it was near Halloween, Marki also brought an impressively large Common Raven.

Marki is executive director of the not-for-profit Wildlife Institute of Eastern New York (<http://www.silentwingsraptors.org/>), based in Saratoga Springs. Marki hopes to increase environmental awareness through her programs.

Climate Watch project continues

Join our bird survey this winter!

SAAS is seeking 20 volunteers to collect data about birds in our area.

SAAS will participate in National Audubon Society's citizen-science pilot project, Audubon Climate Watch, from Jan. 15 to Feb. 15.

The goal of the project is to learn how specific bird species are affected by climate change. The

SAAS survey will focus on both Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches.

The survey is conducted twice a year: in June and in the winter. SAAS joined the program in June, 2017.

Volunteers use a specific protocol established by National Audubon: using grid maps of a specific area, birders will conduct 12 counts, observing for five minutes each. They would also record the numbers and species of other birds identified within 100 meters (328 feet).

The Climate Watch project was developed after National Audubon issued a report in 2014, *Birds and Climate Change*, on risks faced by North American bird species from climate change.

Audubon members asked how they could help. The Audubon Climate Watch program started in 2016, focusing on bluebirds. Details about the national program are available at <http://www.audubon.org/conservation/climate-watch-program>.

Contact SAAS board member Rob Snell for more information: birdbrane1@gmail.com.

Red-breasted Nuthatch is one of the two nuthatch species that will be counted in the Climate Watch survey this winter. Photo: Don Polunci.



Send in your 2019 renewal now!



Memberships are renewed at the start of each calendar year. Chapter supporters receive *The Fledgling* newsletter by email in March, June, September and December, and help support the educational efforts and programs of the chapter.

Renew online through PayPal, or mail this form with a check to:
Southern Adirondack Audubon Society—Membership
P.O. Box 4076 Queensbury, NY 12804

Please print clearly:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email address: _____

Phone: (____) _____

Please indicate your choices:

- I've enclosed a **\$15** check made out to "Southern Adirondack Audubon Society" to be a local chapter supporter and member.
- I am also including a gift of \$_____ for chapter use.
- I would prefer to get the newsletter in paper format and am including a donation of \$_____ to help cover postage and printing. (**Suggested donation: \$5.**)
- I am interested in volunteer opportunities.

Thank you for your support!

Please renew now for the new year!

By Pat Fitzgerald, SAAS Membership Committee

All chapter memberships expire at the end of the year. Chapter supporter dues this year are **\$15.00** per family. Dues support our chapter activities, such as monthly programs and activities at local nature festivals.

Renewal notices will be sent out in December for 2019 memberships. If you renew early, it will save us the postage and paper for mailings. Renew using the form above, or on our website using Paypal. A renewal form is also on the SAAS website (<http://www.southernadirondackaudubon.org/membership/membership.html>.)

Gift memberships are available, and will be announced with an appropriate card at your request. Consider a SAAS chapter membership as a holiday gift!

Currently, 535 members of National Audubon live in our chapter area. Many of our 140 chapter supporters belong to National Audubon Society and also financially support our local efforts of conservation and education. Welcome to our newest chapter supporters:

*Elaine Angel, Bolton Landing
Cindy Bishop, Queensbury
Julie Moore, Rensselaer
James Meehan, Galway*

Field trips & events

Saturdays, Dec. 1, Jan. 5, Feb. 2, March 2 — "First Saturday" bird walks at Spring Run Trail, Saratoga Springs. See page 6.

Saturday, Dec. 15 — Christmas Bird Count. See page 3.

Jan. 15 to Feb. 15 — Climate Watch. See page 7.

Saturday, Feb. 16 — "Birding and Breakfast," Schenectady. See page 6.

Any day: Go birding! Explore one of the Southern Adirondack birding hot spots: <http://southernadirondackaudubon.org/birding/birding.html>.

To stay in the loop about SAAS events and programs, "like" the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society on Facebook and check the SAAS website: <http://southernadirondackaudubon.org/>.