



# The Fledgling

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

Vol. 38 No. 2, December 2020 - February 2021

Website: <http://www.southernadirondackaudubon.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SouthernAdirondackAudubonSociety/>



*Dr. Gordon Ellmers photographed this male Northern Cardinal enjoying wild grapes. Northern Cardinals stay in our area over the winter. Christmas Bird Count participants saw 29 Northern Cardinals last year on count day in mid-December.*

## Christmas Bird Count, Climate Watch

SAAS's winter plans will focus on annual events instead of monthly programs.

SAAS's virtual monthly programs will start up again in March. If any programs are spontaneously planned over the winter, they'll be posted on SAAS's Facebook page.

SAAS's annual Hudson Falls **Christmas Bird Count** will be held on **Saturday, Dec. 19**. Area birders will follow specific routes in an established 15-mile-wide diameter circle in the Glens Falls region. Most birding is done from a car, and some teams may walk along trails or in area parks. SAAS has held a count every year since 1983.

Participating birders should wear masks and follow social distancing and safety guidelines. Unlike other years, the day will not end with a gathering to compile findings. Count results will be included in the March newsletter. To join a count team for a whole or partial day, contact SAAS count compiler Linda White at least a week before the

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### President's Message

## The next hopeful chapter

*By John Loz, SAAS President*

I don't know about you, but I think it's high time to turn the proverbial last page on this year. With all that we had to face in 2020, I am hopeful to see what the next chapter of 2021 will bring. I am hopeful for what this winter, and new year, will offer us birders and bird lovers as the days start to get longer.



Our members have three birding events to look forward to this winter. (See details on on pages 1 and 3 of this newsletter.)

- Our annual Hudson Falls **Christmas Bird Count** will be held on Saturday Dec. 19. It is an excellent way to contribute to the longest running data collection effort in the world. It's a perfect social distancing activity to get out into the crisp, clean air of the winter solstice season.
- Our **Climate Watch bird survey** in mid-January is the next count you can participate in. It contributes climate change impact by tracking two indicator species, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches.
- From February 12 to 15, the **Great Backyard Bird Count** will give us the opportunity to record birds visiting our feeders over President's Day weekend. Maybe you'll feel adventurous and bundle up to look for birds in your local park or open space that weekend! Personally, I'm looking forward to counting birds visiting my feeder from the warm confines of my living room, sipping a cup of hot chocolate, or even a hot toddy. It's

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**Southern Adirondack Audubon Society**

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**Board and Committees**

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Board meetings are held monthly except July, August and December. Members are invited to attend. Contact John Loz for details.

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**Education:** OPEN

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**Publicity:** OPEN

Southern Adirondack Audubon Society (SAAS) is a certified local chapter of the National Audubon Society. SAAS has approximately 600 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.

**Meet our volunteers**

**Linda White**

Linda White of Queensbury has been our Christmas Bird Count Compiler since the first year of SAAS, in 1983. A founding member of SAAS, she has filled many roles over the years, including treasurer, Education Chair and board member. She has also served as a board member of the Friends of the Fort Edward IBA and Winter Raptor Fest.



*Above: Linda White on Terceira Island in the Azores.*



*Left: Linda is an Adirondack 46er. She's climbed the Adirondack High Peaks that are more than 4,000 feet in elevation.*

Over the decades, she worked on many local environmental projects. She assisted with IBA (Important Bird Area) designations in Fort Edward and Saratoga National Historical Park. She worked to protect the Fort Edward Grasslands and Hudson Pointe Nature Preserve project in Queensbury with SAAS and the Indian Ridge project. Her work also helped to protect the area that is now the popular Rush Pond preserve

in Queensbury.

She has shared her love of birding by teaching birding classes throughout the region: for Elderhostel at Garnet Hill Lodge with SAAS past board members Joan Robertson and Linda Theis, for SUNY Adirondack's continuing education at The Glen, and at Queensbury Elementary School.

She is a National Park Service Park Ranger at Saratoga National Historical Park. Previously, she served as a naturalist at Up Yonda Farm in Bolton Landing.

She enjoys the outdoors in many ways. She achieved her goal to become an Adirondack 46er after being inspired by SAAS founding member Joan Robertson. She also enjoys kayaking, biking and traveling. She and her husband are parents of three grown sons.

*For information on this year's Christmas Bird Count, see page 3. The results of the 2020 count will be listed in the March 2021 issue. For the list of species seen in last year's Christmas Bird Count, see page 5 of the March 2020 issue here: <http://www.southernadironackaudubon.org/newsletter/2020Spring.pdf>.*

## SAAS winter events

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count, at (518) 222-5675. If weather on Dec. 19 is inclement, Dec. 20 will be the alternate date. The Christmas Bird Count is a fun way to increase birding skills. New birders do not need to be bird identification experts to participate, and can help spot birds and keep team records.

Counts are held worldwide between December 14 and January 5. Tens of thousands of volunteers will participate in more than 2,000 individual counts across North America. 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 animals. Instead, birders count every bird they see in the designated count areas. For details, see: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count>.

From Jan. 15 to Feb. 15, SAAS will again participate in National Audubon Society’s citizen science pilot project **Audubon Climate Watch**. It hopes to learn how specific bird species are affected by climate change. The SAAS survey focuses on two species: Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches. The survey is conducted



*On the frosty morning of February 21, 2020, SAAS member Don Polunci photographed this Bald Eagle pair along the Hudson River in Fort Miller, Washington County. The larger female is on the right.*

twice a year: in June and mid-winter. To learn more, contact Rob Snell ([birdbrane1@gmail.com](mailto:birdbrane1@gmail.com)).

Volunteers use a specific protocol established by National Audubon: using grid maps of a specific area, birders conduct 12 counts, observing for five minutes each. They record the numbers and species of other birds identified within 100 meters (328 feet). Climate Watch started after National Audubon issued a report in 2014, *Birds and Climate Change*, on risks faced by North American bird species from climate change. SAAS joined the program in June, 2017.

The **Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)** takes place on February 12 to 15, 2021. The aim is to create a global snapshot of bird distribution and abundance. Participants

count for at least 15 minutes on at least one of the days. Sightings and photos are shared on eBird, Cornell’s online bird species checklist. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society started the GBBC in 1998 as the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds. Birders from at least 100 countries tallied 7,054 species in 2020. See this page for details and an account of the 2020 event: <https://gbbc.birdcount.org/>.

## ***President’s Message***

### **The next hopeful chapter**

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Valentine’s Day weekend, too, so if there’s someone special to you — a parent, your child, or your significant other — you can share the love of watching birds together! “Together” still seems to be a tough sell right now in an era when we are advised to be apart in many ways.

Our chapter’s in-person monthly programs and bird walks continue to be on hiatus this winter, but we are preparing for the time when we can start offering them safely again, live and in person, in the spring. I miss the personal interaction and wonderful conversations that come out of birding together in the field and chatting with attendees before and after our public presentations.

I have also missed communing with my fellow Audubon chapter leaders from across the state at our semi-annual Audubon Council meetings, but am hopeful that our first in-person council meeting in 18 months will take place once again in Saratoga Springs in April.

For now, though, I have winter birds to enjoy and spring migration to look forward to. In a world that is so uncertain right now, there is one thing certain I can count on to bring me some solace: the birds. Watching them always brings warmth to my heart, and their diligent, simple actions of foraging and calling through this coldest part of the year, give me the confidence to persevere through the challenges we continue to face today.

I hope the birds continue to do that for you as well. Keep looking up!



Above: Small White Aster (*S. vimineus*), left, and New England Aster (*S. novae-angliae*), right.

### **About Wildflowers**

## **Asters: Stars of autumn**

By Diane Collins

Asters have so many varieties that they warrant their own chapter in my favorite wildflower identification book, *Newcomb's Wildflower Guide*. Asters range in color around the world: white, pink, blue, lilac, purple. More than 100 species are native to the Northern Hemisphere. Asters will flower in response to the shortening of fall days and, with Goldenrod, brighten the landscape with their colors.

Our native asters provide important nectar and pollen for bees, moths, butterflies, and other insects stocking up for the winter. The Monarch butterfly fills up with nectar before starting on the long migration to overwinter in Mexico. If you have asters in your flower gardens, best not to hasten cutting them back until snow cover. The asters may be the last wildflowers we see on our late autumn and early winter walks. Robert Frost honors blue-colored asters in his poem "A Late Walk."

All asters are in the Composite family. "Aster" is the Greek word for "star." Species were named in a variety of ways. The plant was given the genus name "Aster" for

several hundred years. "Starwort" is an old nickname used in herbal and flower books, and indicates healing usage. Pliny recommended a brew of asters for snake-bite. American Indians made tea from the roots to treat diarrhea and fevers, and the Shakers used a concoction of asters to clear up skin disorders.

Renowned Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) sent his botanical student Pehr Kalm to study in North America. One of the plants he returned with was the aster that Linnaeus named "Aster novae-angliae" in honor of the region New England. The former genus "Aster" was changed to "Symphyotrichum" (Greek "symphysis" growing together, and "trichum" hairs) by botanists to describe more accurately 90 of the native North American asters having soft stem hairs.

The New England Aster is one of the best-known American asters and is often cultivated in gardens. They capture our attention, but personally I favor the small white aster varieties, the little stars of autumn.

*Wildflower photographer Diane Collins is the author of Trailside Wildflowers in Cole's Woods; see <http://www.wildflowersinyourownbackyard.com>. Cole's Woods is located in both the City of Glens Falls and the Town of Queensbury, next to Crandall Park. Diane sells her booklet for \$10; proceeds go to The Friends of Cole's Woods and our Audubon chapter.*

## **Warren County Tree Challenge**

Have you noticed a remarkable tree in Warren County while out walking or birding? You can now share it with others. The Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District has organized a new "Warren County Tree Challenge." Residents are invited to explore and post exceptional trees in Warren County. See this Lake George tourism page for details: <https://www.lakegeorge.com/things-to-do/warren-county-tree-challenge/>. Information about the trees can be submitted to [warrencountyny.gov/trees](http://warrencountyny.gov/trees).

## **Which birds spend the winter here?**

Many bird species overwinter in our area. See the species reported by birders in these eBird bar charts for Saratoga County, for instance: <https://ebird.org/barchart?r=US-NY-091&yr=all&m=>. One of the most dramatic birds we may see here in the winter is the Snowy Owl. Several have already been reported this fall in the Northeast. Current sightings are posted in eBird: <https://ebird.org/species/snoowl1>. Vermont naturalist Bryan Pfeiffer discusses sightings in this blog: <https://bryanpfeiffer.com/snowy-owl-scoop/>.

## **Species Spotlight**

### **Evening Grosbeak**

*By Joyce Miller, SAAS Newsletter Editor*

Area birders are very excited that this will be an “irruptive” year for colorful northern finches. Evening Grosbeak, Pine Siskins, Common Redpolls, Purple Finch, White-winged Crossbills, Red Crossbills and other species may migrate to more southern areas in search of conifer seeds.

Evening Grosbeaks (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) have been spotted since October at area seed feeders. Check the latest reported sightings at Cornell’s online checklist eBird: <https://ebird.org/species/evegro>.

The adult Evening Grosbeak male is unmistakable and breathtaking, with a bold pattern of yellow, white and black. It has the same general colors as the delicate American Goldfinch, but is much chunkier, larger, noisier, and has a huge chalky bill. The females are duller gray overall.



*Above: Male Evening Grosbeak  
(Photo credit: edited version of photo by Dominic Sherony, 2012, Wikimedia Commons)*



*Left: Female evening grosbeak in Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario, Canada, 2007.  
(Photo credit: MDF; CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1719933>)*

A flock of these scrappy grosbeaks can leave one breathless with their flurry of activity and abrupt shrieking chirps. You can watch videos of them in action at the Ontario FeederWatch webcam: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/ontario-feederwatch/>. Evening Grosbeaks eat spruce budworms and tree seeds, and will devour sunflower seeds at feeders.

Evening Grosbeaks breed in northern and western North America. Once seen more regularly, their population has declined. They are now species of special concern in Canada.

Research has revealed five types of Evening Grosbeaks,

differentiated by their calls. Type 3 (*Coccothraustes vespertinus vespertinus*) is most likely in northeastern United States. Sound clips of each type are posted here: <https://ebird.org/news/evening-grosbeak-call-types-of-north-america>.

For more photos, life history and sound clips, see this All About Birds site: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Evening\\_Grosbeak/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Evening_Grosbeak/overview).

To see what other winter finches are predicted to visit our area this winter, see Tyler Hoar’s Winter Finch Forecast: <https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2020>.



## SAAS creates perennial flower pocket park in Lake George

On Saturday, Sept. 26, three SAAS board members installed a pollinator-friendly perennial pocket park flower garden at DeLong-Usher Park in Lake George Village.

What was a plain patch of dirt near the parking lot will grow into a perennial garden. The flowers of anise hyssop, penstemon, coneflowers, ninebark and sedum will attract pollinators such as hummingbirds, bees and butterflies.

Delong-Usher Park offers a small beach, picnic pavilions, a playground and tennis and basketball courts.

It is located at the southern tip of Lake George on East Shore Drive (Route 9L), across from George's Restaurant.

SAAS thanks Jim Martino, Town of Lake George Building and Grounds Department Head, and his crew for preparing the garden beds. They also assembled and installed the post for our Audubon "Plants for Birds" sign and leaflet holder, which offers information about bird-friendly plants. It is pictured on the next page.

Stop by to visit this pleasant little park!

*Right: Board members Dusty Caldwell (standing) and Joyce Miller plant perennials in Lake George's DeLong-Usher Park in Lake George Village.*

*Below: SAAS president John Loz puts the finishing touches on a freshly planted perennial.*



## Perennial Pocket Park

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Plants featured in this garden are:

- **Anise hyssop** (*Agastache rugosa*) — Variety: Little Adder, a compact plant in the mint family, with long-lasting purple flower spikes
- **Penstemon**—Variety: Midnight Masquerade, with deep red leaves and purple flowers
- **Coneflower** (*Echinacea purpurea*) — Variety: Green Twister with distinctive green-tipped petals
- **Sedum**, or Autumn Stonecrop — Variety: Spellbound, with pink buds and gray-green leaves
- **Ninebark** shrub (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) — Variety “Diablo,” with purple foliage and white flowers.



## Which species breed in winter?

We may think of winter as a time of little activity outside, but it's an important time for large raptors.

The *Breeding Bird Atlas for New York State* says: "Great Horned Owls are our earliest reliable nester, starting their courtship duets as early as November and beginning nesting in January. In the first few months of the year, other large raptors like Bald Eagles and Common Ravens initiate nesting, followed by the smaller corvids and owls. Urban birds that can nest near warm heating vents and other artificially warm locales also start nesting while there is still snow on the ground, birds such as House Sparrows, European Starlings, and Rock Pigeons."

Check out the colorful Breeding Guideline Bar Chart linked on this page, which indicates breeding time periods in green: <https://ebird.org/atlasny/about/handbook-materials/>. This page offers details on winter bird breeding: [https://ebird.org/atlasny/about/breeding-calendar?mc\\_cid=e55abf3f6e&mc\\_eid=f329d1b7b4](https://ebird.org/atlasny/about/breeding-calendar?mc_cid=e55abf3f6e&mc_eid=f329d1b7b4).

The N.Y.S. Breeding Bird Atlas continues for its second breeding season in 2021. It's a great way to learn about birds and their behaviors. Read about the N.Y.S. Breeding Bird Atlas at <https://ebird.org/atlasny/about> and <https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7312.html>.

In the last N.Y.S. Breeding Bird Atlas from 2000-2004, 251 bird species were discovered breeding in the state. Check the Breeding Calendar to see when to expect activity: <https://ebird.org/atlasny/about/breeding-calendar>.

## Bird-friendly maple sugar

Maple sugar and birds have something in common: good forest habitat. Audubon New York is now working on a pilot project to manage sugarbush forests to increase bird habitat. A sugarbush is a forest predominately made of sugar maple trees that are tapped for maple syrup production.



Containers of bird-friendly maple syrup will display this label.

"As part of its Healthy Forests initiative, Audubon New York is partnering with maple producers to return sugarbushes to a more natural state," Audubon New York reported on its website. "The shift will benefit nesting songbirds, including Scarlet Tanagers, Wood Thrushes, Black-throated Blue Warblers, and

Veeries—and make the resulting product more appealing to bird-loving consumers."

Based on a model by Audubon Vermont, Audubon New York started a pilot project at two farms: one near Buffalo, and one in our area: Mapleland Farms in Salem, Washington County. For more information, see: <https://ny.audubon.org/conservation/bird-friendly-maple>.

## More about window strikes

As a follow-up to the Sept. program by John Loz on bird window strikes, see this brochure from <https://www.muhenberg.edu/media/contentassets/pdf/academics/biology/faculty/klem/Brochure.pdf>. More information is available on this *Birds and Windows* page by ornithologist Dr. Daniel Klem: <https://www.muhenberg.edu/academics/biology/faculty/klem/aco/Bird-window.html>.

## "What's This Bird?" videos

Learn from birding experts with the American Birding Association's video series "What's This Bird?" Two expert birders discuss how they identify bird species using photos submitted to them in these free YouTube recordings. The series is an entertaining and educational way to spend an hour on a chilly day. It may help you become a better birder by learning what to look for. Visit <https://www.youtube.com/c/AmericanBirdingAssociation/featured>.

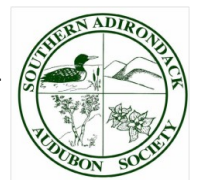
## It's renewal time!

SAAS local chapter memberships start with the calendar year and expire at the end of the year.

Chapter memberships are \$15. A SAAS chapter membership makes an ideal holiday or birthday gift.

Renew online with Paypal, or send a check using the form on the SAAS website (<http://www.southernadirondackaudubon.org/membership/membership.html>).

Currently, approximately 600 members of National Audubon live in our chapter area. Many of our chapter supporters belong to National Audubon Society and also financially support our local efforts of conservation and education. Funds are used locally for programming and educational activities.



**Edward Jones**  
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

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