



**Late Fall 2014**

# WINGBEATS



## A Message From The President

by John Loz, ASCR president



### **Hello Capital Region Audubon Supporter!**

Wait...you aren't a Chapter Supporter yet?

As a member of the National Audubon Society, your zip code is assigned to our chapter area and we are extremely happy you are a member of Audubon! National Audubon is the parent of *your* local 'boots-in-the-ground' all-volunteer *Capital Region Audubon* chapter and we're proud to be volunteering for our local birds - Would you like to help us?

There are 27 local Audubon chapters around New York State and we each have to do our own fundraising. We kindly accept donations from supporters, some of whom are from other states, to help pay for our conservation work and education efforts in Capital Region schools. So for the first time in our 45 year history as a chapter, we are following the lead of our neighboring Audubon chapters and starting our own Inaugural Chapter Supporter Annual Membership! On September 27th, we launched our new local membership drive where

your annual Chapter Supporter membership dues stay right here in the Capital Region. Your dues are used to help sustain our operating costs and pay for materials we use to educate local elementary school children. Your dues are also used in our efforts at local State Parks and other non-profit preserves, where we work to conduct invasive species removal, restore natural bird areas, and create bird-friendly gardens. We encourage you to donate your money where it will have an impact "locally", maybe even right in your backyard! See page 5 for a membership form. Aside from knowing your supporting donation is going to a good cause, we'll be holding a Thank You event for all Chapter Supporters in Spring 2015.

**Our newsletter is going (nearly) ALL Electronic!** In order to reduce our printing and mailing costs, which is quite a chunk of our annual budget, we are significantly reducing our print newsletter. Our chapter board understands that not everyone has a computer or is tech saavy, so we will happily continue to print and send hardcopies of our 'Wingbeats newsletter to those of you who wish to continue receiving in the mail and have on your coffee table! Please see the back page for more info!

Not only will ASCR be able to re-allocate this saved money towards efforts that will have more impact in your community, but we are reducing our local carbon footprint through our significantly reduced paper usage...and ultimately - **reducing our contribution to Climate Change**. Not only that, but you'll get it 10 days sooner & — in FULL COLOR online! Thanks Everyone & Happy Birding! ~ John

### *In This Issue ...*

2014 Late Fall / Winter Programming **2**

ReCap: ASCR Conservation Efforts & New Membership **3**

Airport/Grassland Bird Issue **4**

Join The Huyck Preserve CBC on Jan. 3rd **5**

Gifts for Your Favorite Birder! **7**

## Late Fall Programs

### "Raptor Rapture!"

**Saturday, November 15th**

**Time: 11 am to 4pm**

**Location: NYS Museum Albany, NY**

**FREE and FUN For the Whole Family!**

Join us at our Annual Bird Awareness Day to bring attention to the challenges faced by New York State's migrating songbirds and birds of prey!

Spend a full day seeing Live Birds of Prey, participate in many kids activities, attend interesting presentations and demonstrations.

This year we have something new!

**There's Native American Indian storytelling** as a fun & educational twist to our bird fest!

Co-sponsoring with:

**Friends of the IBA - Washington Co. Grasslands**

### ***Night Owls and Hot Dogs!***

**Saturday, December 6th 4pm to 7 pm**

Location:

Visitors Center, Five Rivers  
Environmental Education Center  
Game Farm Road Delmar, NY

Great Horned Owls are often heard calling around dusk at this time of year in the deep pine woods at Five Rivers.

After meeting at the Visitors Center for a brief introduction, our group will walk out into the woods to listen for calling owls.

Along the way or on the way back, stop by our blazing campfire to enjoy a hot dog and hot chocolate. The owls are not guaranteed, but a good time is nearly a certainty at this popular event!

**Reservations are required** as space is limited: Please call: (518) 475-0291

## 115th Annual "CBC" Christmas Bird Count!

Anyone of any age can be a Citizen Scientist in the Capital Region!

**The Huyck Preserve** recently restarted the Rensselaerville CBC in western Albany County in 2011 and they're looking for **Your** Help!

**Date:** Sun. January 3rd - 8am start!

**To participate: See page 5!**

Work in teams to collect important bird sighting data. Join everyone back at the Edmund Niles Huyck Visitors Center later on Sunday afternoon to see what everyone else counted and...

**Warm up w/ Delicious Warm Food!**

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**Five Rivers Environmental Education Center** will also be holding their long-time Albany Co. CBC on Sunday December 14th!

More CBC counts happening in YOUR area!

Schenectady County, Saturday December 20th  
So. Rensselaer County, Sunday December 27th

## **"SAVING EAGLE MITCH"**

When a Navy SEAL and a former Army Ranger rescue a wounded Steppe Eagle in war-torn Afghanistan, a writer learns what it takes to do one good deed in a seemingly wicked world. ***Presentation by Barbara Chepaitis, Writer & Producer of...***

...A 15 minute Documentary Film on the **Berkshire Bird Paradise** in Grafton, NY where 'Mitch' is now living will be shown!

**Date/Time: Monday January 12th, 7pm**

**Location:** Clifton Park-Halfmoon Library  
325 Moe Road Clifton Park, NY 12065

## Growing Bird-Friendly Community Gardens in Albany and Troy!

Do you have a bird friendly back yard? This past season, Audubon Society of the Capital Region worked with Audubon New York's Manager of Conservation Engagement Laura McCarthy on her TogetherGreen Fellowship project to inspire more people to do just that. The project focused on helping to enhance bird-friendly gardens and helping our chapter achieve more visibility and partnerships in the cities of Albany and Troy. We worked with Historic Albany Foundation (HAF), adding a bird-friendly garden component to their Historic Hidden City Home and Garden Tour as well as partnered with Capital District Community Gardens (CDCG), where we coordinated several volunteer work days to clear invasive species flora and plant natives on a community garden owned hillside overlooking Troy.

The Historic Home and Garden Tour in downtown Albany, showcased three of 12 urban gardens in the Center Square Neighborhood, where owners pledged to take on Bird-Friendly Gardening actions including planting natives, avoiding pesticides and herbicides, and limiting exotic plants. Our chapter volunteers acted as docents in the gardens during the tour, which was attended by over 450 people, while we also hosted an Audubon activity in Hudson-Jay Park complete with bird nesting box info, bird seed feeder guides.

In Troy, the new home of Audubon New York's state headquarters, we worked with Laura and Capital District Community Gardens to clear invasive and plant natives on at the 8th Street Garden Hillside, overlooking the city. Over the course of 3 workdays, we engaged over 40 volunteers and planted natives donated from a sister chapter on Long Island, Four Harbors Audubon society, as well as plants donated by Hewitt's in Albany.

Huge thanks to HAF, CDCG, Hewitts, Four Harbors Audubon, Audubon New York, our volunteer network, and all our partners on this fun project meant to not only enhance bird friendly habitat for songbirds in our capital region and connect our chapter further with our community, but teach more people about the importance of making healthy backyard choices. Read on for how you can help at home!

We'll be looking for volunteers to help on Bird-Friendly Communities work in the Spring and would love to know if this is something you're interested in being involved with.

Send an email to [President@CapitalRegionAudubon.org](mailto:President@CapitalRegionAudubon.org) to be add to our Bird Friendly Garden list! - Thank You!



ASCR Volunteers at 8th Street Community Gardens in Troy, NY 7/9/14

### Join us in Congratulating our First 18 Inaugural Chapter Supporters!

Linda Zaloga  
Sharon and Randy Rivet  
Jim Spear  
Vicki Collello  
Peter Ryan and Patrick Jones  
JM and MJ Purcell  
Sheryl and Randy Collins  
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### Thank You In - Memory - Of Donors

**In acknowledgement of a donation by  
Mr. and Mrs. James O. Colton...**

### **In Memory of Faith Hopkins**

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### Education and Conservation Donations

*A Big Thank You to: **Paul K. Praus***



## Hudson Mohawk Bird Club and ASCR Team Up to Address an Airport Bird Issue (**Full Story**)

by John Loz

Back in June, Hudson Mohawk Bird Club (HMBC) member Tom Williams reported seeing Grasshopper Sparrows and other grassland birds singing and displaying at the Albany International Airport (AI). A couple days later, he reported that the grasses alongside the road and in between the tarmacs had been mowed to quite a short length. He and a number of birders were concerned that the airport might not be aware of these NYS DEC 'Species of Concern' there and that these grassland bird nests might be getting mowed over. Tom and other concerned HMBC members brought this to the attention of Audubon NY's Larry Federman and HMBC president Jory Langner to see how to approach the airport about their concerns and more so to understand what kind of processes there were in place at AI to address animals and birds that appear on the property. Some may be deemed threatened and even endangered. Did AI have a plan in place to address these issues?

It was suggested that HMBC join forces with ASCR to approach the airport property management staff together. Jory Langner contacted me about the observations at the airport and to see how both organizations could move forward together, addressing our members concerns regarding, in particular, grassland bird management at AI. I had a good relationship with Stephen Iachetta, AI's Airport Planner, who by the way is also a strong supporter of birds, and reached out to meet him. Stephen shared that when the grasses between the tarmacs and the approaches to the airport runways reach 15 inches, the grass has to be cut per FAA regulations. But, he said, they do not cut the grasses less than 6 inches as that length is a deterrent to flocking birds. Flocking European Starlings and Canada Geese, among others don't like tall grasses and generally avoid grasses 6 inches and higher. Albany International, in fact, rejected a plan of replacing the natural areas of the airport property with an Astro-turf material that many other large airports across the country have installed to cut down on maintenance costs. As I understand it from Stephen, there are administrators and planners within AI that support having the airport property look as natural as possible



Grasshopper Sparrow

Photo credit: Tom Williams—Albany International Airport - 7/7/14

within the landscape of the surrounding community. And yes, natural grasses are definitely more aesthetically pleasing at an airport, but it is really used as a wildlife management tactic to protect aircraft from collisions with flocking birds. As many of us know, aircraft flying into and through flocks of birds can cause expensive damage to aircraft, but more so, life-threatening situations to the pilots passengers within the aircraft. The Miracle on the Hudson is a particular event that comes to mind.

Mr. Iachetta then directed Jory and me to the local office of the USDA APHIS Wildlife Services in Castleton, NY. AI contracts out the biological expertise and services of the USDA to monitor all wildlife at the airport and make recommendations on how to deal with animals that wander or fly onto the airport property, as well as the flightline approaches of each of the North- South and East-West runways there.

The two of us then met USDA reps Allen Gosser, Wildlife Biologist and Assistant State Director, and Ken Preusser, District Supervisor who monitors the airport grounds, at their offices on July 10th, 2014. We shared a bit about our individual organization's history and missions and then specifically about the concerns our memberships had regarding bird species of concern at the airport. We asked Allen and Ken to share with us what their specific roles were at the USDA and their mission as contractors with AI. They were happy to hear our concerns and discussed the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) guidance on this issue. They directed the two of us to the Certalert 06-07 Advisory Cautionary Non-directive Airport Safety and Operation document that guides both airports and Wildlife Services' activities regarding State-listed species and airports. (Continued on Page 6...)

## **“Help The Huyck” CBC! - Huyck Preserve has resurrected the old Rensselaerville CBC !**

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is one of the oldest citizen science efforts in the country, with this year's CBC being the 115<sup>th</sup>! Huyck Preserve is a CBC site as of 2011, and this year's count will be on **January 3rd**!

Each year thousands of people participate in Christmas Bird Counts in December and January across the country – so here's your chance to join in *one of the oldest holiday science traditions in the country!* They need **YOU** to come count birds with them – you don't have to be a pro either! Birders head out on the trail or by car to listen and watch for birds and record their observations in teams.



They need new birders to continue the tradition in their 4th year as a CBC site. Help by meeting at the **Edmund Niles Huyck Visitors Center at 5052 Delaware Turnpike in Rensselaerville, NY at 8am** to get started and divide into teams with data sheets and guidebooks. We'll then meet back at the **Visitors Center at 1pm** for a **warm lunch** & to compile data! For the hardcore birders don't worry – you can keep counting until 5pm if you'd like, but we only ask volunteer scientists to stay from 8-1pm.

Live within the boundary of our CBC circle? You can stay at home and count the birds that come to your feeder – contact The Huyck by email to get a data reporting form and information and then email them your counts! Either way, we'd love to have you join us for the Christmas Bird

Count, so call 518-797-3440 or email us at [outreach@huyckpreserve.org](mailto:outreach@huyckpreserve.org) if interested. Please leave them your name & phone number, and then mark your calendar for January 3<sup>rd</sup> from 8am – 1pm!

### **Become an Inaugural Capital Region Audubon Chapter Supporter!**

To help us get our new Chapter Supporter initiative kicked off, Hewitt's Garden Centers is offering \$20 Gift Cards to anyone who signs up as an Inaugural ASCR Chapter Annual Supporter!

Send in this form between now and postmarked December 1st, and we'll quickly send you a \$20 Hewitt's Gift Card!

**But sign up soon**, as these cards are only good through **December 25th, 2014!**

*Please make checks payable to:*  
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...and watch for our “Tweets!”



**Also...**



(Continued from Page 3) Here are the specific excerpts that speak directly to the airport landscape that attracts a variety of wildlife and specifically Grasshopper Sparrows:

*“An airport’s air operations area (AOA) is an artificial environment that has been created and maintained for aircraft operations. Because an AOA can be markedly different from the surrounding native landscapes, it may attract wildlife species that do not normally occur [and] are attracted to habitat features found in the airport environment. Also, some wildlife species may occur on the airport in higher numbers (ex: flocking birds) than occur naturally in the region, because the airport offers habitat features the species prefer. Some of these wildlife species are State-listed threatened and endangered species or have been designated by State resource agencies as species of special concern.”*

*“For example, the grassland habitat preferred by Grasshopper Sparrows, which are listed as threatened in New York...”*

*“[Airport operators] must take immediate action to alleviate wildlife hazards whenever they are detected.”*

Based on this, AI does have to mow grasses in accordance with the directives above, but *does not have to mow less than 6 inches*, as indicated by Mr. Iachetta. AI does not ‘deliberately’ preserve wildlife habitats at their airport, such as grasslands, but rather they are a naturally occurring aesthetic consequence of using grasses as a flocking bird deterrent. In the case of this past winter, Snowy Owls, were attracted to the wide swaths of flat open area at the airport. They are not flocking birds, so they were monitored and tolerated on the airport property as long as they were not a threat to aviation safety.

So the bottom line, as paraphrased by Jory Langner: “The airport needs to follow the FAA rules, part 139, which basically states that - The safety of people, planes, the airport and surrounding communities obviously ‘trump’ any concerns for the Grasshopper Sparrows (and other non-endangered species). [As a result,] there will be no special maintenance of the grasslands for these species at the Albany airport. Smaller, local airports like Saratoga airport follow different rules.”

Smaller Capital Region airports might be able to accommodate habitat management for birds. In talking with the Airport Director at a small Long Island airport a couple years ago, this writer found out that there was a program involving the installation of 30 bluebird houses out in the lesser used areas of that Long Island airport.

Albany International Airport and the USDA have protocols in place for “non-lethal” dispersal methods to clear airport runways, flightlines, and approaches of threatening birds or mammals that may wander into those areas. Initially, they will use noise cannons to attempt to disperse the threat, but if that does not work, they use a trap-and-release method, when at all possible. Logan Airport in Boston has for decades used cannon-fired nets to capture Snowy Owls and relocate them to a suitable area and be released well away from the airport.



In conclusion, as far as ground nesting grassland birds go at AI, they really do not belong there. And if they do try to build nests there, it will be an unfortunate choice for them to make. Large airports are governed by the rules and safety regulations of the FAA and as a result trump any laws that state or local municipalities pass regarding ‘species of concern.’ Seeing grassland birds more frequently at airports, in this writer’s opinion, is a sign that there are less grassland habitats for these birds to build and fledge their young. Where once there were plenty of grasslands for generations of grasshopper sparrows to migrate back to and breed, there is certainly much less now. Why? Possible residential development or old farms that have succeeded into forest habitats in rural areas force these birds to find the next best habitat. In this case, a man-made grassland that runs in between airport tarmacs.

What can we, as birders, do to help situations like this one? This writer subscribes to the old adage, ‘Think Globally and Act Locally’, and advocate for sustainable habitat management and preservation of open space in our local towns and rural areas. We can follow up with county farm bureaus and the DEC to acquire documentation to share and educate local farmers and property owners to encourage bird-friendly property and long-term preservation of existing open fields and lands. That way, we can hopefully stem the reduction of suitable habitat for all grassland birds and help our little Grasshopper Sparrows create their own safe ‘Flightline approaches’ and ‘Nesting Terminals’ for their young birds arriving at the airport.



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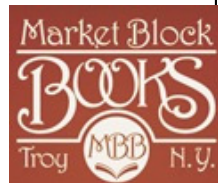
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