



Winter 2017 WINGBEATS

Newsletter of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region of New York State

Great Backyard Bird Count 2017

Written by: Craig Thompson

**HELP
WANTED**

*Great Backyard Bird Count:
No experience necessary!
Work from home!
Great benefits!*

Over President's Day weekend (Friday, February 17 - Monday, February 20), birders of all ages and abilities throughout North America are urged to count birds in their backyards or local parks as part of the annual *Great Backyard Bird Count*. It doesn't cost money. You can do it just by watching out your kitchen window. It's fun and educational. And it really helps contribute valuable information to bird conservation. The only thing you'll need, really, is an internet connection to report your survey results.

But to be honest, mid-February is an absolutely lousy time to ask people to count birds.

The weather is often intolerable, for people and for birds. The winter snow is as deep as it gets.

You've got a bad case of the winter "blahs."

Even the ground-hog went back to sleep!

And the only birds out there are the "usual suspects": our hearty year 'round species, plus several common winter visitors, and maybe a few unexpected transient birds forced down from Canada for lack of food.

But this is precisely why counting birds during the *Great Backyard Bird Count* is of value to ornithologists. By now, birds have completed their migratory itineraries and are "where they should be", in contrast to the National Audubon Society's *Christmas Bird Count*, which often catches birds still in transition. The *Great Backyard Bird Count* shows where the birds are in the dead of winter. And the neat thing is, when everyone counts birds on the same weekend, you've got an instant crowd-sourced database which provides researchers a robust snapshot of bird distribution and abundance.

Sponsored by the National Audubon Society, Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada, the *Great Backyard Bird Count* is now in its 20th year, a rich longitudinal survey useful for tracking changes in winter bird ranges. Carolina wren, for example. Birds are excellent environmental monitors, and studying fluctuations in bird abundance or distribution over time can reveal trends. Which then begs the question "why the trend?", ultimately helping to inform sound conservation strategies. In the wren's case, many attribute an apparent expansion of its winter range to climate change.

So, how can you contribute to the *Great Backyard Bird Count* bird survey? (continued page 3....)

How many birds will you find?

20th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count
February 17-20, 2017

Join in! Count birds in your backyard, local park, or wherever you spot a bird, and submit your observations online.

birdcount.org



Allen's Hummingbird
Photo: Chris Orr/GBBC



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Winter Events

Hudson Valley Bald Eagles

Saturday, January 7, 2pm - 3pm

East Greenbush Library

10 Community Way, East Greenbush, NY 12061

Join us for the presentation of Hudson Valley Bald Eagles: Our Greatest Ecological Recovery, by Tom Lake, Hudson River Estuary Program Naturalist for the Department of Environmental Conservation. Drew Cashman, volunteer with the Audubon Society of the Capital Region will also introduce our new Bald Eagle Nest Watch Program and provide details how other volunteers can get involved. This event is free and open to the public, with complimentary refreshments. Registration is required by contacting the library at 518-708-7825 or emailing Drew at ASCRBEW@gmail.com.

Mid-Winter Eagle Survey

Saturday, January 14th, 10am-Noon

Schodack Island State Park

1 Schodack Island Way, Schodack Landing, NY 12156

For the third year, the ASCR is teaming up with Schodack Island State Park to offer this citizen science event. We will look for juvenile and adult Eagles. Participants must register with the Park office at 518-732-0187. We will meet at Park Pavilion by the river and there will be complimentary coffee, hot cocoa and refreshments after the survey. Free and open to the public, this event will run rain or shine.

Audubon Society Annual Meeting and Open House

Saturday February 11th, 1:30pm-4:00pm

East Greenbush Community Library

10 Community Way, East Greenbush

Come visit the ASCR during this Open House where retired wildlife ecologist and artist Steven Jay Sanford will present a free presentation "Beginning Ornithology: An Introduction to the Science of Birds." This presentation, for both novice and experienced birders of all ages, will cover topics such as the basics of identifying birds and how to make the best of a bird feeder. During a break in his presentation, Steven will display live waterfowl, as well as discuss the interesting adaptations and features these live birds have to survive in the wild.

This event is part of our Annual Meeting. Come check out what this all volunteer, local chapter of the National Audubon Society has been doing for the birds in the Capital Region. A short election ceremony will also take place where the public can meet our new volunteer officers of the Audubon Chapter. This event is free and open to the public.

The Great Backyard Bird Count

Saturday, February 18, 9:00am-10:00am

Schodack Island State Park,

1 Schodack Island Way, Schodack Landing, NY 12156

Join us for a family-friendly introduction to the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). In this outdoor program beginning birders will learn all about the GBBC history, its importance, and how to conduct a bird count in their own backyard. We will meet at the pavilion and then split into groups. Afterwards, we will re-group to compare notes and enjoy complimentary hot chocolate and coffee.

Registration is required. Call the Park Office at 518-732-0187 by Wednesday, February 15 to register and in case of cancellation due to inclement weather.

Bird and Nature Photography from the Adirondacks.

Wednesday, March 29, 6:30pm.

Bethlehem Public Library

451 Delaware Ave., Delmar, NY 12054

Warren Greene will present a program on birds and nature from the Adirondacks using his newest work with digital photography, as well as sprinkle in some of his other photographic work from around the Capital Region.

Audubon: The Film. Saturday April 22, 2:00pm

Guilderland Public Library

2228 Western Ave., Guilderland, NY 12084

In celebration of John James Audubon's birthday on April 26th, the Guilderland Public Library and the ASCR will host a screening of this documentary film about his life.

**Be sure to check back on our website
or Facebook page as more programs
may be added!**

Got Squirrels? A Guide to Squirrel Proof Bird Feeders

Written by: Tom Hartman

Squirrels can look cute with their fluffy tails and shivering whiskers, but before you know it the birds are gone and what's left of your bird seed is scattered messily on the ground. Even the incredible acrobatics and clever problem-solving can grow old if you're forced to refill the birdfeeder over and over. Good bird seed isn't cheap and, let's face it, you're not buying it for the squirrels. So if you find yourself glaring at the squirrels through your window or throwing snowballs at them when they're not looking, it may be time for something new. Bird feeders have evolved over the years to include all sorts of humane designs that keep the squirrels out so the birds can flock to your yard. Here are our top three most effective types of feeders. (continued page 5...)



Photo credit: L. Homenick




Great Backyard Bird Count 2017

(...continued from page 1)

Merely choose a date, time and location for your survey. When you “go live”, simply mark down the highest number of individuals of each bird species that you can see in your “field of view” at any one time during the count period, like if you took a picture. Keep taking those “pictures” and recording “highest count” data for each species for at least 15 minutes, or more if you like. Some familiarity with common winter bird species is necessary, so keep a bird guide handy for those “gotcha” moments.

Once you are done “counting”, log on to bird-count.org and follow the links to establish your (free) Great Backyard Bird Count account, identify your locale and then log in your data. There's other cool

stuff on that URL to peruse, too. It's very easy to collect and to report your field data and it is, of course, of the most importance to bird conservation that you actually take time to log it in.

The *Great Backyard Bird Count* is a great opportunity to get to know your local birds better and to be involved in bona fide citizen science at the same time. Other bird-related citizen-science initiatives in which you might be interested include the National Audubon Society's *Christmas Bird Count*, NYS DEC's *Breeding Bird Atlas*, and Cornell's *Project FeederWatch* and its *E-bird* database. No other scientific discipline has relied so heavily on raw data gathered from everyday people. Thanks to these and other citizen science programs, the active engagement of rank amateurs has been critical to the advancement of conservation science. 

Bald Eagle Nest Watch Citizen Science Program

Written by: Tom Hartman

In the 1960's extinction of bald eagles in New York was more than just a possibility. This elegant eagle had fought through decades of indiscriminate killings and the widespread use of harmful chemicals until only one sterile eagle remained. In 1972 DDT was banned and in 1973 the Endangered Species Act outlawed the killing of these endangered birds. This allowed for the novel initiation of New York's Bald Eagle Restoration Program, which sought to



bring back a breeding population by importing young birds from other states. According to the NY DEC, eaglets were hand raised in a process known as *hacking*. Biologists fed and looked after baby eagles in a suitable habitat and released them when they could fly. The theory was that eagles tended to return to the area where they were fledged. By 1989 the hacking project had established 10 breeding pairs of bald eagles in New York State.

Today, bald eagles are still monitored in order to assess how an expanding human population is affecting their habitat. Although the state conducts many of these studies, less and less time and money is being spent because of rising population. But that doesn't mean they're safe. Bald eagles are repeatedly hit by cars, high speed trains and wind turbines. Chemicals, such as PCB's in the Hudson River, accumulate in birds over time by eating fish and carcasses. Because of these threats to our national symbol, the Audubon Society of the Capital Region is announcing a citizen science Bald Eagle Nest Watch Program. This program is coordinated by Drew Cashman, a passionate birder who has spent five breeding seasons watching Bald Eagles in the Rocky Mountains. Drew expresses "It's just an amazing experience. You get a chance to watch a pair of eagles from the start of



the season to end and also help to protect them. It starts with them putting on these amazing aerial mating displays, then on to nest construction, egg laying, egg incubating, feeding/protecting eaglets, to the eaglets finally fledging." Nest watching is about more than trying to keep the birds safe. Each bird has a personality, every trip has a story. Drew especially enjoys watching eaglets as they learn to fly. "They are so awkward. They continue to practice flapping, hopping and figuring out how to use their wings. There is a lot of crashing into things once they finally fledge and the parents yelling at them. It's like something out of slapstick comedy."

If you're interested in seeing these beautiful creatures in the wild and you'd like to help, you can contact Drew at ASCRBEW@gmail.com. Volunteers would need to monitor eaglets, recording their behavior, productivity of the nest and reporting any disturbances. Training meetings will take place in January and will be announced at the January 7 talk and on Facebook.



(...continued from page 3)

Baffle-Style Feeders

These feeders are equipped with "baffles" which are often dome-shaped structures positioned above the bird seed that cause squirrels to slip when trying to climb down. These baffles can have the additional benefit of protecting bird seed from weather. Make sure to keep these away from trees or porches so squirrels can't jump on them.



Barrier Feeders

These feeders use strong resistances to either keep squirrels from accessing food or to keep them from causing damage.



Tension Feeders

A slightly more reliable, but more expensive way of keeping squirrels out are tension feeders, or weight balancing feeders. These feeders are designed to close access to food with too much weight. Since small birds are incredibly light, they're able to perch on the feeders without any problems.



Share your squirrel stories on our Audubon Society of the Capital Region [Facebook](#) page!



So long 2016.... Here are a few ASCR highlights!



Citizen Science and Educational Events:

- ◆ The Great Backyard Bird Count
- ◆ Albany County Christmas Bird Count - 30th year
- ◆ Migration Celebration at the Mabee Farm
- ◆ Hawkwatch at the Overlook
- ◆ Beginners Christmas Bird Count
- ◆ Owl Prowl at Schodack Island State Park
- ◆ Tabling at Hyuck Preserve Winter Festival

Bird Walks:

- ◆ Kinderhook Creek Preserve bird walk with the Rensselaer Land Trust
- ◆ Bird walks at the Albany Rural Cemetery
- ◆ Bird walk at the Saratoga National Historical Park with the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society
- ◆ Birds and Brews at the Sanders Town preserve with some refreshing brews afterwards at the Wolf Hollow Brewing Company

Conservation and Advocacy Efforts:

- ◆ Twelve "tangle-tainers" constructed and placed throughout the Capital Region
- ◆ Removing Wild Parsnip at Thatcher State Park
- ◆ Three bird blinds installed at Schodack Island State Park
- ◆ Bluebird nesting box workshops at Peebles Island State Park; and for the Girl Scouts at Schoharie Crossing State Historic .
- ◆ Five bluebird houses and a bluebird nesting box trail installed at Peebles Island State Park
- ◆ Twice a month owl surveys in Acra, NY
- ◆ DEC sponsored Waterfowl Count
- ◆ DEC sponsored Cocksackie Raptor surveys
- ◆ Signing onto letters advocating the blocking of dredge spoils dumping in the Long Island Sound

Fundraising:

- ◆ 4th annual bird seed sale fundraiser, which netted nearly \$1,000
- ◆ Charity of the month winner for the Burger 21 Shakes and Burger shop in Latham
- ◆ Bird nesting box sales made by ASCR volunteer
- ◆ Grant for creating signs for the bird blinds!

Thank you to all of our partners, co-sponsors, volunteers and friends of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region. We cannot do this without you!

Announcing the new Strategic Plan

In the fall of 2015 the board members of ASCR determined that to ensure the success of the organization and its purpose, a strategic plan should be developed to help guide the organization and its members for the next five years. The Strategic Planning Committee was created and volunteers from the membership came forward to meet on a regular basis to brainstorm, strategize, and develop the plan.

The committee identified five main areas that ASCR should focus efforts to fulfill its purpose. Goals were set in these areas which formed the foundation of the plan with recommended objectives on how to reach those goals. The plan provides strategies and ideas on how to accomplish the goals but it is ultimately up to the various ASCR committees to do so.

A proposed timeline was created to prioritize the goals based on their importance taking into account the current number of members, active volunteers, as well as other available resources. With that in mind the first goals were to increase and engage the membership to assist in fulfilling the purpose of ASCR, develop strong and consistent communications, as well as continue ASCR's commitment to various protection and conservation efforts.


With an increased and more engaged membership and better communication, the organization will have the resources it needs to successfully complete the remainder of the goals. The following identifies the areas of focus and the contributors to the development of the document.

Areas of Focus

- Membership
- Protection and Conservation of the Environment
- Community Engagement and Enjoyment
- Communication and Branding
- Organization Efficiency and Financial Stability

Strategic Planning Committee Members

Rebecca Allmond
David Covey
Ryan Henderson (Chair)
Lindsay Homenick
Kathryn Sikule

To view the new Strategic Plan for the Audubon Society of the Capital Region go to our home page and scroll over "About ASCR" and click the link. Or click [here](#) to go directly to the document. 

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

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Membership and Volunteers: Fred Bockis & David Covey
 Membership@CapitalRegionAudubon.org
 Volunteer@CapitalRegionAudubon.org

Webmaster: René Facchetti

Volunteer Spotlight: Dave Covey

Q: Where, or in what field do you work?
A: I work in the Human Services field, after a twenty five year career with the New York State Dept. of Correctional Services I started a career working with members of at risk communities.

Q: How are you involved with ASCR?
A: I am most active with ASCR as a board member and have volunteered at several events.

Q: When and how did you first become interested in birding?
A: I can't remember when I wasn't interested in, fascinated by, birds.

Q: What made you want to get involved with ASCR, your local Audubon Chapter?

A: I decided to become involved with ASCR because I have always enjoyed the outdoors and wanted to contribute to an organization that supported the environment and, particularly, birds.

Q: What is your favorite bird?

A: My favorite bird is the Peregrine Falcon, it is beautiful, fast, and has come back from adversity.

Q: What do you like to do when you are not birding?

A: I enjoy hiking, fishing and painting in my 'spare' time.



Questions?

Email: info@capitalregionaudubon.org

**Audubon Society
 of the Capital Region**
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