#### SEED SALE RECAP

ASCR's annual bird seed sale was held on October 11 and October 12, 2024, a departure from our usual Saturday morning pickup timeframe. We also tried a new format: Wildbird Junction in Delmar served as both our seed broker and our pickup location. While not as much of a success as we hoped, we were happy with several aspects of the sale.

While it was well advertised, we came to the conclusion that the new pickup location may have caused confusion for those who expected to go to the Colonie Library. We also concluded that offering two days for pickup instead of one resulted in ambiguity as well as trying to find enough volunteers to handle the pickups.

On the positive side, we did not have to rent a truck to pick up the seed and suet at the vendor. That expense is the largest part of the sale except the seed itself, and takes a pretty large chunk of the revenue.

Another very positive discovery was that the quality and variety of the products sold far exceeded our expectations. The seed blends are very clean, contain no little added "extras" such as tiny rocks, sticks, and empty shells, and we were able to choose several different blends to offer to a wider populations of birds.

The Board will be planning for the 2025 sale starting in the spring. If you have any suggestions, we welcome your feedback so we can improve our process. Contact us at capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com; we'll be happy to include your ideas for the next sale!

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## PILOT BACKPACK PROGRAM SUCCESSFUL

by Carol Quantock

ASCR embarked on a new pilot program this fall to provide beginning birder backpacks to local libraries, with emphasis on smaller libraries whose budgets may not allow for the little extra amenities that larger libraries enjoy.

The Board decided to consult with Southern Adirondack Audubon Society (SAAS), since they have an ongoing program and were able to provide us with invaluable guidance as to the quantity, quality, and usefulness of the backpack contents.

Douglas and Margie Rogers were instrumental in contacting several libraries as well as preparing the backpacks and distributing them. We started out small and chose four libraries to see how the backpacks would be welcomed by staff and patrons.

The libraries chosen were: Troy Public Library, Cohoes Public Library, Watervliet Public Library, and Schenectady Public Library, all of which fall into ASCR's region.

The backpacks, purchased from National Audubon Society, include the following items:

- Lightweight binoculars
- ♦ Binocular instructions
- ♦ Lens cleaning cloth
- ♦ Birding journal
- ♦ Laminated guide to the birds of New York State
- List of locations in each area to see birds
   Below are a couple of photos of library staff receiving their backpacks.





Left: Douglas Rogers handing backpack to Cohoes Library staff member; right: Troy Public Library staff member holding the new backpack. Photos courtesy of Margie Rogers.

#### **NOTES FROM THE BACK WINDOW**

by Carol Quantock

After a very busy summer and fall, I was hoping to settle in for the proverbial "long winter's nap." I should have known better! It seems that time is whizzing by, as it's now only a couple of weeks until the big holidays and the dawn if the new year. I will be trying to dial it back a little bit so I can enjoy watching the bird feeders in the backyard, with hopes of seeing something unusual or a new lifer.

The feeders in my yard generally attract the usual "winter" birds: chickadees, tufted titmice, juncos, white-breasted and red-breasted nuthatches, downy and hairy woodpeckers, pileated woodpeckers, goldfinches, house finches, red-bellied woodpeckers, white-throated sparrows, and the lively Carolina wrens. It's always a thrill to see the birds both at the feeders and gleaning seeds from the seedheads that I have left for them. I am pretty sure that I have saved money by letting the birds feed naturally instead of cutting all the plants down and purchasing more commercial seed.

Speaking of commercial seed, this fall we conducted our annual bird seed sale (see page 1). While the results were a little disappointing, the quality of the seed and suet far exceeds what we have offered in the past. This coming year we may combine the process and have our pickup location back at the Sanford Library. Discussions will ensue over the next few months, and suggestions from members and customers are certainly welcome!

We had our November meeting at the Kelly Adirondack Center and were treated to the sight of the newly planted native plant garden beds around the building. Thanks go to the hardworking Schenectady County Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners for all their efforts. The gardens look great!

Contributing in a big way to this issue are articles by Hailey Mitchell, our speaker at the November meeting, Camille Robinson-Parisi, and Maya Niles, whose articles on Savannah Sparrows, Hog Island, and birds in art, respectively, are representative of the variety of interests of our members.

Do check out the information about ASCR's library Backpack Program. We have started a pilot program and have supplied birding backpacks to local libraries.

And finally, I wish you all a very happy, healthy, safe, and "birdy" holiday season. May 2025 foster in everyone a new commitment to protect the environment, combat climate change, reduce pollution and habitat destruction, and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. Celebrate safely, folks!

## **DECEMBER'S BEST PHOTO!**



Cooper's Hawk; photo by Gerry Woulfin

# SCHENECTADY HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S FESTIVAL OF TREES

At the suggestion of Deb Moyer, the ASCR Board voted to submit an entry in this year's Festival of Trees at the Schenectady County Historical Society. Decorators Deb, Teresa Murphy, and Carol Quantock acquired the tree and decorations and set up a time to trim the tree at the Society's main building at 32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady. The Festival runs through December 28th with the exception of the 24th and 25th. Hours are 10:00 am — 4:30pm.





Left: "Feathered Friends of the Northeast" tree; right: Deb Moyer, Carol Quantock, and Teresa Murphy showing off the ASCR tree.

Interested in bird photography, or on vacation and spotted an amazing bird? If so, we're interested in your photos! Experienced and beginner shutterbugs alike should submit JPEG or PNG photos <u>capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com</u>. Please include as much information as possible about the bird: place where the photo was taken, species if known, date and time of day, and any other helpful data.

#### DRIER WINTER HABITAT IMPACTS SONGBIRDS' ABILITY TO SURVIVE MIGRATION

(Smithsonian's National Zoo & Conservation Biology Institute, October 4, 2024)

#### Climate Change-Driven Drying in Caribbean Likely to Impact Birds Throughout Annual Cycle

A new study from researchers at the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute (NZCBI) shows environmental conditions in migratory birds' winter homes carry over to affect their ability to survive spring migration and the breeding season.

While scientists have long known that the quality of winter, or non-breeding, habitat influences migratory birds' migration timing and reproductive success, the study, published today in Current Biology, marks the first time researchers have linked winter conditions with migration survival. Analysis of the data for both the Kirtland's warbler and the black-throated blue warbler revealed reduced rainfall and diminished vegetative productivity in the birds' Caribbean non-breeding habitats resulted in fewer birds surviving spring migration. For Kirtland's warblers, poor quality winter habitat also reduced survival in the subsequent breeding season.

As bird populations continue to decline, understanding the factors influencing their survival throughout the year is crucial. The Caribbean is expected to get drier in the coming decades due to climate change, suggesting migratory bird species such as these warblers could face even greater challenges going forward.

"If winter habitat quality continues to degrade over the next half-century due to climate change, we can now say that it will reduce birds' ability to survive spring migration," said Nathan Cooper, the study's lead author and research ecologist at NZCBI. "That knowledge can help us prioritize conservation measures on the most drought-resistant non-breeding grounds."

Beginning in 2017, Cooper and his co-authors wanted to investigate how environmental conditions on non-breeding grounds affect survival during spring migration and on the breeding grounds. However, GPS tags, which can track individual birds continuously, are too heavy to attach to most songbirds. Instead, songbird researchers must rely on other devices, like radio transmitters, which are lighter but only reveal their location when a receiver is within 6 to 10 miles. Many species bree



Male Kirtland's warbler; Photo by Nathan W. Cooper, Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute

their location when a receiver is within 6 to 10 miles. Many species breed over large swathes of North America, making it all but impossible to correctly guess where an individual bird might end up breeding with enough precision to detect its radio transmitter.

But Kirtland's warblers offered Cooper and his co-authors a unique opportunity because nearly the entire population breeds in a relatively small part of Michigan. This made it possible to track down the same individual birds tagged in their non-breeding habitat in the Bahamas.

The team analyzed three years of radio tracking data from 136 tagged Kirtland's warblers to estimate their survival rate across their migration and its relation to environmental factors.

In addition to directly estimating survival for Kirtland's warblers, the team also indirectly estimated migratory survival rates for black-throated blue warblers using a statistical technique first developed by Scott Sillett, co-author of the study and NZCBI wildlife ecologist, in 2002. The researchers improved Sillett's methods to analyze 14 years of capture-recapture data from the black-throated blue warbler's New Hampshire breeding grounds and its non-breeding grounds in Jamaica, and then link survival to environmental conditions.

Despite the two different methodologies, both species showed lower survival rates during migration compared to stationary periods. The study also confirmed that poor winter habitat conditions, such as drought or reduced vegetative productivity, led to lower survival rates during spring migration and, in some cases, the subsequent breeding season. This is the first direct evidence of this type of carry-over effect on survival during migration. The approach facilitated by Kirtland's warbler's restricted breeding grounds allowed the team to validate the more indirect approach to estimating migration survival.

"To effectively conserve migratory birds, we need to pinpoint when and where in their annual cycle they're under threat," Cooper said. "Being able to reliably estimate survival during migration versus stationary periods is the first step towards figuring out when, where and how birds are dying throughout the year."

But Cooper said it is critical to take a more holistic approach to effectively protect migratory bird species. For instance, it is unclear whether deaths during migration are the primary source of mortality or just one of many factors. Luckily, Cooper and co-authors Clark Rushing of the University of Georgia and Scott Yanco of the University of Michigan received a four-year grant from the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service's Great Lakes Restoration Act to build full annual-cycle population models for Kirtland's warblers. This model will help scientists determine how the dangers of migration fit into the broader picture for warblers, a strategy that could prove useful for the conservation of other declining migratory species.

#### About the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute

The Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute (NZCBI) leads the Smithsonian's global effort to save species, better understand ecosystems and train future generations of conservationists. Its two campuses are home to some of the world's most critically endangered species. Always free of charge, the Zoo's 163-acre park in the heart of Washington, D.C., features 2,200 animals representing 400 species and is a popular destination for children and families. At the Conservation Biology Institute's 3,200-acre campus in Virginia, breeding and veterinary research on 264 animals representing 20 species provide critical data for the management of animals in human care and valuable insights for conservation of wild populations. NZCBI's more than 300 staff and scientists work in Washington, D.C., Virginia and with partners at field sites across the United States and in more than 30 countries to save wildlife, collaborate with communities and conserve native habitats. NZCBI is a long-standing accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

#### About the Life on a Sustainable Planet Initiative

Life on a Sustainable Planet (LSP) is a vital initiative from the Smithsonian designed to advance and inspire global engagement in environmental stewardship. This comprehensive program applies the Smithsonian's expertise in science, outreach and education to foster holistic approaches to preserving ecosystems, building resilience and educating the world about sustainable climate solutions. Smithsonian scientists partner with communities and organizations around the world, conducting research and educational programs to shape the future. LSP programs save and protect biodiversity, champion sustainable practices and offer innovative solutions to the challenges posed by our changing climate.

# A SUMMARY OF THE "EFFECTS OF VEGETATION AND TIME SINCE MOWING ON NEST-SITE SELECTION AND NEST SURVIVAL OF SAVANNAH SPARROWS (PASSERCULUS SANDWICHENSIS)"

#### by Hailey Mitchell and Dr. Kristen Malone

#### Introduction

Grassland birds have been declining since the 1970s (Rosenberg et al., 2019). The main causes of the decline include habitat loss and degradation (North American Bird Report 2022; Stanton et al., 2018; Douglas et al., 2023). Due to this decline, it has become increasingly important to gather more information on the habitat characteristics needed for grassland birds to successfully breed and how management practices impact breeding success. The objective of our study was to determine what habitat characteristics and mowing practices Passerculus sandwichensis (Savannah Sparrows) selected for when looking for nest-sites and how the probability of nest survival was influenced by these variables.

#### Methods

This study took place over an 8-week period during the summer of 2023 at John White Wildlife Management Area in Basom, New York. During this time, we searched for Savannah Sparrow nests using behavioral cues (persistent chipping, provisioning and removal of feces from the nest) and monitored them every 2-3 days to determine nest fate. Once a nest had fledged (the young had left the nest) or failed, vegetation characteristics were measured at each nest and at a corresponding random point. Several vegetation variables were measured but those that we hypothesized to have an effect on nest-site selection and nest survival were vegetation height, vegetation density and nest visibility index (Davis 2005; Dieni and Jones 2003; Wiens 1969; Warren and Anderson 2005; MacDonald et al., 2015). Additionally, we were provided data from the New York DEC on the history of mowing practices at each field within our study site and measured how far each nest and corresponding random point was from hard edges (forest) and soft edges (agricultural fields and roads) as we also hypothesized that these variables would affect the nest-site selection and survival of Savannah Sparrows (Horn and Koford 2000; Perkins et al., 2013).

#### **Results and Discussion**

The following results are from my thesis: "Effects of Vegetation and Time Since Mowing on Nest-Site Selection and Nest Survival of Savannah Sparrows (Passerculus sandwichensis)" (Mitchell and Malone 2024).

A total of 21 nests were found.

Nest-site selection was only affected by nest-visibility index within a 1-meter radius of the nest. The more concealed the nest was (lower nest visibility) the higher probability of selection.

The only vegetation factor that influenced nest survival was vertical vegetation density at 5-meters from the nest. The denser the vegetation the more likely the nest was to survive.

Time since mowing was found to impact nest survival where daily nest survival rate was greater in fields that had not been mowed since ≥ 8 months or longer.

We found that distance from soft edge (agricultural fields and roads) had a significant, positive effect on daily survival rate of Savannah Sparrow nests, but not distance to hard edges (forests). This means that the further away a nest was from a soft edge, the more likely it was to survive.

#### **Conclusions**

Despite the limitations of our study, it is our hope that these results could provide helpful information to managers when thinking of ways to create high quality habitat for Savannah Sparrows in the Northeast.

If you have further questions feel free to email me at hlmitchell2020@gmail.com.

Citations used in this summary:

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## PURE MAGIC: MY EXPERIENCE AT HOG ISLAND AUDUBON CAMP

(by Camille Robinson-Parisi)

This summer I had the privilege of attending Hog Island Audubon Camp's Birds of Maine Islands service week program with scholarships and support from the National Audubon Society and the Audubon Society of the Capital Region. I knew from my first day on the island that this was going to be an unforgettable experience. Camp director Maggie Dewane set expectations high upon arrival, telling us, "This place is pure magic,"--and magic is an understatement.

I was drawn to the Birds of Maine Islands session because it is service-oriented and seemed like a great way to learn more about environmentally-focused careers, though Hog Island hosts camps for nature lovers of all ages and experience! I got to learn all about seabird conservation and research conducted throughout the islands, from Project Puffin to migratory tern research. We helped staff prepare for future projects by constructing bird blinds, prepping decoys, removing invasives, and rebuilding the research station on Eastern Egg Rock. Every day of camp was jam packed with exploring, birding, phenomenal food, and learning



opportunities from educators and fellow campers alike!

Following my five-hour drive up to

Decoy painting (photo by Aaron May) Bremen, ME, I was both anxious to be

alone in an unfamiliar place and bursting at the seams with excitement. After

being ferried from the mainland to the island, we had some time to settle into our rooms (mine was loon themed!) and do a bit of exploring. That evening we all circled together to introduce ourselves, and while looking around it was clear that I was the youngest person in the group-which was intimidating at first!

Fears were quickly assuaged, though, as I was greeted by the most welcoming and supportive group of staff and campers. Everyone in the circle came from such different backgrounds, but we were all brought together by a shared love and reverence for nature. I spent the week surrounded by

Group shot (photo by Aaron May) naturalists from all walks of life-and all levels of birding experience-that were eager to share their knowledge and excitement.

Another highlight of day one was realizing that Hog Island's artist in residence during our camp week was none other than Rachel Rothberg, a painter and tattoo artist whose work I have been a fan of for years! I called my mom that night, in total awe of how small of a world it is. It was incredibly special to get to know Rachel throughout the week and take a peek into their creative process.

Days two and three began bright and early with 6am bird walks led by renowned ornithologist Steve Kress, founder of the Seabird



Removing invasives (photo by Aaron May)

Institute and Project Puffin. I saw so many species for the first time, including Common Loons (a personal favorite), Black Guillemots, Common Eiders, White-winged and Surf Scoters, and more! Our afternoons were spent doing service workshops and in the evenings we listened to presentations about all kinds of seabird research.

Visiting Eastern Egg Rock was easily the highlight of my trip. We spent days four and five on the Rock, which is a HUGE privilege



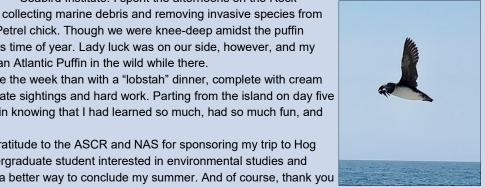
Keeping an eye out (photo by Aaron May)

considering access to the island is restricted to researchers and those working with the Seabird Institute. I spent the afternoons on the Rock

the island, and even got to see a Leach's Storm Petrel chick. Though we were knee-deep amidst the puffin burrows, chances were very low of seeing one this time of year. Lady luck was on our side, however, and my week, no-my LIFE, was made when I got to see an Atlantic Puffin in the wild while there.

There was no better way to conclude the week than with a "lobstah" dinner, complete with cream puff(ins) for dessert, to celebrate a week of fortunate sightings and hard work. Parting from the island on day five was such sweet sorrow, but I left wholly satisfied in knowing that I had learned so much, had so much fun, and did my part to give back.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the ASCR and NAS for sponsoring my trip to Hog Island. This experience was so fruitful as an undergraduate student interested in environmental studies and ornithological research, I couldn't have asked for a better way to conclude my summer. And of course, thank you so much to the Hog Island staff and Friends of Hog Island for facilitating such a special week. That place really is pure magic.



THE puffin (Photo by Rachel Duke)

5

# **BIRDS IN ART, PART 3**

by Maya Niles

The Romantic Era of art was a pivotal time in history for creativity and imagination. Artists sought to break free of Enlightenment ideals and explore the non-scientific aspects of life, such as raw emotions, the human experience, and the beauty and majesty of nature. Stylization became prominent and artists used bold brushwork and imagery to create thought provoking pieces that contrast starkly with the more rigid and factual aspects of the Enlightenment, even sparking a nostalgic interest in mythology. One way these feelings and ideas were demonstrated was through birds. What better way to complete an inspired and stylized landscape than with a mysterious bird perched on a fence or nearby tree?

Some artists who used these creatures in their work include Elizabeth Gwillim, George Stubbs, John James Audubon, and even Francisco Goya. Audubon, however, was an atypical romantic artist; he was much more scientifically oriented and seemingly factual than other artists of that period. He was however, a lover of the natural world, and most exclusively, a lover of birds. One of the key aspects of Romanticism is a fascination with nature, and Audubon could not be a better example of that reverence. He used his skill and passion for the Earth to help others better understand it, and his impact can be felt today in many ways, like in our very own Audubon Society of course. One piece of his in particular that I find interesting is "Swainson's Hawk". In this piece, the fierce predator swoops in from above with talons extended as he reaches towards his prey. I feel that this encapsulates Audubon's relationship with Romanticism in that there are clearly raw emotions evident, but it remains scientifically accurate. Some famous examples of birds in romantic art can also be found in Francisco Goya's "Dead Turkey" and "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" which depict birds in a stylistic and impassioned manner.

In conclusion, the Romantic Era was a time of deep emotional expression and a profound connection with nature, where artists sought to capture the raw beauty and majesty of the world around

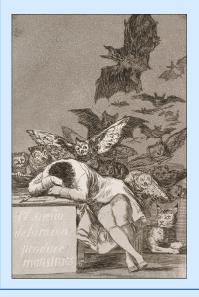
them. Through their use of bold imagery and stylization, they created works that reflected the complexity of life and the powerful emotions inspired by the natural world.



Above: "Swainson's Hawk"; below: "Black Vulture" by John James Audubon, circa 1827-1838



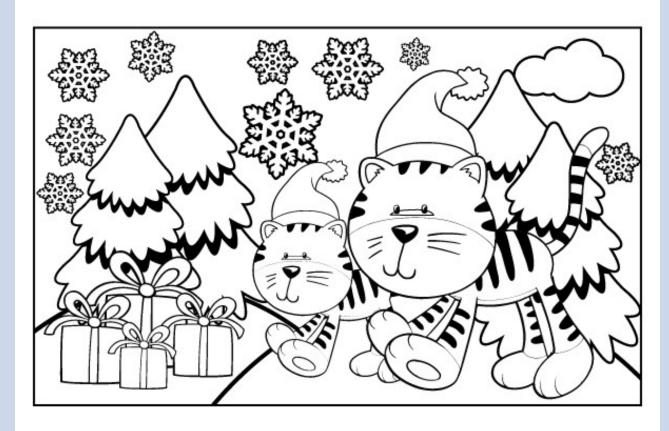
Above: "Dead Turkey" by Francisco Goya, 1812; left: "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" by Francisco Goya, circa 1799; right: "Hebe" by François Huet Villiers, circa 1814





# KIDS' PAGE

# Find the Differences







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#### Questions?

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