

January - March 2008



WINGBEATS

Audubon Society of the Capital Region



2007 Christmas Bird Count Another Adventurous Day Afield by David Gibson



We met again to hunt birds, in friendship and with scopes and binoculars. Yes, once again we ventured forth this December in Ray's car from our rendezvous at the Saratoga Spa State Park for our small part of the Saratoga Christmas Bird Count circle (15-miles in diameter), in our even smaller part of the 108th and the thoroughly international Audubon Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by the Audubon Society of the Capital Region.

While we are intense about our birdwatching on this annual count, we are also pleased to be with one another – I have not seen Ray or Ron in the year past. Tom, Ray and Ron helped start the Saratoga Count and I have birded with Tom and Ray since we all worked at the Spa Park in the 1980s, when Tom was the Park Manager and started the park's "bird life trail."

As usual, we have serious birding to do. Ray and Ron already have "owled" at 5 AM and heard both great-horned and barred owls. Grateful for their accomplishment (and for the extra two hours of sleep that I had), we head right for Saratoga Lake, which is open except for ice fringing the northern and western shore. The sense of morning excitement about a

mostly ice-free Saratoga Lake on a biting cold December day is hard for most people to appreciate. For us, it means the chance to see common loon (we saw half a dozen), coots, common and red-breasted merganser, black ducks and thousands of Canada geese and mallards. But even as Ray was finding coots diving for their morning meal, and counting each mallard and goose that appeared en masse to cover virtually the entire lake near Fish Creek, the wonderful surprise of seeing one male wood duck fly overhead is what will make this Christmas count particularly memorable for me. And for Ron, it may be the two adult bald eagles perched not far from the outlet of the Kayaderosseras Creek, but over a mile away from Ron's spotting scope. How does he do that, I always say to myself! Ron has one hell of an eye, while Ray can spot a small flock of tiny bufflehead half way out on the lake with whitecaps roiling its surface and an icy blast blaring his eye.

But like as not, the truly special moments of our count may not be the spectacular kind of siting of waterfowl on open Saratoga Lake. It may be, instead, the quiet roadside stop by a common swamp wetland, where swamp meets upland forest. After all, birds are keyed to specific habitats. Here, Tom might spy a grouse perched on an upland tree, or a flock of tree sparrows eating roadside grit ahead of us, or a pileated woodpecker sounding off from the thick woods. Earlier, in a quiet walk near the lake, Tom found our only brown creeper of the day, truly like a movable piece of tree bark going up the trunk (not down like nuthatches). From Ray's car, we all thrilled at the roadside flock of snow buntings which flushed and flashed black wings as one. In all our team of 4 found nearly 50 species – far from our record, but not a bad effort, including one yellow-bellied sapsucker who tried his best to hide from Tom's capable eye near the lake.

In This Issue ...

2008 ASCR Programs	2
Gov. Spitzer Funds Parks & Open Spaces	3
X-Mas Bird Count Continued	3
Audubon News	4

Continued on page 3...

Audubon Society of the Capital Region



Cordially Invites You To Attend Our
Year 2008 Programs & Field Trips



ASCR Programs

Unless Otherwise Specified,
Programs To Be Held At:
*William K. Sanford
Colonie Town Library*

The Amazing Bird Life of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve

Thursday, February 21, 2008 @ 7:00p.m.

Speaker: Neil Gifford

*** Special Location:

**Pine Bush Discovery Center,
Route 155, Guilderland *****

Tucked amongst the hustle and bustle of New York's capital city, the Albany Pine Bush supports the best remaining worldwide example of an inland pitch pine scrub oak barrens. While insects have been studied exhaustively here for more than a century, until recently we knew surprisingly little about the Pine Bush bird community. Recent research has revealed a diverse assemblage of breeding season and migratory birds, and that the Pine Bush is especially important for several declining shrubland birds.

Neil Gifford is the Conservation Director for the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, directing monitoring, research and management activities within the 3,010 acre Preserve. He has worked as a Prescribed Fire Technician, Conservation Planner, Ecologist and Conservation Biologist for The Nature Conservancy, Audubon International and other conservation organizations in New York, Maine, and Missouri.

All About Spiders

Thursday, March 13 @ 7:00p.m.

Speaker: Jon Calos

Can't tell a recluse from a widow? Join us for an engaging overview of the behavioral ecology of spiders, with an emphasis on local species. And he hopes to bring some live specimens to show and tell.

Jon Calos has been teaching biology at Emma Willard School in Troy, NY for ten years. He has worked at the University of Cincinnati, studying the communication and sociality of spiders, and at Illinois State University, studying cricket nuptial food gifts.

Endangered Plants

Thursday, April 10 @ 7:00p.m.

Speaker: Steve Young

Botanists from the NY Natural Heritage Program have been exploring every region of the state in their quest to provide the most accurate information about our state's rare and endangered plants. Join Steve Young for an interesting foray into the natural areas of New York in search of our state's botanical rarities, from tiny ferns no bigger than your thumbnail to majestic oaks hidden away among the concrete and asphalt of metropolitan New York City.

Steve Young is the Chief Botanist of the NY Natural Heritage Program, where he oversees the collection, organization, and dissemination of NY's rare plant information. He is one of the founders and past board member of the Invasive Plant Council of NY State and present treasurer and assistant editor of the newsletter for the New York Flora Association.

Refreshments will be served. As always, we encourage you to bring your friends and family. For directions or details, call Greg Rucinski at the Colonie Library at (518) 458-9274.

Parks and Open Space Funding Central to Governor Spitzer's 2008 Environmental Investment

On, January 22nd, Governor Eliot Spitzer proposed a major reinvestment in the State Parks System in his 2008 State Budget. Included in his proposal was a \$110 million in capital funding initiative for improvements at park facilities, with a majority of funding targeted for the upstate region. This funding represents the largest capital investment in the history of the State Parks system, according to the Governor, and makes a significant down payment on the \$650 million backlog in projects identified by State Parks Commissioner Carol Ash. In addition to funding Projects at State Park facilities, a portion of the funding would go towards the Departments of Environmental Conservation and Agriculture and Markets for improvements at State campgrounds and to the State Fair grounds.

On the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), the Governor proposes spending \$250 million, with an additional \$25 million coming from the expansion of the Bottle Bill to include non carbonated beverage containers. Under his proposal, open space funding would increase 20% to a new high of \$66 million providing an important investment in the preservation of Audubon Important Bird Areas and other critical habitat throughout the State. The Governor also advanced preparations for the Hudson –Fulton – Lake Champlain Quadri-centennial celebration in 2009 by dedicating funding for the purchase of the “Walkway over the Hudson”, a former railway crossing that will be turning into a pedestrian bridge over the river in Poughkeepsie, as well as providing funding for other conservation projects throughout the Hudson River Valley.

Visit the Audubon New York Website (ny.audubon.org) for more details on what you can do to support increased environmental funding in the 2008 state budget.



X-mas Bird Count Continued..

...Continued From Page 1

Who could have guessed? That sapsucker makes the 2008 Christmas Bird Count absolutely unique in our group's experience these past 20 years. I am very grateful to have spent another day in the field with this fine team of birdwatchers, and friends who share in the “hunt” we enjoy so much. To have Audubon's science team value our efforts, small as they are in the scheme of things, is so much the better.

I wish to dedicate this short essay to Brian Swinn, contributing editor of *The New York State Conservationist*, who passed away earlier this year. In the December 2007 edition, following an article with his byline, the editors at DEC noted that Brian had died from cancer at age 54. I was shocked and saddened to read about his death. We in Capital Region Audubon Society knew Brian well because he edited *Wingbeats* for more than a decade. Brian told us back in 1987 he was looking for an outlet to write about nature and the environment and also to have a positive influence on his growing family through nature. Our chapter provided that outlet, which may have contributed directly to his employment later on with NYS DEC and *New York State Conservationist* magazine. We are so proud of our past association with Brian and with his years of accomplished writing about our place in the natural world, and we wish to express our sincere condolences to his family.

ASCR Field Trips

Great Backyard Bird Count

Saturday, February 16 @ 9:00 a.m.

**Location: Five Rivers Environmental
Education Center, Delmar**



This weekend, birders all over North America will count birds in their yard or local park as part of the *Great Backyard Bird Count*. Join us as we count birds at our feeder, and show how you too can help the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and National Audubon Society track the distribution and abundance of winter birds from the comfort of your own window!

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Audubon News

ASCR Lands Audubon Mini-Grant



Audubon New York has awarded ASCR a \$700 mini-grant to design and produce a species checklist for Vischer Ferry Nature and Historic Preserve, to be available at the Preserve kiosk, town office and other venues. This initiative further expresses ASCR's Adopt-An-IBA commitment to Vischer Ferry and will advance casual use and enjoyment of the Preserve.

Spring Audubon Council Meeting

ASCR members are cordially invited to participate in the Spring Audubon Council of New York State meeting, which will take place Friday, March 28 - Sunday, March 30 at the Gideon Putnam in Saratoga Springs. For more info, contact Audubon NY at 869-9731 or www.ny.audubon.org



ASCR Annual Report available On-line



What has the chapter been up to lately? Check out www.capitalregionaudubon.org to review ASCR's ambitious 2007-08 Annual Plan, a recap of last year's achievements in ASCR's 2006-07 Annual Report, and other chapter-related info.

Chapter Networker Now On-line

Log on to Audubon's *Chapter Networker* at www.audubon.org/local/cn/networker.html to check out what's happening throughout the Audubon network. This free quarterly e-newsletter is chock full of information and announcements of interest to Audubon movers and shakers.



***** For Programs, Field Trip, & Further General Environmental Information, Visit Us on the Internet at:**
www.CapitalRegionAudubon.Org



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