



Otter Creek Audubon Society

May  
2009

# Otter Tracks

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## Sunday, May 16

# OCAS Birdathon 2009!



**W**inter has gone, spring is here, migrants are starting to flood the trees, and that means the 2009 OCAS Birdathon is about to happen. The date is Saturday, May 16, with adjustments one way or the other for inclement weather. Several OCAS teams will seek to identify as many bird species as possible in a 24-hour period. Prior to this the teams solicit pledges from sponsors based on an amount per species or a lump sum. Proceeds support a variety of OCAS programs, including OCAS travel grants to area schools for natural history programs or similar activities.

Call Barb Otsuka at 388-6829 to create your own team, participate on a team for all or part of the day, or if you would like to support one or more teams with a pledge. This is OCAS' primary fundraiser of the year. We encourage you to be generous. 🐾



### OCAS Mission:

To protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats by encouraging a culture of conservation within Addison County.



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**Pileated Woodpecker: a rare visit to a feeder**  
Photo by Lewis Holmes

[www.audubon.org/chapter/ottercreek](http://www.audubon.org/chapter/ottercreek)

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Audubon Society

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## Climate Change: Does the Perception Fit the Data?

Editorial by  
Warren King

 **VIEWPOINT**

**T**he Pew Research Center recently asked “How important is climate change to you?” Thirty percent of 1503 respondents thought climate change was a top priority, down from 38 percent in 2007.

Climate scientists are starting the long process leading to the 2014 Assessment Reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Information assembled since the 2007 Assessment Reports suggest significantly higher rates of ice melt in the Arctic and the Antarctic, among other major changes. In the Antarctic the Wilkins Ice Shelf, two-thirds the size of Vermont, is breaking up into icebergs. In the Arctic the estimate from a few years ago for a summertime ice-free Arctic Ocean was around the year 2100. Now it is 2030, but one model predicts an ice-free date as early as 2013. While ice, like snow, reflects most sunlight, water absorbs most sunlight, further accelerating the build-up of heat.

Why the decline in public perception of the importance of this issue? Perhaps it is a delayed response to corporate oil’s campaign to cast doubt on climate change science and hence, its significance. Perhaps people are realizing how big the problem is and how little any individual or even any government can contribute to its solution. Or it may simply be that the economy has preempted all other concerns.

We must keep firmly in mind that taking no action to reverse climate change will be far, far more expensive and destructive than the cost of taking action. The Obama administration has promised to address not only the inaction on climate change of administrations dating back to Ronald Reagan, but to lead the world toward a resolution of the problem.

The U.S. Congress has now begun to do its part as well. Representatives Waxman and Markey have proposed a comprehensive legislative package entitled “The American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009” that will address many of the facets of climate change, including a cap and trade program. It won’t look much past 2020, and it doesn’t address mitigation of landscape changes and their impacts on biodiversity, but it is a splendid start. We must encourage our congressional delegates to work for this bill as if our lives depended on it. We can’t afford to let the current indifference to climate change documented by the Pew Center poll sidetrack us from taking essential actions. 🐾

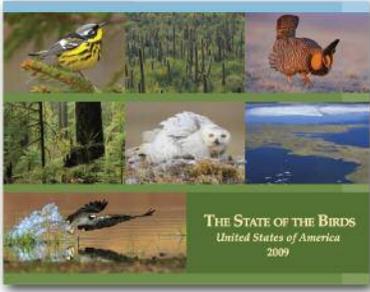


**John Flicker, National Audubon Society President (left), with B. Holt Thrasher shortly after Mr. Thrasher’s election as Chair of the Board of the National Audubon Society.**

## New Board Chair of National Audubon

**J**ohn Flicker, President of National Audubon, recently announced that B. Holt Thrasher, President for Energy and Climate Change.

Mr. Thrasher noted, “Audubon’s unquestioned leadership in bird, habitat, and environmental conservation is urgently needed at this time of unprecedented challenge and opportunity.” Perhaps now we can look for a reversal of the long-term decline in Vermont and the Northeast of flickers and thrashers. 🐾



**Book Review:  
The State of  
Birds 2009**

**Review by Warren King**

**T**his 36-page report summarizes region by region, habitat by habitat, and problem by

problem the most serious threats facing birds in the United States. The report is an unprecedented collaboration of authorship between U. S. government agencies, including the Fish and Wildlife Service as the lead author, state agencies, and several leading national conservation organizations including National Audubon. It features stunning photography and informative graphics.

The report emphasizes the importance of birds as indicators of environmental health in the U.S. Of the 800 species native to the U.S., 67 are endangered or threatened and 184 more are of conservation concern because they are declining, rare, or at risk.

Of highest priority is unquestionably the state of birds in Hawaii. Seventy-one species have gone extinct since the islands were first settled by Polynesians around 300 A.D. One third of the remaining native species are endangered. Forest habitat protection and removal of exotic predators and

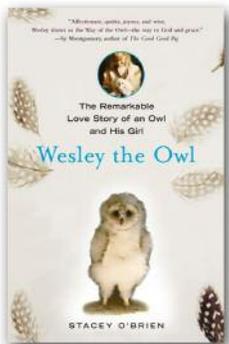
herbivores are desperately needed to slow the loss of yet more species.

Seabird species are of grave concern as well. Over one-third of oceanic birds in U.S. waters are declining due to pollution, overfishing, predation on nesting grounds, and incidental catch by the fishing industry.

Although most of Vermont's birds are faring well, some are not. Several grassland birds, like Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Upland Sandpipers, are declining. Shrubland species, including Rufous-sided Towhees, Brown Thrashers, and Field Sparrows, continue to decline. Several birds of early successional forest, like Chestnut-sided Warblers and Golden-winged Warblers, and some neotropical migrants such as Wood Thrushes, Eastern Wood Pewees and Canada Warblers, have shown persistent and worrying declines as well.

On the bright side a number of endangered species in the U.S. have increased thanks to intensive management and protection. Management of waterfowl has brought about remarkable increases in species like Wood Ducks, Redheads and Green-winged Teal, which are now at or near record highs.

This report contains a remarkable amount of information about our birds and their problems, and is well worth reading. Look for it online at [stateofthebirds.org](http://stateofthebirds.org) or through a link from the National Audubon website ([audubon.org](http://audubon.org)). Hard copies are not currently available. 🐾



**Book Review:**

**Wesley  
the Owl**

**By Stacey  
O'Brien**

**Free Press 2008**

**\$15.00 (paper)**

**Review by  
Amy Douglas**

**T**his short book is a pleasure. Author Stacey O'Brien first met Wesley, a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), when he was 4 days old at the owl research facility at Caltech in Pasadena, California. Wesley had a wing injury and he could not be rehabilitated for return to the wild. Her story of 19 years with Wesley contains a mix of fascinating owl behavior anecdotes and descriptions of the bond that grew between them.

Owls' brains are sound oriented whereas most vertebrates are sight oriented,

so Stacey talked to Wesley constantly from the time she brought him home so that he would bond with her voice. Owls make strong eye contact with their parents, especially when begging for food, and Wesley focused on Stacey from the time he opened his eyes.

Owls eat mice and cough up a pellet of hair and bones once digestion is complete. Stacey usually bought frozen mice from pet stores, but at times shortages occurred which required her to learn to kill live mice, which she believes led to developing carpal tunnel syndrome in her wrist.

Wesley became agitated when Stacey tried to leave him with a co-worker while she ran errands. Stacey was Wesley's only person, although he eventually tolerated other caregivers when Stacey was ill. Young Wesley took cues from Stacey and as a result became friendly with a golden retriever that belonged to Stacey's friend and landlord.

Owls appear to be inquisitive and play-

ful to the point where they make up games.

They don't generally like water, but Wesley liked to copy Stacey's actions. He eventually had his own toothbrush and bowl of water to use while Stacey brushed her teeth. Later in his life, he enjoyed the bathtub, getting himself soaked. Owl feathers are not designed for water life. Stacey used her blow dryer to dry Wesley off. He learned to lean into the air stream and to fluff his feathers.

If you are single and looking for a mate, you do not want an owl in your household. Stacey's dates failed: one was immediately grossed out by Wesley's dead mouse diet, and another found her absorption with Wesley too much to take.

As in most tales of animals and pets, Wesley dies in the end; Kleenex required. Nonetheless, enjoy a few hours with Wesley as he makes his way through a human world with his owlish perspective. 🐾

# May Morning by Alder Creek

by Lewis Holmes

The rock seat is cool to the touch in the early morning air. The sun streams in from up the valley, highlighting the heavy dew on the emerging grass and spirea. An old beaver dam still holds back some water, the thick silt framing a quiet pool. A small school of 3-inch trout moves about where water splashes through a broken section. The tracks of many deer and a moose sink deep into the mud.

Reliable every year, a Magnolia Warbler calls invisibly from the young fir and spruce while a Winter Wren sings away to my right. Red maples are still flowering and provide red highlights to the receding wood line that still shows the grey of winter. The sun is delightfully

warm. A ribbon of water splashes over half buried logs, pausing in the slowly turning eddy before rushing onward.

A dark bird flits about in the lower branches of a fir, its back to me, belly showing just enough yellow to be intriguing. Moves down, down, around the trunk, then drops into the spirea, still unknown. A pair of yellowthroats flit noisily through the shrubs, the female leading the way for the attentive male. Swamp Sparrows and Black-throated Blue Warblers trill and sing repeatedly. The dark bird pops back up into the fir, framed in the branches as its dark neck-lace, eye spot and solid yellow breast proclaim it to be a Canada Warbler.

Walking out, I pass through the blue cohosh and bellwort of the hardwoods and back into the goldthread, bluebead lily and painted trillium of the conifers. At the base of a large red maple is a wide patch of Dutchman's breeches. A jumble of windthrown firs provides more seating by another aging beaver pond where newts and water bugs appear to fly through the marvelously clear cool water. A caddisfly larva with a large shaggy home lumbers past a few small fish. Looking up, flowering hobblebush shows through the ribbon of spruce and fir that line the creek. I reluctantly move toward home. 🐾

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## Salamander Escorts 2009

The window of opportunity for assisting amphibians across the road was brief but productive in 2009. The season started on 26 March. At the Morgan Road site in Salisbury 25 people moved 824 amphibians, the bulk of which was blue-spotted salamanders, although spotted and four-toed salamanders, wood frogs and spring peepers were present in lesser numbers. At the North Street site in New Haven 196 migrating amphibians, evenly divided between blue-spotted and spotted salamanders and wood frogs, kept both volunteers busy for an hour. The Salisbury site had no cars in two hour, while the New Haven site had 12 cars in an hour, resulting in 26 dead amphibians.

On 29 March the conditions for movement were once again right. We monitored only the New Haven site, where 47 people moved 283 amphibians. Twelve cars passed in two hours, accounting for 43 amphibians. Numbers were divided fairly equally between blue-spotted, spotted and four-toed salamanders, and wood frogs and spring peepers.

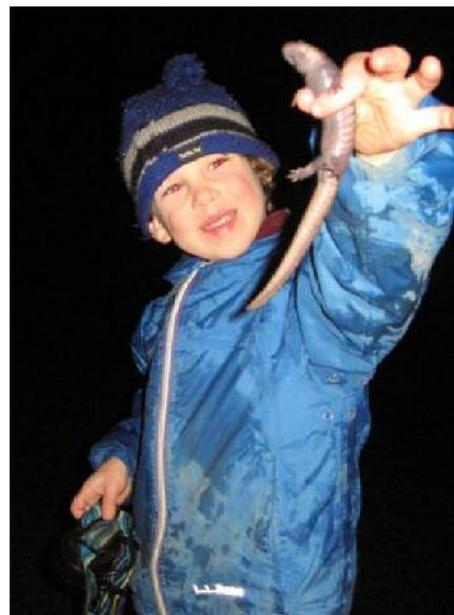
Finally, on 3 April 23 people moved 771 amphibians in two hours at the Salisbury site. Three passing cars accounted for a single amphibian death. At the New Haven site 22 volunteers moved 159 amphibians. Seventeen cars were responsible for 31 dead amphibians.

Enthusiasm for participating in this program ran high. Eighty people signed up for the OCAS email alert list. We had visits from reporters and photographers from Associated Press (AP) and WCAX Channel 3. More than 100 stations nationwide carried the AP story, and it made the front page of Yahoo.

Several dedicated volunteers documented the importance of an amphibian crossing on the busy Vergennes-Monkton Road. This road has regular, high-speed traffic, narrow shoulders, no

pull-offs or parking areas, and regular amphibian mortality between 30 and 50 percent. This is not a volunteer-friendly site. Amphibians making it to wetlands to breed need to return over the same route and face similar likelihood of mortality. Careful documentation of this mortality and long term planning may result in the installation of one or more underpasses, where amphibians can move in safety to their breeding wetlands from upland overwintering sites. Herpetologist Jim Andrews engaged in a "challenging" interview with Fox News about amphibian migration, road traffic, and the advantages and costs of amphibian underpasses.

OCAS thanks all the volunteers who moved amphibians. We invite you to sign up to help again in 2010. 🐾



Colden Sapir moving a spotted salamander.  
Photo by Sonya Sapir



## OCAS Calendar of Events

## May – August 2009



**SUNDAY, MAY 10**  
7:30-10:30 AM

**Warbler Warm-Up.** Mike Winslow and Warren King will lead a search for newly arrived spring migrants.

Hone your birding identification skills before leaf-out. Co-sponsored by The Watershed Center. Meet at the Bristol Waterworks, Plank Road east of North Street, Bristol.

**THURSDAY, MAY 14**  
8-11 AM

**Marsh, Meadow and Grassland Wildlife Walk.** A monthly joint OCAS-MALT event. Meet at Otter

View Park parking area, Weybridge Street and Pulp Mill Bridge Road, Middlebury. See insert, this issue.

**SATURDAY, MAY 16**

**Otter Creek Audubon Birdathon.** Help support our activities

through the year by contributing to our major annual fundraiser. See article in this *Otter Tracks*.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 13**  
9 AM – NOON

**Follow the Water: Protecting the Water Quality of Otter Creek with Rain Gardens and Green Roofs.**

See what others have done and you can do to help control storm water run-off. A one-mile walk in Middlebury, starting at Otter View Park on Pulp Mill Bridge Road. An Otter Creek Audubon-Middlebury Area Land Trust collaboration led by Chris Robbins. For questions please call Suzanne Young at MALT 388-1007.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 20**  
8-11 AM

**Marsh, Meadow and Grassland Wildlife Walk.** A monthly joint

OCAS-MALT event. Meet at Otter View Park parking area, Weybridge Street and Pulp Mill Bridge Road, Middlebury. See insert, this issue.

**THURSDAY, JULY 9**  
8-11 AM

**Marsh, Meadow and Grassland Wildlife Walk.** A monthly joint

OCAS-MALT event. Meet at Otter View Park parking area, Weybridge Street and Pulp Mill Bridge Road, Middlebury. See insert, this issue.

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 8**  
8-11 AM

**Marsh, Meadow and Grassland Wildlife Walk.** A monthly joint

OCAS-MALT event. Meet at Otter View Park parking area, Weybridge Street and Pulp Mill Bridge Road, Middlebury. See insert, this issue.

## Species Account: Canada Warbler

By Lewis Holmes

**General:** An active warbler that forages low in dense brush, frequently at the edge of woods along streams or bogs. It frequently cocks its long tail and drops its wings as it make short sallies to catch airborne insects or gleans leaves and twigs. It is inquisitive and tends to respond to visitors to its territory.

**Description:** Dull grey-green above, the breast is a solid yellow and the undertail coverts are white. The spring male has lots of black in the crown and face. Both sexes have a bright white eye ring. A necklace of vertical black stripes crosses the upper breast, strikingly dark in the male while less conspicuous in the female. Its song according to the Peterson Field Guide: Birds of Eastern and Central North America, 5th edition, is a “staccato burst, irregularly arranged.” The Canada Warbler is often easier to hear than to see.

**Habitat:** Rare at low elevation in the Champlain Valley, it is more commonly found in the cooler hills and mountains in wetter areas with dense undergrowth. It frequents areas with conifers such as spruce, fir or hemlock but also under decid-



Male Canada Warbler

Photo by Mike Danzenbaker

uous trees as well. Cool shaded moist thickets under mature trees and along wet ravines, streams or swamps are likely locations.

**Nest:** On or near the ground in upturned tree roots, mossy hummocks or bank cavities, are made of grasses, weed stems on top of large dead leaves and lined with fine rootlets. It usually lays four eggs, white with brown spots or blotches. 🐾

# Rare Bird in Orwell

by Ernie Franzgrote

The keen eye of Orwell resident Norton Latourelle led to the addition of a new species, the Golden-crowned Sparrow, to the Vermont Bird Checklist, pending validation by the Vermont Bird Records Committee.

Norton and Marlene Latourelle, owners of Norton's Gallery on Route 73 in Orwell, are avid nature supporters and observers. Their property is managed to ensure good habitat for birds and critters, and the feeders in their yard are always busy.

On Monday, April 13, the Latourelles called a friend, Ernie Franzgrote of Shoreham, and described what they had already tentatively identified as a Golden-crowned Sparrow. The trouble was that the bird's range is in the far western United States and Canada. Franzgrote in turn called Sue Wetmore of Brandon and the four then got close looks at the bird, an adult in breeding plumage. The image included here is from a partial frame of HD video obtained by Franzgrote that afternoon.

Wetmore posted the sighting on the Vermont section of Birdingonthe.Net that evening. In the following days the Latourelles were gracious hosts to more than 100 visitors, providing Adirondack chairs on their lawn within good view of the



**Golden-crowned Sparrow in Orwell, a first record for Vermont.**  
Photo by Ernie Franzgrote

feeding ground favored by the bird (and within good view of the Adirondacks!). "Goldie" was a most cooperative rare bird, appearing so regularly that every one of the visitors was able to see him. 🐾

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