



Otter Tracks

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Rodney Olsen Gets Silver Feather Award

An enthusiastic crowd applauded Rodney Olsen's receipt of the Silver Feather from OCAS board member and former president Mike Winslow at OCAS' annual dinner on November 12th. OCAS gives the Silver Feather annually to an Addison County resident "for notable devotion, dedication and untiring effort on behalf of the preservation and enjoyment of the natural communities of Addison County."

Rodney Olsen has taught special education students in the Diversified Occupations program of Middlebury Union High School since 1995. He has encouraged his students by involving them in his bird banding programs. He and his students catch and band hawks, falcons, owls and songbirds primarily at the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area and a nearby Snake Mountain site. He has brought his students together with students from regular education high school, elementary school, and college, as well as professionals and the general public through the banding and the special programs his students present. These programs attract large audiences. Three of his students have gone on to become licensed bird banders. Graduates of his program show continued dedication to Rodney and his work by helping out with his current students and projects.

Rodney also runs a bird banding station for songbirds as part of the continent-wide Monitoring Avian Productivity and



Rodney Olsen receives Silver Feather Award from Mike Winslow. Photo by Warren King

Survivorship Program (MAPS). His bird banding demonstrations have become a mainstay attraction of the annual Dead Creek Wildlife Day.

At the annual dinner keynote speaker Fish and Wildlife Department biologist Forrest Hammond gave an informative, entertaining presentation on interactions between humans and black bears in Vermont. He stressed the importance of taking down bird feeders and suet dispensers from mid-April to November because bears that become habituated to people and their food are likely to end up as problem bears. He noted, "There is a good deal of truth to the phrase 'A fed bear is a dead bear.'" He encouraged people who have visits from bears to actively do their best to scare them away to prevent habituation.

OCAS Mission:

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



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Vol 35, No. 4

www.audubon.org/chapter/ottercreek

Printed on 100% recycled paper

OCAS Silver Feather Recipients

Marge Nelson	1996	Jim Andrews	2000	Heidi Willis	2005
David Brynn	1997	Arthur Gibb	2001	Judy Peterson	2006
Abbott Fenn	1998	Barry King	2002	Gioia Kuss	2007
Justin Brande	1999	Marc Lapin	2003	Gale Hurd	2008
Greg Lowenberg	1999	Keith Hartlein	2004	Rodney Olsen	2009

Otter Creek Audubon Society

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Non-target Mortality

Editorial by
Warren King



Chemical control of sea lampreys was initiated in Lake Champlain to limit the impact of sea lamprey and salmon. Each year a collaborative program run by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, New York Department of Environmental Conservation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service controls larval lampreys in one or more Champlain tributaries with injections of TFM, an effective lampricide. The program costs Vermont \$600,000 annually on average, and is popular with fishermen because Lake Champlain trout and salmon show fewer lamprey wounds and are larger and healthier as a consequence. Without TFM treatment the Lake Champlain populations of these hatchery-reared fish decline quickly.



Sea lampreys on a lake trout Photo courtesy USGS, Department of the Interior

TFM isn't perfect. It affects a number of non-target organisms in addition to larval lampreys. Some of these non-target species, including several freshwater mussel species, at least one fish species, a rare lamprey species, and the largest Vermont amphibian, the mudpuppy, are threatened or of special concern in Vermont. The Vermont Endangered Species Committee has proposed addition of the mudpuppy to the Vermont list of threatened species, but the Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources did not accept this recommendation, citing the need for further study.

The mudpuppy has not been thoroughly studied in Vermont, although a graduate student from the University of Vermont is currently conducting research on it. The Reptile and Amphibian Scientific Advisory Group of the Vermont Endangered Species Committee has recommended against lampricide treatment in all Vermont rivers. The Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources has supported the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department in their use of lampricides.

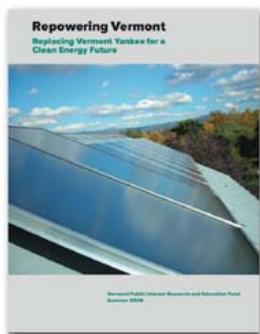
The Lamoille River took its first turn for TFM treatment on October 1st this year. Biologists counted over 500 dead mudpuppies from a post-treatment sample. Although this number doesn't mean that the mudpuppy population in the Lamoille River has crashed or even declined significantly, herpetologist Jim Andrews recently noted, "We know that the number of mudpuppies killed in this one treatment is greater than all the mudpuppies from all other reports from all other sources combined in this state." Lampricide treatment has produced mudpuppy mortality in all Vermont rivers treated, with the sole exception of the most recent of several treatments of Lewis Creek. It is not clear if mudpuppies still inhabit Lewis Creek.

Lampricide treatment of Great Lakes tributaries have resulted in population declines. For example, in the Grand River in Ohio, treatment mortalities ranged between 29 and 82 percent of the population. No comparable data exist for Lake Champlain tributaries. Nor do we know if any short- or long-term sub-lethal impacts occur following treatment. It seems irresponsible of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department to continue this treatment regime without more substantive knowledge of the treatment's impact on mudpuppies and other non-target species. The time has long passed that the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife can maintain responsibility for healthy populations of just game species. 🐾



Marv Elliott, co-president of Rutland County Audubon, receives the Audubon Vermont Steve Young award at the November 14th Vermont Audubon Assembly for his key role in acquiring a 55-acre addition to the West Rutland Marsh IBA.

Photo by Roy Pilcher



Book Review:
Repowering Vermont: Replacing Vermont Yankee for a Clean Energy Future
 by James Moore
 VPIRG, 2009, 36 pp.

Review by Margaret Lowe

Repowering Vermont; Replacing Vermont Yankee for a Clean Energy Future is a 36 page booklet written by James Moore for Vermont Public Interest Research and Education Fund. The title puts the author’s point of view quite clearly. The booklet begins with a two-page summary. The first half of the publication provides convincing evidence of the relatively poor maintenance and inadequate staffing at Vermont Yankee. License renewal is coming in 2012. The operators have little incentive to invest in ways that would result in operating the plant in a safe manner.

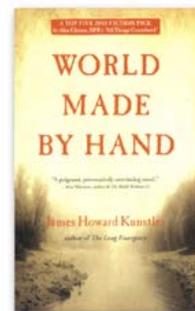
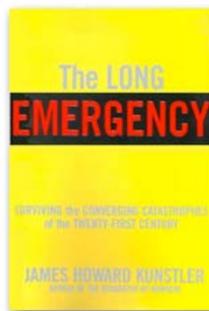
The second half of the publication discusses the advantages of renewable local Vermont energy sources and energy conservation and efficiency as alternatives to Vermont Yankee. The power potentials from wind, wood, farm and landfill generated methane, and hydroelectric sources are discussed, but their relative advantages and disadvantages are not explored. For instance, what are the effects of increased wood utilization on the forest ecosystems? What about increased CO₂ production?

There is no discussion of alternatives to closing the Vermont Yankee plant. Could it operate more safely? There is no adequate permanent waste storage facility in the U.S. at this time. What really will happen to the spent fuel? Could heat from the spent fuel be used safely? The booklet does not provide background information I’d have liked, for example: who owned the plant before Entergy, and why did they sell it? 🐾

Fewer Americans Believe Climate Change is Serious

One day after eighteen U.S. scientific organizations reaffirmed their concerns about the seriousness of the impacts of climate change, the Pew Research Center released a poll that showed a nationwide decline in the numbers of respondents who believe the evidence for climate change is strong. In 2006, 77 percent of respondents to a similar poll believed the earth was warming. In April 2008, that figure had dropped to 71 percent. Now it is 57 percent. Only 36 percent of the 1500 respondents thought human activities were responsible for the temperature

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Book Reviews:

The Long Emergency & World Made by Hand

by James Howard Kunstler
 Both published by Grove Press, each 336 pp.

Review by John Chamberlain

If you are new to the concept of peak oil, or haven’t spent much time considering the implications of it, James Howard Kunstler’s book *The Long Emergency* will be a wake up call.

Kunstler goes through the history of oil in western civilization, and reviews its critical importance in our economy. He explains the concept of peak oil, and the reasons for believing that we now face, or will face in the near future, a long period of declining oil production. He outlines what that decline will do to our economy, and why alternative energy sources like wind and solar power will come close to replacing oil. Finally, he reviews at length what the changes will mean in our lives. It’s not a cheerful analysis.

If you’re interested in what life may be like after peak oil, Kunstler’s novel *World Made By Hand* is an interesting and plausible speculation, as well as an entertaining read. The novel takes place in a small fictional town in the Hudson Valley of New York, at a time some years in the future. Automobiles have disappeared, and electrical service is sporadic. The state government is increasingly dysfunctional, and the national government hasn’t been heard from in years.

The novel relates the events of a single summer, as people struggle to deal with the new reality and rebuild their lives and their community. The difficulties they face are daunting, and the events in their lives often tragic, but the strength of the human spirit shows through. In the end, the novel is hopeful, rather than depressing.

Kunstler has been called a “doomer” and a “dystopian”, but he rejects these labels. He believes that we must face the reality of our situation in order to deal effectively with it. Whatever challenges the future puts before us, the world is still ours to make. 🐾



OCAS Calendar of Events

December 2009 – March 2010

MARSH, MEADOW AND GRASSLAND WILDLIFE WALKS

A monthly joint OCAS-MALT event. Meet at Otter View Park parking area, Weybridge Street and Pulp Mill Bridge Road, Middlebury.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 8 – 11 AM
Leaders: Barb Otsuka and Ron Payne

THURSDAY, JANUARY 7, 8 – 11 AM
Leaders: Warren and Barry King

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 8 – 11 AM
Leader: Alcott Smith

THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 8 – 11 AM
Leader: Gary Starr

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19 Ferrisburgh Christmas Bird Count. Call Mike Winslow at 877-6586 for details.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19 Mt. Abe Christmas Bird Count: Call Randy or Cathy Durand at 453-4370 for details.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20 Middlebury Christmas Bird Count: Meet at Rosie's Restaurant, Route 7 south of Middlebury for 6 AM breakfast. Call Jim or Kris Andrews at 352-4734 for details.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 2 Hinesburg Christmas Bird Count: Call Paul Wiczorek at 434-4216.

FRIDAY-MONDAY Great Backyard Bird Count. See article in February 2010 *Otter Tracks*.

SATURDAY, MARCH 13 Green Energy Expo. A full day event. Middlebury Union High School, 73 Charles Avenue, Middlebury.



Seed supplies ordered for OCAS Seed Sale

photo by Seth Gibson

THIRD ANNUAL CABIN FEVER LECTURE SERIES (THE SECOND THURSDAY JAN. – MARCH)

THURSDAY JANUARY 14, 2010, 7 PM

Timber Rattlesnakes: What You Always Wanted to Know (But Were Afraid to Ask)

Dr. Bill Brown, emeritus professor of biology, Skidmore College. Downstairs at Ilsley Library, 75 Main Street, Middlebury.

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 11, 2010, 7 PM

The Nature Conservancy in the Yunnan Province of China

Jackie Tuxill, conservation consultant with the National Park Service and former Vermont Nature Conservancy board member, just returned from Yunnan for the third time in five years. Downstairs at Ilsley Library, 75 Main Street, Middlebury.

THURSDAY MARCH 11, 2010, 7 PM

Wise on Weeds: An Introduction to Invasive Species

Sharon Plumb directs the Wise on Weeds Program for the Vermont Nature Conservancy. Downstairs at Ilsley Library, 75 Main Street, Middlebury

Fewer Believe in Climate Change

continued from page 3

increase, down from 47 percent in 2006 and 2008. Andrew Kohut, Pew Research Center director, noted "The priority that people give to pollution and environmental concerns and a host of other issues is down because of the economy and because of the focus on other things. When the focus is on other things, people forget and see these issues as less grave."

Among Democrats, 75 percent believe climate change evidence is solid, while 35 percent of Republicans see the evidence as solid. People living in the Northeast or on the West Coast were most convinced of the seriousness of the problem; those from the Midwest or the mountain states were least convinced.

Thirty percent of respondents had heard little about a national cap and trade system, the primary strategy proposed for reducing carbon emissions, while 55 percent had heard nothing. Among the 14 percent who had heard a lot about cap and trade, 64 percent opposed it and 32 percent supported it.

Fifty-six percent of respondents thought the U.S. should join with other countries in setting carbon emission standards. Thirty-two percent believed the U.S. should set its own standards. 🐾

Seed Sale Successful; Song Sparrows Smile

The annual Agway/ Otter Creek Audubon was a great success this year, in spite of the increasing number of bird house mortgages in default. Twenty individuals ordered almost 2500 pounds of bird seed, and Otter Creek Audubon realized a profit of \$290, which will go to support our programs throughout the year.

Our thanks to Scott Jacobs and all his crew at Agway for their support in this annual event. 🐾

Jane and the Owl

by Lewis Holmes

Heading up to the house just before 7AM, a vireo is scolding frantically up ahead, hopping from tree to tree. A large shape moves to a new branch in a beech tree and a quick look with binos shows it to be a Barred Owl. Quite unperturbed by me or the vireo, the owl eventually closes its eyes while I stare. Its breast is white with thin vertical brown streaks. The facial discs are less grey than the owl seen yesterday, the beak is dirty yellow, the eyes the same fathomless black, intense, alien. The neck feathers are greyish-brown with thin horizontal white stripes and overall the head and neck are grey, featureless, indistinct. The back and tail feathers are sharply marked brown and white and the tail feathers have white spots on one side. While up close the back and tail are distinctive with crisp markings, the whole of the bird blends in as well with the beech as yesterday's owl did with the hemlock.

Light rapid flapping of flip-flops comes from behind me as my daughter trots up towards the house. She is slow to find the owl through the binos, then gazes appreciatively. She walks slowly up the path, stopping below the beech. The owl's head swivels to follow her progress, then bends down sharply to see her below. The girl in the pink hooded sweatshirt and wild hair looks up at the solemn still grey owl, both quiet in their exchange, wide blue eyes peering into the bottomless black ones. Jane slowly walks up the hill then resumes her youthful noisy pace. The owl looks at me then draws his grey lids over the dark eyes and rests. 🐾



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