



Otter Creek Audubon Society

May
2010

Otter Tracks

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Spring is here, warblers are starting to flood the trees, and the 2010 OCAS Birdathon is about to happen. The date is Saturday, 15 May, 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 our OCAS programs, including 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 to support one or more teams with a pledge. This is OCAS' primary fundraiser of the year. Please be generous. 

Redwing photo by Walter Siegmund



OCAS Mission:

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

OTTER CREEK AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Middlebury, VT 05753

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388-4082

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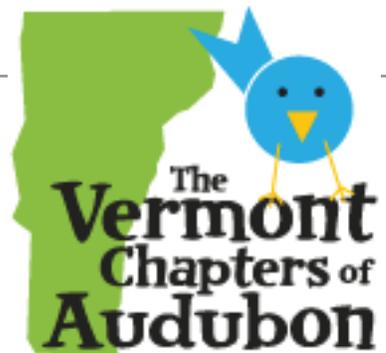
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Vermont eBird

Launched in 2002 and maintained by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, eBird is an exciting new vehicle for birders to log in their bird sightings. OCAS is participating by sending in our checklists after each monthly walk at Otter View Park and the Hurd Grassland. If you click on the links at our website, it will lead you to eBird, where you can see our results posted. Both Otter View Park and the Hurd Grassland are now eBird hotspots in Vermont. Vermont's Audubon chapters have joined to give financial support to the Vermont Center for Ecostudies which maintains Vermont eBird. If you check it out (<http://ebird.org/content/vt/>), you will see our Audubon Chapters of Vermont logo, and importantly, a summary report by Kent McFarland, State of Vermont eBird 2009, which explains how our citizen science activities are being used by professional ornithologists. 



Otter Creek Audubon Society

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OCAS Zac Osborne Fund

Each year OCAS provides funds to Addison County applicants for activities relating to environmental education. We encourage Addison County teachers to apply for funds to transport their students on environmental field trips and use contributions to the Zach Osborne Fund for this purpose. This fund honors the memory of a respected and committed OCAS board member and teacher at the Hannaford Career Center in Middlebury. We welcome contributions to the Zach Osborne Fund, OCAS, PO Box 938, Middlebury VT 05753. 🐾

Thanksgiving Comes Late (or Early) to Ripton



VIEWPOINT

Editorial by Warren King

At our house in Ripton we were adopted by a small flock of wild turkeys all winter. Four hens and a tom came out of the woods each morning to forage for the sunflower and thistle seed that rained down from our feeders. These birds also spent much of each day foraging nearby and pecking gravel from our driveway for grinding material for their gizzards.



Northern Goshawk on its Wild Turkey prey.

Photo by Warren King

At 7 AM on the morning of March 5th a thunderbolt in the form of a northern goshawk shot out of the nearby woods and nailed one of the hen turkeys at the edge of the field below our house. I first saw the bird perched on its prey probably just a few minutes after the attack. The goshawk was dwarfed by the turkey. Female turkeys outweigh female goshawks on average by a factor of four to one.

The goshawk fed intermittently through the day. By late afternoon it had devoured both breast muscles and had opened the abdominal cavity, even though it had been scared off the carcass several times. It was a wonder it could fly with its extra fuel load.

The goshawk returned early the next morning to resume feeding. We neither saw nor heard evidence of coyotes or other predators or scavengers having discovered the carcass during the night. Several times through the second day and again on the third day the hawk returned to feed. By noon of day three feathers festooned the yard. The goshawk attempted to drag the carcass but only moved it a few feet. All that remained was feathers, skin and cleaned bones.

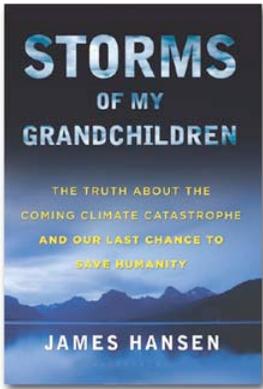
We have not seen the other three hens since the attack, but the tom appeared several times, sticking to the trees and bushes rather than parading in the open field as was his habit before the attack. Witnessing an attack of this sort makes one realize that whether we regard nature as a work of exquisite beauty or a process of savage indifference, both views are correct. The difference lies only in our perspective. 🐾

Eagle Volunteer Opportunity



One of these years, maybe even this year, Bald Eagles will nest in the Champlain Valley. Eventually, there will be a number of pairs. If you would like to be a part of the action by helping observe the comings and goings at a nest, contact David Sausville, manager of the Fish and Wildlife Department's Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area in Addison, to express your interest. He will train and work with volunteers to make observations at a nest every 7-10 days. Contact David at David.Sausville@state.vt.us or call him at 759-2398 and leave a message. 🐾

Photo by Eric Frommer



Book Review:

Storms of My Grandchildren:

The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity

**by James Hansen
Bloomsbury, 2009, 320 pp.**

Review by Margaret Lowe

James Hansen is a leading climatologist whose career has focused on the forces affecting the global climate. He is the director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies. His recent book, *Storms of My Grandchildren*, explains the science involved in the debate about global climate change. He provides the geological data that show that earth's climate has been warmer and colder over many cycles through millions of years. He explains the evidence that the global climate is now warming and warming very rapidly by geological standards. This warming comes about because the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is increasing. The rate of climate change is so rapid that some living organisms are having difficulty adapting. Dr. Hansen shows us why even more rapid change will happen if current trends continue, explaining the importance of feedback loops such as those involving the melting and loss of Arctic and Antarctic ice sheets and the release of methane hydrates. If carbon dioxide levels continue to rise we can expect worse yet: catastrophic weather—terrible storms and great droughts—large rises in sea level, the disappearance of the Himalayan glaciers with the melt water they provide to much of Asia, the death of many species (some polar and alpine species and some coral reef species are already in trouble). Mankind may not survive.

But it may not be too late. Dr. Hansen's recommendation: an 80 percent drop in CO₂ levels by 2030. How to achieve that? No new coal burning plants, a phase-out of existing ones accomplished by a gradually increasing tax (fee) on all fossil fuel sources, which will raise the price for users of fossil fuels and encourage decreased consumption. Hansen wants the proceeds of the tax to be distributed equally to all citizens (hence he calls his plan a fee-and-dividend plan). Hansen is concerned that efficiency, wind, and solar power will not be enough to replace the coal. Interestingly, he suggests using

nuclear power. He reports that "fourth generation" nuclear plants with "fast" reactors could use current nuclear waste for fuel and would themselves produce about one percent of the amount of waste that today's plants produce. Their waste would be easier to handle as well. Development of "fourth generation" nuclear plants had progressed to the point of building a demonstration plant when the program was terminated in 1994.

This book is in many ways a memoir. Hansen details his efforts to bring his concerns about climate change to the attention of national politicians and government officials. He has been frustrated in his attempts to decrease human generated CO₂ output. The subtitle of Susan Salter Reynolds's review of the book in the Los Angeles Times for December 27, 2009 reads "The father of global warming has been sounding the alarm for more than 30 years. He is more discouraged than ever." A good part of the book deals with this frustration with political leadership and the power of "special interests."

The book was slow reading. How much was organization of the material, how much was the detail of the political frustrations, or other causes, I am not sure. I appreciated the details of the science, though there were a fair number of specialized terms to keep straight.

In sum Hansen has done us all a great service. Global warming is real. It is caused by human activities. The consequences could kill us all. We need to realize that the earth is finite. Much of modern society is focused on growth – growth in production, profits, housing prices, human population, etc. The earth is not growing bigger. We must think not about growth but about sustainability. We need to realize that we can live sustainably and happily as well. In the words of our local songwriter, Pete Sutherland;

*When the well's run dry, and the trucks won't roll
When the pilot light is out
and they've had to quit the coal
When the sky is for the birds,
and the roads are for your feet
We will all want less, and appreciate it more
Find the sweetness in the fruit
and know it down to the core..."*

Jim Hansen tells us that we can't wait for the well to run dry or the pilot light to go out and it's now we have to quit the coal. 🍄



Carolina Wren (*Thyrothorus ludovicianus*) Photo by Gary M. Starr

Carolina Wren

By Gary M. Starr

The Carolina Wren is a delightful addition to our mild winter bird sightings, but that was not always the case. The 5.5-inch, rusty-brown wren with a distinctive white eye stripe has migrated into southern Vermont and the Champlain Valley as winters have become milder. The first recorded sighting for Vermont was in Burlington in 1936. The first nesting pair was seen in Middlebury in 1977.

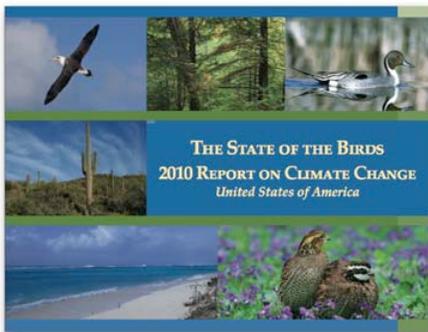
The rest of the year they forage near the ground with their thin, long bills in bushy/shrubby habitats looking under leaf litter for spiders and insects. Carolina Wrens form bonded pairs and protect their territory throughout the year. Nesting from early spring to late summer, they can have up to three broods per season. Nests are often near houses, over doorways, and in hanging plants. Eggs are speckled pink and the chicks fledge by 14 days.

Although small at three-quarters of an ounce, they make more noise per ounce than any bird in the area. The “teakettle-teakettle-teakettle” call is distinctive and can be heard through the year.

Carolina Wrens are a special treat during our Christmas Bird Count. Stay tuned: a Carolina Wren will be included in our Fall Ornament Fundraiser. 🐾

Our birds are considered a fringe population and can disappear following a severe cold period, as they did in the harsh winter of 1976-77.

During winter they might visit feeders with suet and hulled sunflower



Book Review:

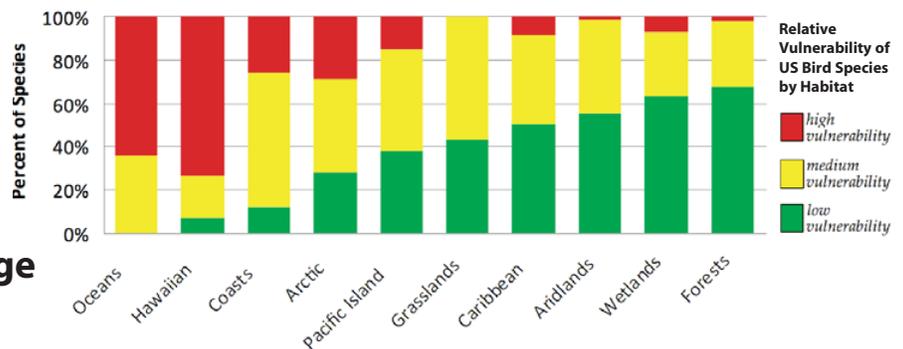
The State of the Birds: 2010 Report on Climate Change

Review by Mike Winslow

In early March *The State of the Birds: 2010 Report on Climate Change* was released. This 32-page report follows on the heels of the 2009 report (reviewed in May 2009 Otter Tracks) that showed nearly a third of the nation’s 800 bird species were endangered, threatened or in significant decline. The 2010 report is a collaboration of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and experts from the nation’s leading conservation organizations including Audubon.

The 2010 report presents the first systematic analysis of what may happen to bird populations in each major biome of the United States as a consequence of climate change.

The report assessed vulnerability of bird species in eight habitat groupings: oceans, Hawaii, coasts, the Arctic, Pacific islands, grasslands, the Caribbean, arid lands, wetlands, and forests. Forest and wetland species were most resilient, with 68 and 64 percent of species respectively categorized as low vulnerability. Oceanic and Hawaiian species were most vulnerable.



Forest birds are expected to fare better than many other groups because of their large ranges and high reproductive potential. However, even within this group there are some species expected to struggle, for example the Bicknell’s Thrush of Vermont’s mountains.

Ocean birds include albatrosses, petrels, puffins, and murres. They face challenges associated with rapid widespread shifts in pelagic food resources as a result of warmer temperatures and changing wind patterns. They also have low reproductive rates, making these species less resilient in general.

The report concludes that, “Without additional information on how birds are responding to the effects of climate change, we will be unable to adjust our conservation and management strategies. Well-designed monitoring systems will also be needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used to counteract effects of climate change on bird populations.”

The report is available on the web at www.stateofthebirds.org

OCAS Calendar of Events May – August 2010



**SATURDAY–SUNDAY
MAY 1–OCTOBER 31** **FOREST BIRD QUEST AT WRIGHT PARK.** Self-guided walking adventure focusing on the birds and habitats of Wright Park that ends with the discovery of a treasure box. Particularly appropriate for families. A set of clues to follow and a site map are available at the trailhead from May to November. Parking for Wright Park at end of Seymour Street Extension, turn north just before the covered bridge in Middlebury.

**SUNDAY, MAY 9
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. Call Warren at 388-4082 if in doubt about the weather.

**SATURDAY, MAY 15
OR SUNDAY, MAY 16** **OTTER CREEK AUDUBON BIRDATHON.** Help support our activities through the year by contributing to our major annual fundraiser. Call Barb Otsuka at 388-6829 to make a contribution or to participate.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 12
8 AM** **MANAGING YOUR LAND FOR BIRDS AND OTHER WILDLIFE.** Audubon Vermont's Champlain Valley Bird Initiative and NRCS's wildlife habitat conservation programs work with landowners to help them care for wildlife. Learn about creating and maintaining critical grassland and shrubland habitat for species of special concern such as meadowlarks, Bobolinks, Eastern Towhees and migrating warblers. Meet at Otter View Park to carpool to outing location. Led by Mark LaBarr, Audubon Vermont, and George Tucker, Otter Creek Natural Resources Conservation District.

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 7
9 AM-NOON** **WORKDAY TO CONTROL PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE AT THE HURD GRASSLAND.** Bring work gloves, boots, narrow digging tools or trowels if you have them. Leader: Barb Otsuka. Meet at Otter View Park parking area, Weybridge Street and Pulp Mill Bridge Road, Middlebury, to carpool to site.

MARSH, MEADOW AND GRASSLAND WILDLIFE WALKS

A monthly joint OCAS-MALT event. We invite community members to help us survey birds and other wildlife at Otter View Park and Hurd Grassland. Meet at Otter View Park parking area, Weybridge Street and Pulp Mill Bridge Road, Middlebury.

THURSDAY, MAY 13, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: Josh Phillips

THURSDAY, JULY 8, 7:30 – 9:30 AM
Leaders: Marcia Parker and Ron Payne

THURSDAY, JULY 8, 7:30 – 9:30 AM
Leader: Warren King



Eastern Meadowlark. See 'Managing Your Land for Birds and Other Wildlife,' Saturday, June 12. photo by Alan D. Wilson, www.naturespicsonline.com

Chance to Help

continued from page 6

up behind me I held them in one hand, got back in my car, and started driving. The heat of my hand overcame their sluggishness and they squirmed vigorously. I did a one-handed u-turn at the stop sign, and one wiggled free and leapt into the darkness of the car. I completed my turn, avoided the oncoming car, and pulled up next to the pools. I released the male and female, then started hunting for the escapee in my car. Quick pats under the seat came up empty and I had visions of a desiccated frog in some cranny. I found him crouched in the corner of the floor mat. Another release, then a final scan for any remaining creatures not programmed for tarmac and traffic. As I headed off, my sticky hands and light heart made me realize that spring had truly arrived. Warm weather and sun are not all that make this season magic. 🐾

An Unexpected Chance to Help

by Lewis Holmes

The brief rain had stopped and it was only about 40 degrees, so I was surprised to see the wood frog hopping in the road. Pausing where the headlights would help me most, I approached and deposited him at his destination. Nice sign of spring when the weather doesn't feel like spring.

Half an hour later, driving the opposite direction, another frog appeared in the same spot. Again a male, darker this time with his mask hardly visible against his base color. I lifted him to safety calling in my hands, his quacking vocalization a startling but wondrous gift. Turning left I stopped short as a series of light reflections down the road identified more frogs, all facing the small vernal pools just off the road. These pools fill up off and on all year with heavy rains and are marked by winterberry when the leaves are down and by a noisy burst of peepers in the spring and early summer. I had never heard the wood frogs though, probably because their visit is brief and the colder weather keeps the car windows up during their stay.

The cold temperature and absence of rain seemed to have stopped their progress and, while the road is not busy, the intermittent traffic put them at risk. Putting on my hazard lights I moved a plump female to the water side of the road. I passed



Wood Frog.

Photo: Bev Wigney, <http://magickcanoe.com/blog/>

a flattened traffic victim, then took another few steps to where three travelers were clumped together hugging the road. Again none hopped at my approach. Two females and one male just fit into my hands. The male started to call as we reached the water. Afraid of stepping on more frogs in the grass I left them at the roadside. A couple more escorts, then I headed back to the car.

Looking back, new light spots marked more frogs. Their dark backs were not apparent when I drove past them, but now I could see their lighter underbellies. A car turned onto the road in the distance. I turned my car and fixed the headlights on the frogs, scooping up two males and a fat female. As the car came

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