



Otter Creek Audubon Society

September
2011

Otter Tracks

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Tenth Annual Dead Creek Wildlife Day Saturday, October 1, 2011

Mark Saturday, October 1st on your calendar. That is the date of the tenth annual Dead Creek Wildlife Day, the family-oriented celebration of the remarkable wildlife of the Champlain Valley. Events begin at 9:30 and continue nonstop until 4 at the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area headquarters on Route 17, one mile west of Route 22A in Addison. Bring the whole family for free wildlife-related events, presentations and field trips designed to fascinate all ages and levels of interest in the natural world.



A Great Horned Owl visits Dead Creek Wildlife Day from the Squam Lake Natural Science Center
photo by Lil Lumbra, Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department

Start the day with a bird-banding demonstration at the Dead Creek boat launch and parking area on Route 17, or The Big Sit, an attempt to find a record 50 or more bird species from a 17-foot circle at West Brilyea Reservoir. Take part in a morning or afternoon nature walk, carve a duck decoy or other animal from wood or soap, tag butterflies, try fly-fishing, watch retrievers in action, see live animals up close, help your child build a bluebird nest box, learn about invasive plants, or attend one of the many other events.

The Addison Central School PTA will provide healthy, reasonably priced lunches and snacks. Two large tents house exhibits and nature-related items for sale. Admission and parking are free. A free shuttle bus connects the headquarters area with the Dead Creek Route 17 boat launch, West Brilyea reservoir, and the Route 17 Goose Viewing Area. Plan ahead so you don't miss the events that interest you most by checking the schedule. Click on Dead Creek Wildlife Day on Google. 



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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OCAS' annual bird seed sale has been cancelled due to unpredictable prices for sunflower seeds, in short supply from midwestern flooding. Agway will offer a sale in November if sunflower seed prices return to a reasonable level.

Otter Creek Audubon Society

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2010-2011**

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Membership Renewal Information

To help you with membership renewal we have highlighted the due date on your label.

It's handy to renew over the phone at the National Audubon membership center:

800/274-4201

Please check the "Join Us" tab on our webpage:

ottercreekaudubon.org.

We've prepared a membership FAQ, listing questions we often hear from OCAS members. If your label doesn't have an expiration date, it means we are sending it as a gift. Please check the FAQ.

New Loon Decline

Editorial by
Warren King



VIEWPOINT

In 2005 the Common Loon was removed from the Vermont List of Threatened and Endangered Species. Numbers of nesting pairs and fledged young have continued to rise slowly in Vermont since 2005. Such has not been the case in Maine and New Hampshire, though. Between fall of 2005 and summer of 2006 the Squam Lake, New Hampshire, population dropped from seventeen to ten pairs. Lake Umbagog in eastern New Hampshire experienced a decline from 32 pairs in 2000 to 13 pairs in 2006. Maine's Lake Mooselookmeguntic loon pairs fell from twenty to eight between 2006 and 2008. However, most small lakes



Loon pair on Lake Dunmore Photo by Mike Korkuc

have had stable or slightly increasing numbers and a few larger lakes have fared well, too.

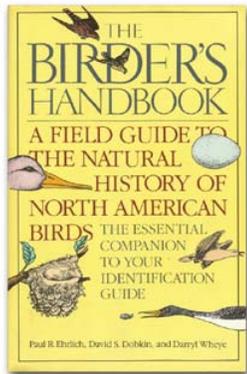
Vermont loons nest primarily on small lakes, one pair to a lake. Lake Dunmore (985 acres), among Vermont's largest lakes to have breeding loons, has one pair. New York, New Hampshire and Maine, by contrast, have some larger lakes that support numbers of loon pairs.

The causes of the decline are not yet known, but New Hampshire's Loon Preservation Committee, the pioneer of organized loon conservation efforts in northern New England, has targeted Squam Lake, already well studied, for intensive research. The BioDiversity Research Institute in Maine is undertaking related research on Maine lakes.

The most likely cause of decline is high concentrations of chemicals, including mercury from midwest power plants, the flame retardant PBDE, the stain repellent PFOS, and fuel and waste combustion byproducts PCDDs and PCDFs, which are now present in loons in concentrations shown to affect the health or nest success of other bird species. The Loon Preservation Committee postulates that the stress of breeding, molting a full set of feathers, and migrating to the coast may cause loons in late summer and fall to metabolize residues of these chemicals deposited in their body fat during the spring and summer. Research on this subject is ongoing.

It is not clear how or why these chemical concentrations affect loons breeding on large lakes and reservoirs more than loons breeding on small ones. Reproduction rates continue to be depressed on large lakes and fewer eggs are hatching, although there have been partial recoveries on at least some large lakes.

This research shows the importance of continued monitoring of "recovered" endangered species. If this problem affected only small lake loons instead of large lake loons the decades of work by loon biologists and countless hours of monitoring of nests by Vermont's many loon volunteers might have been for nothing. It points to the need for the U.S. to follow Europe's lead in espousing the precautionary principle to guide the use of potentially toxic chemicals. The burden of proof that a chemical is not harmful should fall on the corporations wishing to manufacture and sell it. A chemical should not be put in use until scientific consensus indicates it is safe. We should have insisted on this procedure in the aftermath of the DDT era. Now it appears Common Loons, among our best-studied birds, may become our canaries in the same way that Peregrine Falcons were forty years ago. How many less well-studied species are undergoing similar but unrecognized declines is a valid cause for concern. 🐾



Book Review:

The Birder's Handbook: A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds

**by Paul R. Ehrlich, David S.
Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye**

Fireside, 1988, 785 pp.

Review by Ron Payne

A good field guide is one of the most important tools in a birder's arsenal. They are the key to learning what species of birds are in a given region and how to identify them. But have you ever found yourself wanting more in-depth information on a species' life beyond just the identity a field guide provides? What about a bird's breeding habits, diet or even its biological makeup? Well it is into this gap in information that *The Birder's Handbook* aims to step. This hefty tome could be considered two books in one, the odd pages giving detailed treatments of over 650 North American species, and the even pages offering a series of essays that could be seen as an ornithological primer.

Two to a page, the species treatments are cleverly designed with a header of easy to decipher icons and shorthand that tell you at a glance basic breeding and behavioral information such as in what habitat the species nests, what type of nest it builds, a timeline of reproduction from egg to fledging and its feeding habits. Below the headers is more detailed information about these categories. For example, an icon may tell you that a bird builds a cup-style nest, while below it tells you the materials they build that nest from. There is also information on the conservation status of the species, and notes that explain their unique behaviors. These species treatments are extremely useful while following nesting birds. The timeline they provide has enabled me to estimate the time hatchlings spend on the nest, allowing me to be on hand to see them fledge.

If the species treatments were the only thing this book contained, it would make it an invaluable addition to anyone's library, but the inclusion of the essays really puts it over the top. They answer almost every question you could think of about birds and many more that you may not have even considered. There are nuts and bolts explanations of the anatomy of birds as well as behavioral essays on mating, survival strategies and natural history, all done in a very readable and entertaining style. Among my favorite essays are the ones on the demise of extinct North American species like the Carolina Parakeet that give perspective on man's impact on ecology.

If there is a drawback to this book it is its age. Published in 1988 and not updated since, it hasn't kept up with the lumping, splitting and name changes on the AOU species list. Also, a feature of the species treatments, page numbers where you can find each species in popular field guides, has become useless unless you have a guide from that period. But these little flaws have done nothing to keep this wonderful book from remaining in print. If you pick up a copy you will find, like me, that it is one of the most useful and educational books you own. 🐾

The Cost of Bats' White-Nosed Syndrome

Bats' contribution to the control of agriculturally significant insects has now been estimated to be an average of \$22.9 billion a year, with a range of \$3.7 billion to \$53 billion. This is the amount that scientists estimate that the loss of bats due to white-nosed syndrome and mortality from wind tower collisions will cost U.S. agriculture. Included in this cost is the added cost of pesticides that could have been foregone with healthy bat populations. The related health costs of added pesticide use on humans and other animals was not included.

A single colony of 150 big brown bats in Indiana was shown to eat 1.3 million insects that have the potential to damage crops, according to an April article in *Science* by Dr. Gary McCracken, head of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology of the University of Tennessee.

McCracken estimates that more than a million bats of several species have died from white-nosed syndrome. It has now spread to bat hibernacula from Canada to Missouri and Oklahoma without hope in sight thus far of reducing bat mortality. He also estimates that 33,000 to 110,000 bats were killed by wind turbines in the mid-Atlantic Highlands alone. The insect control provided by bats killed by wind turbines was added to the numbers that died from white-nosed syndrome to calculate the lost value of these bats in controlling agricultural insects. McCracken pointed to the huge value to agriculture of bat control of insects as a strong reason to find solutions to these problems of bat population decline.

NB: Because of the extremely sharp recent decline of the little brown bat and the northern long-eared bat in Vermont and elsewhere in the East, both species are under consideration for emergency listing as endangered. Little brown bat was believed to be the most abundant bat in Vermont. Since the discovery in 2006 of white-nosed syndrome, a fungus that infects bats that hibernate together in caves, the little brown bat has declined at least 90 percent. The long-eared bat may have declined even further. 🐾



Bat with advanced white-nosed syndrome

Photo by J. Chengler



Golden-winged Warbler Considered for Federal Endangered Status

by Warren King

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has issued a 90-day finding that a petition to list the Golden-winged Warbler as endangered or threatened may be warranted. A year-long investigation into the warbler's status has begun. At the same time USFWS noted that an emergency listing of the species was not justified by the petition's information or their 90-day finding.

The Golden-winged Warbler occurs regularly but sparsely in Addison County, where it frequently interbreeds with the more southerly Blue-winged Warbler. Interbreeding may be one reason for its scarcity. Another reason is the decline in extent of structurally disturbed, early successional habitats following the return of Vermont's largely forested landscape after extensive forest clearing in the 19th century. It occurs almost entirely in early successional habitats.

The Golden-winged Warbler breeds from the Appalachians of Georgia north to southern Quebec and also in Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin and south central Canada, but with a north-south band between these two areas in Indiana, Ohio and western New York from which it is largely absent. It winters in southern Middle America and northern South America. Its global population is estimated at 210,000 birds. 🐾

Black-crowned Night Herons Learn to Fish with Bait

by Warren King

A population of Black-crowned Night Herons on Kauai and Oahu has learned to catch fish by using bread as bait, according to an 11 May 2011 report in *Elepaio*, the journal of the Hawaiian Audubon Society. Black-crowned Night Herons are widely distributed across the Americas, Africa, southern Europe and Asia and several oceanic island groups. They are opportunistic in their feeding habits, taking fish, crustaceans, amphibians, rodents, bats, leeches, spiders, and birds' eggs and chicks.

A Black-crowned Night Heron was first observed fishing with bread for bait in 1996 in Irvine, California. In 2001 a night heron was noted fishing with bread at the Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans. These appear to be isolated instances.

On Kauai and Oahu reports of the species fishing with bread date from 2007. In 2008 several Black-crowned Night Herons used bread for bait at water hazards on two golf courses on Oahu. While one night heron actively fished with bait, other night herons stood nearby and took passive advantage of the bread's attraction by catching attracted fish.

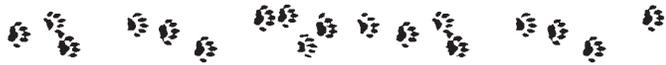
Observers noted, and captured on film, a night heron on Oahu that placed bread in a pond with care, but upon approach of an ornamental carp too large to eat, removed the bread with its bill. When the large carp moved away, the night heron replaced the bread and promptly caught and swallowed a smaller fish. The night heron "selected" for prey size on three occasions, replacing the bait each time as soon as the large fish moved on.

Several other heron species, notably the Green Heron, have used bread for bait on occasion. This is the first instance of several herons, on two adjacent islands, fishing actively and passively with bread for bait. The technique was not only successful, it was clearly being transferred from bird to bird through observation. 🐾



A series of photos documenting a Night Heron fishing with bread
photo by Michael Walther/Oahu Nature Tours

OCAS Calendar of Events September – December 2011



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17 Hawk Watch at Buck Mountain, Waltham. Hawks should be at peak numbers. Meet at 11 AM at Vergennes park and ride, junction of Routes 22A and 7, Vergennes. Joint outing with Green Mountain Audubon. Call Warren King, 388-4082, for more information or if in doubt about the weather.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1 **DEAD CREEK WILDLIFE DAY.** 9:30 AM-4 PM Celebrate wildlife in the Champlain Valley at a daylong series of events at Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area headquarters, Route 17, one mile west of Route 22A in Addison. See bird banding and butterfly marking, learn about Vermont's salamanders, see live animals close up, take morning and afternoon nature walks. Call 802-241-3700 for information. See article this issue.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10 **OTTER CREEK AUDUBON ANNUAL DINNER AND MEETING.** 6-8:30 PM Reservations needed for dinner at 6. Steve Kress, Director, National Audubon Society Seabird Restoration Program, will speak on "Saving Endangered Seabirds: Lessons from Puffins and Terns in the Gulf of Maine." No fee for talk at 7:15. Call Seth Gibson at 388-2556 for reservations. OCAS members will receive a separate invitation by mail.



Atlantic Puffin photo by Andreas Trepte, www.photo-natur.de

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17 **FERRISBURGH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT.** Call Mike Winslow at 877-6586 for details.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17 **MT. ABE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT:** Call Randy or Cathy Durand at 453-4370 for details.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18 **MIDDLEBURY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT.** Call Jim or Kris Andrews at 352-4734 for details.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 31 **HINESBURG CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT:** Call Paul Wieczorek at 802/434-4216 for details.

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. Shorter and longer routes possible. For information call 388-1007 or 388-6829.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: Gary Starr

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: Warren King

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: Ron Payne

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: Josh Phillips

RELATED EVENTS

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 12:20 -1:20 PM

THE USE OF SOCIAL ATTRACTION FOR RESTORING RARE AND ENDANGERED SEABIRDS. Steve Kress, Director, National Audubon Society Seabird Restoration Program. Middlebury College Environmental Studies Colloquium Series. Middlebury College Franklin Environmental Center, 531 College St, Middlebury. (Kress will speak at the OCAS Annual Dinner later that day.)



Short-tailed Albatross Chick Fledges on Midway

The May 2011 *Otter Tracks* noted the survival of 60-year-old "Wisdom", the oldest known Laysan Albatross, and her chick following the tsunami of 10-11 March that flooded portions of Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge in the northwestern Hawaiian chain. The article also called attention to the hatching of an endangered Short-tailed Albatross on Midway, the first recorded hatching away from the species' breeding islands off the Japanese coast. Refuge officials banded the chick on 8 June and it fledged on 16 or 17 June. The parents, both banded on Tori Shima, near Okinawa, were eight (the female) and 24 years old (the male) respectively. 🐾

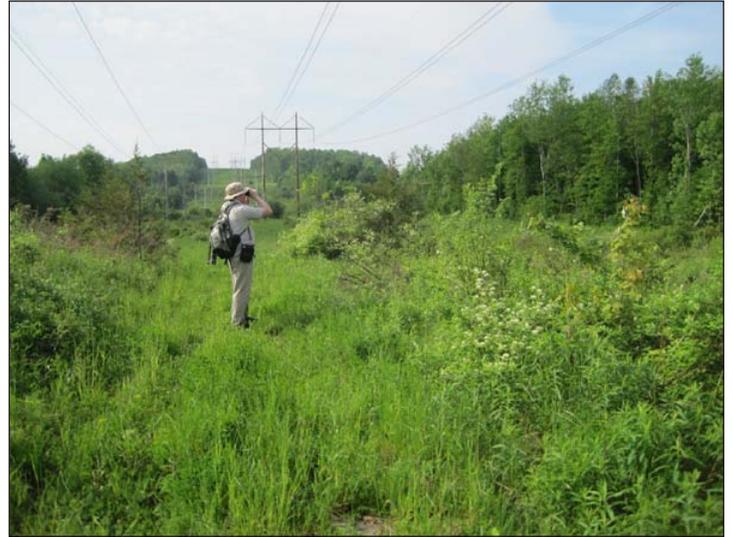
Prairie Warblers in Leicester: An eBird Success Story

By Ron Payne

On a sunny morning in late May at a power line right-of-way in Leicester, Ian Worley and I set out in search of a little bird not commonly recorded in Addison County. Soon we heard the telltale accelerating trill we were hoping for. We caught some motion at the top of a red cedar, a small bird with a yellow breast and black streaks down the flanks. We had definitely found our quarry, the Prairie Warbler.

Finding Prairie Warblers became a priority for me this year as an Addison County captain for County Quest, a friendly competition between Vermont's counties to find the most bird species in a year. The official recording system for Quest is eBird, the online bird-listing database run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Asking experienced birders where I could find Prairie Warbler in Addison County failed to give me any leads, so using eBird to find them was the natural next step.

On Vermont eBird website, I went to "View and Explore Data," then "Graphs and Maps" and searched for Prairie Warbler. This gave me a map showing the location of all the reported sightings of the species in Vermont. There was only one Addison County report on the map. Clicking the marker showed me that this sighting was made at Cornwall Swamp in 2004. That is one of my regular haunts and I had never seen a Prairie Warbler there, so that wasn't much help. But my eye was drawn to a cluster of



Ron Payne searching for an Addison County Prairie Warbler Photo by Ian Worley

Prairie Warbler sightings lower on the map in Brandon. Zooming in, I could see that they were all close to a power line that runs north into Leicester, and therefore Addison County. Kept in a constant early successional state by power companies, power line corridors are prime habitat for Prairie Warblers, who, despite their name, prefer shrub to grass. When I told Ian about this he agreed that it was worth investigating, and it turned out to be a very successful trip. This is a technique you can use with eBird to help find birds that are missing from your lists too. 🐦

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