



Otter Tracks

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John Chamberlain accepts the 2011 Silver Feather award from OCAS President Barbara Otsuka at the annual dinner.
Photo by Warren King

Chamberlain Receives Silver Feather Award

Kress Wows Crowd with Puffin Recovery Story

At the OCAS annual dinner at the Waybury Inn on Thursday, November 10th, an overflow crowd applauded John Chamberlain, the recipient of the Silver Feather award from the OCAS Board. He served in each of the four officer positions at least once during his long tenure on the Board. He was a reliable fixture in his role as treasurer, which he performed with great competence thanks to his professional status as a CPA.

The featured speaker of the evening, Dr. Stephen Kress, has spent a lifetime restoring seabird colonies on islands in the Gulf of Maine that were wiped out or depleted last century by hunting, introduced predators and invasive plants. Kress is best known for bringing back populations of iconic Atlantic Puffins through innovative techniques that capitalize on social attraction. The techniques include the use of decoys, sound recordings and mirror boxes to convince prospecting seabirds to land on, and eventually to breed on, formerly abandoned islands. The techniques have been effective with puffins, razorbills, several tern species, murrets, petrels and albatrosses. Interns trained annually by Kress and his staff have rebuilt seabird numbers into the

low thousands on some islands. Biologists around the globe have applied Kress' social attraction techniques to the restoration of endangered colonial seabirds. Species that have benefited include the Cahow or Bermuda Petrel, Galapagos Dark-rumped Petrel, Short-tailed Albatross on Japanese islands, Common Murrets on California islands, and Caspian Terns on Columbia River islands.

Dr. Kress is the National Audubon Society Vice-president for Bird Conservation, director of Audubon's Seabird Restoration Program, and manager of the thirteen islands of Audubon's Maine Coast Seabird Sanctuaries. He is a Visiting Fellow of Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology. 🐾



Dr. Stephen Kress
photo by John Goodman



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

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Otter Creek Audubon's *Silver Feather Award* was established in 1996 for "notable devotion, dedication and untiring effort on behalf of the preservation and enjoyment of the natural communities of Addison County." John Chamberlain is the 17th Addison County recipient. Last year's award went to David Sausville, director of Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area.

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.

Population Milestone

Editorial by
Warren King



VIEWPOINT

Back in 1999, when the global human population reached six billion, my wife and I bought a new car. On 31 October, the U.N. Population Division announced the global population hit seven billion, and we traded that car in on a new one. Twelve years to add a billion people—not good news for the health of the planet and the several million other species with which we share it. There is no more direct measure of impact on the world's habitats, and the organisms that require them, than the size of the human population. If there is any good news to be found in this statistic, it lies in the fact that the next billion, from seven to eight billion, will take a year longer to arrive than this billion did. And since the global population growth rate declined from a historic peak of 2.2 percent in 1963 to 1.2 percent in 2009, and is expected to decline further, the elapsed time between 8 and 9 billion will be 15 years. New analysis from the U.N. Population Division suggests that growth will continue through the end of the century.



What is the human carrying capacity of the earth? In 1996 population ecologist William Rees estimated that to accommodate the 5.86 billion people then alive at current North American living standards, in which each person required 11.12 acres for survival, two additional earths would be required. To support 10 billion in this style would require 5 additional earth equivalents. The human ecological footprint is calculated with increasing precision annually, with a three-year time lag to allow the U.N. to assemble the underlying data. In 2007 the world average footprint was 6.7 global acres per person; the world average capacity of the earth is 4.4 acres per person, resulting in a deficit of 2.2 acres per person.

The U.S. has the highest reproductive rate among industrialized nations, currently just below the replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman, although the U.S. population continues to grow due to the population lag effect and will continue to do so until the U.S. age distribution reaches equilibrium. Europe has been losing population for the last decade and will continue to decline even though some countries have instituted financial reproductive incentives. Asia continues to grow due to the population lag effect in spite of China's longstanding efforts to reduce growth. India will supplant China as the most populous nation in 2025. Both nations will experience sharp population declines by about 2050. Afghanistan will be as populous as Russia by 2100. North America will continue to grow but not as quickly as Latin America. Nigeria's population will surpass the U.S.'s by 2050. Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to experience the greatest growth through the 21st century, when it will be three-quarters the size of Asia's population.

The U.S. presently has 5 percent of the global population and commands 22 percent of global energy use. Each U.S. resident, on average, consumes as much energy as 6 Brazilians, 10 Chinese or 20 Indians. Yet the U.S. has no population policy. Population growth and its consequences is a subject for discussion in academic circles, but not in political circles. Isn't it time we asked our elected officials to consider the consequences of no population policy?

Oh, and that car we bought? It's a 2008 with many miles on it, so it won't be around when the next billion babies have been born on this earth. 🐾

Owl Banders Set Sights on a Celebrity

By Rodney Olsen

Since 2002, students of the Diversified Occupations, a self-contained school program catering to Addison County high school students with unique needs, have operated an owl banding station at Buster Grant's sugarbush on the north slope of Snake Mountain in Addison. Armed with mist nets and an audio lure, these budding biologists catch, band and release migrating owls. And, for one evening each year, they open their station to the public. Visitors with a passion for owls can witness these young citizen scientists in action at what is affectionately known as "Owl Night".

Over the last decade, hundreds have witnessed the students banding the most common nocturnal migrant passing through our area- the Northern Saw-whet Owl (NSWO). Owl Night corresponds to the peak of the Northern Saw-whet Owl migration, when as many as 33 of these pint-sized nocturnal raptors have been caught and banded in one evening. The NSWO is the perfect educational ambassador. However, one question remains: Is it the quantity of owls banded or the quality that is most significant to the students?

Scientifically speaking, focusing on the NSWO allows for a "quantity" of birds, which is conducive to good science. And good science allows us to better understand the ecology of one species by documenting migration timing, as well as age and sex ratios. However, these banders also enjoy the diversity, or quality, of species they have encountered over the years.

Over the years six species have been encountered at this location: NSWO, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Screech Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Boreal Owl. So,



Three Barn Owls peer from their roost in an Addison barn. Photo by Rodney Olsen

once you've banded hundreds of owls, and encountered six species, what's next, or more specifically, who's next?

When I moved to Vermont, I had hoped to see a Barn Owl but was informed that they were scarce. The few historical sightings occurred back in the 1970's, twenty years prior to my arrival. They have remained unrecorded since. Unfortunately, I was told this after I had already placed a dozen nest boxes in abandoned barns and silos in the area. Well, twenty years passed and most of my hopes of seeing a Barn Owl had vanished. Until just recently there was nothing new to report. However, in:

2008: I entered a barn in Addison to find the floor below the nest box covered with owl pellets (undigestibles), feathers (proof of a Barn Owl) and whitewash (poop).

2009: An audio lure broadcasting the call of a Barn Owl was played in neighboring silos, and an owl used the location for a roost site for the entire summer.

2010: No owls were observed.

2011: Four active locations were

found with seven birds in total.

Two sites featured signs of nesting activity (one location revealed 3 young birds while another had 2 unhatched eggs present).

So, if you find yourself passing by Buster's sugarbush one evening and the lights are on, there's a good chance that the students will be practicing good science by capturing large "quantities" of NSWO's. But, you can be sure that this year a remote section of Buster Grant's sugarbush will be dedicated to the capture of the "high-quality" yet elusive resident, the Barn Owl.

Editors note: Barn Owl is considered a species of special concern in Vermont. This is an unofficial category, meaning neither endangered nor threatened. It is used to characterize species at the edge of their range, without obvious cause of threat, or whose status has not been more precisely documented but for which there is clear concern. The 2011 records appear to be the first evidence of nesting in Vermont since 1983. Several records were documented in Vermont between 1977 and 1983. A Barn Owl was recorded in Bennington in 1997. 🦉



Chickadees Cheer Seed Sale

Since late summer the folks at Middlebury Agway have been searching for bird seed at prices better than the summertime highs. The spring floods in the mid-west (not to mention Burlington) ruined a lot of the crops, and drove up prices on sunflower seeds, nyger, etc., to very high levels. The Agway team has found the best prices available and again included us in their fall seed sale. So cheer up chickadees and cardinals, here comes the winter feed.

Fill out the order form that is enclosed with your *Otter Tracks*. Be sure to include your address and phone number. Return it to: Seth Gibson, OCAS, PO Box 938, Middlebury VT 05753 (so OCAS gets credit for the order). Agway will call you when the shipment comes in. Pay for the order when you pick it up. 🦉

Fifth Annual Cabin Fever Lecture Series

Otter Creek Audubon is pleased to announce its fifth annual Cabin Fever Lecture Series for winter 2012. All events take place the second Wednesday of each month downstairs at Ilsley Library in Middlebury at 7PM and are free and open to the public.

On Wednesday, January 11th, the program will be “Warblers – Need We Say More?” Our warbler program by local birders Gary Starr, Ron Payne, and Dayton Wakefield will present a mixed flock of warbler information. Pictures from the Wakefields’ and Starrs’ trip to the 2011 Big Week of Birding on Lake Erie near Clinton, Ohio will start the program. Ron Payne will talk about local warbler hot spots and how to identify the birds. Regional hot spots such as Plum Island, Monhegan Island and Cape May will be dis-



Black-throated Green Warbler

ussed in anticipation of organizing an Otter Creek Audubon foray. Bring your warbler thoughts to share.

On Wednesday, February 8th, come take an evening excursion to the lush, green tropics of beautiful Costa Rica with the birder/naturalist/photographer team of Julia and Chris Child of Starksboro. Featuring twelve different ecological zones and twice as many bird species as the continental United States in an area the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined, Costa Rica is a haven for diverse wildlife and the people who seek it out. Julia and Chris have visited Central America frequently in the last decade and take the road less traveled in search of their main quarry—birds! Julia’s knowledge and research of



Blue-crowned Motmot

avian identification and habitat combined with Chris’s “on the move” photography technique are bound to turn up something exciting and capture its image for others to enjoy. This “eye candy” visual presentation is not only colorful but also has an informative, fun narrative that will make you want to go soon, too! So come take a hike with them and see for yourself the landscape, flora and fauna and, of course, the many “Beautiful Birds of Costa Rica”.

On Wednesday March 14th John Rogers will present “Bluebirds and More”. His presentation includes the life history of the Eastern Bluebird, nest box management, other birds that nest in bluebird boxes, and more. The focus is on bluebirds, but John also shares his passion for the natural world in hopes the audience will absorb a deeper messages about nature—and life. The program has variety, feeling, and is thought provoking. Also included are just a few common wildflowers and memorable quotes by great naturalists of the past. With beautiful photographs, sounds, and a sincere, enthusiastic presentation style, this program is of interest to anyone who appreciates nature. 🐾



Eastern Bluebird

OCAS Field Trip Grants

Otter Creek Audubon Society is pleased to announce the availability of a limited number of grants to help finance environmental education projects for Addison County schools. The mission of Otter Creek Audubon is to protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats by encouraging a culture of conservation within Addison County. All local efforts are volunteer-run.

Grant funds may be used to help defer the cost of transportation, admission fees, equipment, outside presentations, or other expenses that will improve students’ understanding of the natural world. Grants of up to \$1,000 will be awarded for use in 2012, and Otter Creek Audubon will seek to assist schools in multiple supervisory unions. Proposals that get students into the natural world will be favored.

In 2011 OCAS provided funding for four schools. Vergennes Elementary students attended the paddling ecology program at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum. Bristol Elementary participated in the Four Winds nature program. Orwell Village School hosted an environmental science day at Camp Sunrise. Shoreham Elementary attended a nearby natural history museum.

Applications are due by January 11, 2012. Completed applications can be sent to mikekira@myfairpoint.net. Grant recipients will likely be contacted by February 20, 2012. Successful applicants will be asked to provide a one- to two-page summary of their field trip after it takes place. Otter Creek Audubon is continually refining the field trips grant application process. If there are any questions or recommendations about the application process and to obtain application materials, please contact Mike Winslow at 802/877-6586 or email mikekira@myfairpoint.net. 🐾



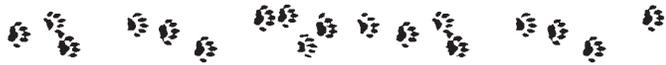
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Difference for

Birds and Wildlife

Join Audubons’ Action Center

www.AudubonAction.org

OCAS Calendar of Events December 2011 – March 2012



ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS IN ADDISON COUNTY.
ALL WELCOME. CONTACT ORGANIZER FOR DETAILS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17 FERRISBURGH CHRISTMAS BIRD
COUNT. Call Mike Winslow
at 877-6586 or write
mikekira@myfairpoint.net
for details.

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

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18 MIDDLEBURY CHRISTMAS BIRD
COUNT. Call Jim or Kris Andrews
at 352-4734 or write
jandrews@middlebury.edu
for details.

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

FRIDAY-MONDAY GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT.
FEBRUARY 17-20, 2011 See upcoming article in February
2012 *Otter Tracks*.

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

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 8 – 10 AM
Leader to be announced

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 8 – 10 AM
Leader to be announced

SATURDAY, MARCH 17, 8 – 10 AM
Leader to be announced

FIFTH ANNUAL CABIN FEVER LECTURE SERIES (SECOND WEDNESDAYS JAN-MARCH)

Downstairs at Ilsley Library, 75 Main Street, Middlebury.
See article on pg. 4 for details.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2012, 7 PM

Warblers: Need We Say More? Presented by Gary Starr,
Ron Payne and Dayton Wakefield.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2012, 7 PM

Beautiful Birds of Costa Rica. Presented by Julia
and Chris Child.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2012, 7 PM

Bluebirds and More. Presented by John Rogers.

Endangered Birds

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and possibly Black-crowned Night Herons and nest abandonment reduced nesting success. Robust vegetation growth in response to the rains hampered nest and chick counts. The Common Tern Recovery Plan states that delisting will take place when an average of at least 200 breeding pairs are recorded over a five-year period. This was the fourth year more than 200 pairs were present.

Black Tern: Nesting took place only on Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge. Conservatively, 77 pairs attempted to nest and at least 32 fledglings were observed. High water in the refuge caused birds to abandon traditional nesting areas and to attempt nesting in areas not previously used.

Bald Eagle: Three new nests were discovered, making 18 nests statewide and including nests in New York along Lake Champlain and in New Hampshire along the Connecticut River, the area covered by the Vermont Bald Eagle Recovery Plan. A nest in Waterford was lost and the eggs from a nest in Springfield were lost, but all other nests produced one or two young each. The birds released to the wild in 2005 at Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area are all of breeding age but only one was reported. It was seen in southern New York. The Recovery Plan states that delisting will take place when an average of at least 19 nests are successful over a five-year period.

Spruce Grouse: Searches for the 130-plus birds released over the last two years in Victory Basin yielded sightings of two females. The results of intensive searches next year will determine whether the capture and release program will resume.

Upland Sandpiper: One pair was seen at Morse's Line on the Quebec border and a few were observed on migration in the Champlain Valley. The species has declined precipitously from 1996 when surveys led by Judy Peterson recorded at least 100 pairs in Vermont. The causes of decline are not known with certainty, but more intensive use of agricultural fields in the Champlain Valley and elsewhere in Vermont have contributed to the decline. 🐾



STATUS OF VERMONT'S ENDANGERED BIRDS

Vermont removed the Common Loon, Peregrine Falcon and Osprey from its list of threatened and endangered species in 2005. These species continue to be monitored but at a decreasingly intensive level as confidence grows that their populations are secure. Here's a brief rundown on two of them as well as those still on the endangered species list.

Common Loon: Loons fared well with 71 pairs attempting to nest, one fewer than the record high in 2010. Fifty-one pairs nested successfully, six fewer than in 2010. Nesting pairs occurred on 62 lakes, one less than the record in 2010. Record high water on several lakes delayed nesting by several weeks. The nest on Lake Dunmore was abandoned, possibly due to disturbance.

Peregrine Falcon: Only 38 nesting cliffs were monitored in 2011 due to funding reductions, although new pairs were discovered at four sites. Twenty-eight pairs nested and 18 pairs fledged at least 36

young. The fledgling rate of 0.95 fledglings per territorial pair was the lowest since 1990 due to bad weather, human disturbance and predation. Addison County nests all failed with the possible exception of those at Rattlesnake Point and Snake Mountain.

Osprey: No statewide count of nesting pairs was made, but in general the number of territorial pairs was at an all time high, while nesting success was reduced. On Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge nesting pairs reached 41, an increase of 10 pairs from 2010.

Common Tern: A peak of 203 nests was counted, compared to 209 nests in 2010. However, only an estimated 40-50 young fledged, 0.2 fledglings per pair compared with 0.7 fledglings per pair in 2010. Only two nestings were attempted on Rock Island, which became two islets due to record high water on Lake Champlain. Young fledged only on Popasquash Island. Predation by Great Horned Owls



Bald Eagle at Weybridge Dam on Otter Creek
Photo by John Meakin

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