



Otter Creek Audubon Society

February
2013

Otter Tracks

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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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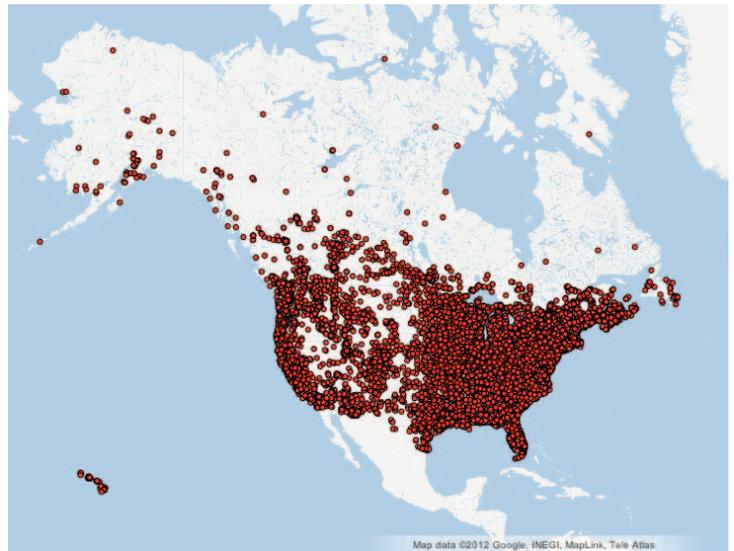
THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

Home Submit Your Bird Checklist Explore the Results

GBBC is a joint project of The Cornell Lab of Ornithology Audubon Canadian Partner BIRD STUDIES CANADA

Go Global: Great Backyard Bird Count February 15-18!

The 2013 Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) takes place from Friday, February 15, through Monday, February 18. This year for the first time GBBC is joining up with eBird to provide global coverage. But before you submit a list you must create a free GBBC account. You will no longer be able to mail in your observations. Go to www.birdcount.org and click on 'How to Participate.' You'll find downloadable instructions on creating your free account, how to enter your 2013 observations, and learn about the opportunities available to you with this new arrangement. If you are already registered with eBird you can use the same login information. Count the birds in your backyard, your favorite birding spot, even traveling. Use the convenient tally sheet inserted in this issue, but remember that you need to create your account to report sightings. The result provides a 4-day snapshot of bird distribution and abundance over much of North America and, now for the first time, around the globe.



Great Backyard Bird Count reports from 2012. Checklists Submitted: 104,285, Total Species Observed: 623, Total Individual Birds Counted: 17,382,831!

Here's what you do when you have created your account:

- Count the highest total of each bird species for at least 15 minutes in your yard, or wher-

ever you want. Taking the highest total avoids duplicate counting.

- Send your totals for one or more days during the GBBC period to www.birdsource.org/gbbc. Use a separate checklist for each day or each site on a given day. The on-line checklist is user-friendly. Ask a friend to create an account and to submit your list for you if you are unable to submit your list.

Birdsource is a collaboration of National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Those wanting to continue this kind of monitoring through the winter should look into participating in Project FeederWatch by going to www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/.

Otter Creek Audubon Society

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2012-2013**

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Amphibians and Vermont Gas

Review and
Editorial by
Warren King



Vermont Gas has proposed running a natural gas pipeline from Chittenden County through Monkton to Vergennes and Middlebury and ultimately to the Ticonderoga Paper Mill. The paper mill is expected to use 70 percent of the supply. Monkton residents are upset because without consultation Vermont Gas switched the proposed pipeline route from the VELCO powerline right-of-way through Monkton Swamp to the Monkton Road shoulder. The newly proposed route would pass in front of 60 houses, some of them historically significant, in the Monkton communities of Monktonboro and Barnumtown. All the roadside trees of Barnumtown would be removed.

The Addison County Regional Planning Commission has requested party status in the Act 248 proceedings with the Public Service Board. The Regional Planning Commission supports access to pipeline gas by all the towns through which the pipeline would pass, supports the Town of Monkton's opposition to Monkton Road as a transmission corridor, supports reconsideration of the VELCO corridor, and opposes use of eminent domain by Vermont Gas.

One issue not discussed by the Regional Planning Commission is the potential impact of the pipeline on the significant amphibian population of Monkton Swamp and the proposed underpass culvert, the first in Vermont, that would permit safe amphibian access to the swamp from uplands across Monkton Road without running the gauntlet of heavy, fast-moving traffic on Monkton Road. On nights that amphibians are migrating, Monkton Road can get slippery from the mass of crushed amphibian bodies.

Here are two important points the Public Service Board should consider. If the Monkton Road location is approved, the pipeline should be located at a depth that avoids conflict with the proposed amphibian underpass culvert. If the VELCO corridor is approved, the design and location of the pipeline should take into account the location of vernal pools on which the Monkton Swamp amphibians depend for reproduction. 🐸

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.



Hemlock woolly adelgid egg sacs infesting a hemlock branch

Adelgid Reinforces Foothold in Southern Vermont

Hemlock woolly adelgid (a true bug, *Adelges tsugae*, order Hemiptera) is a killer of hemlocks. It is best identified by its egg sacs, which resemble small cotton tufts, under hemlock branches. The 2011-2012 "winter that wasn't" resulted in winter mortality of only five percent of hemlock woolly adelgids in Vermont monitoring plots in Windham County compared to 87 percent mortality the previous year. Last year adelgids spread to seven new Vermont towns, including Pownal, the first identified from Bennington County. A beetle predatory on adelgids was released, and a UVM project is studying a native fungus for its effect on adelgids. 🐞

2013 Salamander Escorts

OCAS will provide limited salamander escort coverage once again this spring at the Morgan Road site in Salisbury. On an ideal evening, wet and warm, this site can experience a thousand or more amphibians of seven species crossing from their wooded wintering sites to vernal pools where they breed. Although road traffic averages only a few vehicles per hour, moving amphibians to the road shoulder ensures them a safe journey. It also provides a less dangerous environment for you to experience the spectacle of spring amphibian migration than at crossings with greater, higher speed traffic.

The window for our 2013 program is from Monday, March 25th to Sunday, April 14th. Otter Creek Audubon will have organizers present on two nights that we consider to be “sure things” based on the meteorological forecast. We will alert our 2013 email list, and will post notice on OCAS’ Facebook page.

Movement starts about 8:30 pm and can go to 1 am. Volunteers arrive or leave when they wish, gathering data for an hour, possibly two. You will be on a public road, and although traffic is light and slow, we cannot be responsible for drivers’ attitudes or actions. You must be responsible for your safety and the safety of others you bring.

Please contact Warren or Barry King at 388-4082 or kinglet@together.net to sign on to the 2013 salamander volunteer email list. Sign up even if you signed up last year or in 2011. Provide an email address that you will see around suppertime. We will give



Red-backed Salamanders

photo by Chris Slesar

you as much lead time as possible, ideally with a morning “heads up” alert and an early evening confirmation if the weather continues to look auspicious. Email and Facebook are the preferred modes of contact, but if telephone is the only way you would receive a timely message, provide your phone number. When you sign on, we will provide you with directions and other information. 🐾

The Atlas of Vermont Life By Ron Payne

Inside the borders of Vermont reside an amazing variety of species. Even in a small state like ours, no one knows the exact number. This gap in knowledge could be crucial to understanding the health of the ecosystems around us. Now, the Vermont Center for Ecostudies is aiming to fill this gap with an ambitious project they call the Atlas of Vermont Life, and they need your help to do it.

They are asking for submissions of any wild or naturalized organism you can find. These could include trees in a forest, bugs in your garden, your latest fishing catch, birds at your feeder, or anything else you might come across. Observations for this project are submitted through a website called iNaturalist, and it couldn’t be simpler. You upload a picture or a description, plot the location on a map, the date it was seen, and the name of the species you observed. When someone else on the site agrees with your ID, your submission gets rated “research grade”.

Easing things further, you can connect iNaturalist to your existing Facebook, Flickr, or Picasa accounts and import pictures from them into your submissions. And there is also a smartphone app that allows you to make submissions in real time in the field using your phone’s camera and GPS functions to do most of the work for you.

Also, if you find something that you can’t identify, you can put an “ID Please” tag on your submission, and the active community of amateur naturalists and professional biologists on the site will help you give it a name. Of course you can participate in this process too, using your knowledge to help other users identify their submissions. And just viewing the site allows you to do some fun armchair nature observation, all the while learning more about the things that live around us.

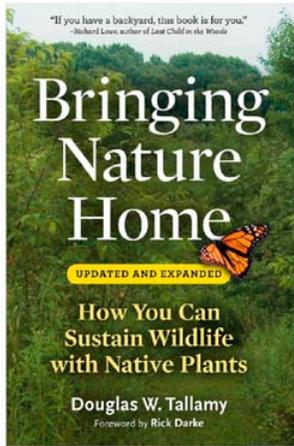
So the next time you make an interesting nature sighting, please consider submitting it to the Atlas of Vermont Life at www.inaturalist.org/projects/atlas-of-vermont-life, and help expand the knowledge of species in our state. 🐾

Arctic Tern Migration Tracked

You may recall that Otter Creek Audubon’s annual dinner in 2011 featured a spellbinding presentation by Steve Kress, director of National Audubon’s



Seabird Restoration Program, on the restoration of breeding populations of Atlantic Puffins and other seabirds on islands in the Gulf of Maine. From Steve comes word of the successful tracking of nine Arctic Terns by means of 1.6-gm geolocators from their Gulf of Maine breeding islands south to the Antarctic and back again to their breeding islands, an average distance of 36,913 miles. The longest round-trip voyage was 44,637 miles. The tracks varied considerably, but showed important areas of concentration off the Uruguayan coast of South America on the way south, in the Weddell Sea east of the Antarctic Peninsula, and in the North Atlantic well east of Newfoundland on the way back. 🐾



Book Review:

**Bringing Nature Home
How You Can Sustain
Wildlife with Native
Plants**

**by Douglas W. Tallamy
Timber Press, 2009**

Review by Warren King

Doug Tallamy combines the talents as a superb photographer, a productive researcher (68 research publications), and an entertain-

ing writer with an important story to tell. The subtitle "How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants" describes only a portion of the message. Tallamy is chair of the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. He is well qualified to observe the ongoing battle

between plants, insects and birds and to interpret for all of us interested in birds the significance of the introduction of non-native plants into the fray.

In a nutshell his argument is that urban and suburban landscapes, increasing annually by two million acres in the U.S., don't contribute their potential as bird habitat. Many of the plants we surround ourselves with in suburbia are native elsewhere, usually Europe or Asia. Most songbirds take advantage of the availability of huge numbers of insects and their larvae in early summer to feed their newly hatched offspring. But nonnative vegetation has only a small fraction of the insects that native plants have. Songbirds spend most of their time on native plants because they have far more insects. To increase the number of birds a given acre of suburban yard can sustain, add to the number and diversity of plants, make sure they are native, and eliminate nonnative plants. Easier said than done, as anyone who has battled with buckthorn, purple loosestrife or Japanese knotweed can attest.

Tallamy provides substantial information on, and spectacular photographs of, both beneficial and not so beneficial insects. He provides lists of native plants you should consider planting rather than nonnatives. He guarantees that if you persist, you will have more, lots more, songbirds in your yard. 🐾

Seabirds Eating More Plastic

A 2009-10 University of British Columbia study of 67 Northern Fulmars found dead along the Washington-British Columbia coast revealed a continuing increase in the frequency and amount of plastic particles ingested. Three studies twenty years apart starting in 1969 show the percent of dead fulmars with plastic particles rising from 60 percent to 92 percent. The average amount ingested rose from 0.04 gm to 0.385 gm. Some birds had gizzards completely filled with particles.

According to the study plastic particles can lacerate stomach linings. They occupy space that should have food in it. Further, the plastic absorbs chemical contaminants from the seawater that may pass into the birds' bodies. Most of the plastic comes from twine, rope, fishing line, Styrofoam, plastic sponge, sheet plastic and hard plastic pieces. No efforts have been made yet to reduce the problem. 🐾



Special Offer to Attend Audubon Hog Island Camp

Otter Creek Audubon is partnering with Audubon's renowned Hog Island Camp to make available to an Addison County resident one \$500 scholarship to attend any one of eight 6-day birding and nature sessions this coming summer. To qualify for the scholarship registration must be completed by 28 February. Contact Gary Starr, OCAS' Education Committee chair, at 388-6552, for further information. The participant would need to provide the remaining registration fee of \$400-500. An additional \$25 discount is available to anyone signing up before February 15. Each session is geared to a particular interest group. For example, July 18-23 is entitled Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week. The Hog Island Camp website <http://hogisland.audubon> describes the programs and the dates if you click on 2013 Camp Sessions.

Hog Island Camp is located in Muscongus Bay, just off the coast from Bremen ME. It has been in operation since 1936 and regularly attracts nationally known naturalists, scientists and educators. Dr. Steven Kress, known for his work restoring puffins and other seabirds to islands of the Gulf of Maine, is the camp director. He was the stand-out guest speaker at OCAS' annual dinner in 2012.

Several OCAS board members attended a session last year and returned with glowing recommendations. OCAS would like a brief report from the recipient. Please pass this message to anyone who would appreciate the opportunity. 🐾

OCAS Calendar of Events February – May 2013

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15 TO MONDAY, FEB. 18	GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT: See article on page 1.
MONDAY, MARCH 25 THROUGH SUNDAY, APRIL 14	WINDOW FOR SALAMANDER ESCORT ALERTS. Please sign up for notification. See article this issue.
SUNDAY, MAY 12 7:30-10:30 AM	WARBLER WARM-UP. Ron Payne and Warren King will lead a search for newly arrived spring migrants. Hone your birding identification skills before leaf-out. Co-sponsored with 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.

2012 County Quest Results by Ron Payne

The second year of County Quest has just come to a close, the results are in, and unfortunately Addison County didn't do quite as well as we did last year. County Quest is a friendly competition between the counties of Vermont to see which county can find the highest number of bird species in a calendar year. The tally is kept on eBird, and, looking at the numbers there, we are forced to tip our hats to our neighbors to the north in Chittenden County who edged us out in the total species count, 242 species to 238. In the "par weighted" tally, a method of scoring that attempts to level the playing field between counties with different species potential, we came in 3rd behind Washington and Chittenden counties. Windsor County takes top spot for most checklists submitted with 4,937, edging us out by 340 submitted checklists.

Statewide Individual awards go to Jim Mead from Chittenden County for finding the most species with 252, and Addison County's Ian Worley for submitting the most checklists with 1556. Ian also takes the honor for finding the most species in Addison County with 222.

One of the main reasons we fell in the rankings this year was that we missed some species that should be reliably found in Addison County. Least Bittern and Bicknell's Thrush, for example, are species that take some effort to see, but are certainly here to be found by those who put in that effort. But we have a chance to get revenge this year, and we've already made a great start. Rarities such as Tufted Duck, Glaucous Gull, and a potential new state record, Common Pochard, have already been found in 2013, and with your help we hope to create a tally that puts us back on top.

From a larger perspective, Quest continues to meet its main goal, which is to inspire birders to submit their checklists to eBird. Though the total number of species reported in the state was lower this year, it wasn't for lack of trying. In 2012, Vermont birders submitted 28,346 checklists to eBird, 8,402 more than in 2011. So, clearly the good eBirding habits started by the Quest persist. 🐾

SIXTH ANNUAL CABIN FEVER LECTURE SERIES

Downstairs at Ilsley Library, 75 Main Street, Middlebury

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 7 PM

Michael Winslow: Owls of Vermont

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 7 PM

Susan Roney Drennan: Albatrosses and their Interaction with Longline Fisheries

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. Beginning birders are welcome. Come for all or part of the walk. For information call 388-1007 or 388-6019.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 8 – 10 AM

Leader: Ron Payne

SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 8 – 10 AM

Leader: Warren King

THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 8 – 10 AM

Leader: Ron Payne

SATURDAY, MAY 11, 8 – 10 AM

Leader: Gary and Kathy Starr

White-nose Fungus Persists on Cave Floors

It's been a bad few years for eastern North American bats. White-nose syndrome, caused by the fungus *Geomyces destructans*, was introduced here, perhaps from Europe where bats have evolved to tolerate it. It has reduced some populations of cave-hibernating bats by well over 90 percent. The little brown bat, not long ago Vermont's most abundant, is now an endangered species. Once jammed with bats all winter, cave roofs are virtually bare.



New research by a U.S. Geological Survey microbiologist has shown that the fungus that results in white-nose syndrome persists for months, possibly years, in the soil of caves that formerly hosted bats with white-nose, but no longer do. Caves that did not harbor white-nose bats had no fungus in the soil. Surviving bats attempting to recolonize such caves are thought to be at risk of getting white-nose syndrome from the persisting fungus. One strategy for dealing with the spread of the fungus, keeping people out of bat caves, has worked. The tread of a boot can carry fungus enough to wipe out a bat population. 🐾

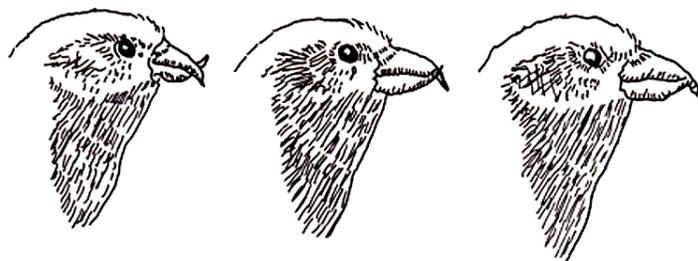
A Possible Winter Surprise

by Susan Roney Drennan

Those of us looking for winter birds may have already seen redpolls, siskins, finches, grosbeaks, Snow Buntings, Rough-legged Hawks, and Snowy Owls. With good luck we might come up with a nomadic, “irruptive” Red Crossbill before winter’s end.

Bird migration is predictable, seasonal and repeatable annually. However, some large raptors, various northern finches and some owls leave their breeding grounds only when food resources are particularly low. When these birds move well beyond their breeding grounds, this is called an irruption (or invasion). Irruptions are not predictable or seasonal but are almost always caused by low food resources in a species’ normal wintering area (e.g., lemmings for Snowy Owls) or a sudden superabundance of food in an unusual wintering area (e.g., pine cones for crossbills), not weather.

Crossbills are rare, sporadic in occurrence, striking in appearance, and singular in behavior. In North America, there are officially two crossbill species: the Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*), and White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera*). However, new research suggests that there may be as many as eight full species of Red Crossbill based on bill size and other characteristics. Small-billed crossbill populations feed on spruce cones; large-billed crossbills specialize on pines. Final answers on the taxonomy and distribution of Red Crossbill species and subspecies may take many more years of research.



Differing bill sizes and shapes of Red Crossbill subspecies
Illustration by Susan Roney Drennan

Crossbills are in the same family as grosbeaks, finches, sparrows and buntings, and have seed-cracking bills. The male Red Crossbill is reddish and the female olive-green. Both the males and females have bills with the tips of the mandibles crossed, used to pry open evergreen cones to extract the seeds. Crossed bill tips are inserted between cone scales, then pry them apart with a pressure in excess of 100 pounds per square inch, and, with the tongue, remove the seeds. Unlike all other birds, the pressure is used to open the bill, not to close it. Cone availability dictates crossbills’ annual cycle. Their nomadic movements over most of North America are driven by the variable nature of cone production. Hundreds of birds can be in an area for as little as a few months, followed by years of absence, for which reason crossbills are difficult to study.

If you are lucky enough to see them this year, watch them swing about the pine trees, parrot-fashion, with the help of their crossed bills. Listen for them calling out kimp kimp overhead in flight. At first glance, they would seem to be hampered in getting at the seeds in the cones—a superficial criticism when one actually sees the thoroughness and admirable dexterity of their work. 🐾

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