



Otter Creek Audubon Society

September
2013

Otter Tracks

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Priceless!



Building Bluebird houses at Dead Creek Wildlife Day

Twelfth Annual Dead Creek Wildlife Day Saturday, October 5, 2013



Dead Creek Wildlife Day brings you Vermont's best presenters of natural history information on a wide variety of topics. The whole family will enjoy, for example, the Wild Critters of Vermont, where this year you will see a porcupine, an opossum and a Screech Owl up close and learn how they make a living. Retrievers will demonstrate retrieving game and also search and rescue techniques. You can get wildlife photography tips from an expert. And under expert guidance you or your children can carve with soap as your medium or with wood if you're interested in decoys. You can take home the results of your efforts.

Want to learn the secrets of telling apart one warbler species in confusing fall plumage from another? These and many more secrets of iden-

tifying and handling birds will be revealed by the banders of the Dead Creek Bird Observatory at the bird-banding demonstration, 7 am to noon at the Route 17 Dead Creek bridge boat launch.

From 10 am on, multiple events take place through the day until 4 pm. The Addison School PTA provides a healthy lunch and snacks at reasonable prices.

The Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area headquarters, on Route 17 one mile west of Route 22A in Addison, is the site of most presentations. Continuous free shuttle bus service runs from the headquarters to the starting location of field events and back through the day. The enclosed schedule of events will help you plan your day so you don't miss events important to you, your family or friends. 🐾



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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Climate Change Impact on Common Species

A study published in May in *Nature Climate Change* looks at the projected impact in this century of climate change on the range of 50,000 common plants and animals around the globe. If climate change is allowed to continue unabated, two-thirds of the common plant species and half of the animal species will lose more than half of their world-wide range by 2080. The strongest impact will be on plants, amphibians and reptiles. Species loss will be greatest in Sub-Saharan Africa, Central America, Amazonia and Australia. Plants in particular will be hard hit in North Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Europe.

The authors note, however, "prompt and stringent action to reduce greenhouse gas emis-

sions globally would reduce those biodiversity losses by 60 percent if global emissions peak in 2016 or by 40 percent if emissions peak in 2030, showing that early action is very beneficial. This will both reduce the amount of climate change and also slow climate change down, making it easier for species and humans to adapt."

A study of this magnitude could only have been undertaken with massive computer support and from datasets shared online between scientists, natural history collections and volunteers through the Global Biodiversity Information Facility. The study emphasizes the consequences of inaction and of timely, appropriately scaled action on the future of the planet's biodiversity. 🐾

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Audubon Society

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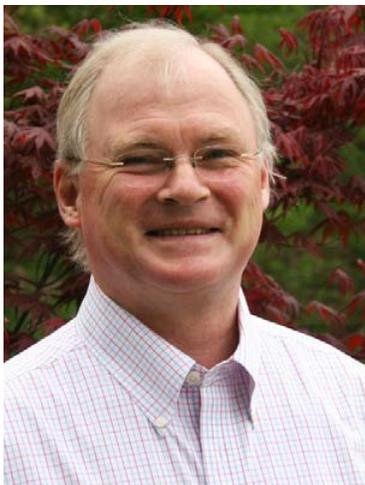
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**Peter Ross:
New Audubon
Vermont Director**

Lessons from the Past: Pesticides Kill



VIEWPOINT

Editorial by
Warren King

Fifty years ago Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, which alerted the world to the dangers of persistent organo-chlorine pesticides. DDT, then the most widely used pesticide, was banned ten years later, but not before nearly eliminating a number of raptors, including Peregrine Falcons, Bald Eagles and Ospreys. Because of their position at the top of their food webs, these birds received concentrated doses of pesticide, resulting in eggshells too weak to withstand the rigors of incubation. The manufacturers of DDT fought the ban tooth and nail, but conservation interests finally prevailed in court. Recovery took many years and is now mostly complete, as evidenced by the removal of Peregrines and Ospreys from the federal and state lists of endangered species.

However, a new class of pesticides, neonicotinoids, neonics for short, is now threatening to repeat the process. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has approved 595 neonics for use since the 1990s. Neonics are now the most widely used pesticides globally. They are persistent in the environment, get into water supplies readily, and they kill relatively indiscriminately in small concentrations. Birds and insect pollinators are among their unintended targets. Bees, in particular, are seriously affected.

According to a report on neonics recently released by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), "A single seed treated with imidacloprid can kill a bird the size of a Blue Jay." Imidacloprid has been in use for 20 years and is among the most widely used neonics. A recent study in the online peer-reviewed journal *PLOS One* concludes that the single most important cause of the decline of grassland birds is not loss of grassland habitat but rather insecticide poisoning.

The ABC report points out that EPA testing is behind the times, using results from testing done on one species of insect and two bird species unusually resistant to neonic treatment. ABC has asked the two largest manufacturers of wild birdseed, Scott's Miracle-Gro and Kaytee Products, to assure the public that their seed is neonic-free. The two corporations have not responded yet. ABC recommends avoiding the following lawn and garden products, all of which contain neonics: Ortho MAX Tree and Shrub Insect Control, Green Light Grub Control with Arena, Maxide Dual Action Insect Killer, Ortho Rose and Flower Insect Killer, and Zylam 20SG Systemic Turf Insecticide.

This sounds eerily like the DDT days all over again. When will we ever learn? 🐾



The Audubon Vermont board of directors is pleased to announce the appointment of Peter Ross of Jericho VT as the new executive director of Audubon Vermont. Peter comes to Audubon Vermont from a career in education, program administration and development, and fundraising. He is a long-time Vermonter.

He has worked for The Sharon Academy, South Burlington High School and Purnell School and most recently as vice-president for community relations and development of the Greater Burlington YMCA. He is an avid skier, cyclist, hiker, and kayaker, with an enduring interest in environmental issues. Peter brings with him a number of years' experience in fundraising for not-for-profit organizations.

The Otter Creek Audubon board of directors anticipates that Peter will provide a brief update of Audubon Vermont activities at the OCAS annual dinner on Thursday, November 14th, affording OCAS members an opportunity to meet him. 🐾

Woodpeckers and Emerald Ash Borers

Those big purple triangles we've all seen hanging from roadside trees remind us that emerald ash borers (EABs) are on Vermont's doorstep. The triangles, 482 of them in 2013, are covered with a sticky substance and impregnated with an ash borer pheromone. The hope is that they will alert us to ash borer infestations while they can be contained.

We have strong allies against the EAB in the form of Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers. Studies in one area have shown that these woodpeckers find and eat up to 90 percent of EABs. By managing your woods for woodpeckers you help protect against EAB infestations. Telltale woodpecker foraging evidence can lead to discovery of EABs long before ash dieback is evident. Look for sites on ash trees where woodpeckers have flaked off bark looking for S-shaped EAB larval galleries. A D-shaped hole at or near the flake site marks the exit hole of an EAB.

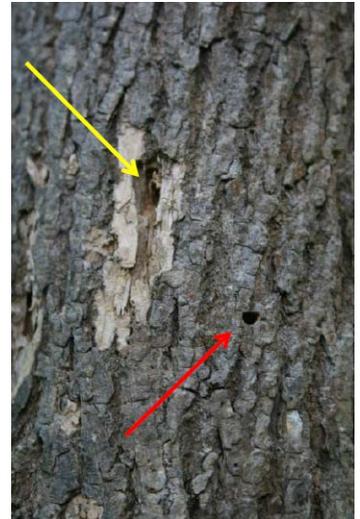


Woodpecker Holes

photos by Emilie Inoue



'D'-Shaped exit hole



Woodpecker Hole (upper arrow)
'D'-Shaped exit hole (lower arrow)

To manage your woods for woodpeckers you should:

- Retain at least four hardwood snags 12 inches or more in diameter per acre,
- Retain declining aspen, paper birch, red or sugar maples for future snags,
- Retain woodpecker cavity trees for feeding or nesting, and limit forest roads and

permanent forest openings to minimize fragmentation.

These recommendations come from Audubon Vermont's Friends of Forest Birds e-Newsletter (<http://vt.audubon.org/friends-forest-birds-e-newsletter>).

For updates on the status of invasive species in or near Vermont, including EAB, contact <http://www.vtinvasives.org/news>. 🐾

Cowbird Independence By Ron Payne

We humans often perceive Brown-headed Cowbirds as villains of the bird world. Their practice of brood parasitism, laying eggs in the nests of other species and not rearing their young themselves, is the source of their bad press. And it certainly can be a disturbing sight to see cowbird nestlings outcompeting their unrelated nest mates, frequently leading to their nest mates' deaths, and then quickly growing to a size much larger than their unwitting warbler, vireo or other adoptive parents. Should a host parent recognize and eject a cowbird egg, the host often finds its eggs destroyed in retaliation by the cowbird parent.

I don't think it is right to apply human morality to what has evolved to be a very clever and successful breeding strategy. If anything, moral questions regarding cowbirds would be better aimed at ourselves, since it is human-generated forest fragmentation that has exposed many more forest breeding birds to the attentions of the Brown-headed Cowbird. And there is at least one stage of their life cycle that I find admirable. There comes a moment when cowbird chicks gain independence from their surrogates and, without any teaching from adults of their own species, somehow find their own way to becoming adult cowbirds. It makes one wonder about the relative value of learned and instinctual behavior.



Juvenile Brown-headed Cowbird

photo by Ron Payne

I was pondering this a couple of summers ago while watching a juvenile cowbird that had spent the previous few days foraging on its own in my backyard, when along came another couple of juvenile cowbirds. These two were recent fledglings that were being tended by a pair of Eastern Phoebes, very common cowbird hosts. The phoebes were catching insects and feeding them to the begging cowbirds waiting on the grass. I was surprised to see the first cowbird I had been watching approach the phoebes and start begging itself. Amazingly, one of the phoebes fed its next catch to this cowbird, realized its mistake, and aggressively flew at it, chasing it away. In this case I had a hard time putting aside human morality, seeing what I witnessed as adding insult to injury to the poor phoebe pair. 🐾

European Buckthorn Impacts Amphibians, Birds, Mammals

In areas where European buckthorn is plentiful, this invasive plant is having a impact on amphibian and bird populations and on mammal distribution. Already facing a global population crisis for other reasons, amphibians are subject to poisoning from the chemical emodin, a poison found in all buckthorn parts. The poison reaches peak concentration in spring, at the time that amphibian embryos are developing in vernal pools in the mid-western U.S., where the research was done. Plant material that reaches vernal pools during leaf-out released enough emodin into those pools to kill embryos of three frog species and are one likely cause of low amphibian hatching rates in the Midwest and quite possibly wherever buckthorn grows around vernal pools.

In another study carnivores prey more easily on eggs or young of birds attempting to nest in European buckthorn than in native shrubs. The presence of buckthorn attracts coyotes, raccoons and opossums, who find hunting easier there. White-tailed deer avoid buckthorn not only because buckthorn attracts coyotes, but also because deer find buckthorn vegetation distasteful. 🐾



Eurasian buckthorn

photo by florafinder.com

Audubon Continues Partnership with VELCO in Shrubland Survey

By Margaret Fowle

For the second consecutive year, Audubon Vermont worked collaboratively with the Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) to conduct a survey of priority shrubland bird species along the VELCO right-of-way (ROW). Approximately 20 teams of 2-3 observers from Rutland County Audubon, Otter Creek Audubon and Green Mountain Audubon chapters participated in the survey. In addition, Audubon Vermont biologists Mark LaBarr and Margaret Fowle worked with UVM professor Allan Strong and graduate student Christine Peterson to further analyze specific habitat requirements of the target species.

Audubon observer teams scoured their assigned routes once during the survey period from late May to late June. Target species included Golden-winged Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Field Sparrow, and American Woodcock. Golden-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and American Woodcock are also priority species in National Audubon's Atlantic Flyway Initiative. In 2013, Brown-headed Cowbird was added to the target species in an effort to study any association of cowbirds with the ROW shrubland habitat. At least one of each target species was detected each year, with Eastern Towhee and Field Sparrow the most common species observed (see table). 🐾

Species	No. Observed 2012	No. Observed 2013*
Golden-winged Warbler**	8	11
Blue-winged Warbler	13	16
Eastern Towhee	66	75
Brown Thrasher	10	5
Prairie Warbler	19	24
Field Sparrow	65	69
American Woodcock	1	1
Brown-headed Cowbird		46
Total Individuals	182	247

* Preliminary results for 2013

** Hybrid winged warblers in 2012: 1 Brewster's Warbler; 2013: 3 Brewster's and 1 Golden-winged that was singing a Blue-winged song

Audubon Vermont will compare the bird locations to management practices used by VELCO and develop recommendations for enhancing the shrubland bird habitat within the ROW. This work will be supplemented by UVM's analysis of the territories used by the target bird species. In addition, Margaret Fowle has worked with several landowners along the ROW to discuss ways to enhance shrubland habitat in the surrounding areas.



Brewster's Warbler on the VELCO powerline corridor photo by Gary Starr

OCAS Calendar of Events September – December 2013

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8 11 AM – 2 PM **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, led by Ron Payne, Warren King and Bruce MacPherson. Call Warren at 388-4082 for more information or if in doubt about the weather.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5 9:30 AM – 4 PM **DEAD CREEK WILDLIFE DAY.** 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, take a beginners' bird walk, learn about Vermont's rattlesnakes, see a porcupine, an opossum and a screech owl close up, take morning or afternoon nature walks. Call 802-241-3700 for information. See article this issue.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14 5:30 – 8:45 PM **OCAS ANNUAL DINNER AND MEETING.** The speaker is Mary Holland, noted naturalist, educator and author of *Naturally Curious*. Reservations needed for dinner at 6. No fee for talk at 7:15. Dinner will be at the American Legion at 49 Wilson Rd. off Boardman St. behind G. Stone Motors south of Middlebury on Route 7. Call Sue Rasmussen at 897-5411 for reservations. OCAS members will receive a separate invitation by mail. See article in November *Otter Tracks*.

ADDISON COUNTY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS
(Look for article in November *Otter Tracks*)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14 Ferrisburgh Christmas Bird Count. Call Mike Winslow at 877-6586 for details.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14 Mt. Abe Christmas Bird Count. Call Randy or Cathy Durand at 453-4370 for details.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15 Middlebury Christmas Bird Count. Call Jim or Kris Andrews at 352-4734 for details.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28 Hinesburg Christmas Bird Count. Call Paul Wiczorek at 802/434-4216 for details.

MARSH, MEADOW AND GRASSLAND WILDLIFE WALKS

A monthly joint OCAS-MALT event. We invite community members to help 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 388-6829.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: Ron Payne

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

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: Ron Payne

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: Craig Zondag

Thank You!

continued from page 6



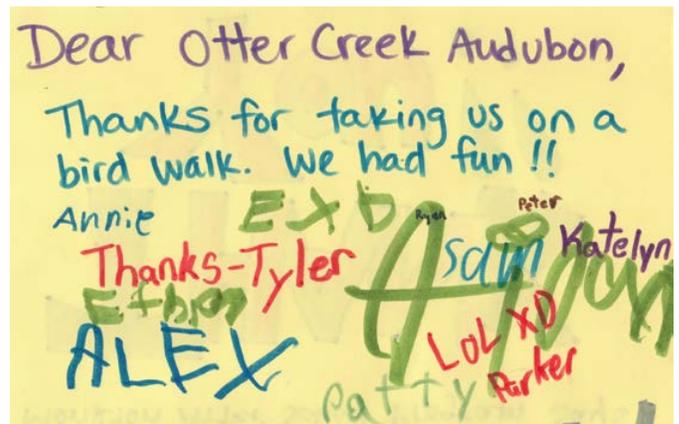
“Bird watching is awesome!” — Aiden

“Dear Carol, I want you to come back next year.” — Jenna

“To Carol, I loved bird watching with you.” — Owen

Monkton Afterschool Program

Students birded along a trail from the school to nearby Cedar Lake. The path led past fields rich with Bobolinks.



Thank You Notes? Priceless!

by Carol Ramsayer

Last April and May OCAS brought a variety of birding adventures into five Addison County schools. Ten OCAS members led 10 hikes and presented 8 hands-on programs. What a privilege it was to provide these enrichment experiences for our local students.

Our thanks go out to the teachers for making time in their classroom schedules to include us. And, speaking of thanks, here is a sampling of the letters and artwork we received from the children. Each one is a treasure!

Mary Johnson Children's Center

The pre-schoolers each made their own "binoculars" to use on bird walks to the "wobbly bridge" over Otter Creek.

- "I liked the blue jay you showed me! Thanks for coming." — Jason
- "I liked finding birds." — Grace
- "I liked the bird calls." — Willow
- "It was fun." — Logan

Shoreham Elementary School

Building on their already impressive knowledge of birds, Ms. Logan's first graders enjoyed four afternoons of programs and walks.

- "Dear Gary, thank you for letting us use a knife and carving birds." — Alex
- "Thank you, Gary, for teaching us how to carve birds. I liked when we painted. I really liked that." — Wyatt
- "...I loved carving birds. Carving is my favorite thing to do. Can you come back again next year?" — Mackenzie
- "Dear Craig, Thank you for letting us find silhouettes with the binoculars. I liked when we got to guess the silhouettes. You are a great bird teacher." — Cole



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