



Otter Tracks

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Silver Feather to Mike Winslow

Mary Holland Captivates OCAS Dinner Crowd

The Otter Creek Audubon board of directors gave its Silver Feather award to Michael Winslow at the 2013 annual dinner. The crowd of Otter Creek Audubon members and friends was captivated by an illustrated presentation accompanied by an extensive display of natural materials from Mary Holland, naturalist and writer, at the Middlebury American Legion on 14 November.

OCAS has awarded the Silver Feather annually since 1994 “In honor of notable devotion, dedication and untiring effort on behalf of the preservation and appreciation of the birds, other wildlife, and natural communities of Addison County.” Mike Winslow meets these criteria most admirably.

Mike joined the OCAS board in September 2000 and served as OCAS vice-president from 2003 to 2004 and as president from 2004 to 2008. He originated OCAS’ popular Cabin Fever winter lecture series in 2008 and organized it until his departure from the board in 2012. He also created and ran the OCAS School Education Grants Program until 2012. He led numerous field trips for OCAS and has served for several years as the compiler for the Ferrisburgh Christmas Bird Count. He is a keen and accomplished birdwatcher whose special talents, identifying birds by song at great distance and willingness to forego sleep, have combined to make him OCAS’ foremost owl expert.

He has been staff scientist for the Lake Champlain Committee since 2001. For a decade he has written a monthly column for the Lake Champlain Committee called *Lake Look*, which Mike expanded into the book *Lake Champlain: A Natural History*. The book was co-published by the Lake Champlain Committee in 2008 and received an Independent Publisher Book



Mike Winslow receives the Silver Feather photo by Gary Starr

Award silver medal.

Mike has an undergraduate degree from St. Lawrence University, taught at the Keewaydin Environmental Education Center in Salisbury for two years and in Ecuador for two years. He received an MS degree in botany from the University of Vermont. He and his wife, Kira reside in Vergennes with their daughter, Cedar.

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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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Otter Creek Audubon Society

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2012-2013

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OCAS Annual Dinner

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When not involved in OCAS activities, Mike coaches wrestling, plays chess avidly, and volunteers for a variety of environmental causes.

The evening's keynote speaker was Mary Holland, highly regarded naturalist and author of *Naturally Curious: Photographic Field Guide and Month-by-Month Journey through the Fields, Woods and Marshes of New England*. *Naturally Curious* won the 2011 National Outdoor Book Award for best nature guidebook.

Holland has authored two children's books and numerous magazine articles and writes a monthly nature column.

Mary's presentation, entitled *Naturally Curious*, led us on a verbal and pictorial treasure hunt starting with the earliest evidences of spring in March and progressing chronologically through the New England year. The striking photographs, all taken by the author, captured the essence of each point she made. The audience was spellbound. 🐾

The Last IPCC Assessment Report

Editorial by
Warren King



VIEWPOINT

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established in 1988 under United Nations auspices by the World Meteorology Organization and the United Nations Environmental Program and was commissioned by 195 countries of the U.N. IPCC produced its first assessment report in 1990. Subsequent assessment reports have appeared about every six years. The reports have been in four parts. Part 1 covers the science, part 2 deals with impacts, adaptation and vulnerability, part 3 with mitigation, and the last is a synthesis report.

Drafts of IPCC 5, still partly in preparation, contain 2000 pages, compiled by 258 lead authors and hundreds of contributing authors and editors, who have waded through 52,000 written comments. It is four times the size of IPCC 1. Part 1 of IPCC 5 was released in September 2013.

IPCC 2 raised eyebrows by stating "the balance of evidence suggests a discernable human influence on global climate". This statement was strengthened in IPCC 3 to "is likely" (greater than 66 percent), to IPCC 4 "very likely" (greater than 90 percent), to IPCC 5's "extremely likely" (greater than 95 percent) that human influence caused more than half of the surface temperature increase between 1850 and 2010.

Because of contributions by hundreds of assessment contributors and buy-in by the world's governments, the final product is conservative. New theories or cutting edge results are often passed over until corroborative evidence surfaces and a large number of scientists reach agreement. Thus, a frequent criticism of the IPCC process is that it is lowest common denominator science, well behind the times. Cases in point: in IPCC 5 a major study quantifying the amount of carbon release by permafrost thawing was omitted, as was research indicating that ocean acidification will amplify global warming by just less than one degree F.

However, significant changes do emerge. In IPCC 5 methane now traps 34 times the heat of CO₂, whereas it trapped only 25 times the heat of CO₂ previously. IPCC is now on record agreeing with NASA scientist James Hanson that to keep below a two degree C (3.6° F) global temperature rise combustion must be kept below one trillion tons of carbon equivalents emitted, more than half of which have already been emitted. Three trillion tons remain in the ground as fossil fuels. Estimates of sea level rise have shifted upward from IPCC 4 by 50 percent.

In spite of IPCC's blunt, dire warnings, emissions of greenhouse gases have increased 60 percent since IPCC 1. Meanwhile, September 2013 tied with September 2005 for the hottest September globally. Global population demand for food will increase fourteen percent per decade, but the global food supply will decrease two percent per decade as a consequence of climate change. And then came Typhoon Haiyan, apparently the world's strongest typhoon, which climate change helped pump up.

IPCC 5 will be the last because it has become too cumbersome. IPCC will continue its work, but future reports will deal with specific aspects of climate change as the need arises and as sufficient information surfaces. We can't forget that the recipients of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize were Al Gore and the IPCC. Although intentionally dry, non-speculative and subject to politicization by climate change skeptics, it is the best we have. 🐾

California Gets the Lead Out

California Governor Jerry Brown signed a bill on October 11 that will require the use of non-lead ammunition for all purposes by 2019. Ammunition is the largest unregulated source of environmental lead in California, as it is in Vermont and across the nation. Lead poses a threat to the survival of California Condors and Golden Eagles in California and Common Loons in Vermont.

Since 1991, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has required the use of non-lead shot in waterfowl hunting. Suitable affordable alternatives are commercially available for all lead ammunition. Lead is a risk to health in wildlife and humans alike. 🐾

Salamander Insurance

In July OCAS completed work on a conservation easement protecting the upland forest area where most of the frogs and salamanders using a road crossing in Salisbury overwinter. OCAS will hold the easement in perpetuity and will monitor the 5.5-acre wooded parcel annually to ensure that the forested landscape on which the amphibians depend remains intact and undeveloped.

OCAS is grateful to the current property owners who are pleased to have teamed with us to provide assurance that the uphill part of this now well-documented crossing site is secure for generations of amphibians and amphibian-enthusiasts. We are also grateful to Salisbury herpetologist Jim Andrews and the former property owners for initiating the conservation easement.

Since 2006 Otter Creek Audubon OCAS

has provided an amphibian escort service at Morgan Road in Salisbury. We have fielded teams of enthusiasts, sometimes 30-strong, willing to don raingear on relatively warm wet evenings in March and early April to move amphibians. On a good night they move hundreds of individuals of four salamander species and three frog species safely across the road from overwintering sites in upland forest to breeding or summering sites in or near vernal pools in the Salisbury Swamp. The crossing site affords those with an interest in nature the opportunity to view close up an underappreciated, seldom observed, yet sometimes dramatic wildlife migration. We have partnered with Jim Andrews and the Salisbury Conservation Commission to provide a safe, controlled and intriguing experience for people of any age. 🐾

Protecting Shorelines

By Mike Winslow, Staff Scientist
Lake Champlain Committee

Although increasingly rare, naturally vegetated shorelines protect water quality and ecological health. The deep roots of trees and shrubs provide bank stability.

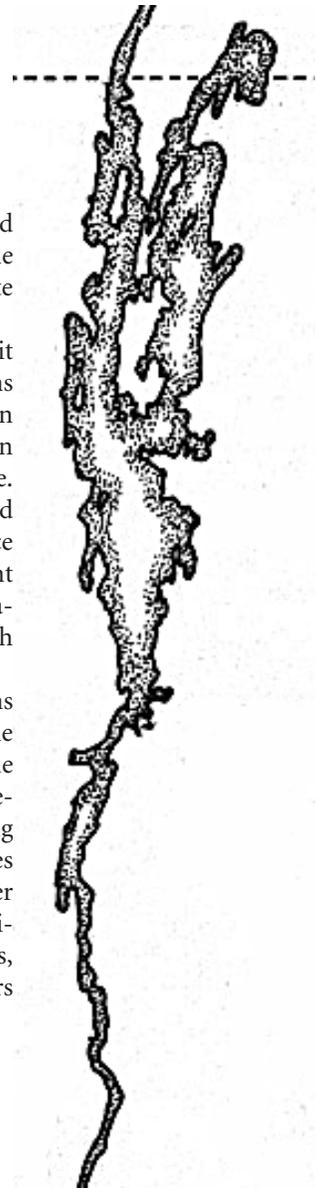
During the Lake Champlain floods of 2011, vegetated shorelines resisted erosion better than grassy shores or even areas with retaining walls. Overhanging branches shade the water. That shade, plus wood that falls into the lake from the shoreline, provides better habitat for fish. Autumn leaves create habitat for insects upon which the fish feed. Vegetated shorelines help treat stormwater pollution. A 100-foot vegetated buffer absorbs 73 percent of stormwater runoff; a bare grass lawn absorbs only 18 percent. Cleared shorelines contribute 18 times more sediment, five times more runoff, and seven times more phosphorus to the lake than those where the shoreline is wooded. Vegetated shorelines also promote healthier ecological communities. Development decreases macro-invertebrate diversity in lakes, leading to less and fewer types of food for fish.

Naturally vegetated shorelines offer economic benefits both for homeowners and the community. One study found that for every one-meter increase in water clarity a property's value increased by \$200 per foot of frontage. Clean lakes bring not only added tax revenue from higher property values, but also tourist dollars.

A study from the University of Vermont found that parks on lakes generated nearly three times the visitor expenditure revenue of non-lake based state parks.

Vermont lacks any statewide regulations to limit shoreline clearing, and only 20 percent of towns have such standards. As a result, shoreline condition for Vermont lakes is worse than other northeastern states, and even worse than the national average. Only 17 percent of Vermont lakeshores are in good condition as measured by the extent of disturbance and lawns along the shore, compared to 42 percent regionally and 35 percent nationally. The legislature has taken strides to address this problem with House Bill 526.

Government emphasis on voluntary programs and educational materials has failed. While some individual landowners have invested in shoreline protection, the overall pace and severity of shoreline clearing have accelerated. Unchecked clearing of shorelines shows off massive properties or gives private citizens a view, but sacrifices public water resources. It is time for Vermont and its municipalities to enact better regulations to protect shorelines, thereby protecting the investments of landowners and the interests of the community. 🐾

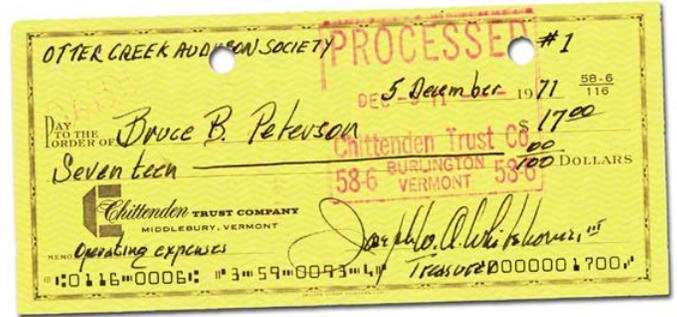


Otter Creek Audubon Archives

By Warren King

Otter Creek Audubon Society is happy to announce that the Henry Sheldon Museum in Middlebury has generously agreed to hold OCAS' archives in safekeeping. Once they are accessioned and organized according to the museum's requirements, they will be accessible to anyone for the asking.

As is the case with many volunteer organizations, much documentation of the early days of Otter Creek Audubon has been lost. The exception for OCAS is the early financial records kept impeccably for 12 years by original treasurer Col. Joseph Whitehorne III and then for 18 years by his successor, John Chamberlain. Voucher #1, dated 28 November 1971, was for a deposit of \$150 from National Audubon Society, which represented OCAS' share of dues received by National Audubon at that time. Cheque #1 (using Col. Whitehorne's spelling) was for \$17 to reimburse first OCAS president, Bruce Peterson, for expenses.



First OCAS check, issued in December 1971

The archival collection of papers includes articles of incorporation as a not-for profit organization, bylaws, lists of OCAS officers and board members, agendas and minutes of board meetings, strategic plans, miscellaneous significant correspondence, treasurer's reports, easement documents, back issues of *Otter Tracks* and other papers of note. OCAS failed to recognize our 40th anniversary two years ago, but we will make up for this oversight with a 50th anniversary celebration in 2021. 🐾

Seventh Annual Cabin Fever Lecture Series

Otter Creek Audubon is pleased to announce our seventh annual Cabin Fever Lecture Series for January, February and March 2014. All events take place downstairs at Ilsley Library in Middlebury at 7 PM on the second Thursday of the month.

In January, Gary Starr, proprietor of Starr Decoys and long-time OCAS board member, will take us on a photographic journey to what has been called the eighth continent, Madagascar, which he visited in 2013 with his wife Kathy.



Madagascar tenrec

ing on. Madagascar's erosive red earth bleeds continuously into the surrounding Indian Ocean. Gary will share the unforgettable sights of Madagascar with us on Thursday, January 9 at 7 PM.

In February we'll hear from Scott Darling, wildlife biologist with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and the point person for Vermont's bats. The advent of white-nose syndrome has thrown the bat landscape topsy-turvy. What were



Scott Darling netting a bat photo courtesy of Scott Darling, Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department

once our most common bat species are now the rarest; their precipitous decline led to the listing of three bats species as endangered in Vermont. One of them, the northern long-eared bat, was recently proposed for federal listing. Scott will share his experiences in working with the many scientists now engaged in this struggle to save bats and will offer his insights into prospects for their recovery. Scott's presentation on bats is on Thursday, February



Allan Strong with a Bobolink photo courtesy of Allan Strong, UVM Rubenstein School

13 at 7 PM.

In March Dr. Allan Strong, associate dean of the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources of the University

of Vermont, will provide an illustrated overview of The Bobolink Project. Faced with a rapidly and persistently declining Bobolink population and increasingly intensive management of Vermont's grasslands, Allan Strong helped put together a novel strategy for raising community funds to support healthy Bobolink habitat in Vermont. In this project, which will continue in 2014, the money raised from donations goes directly to individual farmers to reimburse them for the cost of postponing mowing. The delay allows Bobolinks to raise a nest of youngsters. Allan's presentation takes place on Thursday, 13 March at 7 PM.



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.

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

SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: Barry King

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: Ron Payne

SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 8 – 10 AM
Leader: To be announced

2013 Status of Vermont's Rare Birds

The **Common Loon** was removed from the Vermont Endangered Species List in 2005, but continues at risk due to human interference, predation, flooding, lead poisoning and loon territorial disputes. Ninety-one pairs produced 97 chicks in 2013. Heavy rains in May and June evidently flooded six nests, but 71 young fledged. Bald Eagles took two young. Several other fledglings may have succumbed to aggressive interactions with loon intruders. Lake Dunmore's pair suffered nest predation.

The **Osprey** was not monitored carefully due to state financial constraints. The population was removed from the Vermont Endangered Species List in 2005 and apparently remains in good shape with nests in excess of 100.

Thirty-three pairs of **Peregrine Falcons** nested and at least 50 young fledged. New nest sites were found in Townshend and Manchester, but five normally occupied sites, among them Salisbury's Rattlesnake Point and Bristol's Elephant Mountain, did not have pairs. Audubon Vermont's Peregrine biologist Margaret Fowle said, "Record rainfall in May and June likely contributed to the poor success rate in 2013."

Two hundred seventy pairs of **Common Terns** bred on Audubon Vermont's Popasquash and Rock islands, but only about 50 chicks fledged. Productivity of 0.2 fledglings per pair was well below the 0.6 chicks per pair over a five-year period required by the recovery plan for downlisting.

Black Tern breeding is now confined to Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, where 129 pairs bred this year, compared to 137 pairs in 2012.

The **Bald Eagle** is on its way to downlisting. Twenty-six nests in the Vermont recovery plan area, which includes both shores of the Connecticut River and Lake Champlain, fledged 37 young,

OCAS Calendar of Events December 2013 – March 2014

ADDISON COUNTY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

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 Wieczorek at 802/434-4216 for details.

SEVENTH ANNUAL CABIN FEVER LECTURE SERIES

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

THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 7 PM
Gary Starr: Madagascar: The Eighth Continent

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 7 PM
Scott Darling: Bats on the Brink

THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 7 PM
Allan Strong: The Bobolink Project

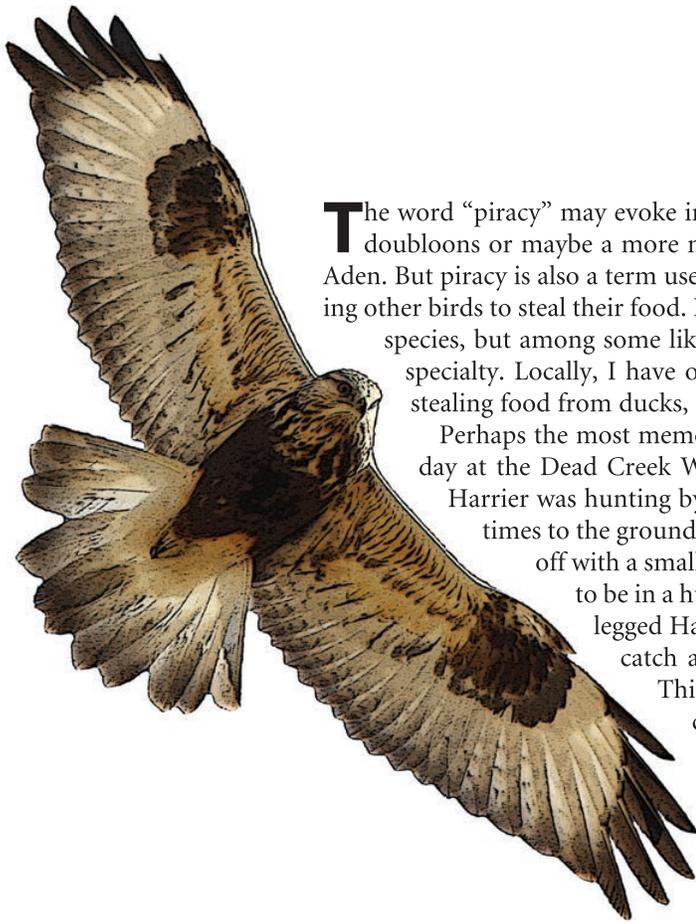
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14 **GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT**
TO See gbbc@cornell.edu
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17 Watch for article in February
Otter Tracks.

compared to 35 in 2012. The downlisting threshold is 19 nests with one fledgling per nest for five years. This was the third year above the threshold. Addison County nests included one on Otter Creek in Salisbury and one in New Haven.

Spruce Grouse are holding their own in the Nulhegan Basin. Reproduction was confirmed in the Victory Bog area, where birds from Quebec and Maine were released several years ago. Greater acreage of black spruce-balsam fir habitat is growing toward middle-age, which the birds prefer.

Upland Sandpipers were represented by a lone pair at Morse's Line, east of Highgate.

Grasshopper Sparrows continue to decline. The eleven seen at the Franklin County Airport, five reported from Camp Johnson, and several isolated individuals comprise the extent of Vermont observations in 2013. 🐦



Gar! Pirates!

By Ron Payne

The word “piracy” may evoke images of eye patch-wearing buccaneers raiding the Spanish fleet for doubloons or maybe a more modern image of armed raiders attacking cargo ships in the Gulf of Aden. But piracy is also a term used to describe one of the more shady avian feeding strategies, harassing other birds to steal their food. Kleptoparasitism is the technical term, and it isn’t practiced by many species, but among some like sea-going frigatebirds, jaegers, and skuas, the tactic has become a specialty. Locally, I have observed this behavior on several occasions. Examples include gulls stealing food from ducks, and in turn, eagles stealing food from gulls.

Perhaps the most memorable example of piracy I’ve witnessed came on a cold early winter day at the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Goose Viewing Area in Addison. A Northern Harrier was hunting by floating over the snow-dusted fields, veering and dropping several times to the ground only to come up with empty talons. Eventually it met success, lifting off with a small ball of fur, perhaps a meadow vole. After making its catch it seemed to be in a hurry to get away with its meal. I soon saw why. A dark morph Rough-legged Hawk perched on a tree a half-mile away had seen the harrier make its catch and was now barreling across the fields toward the smaller raptor.

This chase played out over the next minute or so. The hawk steadily closed the distance until it reached the harrier and made one quick swoop, at which point the harrier decided it wasn’t worth the fight and dropped its hard-earned meal. The hawk retrieved and carried off its prize. Its act of piracy had given it not quite a free meal, but certainly an easier one. 🐾

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