



Otter Tracks

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Silver Feather Goes to King

by Susan Roney Drennan

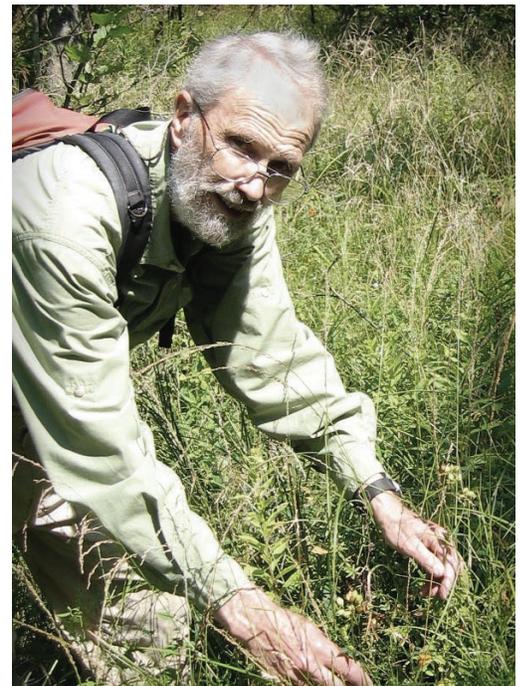
Since 1995, Otter Creek Audubon has bestowed The Silver Feather Award to an Addison County resident, “in honor of notable devotion, dedication, and untiring effort on behalf of the preservation and appreciation of the birds, other wildlife, and natural communities of Addison County.”

The Silver Feather recipient for 2016 is Ripton resident Warren King, in gratitude and recognition of his many years protecting wilderness and wildlife, and for bringing a heightened awareness of nature to countless Vermonters.

Warren works effectively and persuasively with others. In this manner, he has cast a profound influence locally. Working closely with the Middlebury Area Land Trust and OCAS, he helped establish the popular Otter View Park in Middlebury. He also worked behind the scenes with the Lewis Creek Association to raise funds to construct wildlife underpasses at a busy amphibian crossing on the Monkton-Vergennes Road. He worked with Jim Andrews and the OCAS Board to create a conservation easement on the upland overwintering site of an important amphibian crossing in Salisbury. Fifteen years ago Warren, David Sausville of Vermont Fish and Wildlife, and Rick Hedding of Forests and Parks created the first Dead Creek Wildlife Day, an event that attracts hundreds of participants annually and is recognized by the VT Chamber of Commerce as one of the state’s top ten autumn events.

Warren has been on the Ripton Planning Commission since 1993, and its chair since 2002. He created the Ripton Conservation Commission in 1994 and served as chair until this past summer.

Warren, along his wife, Barry, still puts time in the field on several citizen science projects, leading bird and nature walks; controlling invasive exotic plants; and coordinating Ripton’s Green-Up Day. As a Plant Conservation Volunteer for the New England Wildflower Society since 2005 he has moni-



Warren King

Photo by Mark Nelson

tored rare plants in Addison County. He has mapped the distribution of the beautiful purplish-blue perennial, Jacob’s ladder throughout the wooded seeps of Ripton and Lincoln, from which he created an overlay map to protect the plant’s narrow habitat band.

Warren’s interest in conservation of rare species began in the 1960s when he worked for the Smithsonian institution, first on the Pacific Seabird Project and eventually chairing the U.S. chapter of the International Council for Bird Preservation. When he moved to Vermont in the ‘80’s, he transmitted his love of birds and conservation to hundreds of school children and staff at the Keewaydin Environmental Education Center. His involvement quickly and naturally spread to the

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OCAS Mission:

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

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Natural Rights

Editorial by
Warren King



VIEWPOINT

In 2008, 65 percent of Ecuadorian voters approved a new constitution that included two remarkable sentences: "Natural communities and ecosystems possess the inalienable right to exist, flourish and evolve within Ecuador. Those rights shall be self-executing, and it shall be the duty and right of all Ecuadorian governments, communities and individuals to enforce those rights." With this new language, the customary requirement that a lawsuit show financial injury to an individual changes to a requirement that it show ecological injury to Ecuador's ecosystems. In effect, natural ecosystems gained personhood in Ecuador just as corporations gained personhood in the US through the "Citizens United" decision. In Ecuador, anyone may bring suit to correct ecological wrongs; in fact it is everyone's obligation to do so.

At about the same time as the constitution passed, the Ecuadorian government became embroiled in a massive legal battle over \$9.5 billion in damages from oil development by Texaco. Texaco was acquired by Chevron and the case continues in the courts in the U.S., Ecuador and elsewhere around the world. Chevron has spent over \$2 billion on the case denying its culpability and attempting to blame everyone else involved in the case. Those two sentences in the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution have had no appreciable effect on the case.

In July 2016 the New Zealand government released formal ownership of 821 square miles of Te Urewera National Park, and the park became a legal entity "with all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person." The implication is similar to those two sentences in Ecuador's constitution. Lawsuits may be brought on behalf of the park land, not on behalf of individuals suffering financial damages on that land. Hunting permits and other legal matters will now be handled by a board comprised of government and Maori representatives.

Similarly, this "personhood" expansion has been applied to the Whanganui River, New Zealand's third largest, which has been noted by the local Maori tribe as "an indivisible and living whole, comprising the river and all tributaries from the mountains to the sea." On 30 August an agreement between the Maori and the New Zealand government requires that the river basin "will be recognized as a person when it comes to the law."

In the U.S. personhood is a concept that is effective for the benefit of corporations but not yet for the benefit of the natural world. These cases and hopefully others that follow will test the willingness of people and governments to set aside some personal rights and concerns about personal financial injury for the benefit of a healthy natural world, on which we all depend. 🐾

Migratory Bird Treaty Centennial

A milestone birthday took place in August with little fanfare. August 16th was the centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty, a convention between Great Britain on behalf of Canada, then part of the British Empire, and the U.S. to protect migratory birds, live or dead, and their parts, including feathers, nests and eggs. It came into existence in response to the unprecedented slaughter of wild birds in the U.S. for personal use, the commercial market, and for the millinery trade.

The treaty remains in effect and currently covers about 800 species. Exceptions to the treaty are permitted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for game bird hunting, scientific, education-

al and depredation control purposes, and for Native American traditional uses. The treaty was enacted under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. It became the model for similar treaties between the U.S. and Mexico, Japan and the Soviet Union, now Russia.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, its predecessor, the Weeks-McLean Act of 1913, and the Lacey Act of 1900 were the first laws in the U.S. protecting wildlife. The Lacey Act prohibits trade in fish, wildlife and plants that were taken illegally, and regulates the introduction of non-native animals, including birds. 🐾





Displaying a model of a beaver lodge

photo by Carol Ramsayer

Hog Island Audubon Camp

Hog Island Audubon Camp is a renowned summer camp off the coast of Maine, run by National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. *Each summer they offer several camp sessions for adults and teens, each lasting about 6 days.* As in other years, the OCAS board is offering one \$600 scholarship to an Addison County educator interested in attending the 2017 summer session entitled “Sharing Nature: an Educator’s Week”

(July 16-21, 2017). Total cost for this program is \$1095. The participant would be responsible for the remaining \$495, although additional scholarships may be available from National Audubon. If interested in applying, please send an email to Otter Creek Audubon, ocasvt@gmail.com. Applications will be available in early December. (See Sara Lesperance’s article below for one educator’s perspective of her Hog Island experience.) 🐾

Hog Island Educators’ Week

By Sara Lesperance

5th-6th grade teacher, Ripton Elementary School

Hog Island is a magical place. Plain and simple. Its picturesque setting captivates the intellect, while melting away any worries of the mind. It seems as though the staff threw overboard any stresses or concerns that campers might have had. I had no idea what to expect, but I knew from the ferry ride over that this learning opportunity was for me.

It is difficult to summarize my notes from the week; every workshop, field trip, exploration, and useful resource title helped strengthen the work I do with children in so many ways. One of the most valuable pieces for me was the engaging conversations I had with the instructors and staff. Their depth of knowledge was proficient with distinction. Throughout all of the workshops and activities provided, instructors were enthusiastic and provided engaging approaches to connecting kids to the sciences of the outdoors.

I was not expecting the workshops to highlight so many disciplines; it was won-

derful to have the opportunity to sing, journal, take photos, and even act! This helped remind me of the different ways students learn, but, more importantly, it helped remind me of the value of having fun while learning.

The weather gods were on our side for the whole week, which certainly makes Maine even more breathtaking. The boat ride out to the restored Atlantic Puffin and Tern colony on Eastern Egg Rock was indeed a highlight for all. Intertidal explorations and hiking through Hog Island’s unspoiled spruce-fir forest kept the active me more than happy. For any teachers wanting a valuable learning experience, I strongly suggest the Educator’s Week on Hog Island.

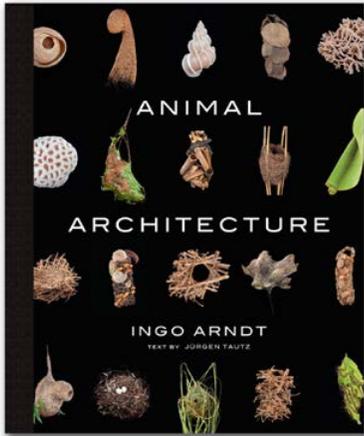
I want to thank Otter Creek Audubon and the National Audubon Society for making the scholarship opportunities available for me to be able to attend this amazing educator’s week. 🐾

Calling all Addison County Educators!

By Carol Ramsayer

Otter Creek Audubon is pleased to announce that Environmental Education Grants will again be available to Addison County educators. Applications for the 2016-2017 school year can be found on our website in late-November, with a submission deadline in mid-January. In addition, school principals will be asked to distribute digital applications to their teachers. We encourage teachers interested in designing nature-based experiences for their students to apply. Spread the word!

Here’s an example of a 2016 grant that was unique for its collaboration between two schools. Students from the entire Leicester Central School were mentored by high school students in the Moosalamoo Center of Otter Valley Union High School to learn about the natural and human history of Hawk Hill. For a month and a half, the older students shared their knowledge of beaver pond diversity, water quality, and the local fauna and flora. The life of fur traders that had previously inhabited the Hawk Hill environs was taught through re-enactments. In May, parents and OCAS members were invited to a celebration to experience all that the students had learned. There was haiku along the trails, a fur traders’ encampment with real campfire-cooked food, displays of pond life and, to top off the celebration, a beaver-themed songfest. OCAS members were thoroughly impressed with the children’s knowledge and enthusiasm, as well as the friendly collaboration between the two age groups. Also unique is that both Rutland County Audubon and Otter Creek Audubon shared in the funding of this exciting endeavor. 🐾



Book Review

Animal Architecture

by Ingo Arndt and Jurgen Tautz

Abrams, 2014 . 160 pgs

Review by George Bellerose

If you're like I am, the latest coffee-table book of nature's wonders is soon buried beneath its

successors. *Animal Architecture* by the German nature photographer Ingo Arndt is and will remain at the top of my pile.

Arndt has captured, in stunning studio close-ups and field photographs, engineering marvels in four fields: Birds, The Purpose Determines the Structure; Articulates, Creators of Their Own World; Mammals, Landscape Architects; and Corals, Bivalves, Snails, Calcified Master Builders.

Text by Jurgen Tautz, a German behavioral scientist, socio-biologist and bee expert, eruditely explains how species around the world shape and are shaped by their environment.

Consider the Stonehenge-like, 30-foot towers of the Australian compass termite. The towers are flat-sided, arranged in a north-south orientation. The warming morning sun strikes the flat side; the hot mid-day sun strikes the tower's narrow, top ridge. Combined with a chimney-like ventilation system, the tower maintains a constant internal temperature in 100-degree heat.

For bird watchers, Arndt's photographs of the intricate construction of nests and Tautz's behavioral explanations of the whys of nest building will be one of the book's highlights.

Take the bowerbirds of Australia and New Guinea. Female bowl-shaped nests are strictly functional. There they hatch and rear their young with no male support. Male nests are "pieces of art" and "a seduction palace" with the inside of the bower-shaped walls decorated with colored objects: feathers, berries, blossoms, bottle caps, glass shards.

With this courtship backdrop, the male sings and dances, ideally irresistibly. For me, this book was a journey through the irresistible beauty and mysteries of the natural world. 🐾



Status of Rare Birds of Vermont Annual Update - 2016

Common Loon set new records: 93 pairs attempted nesting, of which 65 pairs successfully fledging 80 chicks. Intraspecific competition for territories is becoming an issue on some Vermont lakes. Lake Dunmore's pairs failed, but pairs on Silver Lake and Goshen Reservoir were both successful.

Osprey The Vermont population continues to grow. Look for signs of territorial competition with Bald Eagles in coming years.

Peregrine Falcon At least 51 territories were occupied, a record, and at least 81 young fledged, also a record.

Common Tern About 220 pairs attempted breeding, 139 nests on Rock Island, 89 nests on Popasquash, and 6 on Grammas Island. Predation by Great Horned Owls and Black-crowned Night Heron occurred early in the

season. Evidence suggests that daytime Peregrine predation may have caused massive abandonment on Rock and Popasquash prior to 16 June. A wire grid kept Double-crested Cormorants away, but Ring-billed Gulls were plentiful and required some control. Eleven chicks fledged, all from Grammas Island.

Black Terns decreased from over 100 pairs in previous years; 64 pairs nested on Missisquoi Refuge, and 22 pairs nested on adjacent properties. Low water and eagle harassment may have contributed to the decline.

Bald Eagles continued their upward numbers. One estimate yielded a possible total of 350-370 eagles in Vermont. Look for a downlisting of this species from endangered to threatened before long.

Spruce Grouse The Northeast Kingdom's Nulhegan Basin and Victory Basin, the only places in Vermont known to have this species, were monitored last in 2015. The next survey is due in 2018.

Common Nighthawk About 8,000 were reported heading south during migration. No news on the breeding population.

Grasshopper Sparrow Four birds were found at Camp Johnson, down from a high of 10, also 3 at Springfield Airport., Franklin County had as many as 17 birds.

Whippoorwill Fieldwork has revealed this species to be somewhat more widespread than previously assumed in the southern Connecticut River valley and the Brandon and Panton areas. 🐾

Left to Right – Common Loon (Nat. Park Service), **Black Tern** (Fish & Wildlife Ser.), **Bald Eagle** (Murray Foubister), **Common Nighthawk** (Andy Reago & Chrissy McClarren), **Grasshopper Sparrow** (Dominic Sheronoy)



OCAS Calendar of Events November 2016 – January 2017

ADDISON COUNTY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

- 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, JANUARY 7** **HINESBURG CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT:** Call Paul Wiczorek at 802/434-4216 for details.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1 **FIRST DAY BIRD HIKE**
9 AM New Year's Day birding trips are a tradition held by many in the bird watching world as they begin to fill their annual bird lists. This year we invite you to join us as we combine that tradition with the fairly new tradition of First Day Hikes held at State Parks across the country. Meet us at Button Bay State Park in Ferrisburgh at 9 AM on January 1 to walk the trails in search of overwintering birds.

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 388-6019.

- SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 8–10 AM**
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 8–10 AM
SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 8–10 AM
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 8–10 AM

NINTH ANNUAL CABIN FEVER LECTURE SERIES

- (Second Thursdays, January-March)
 Downstairs at Ilsley Library, 75 Main Street, Middlebury
- THURS, JANUARY 12, 7 PM.** Chris Bernier, Vermont Fish and Wildlife: *Canada Lynx: A Vermont resident?*
- THURS, FEBRUARY 9, 7 PM.** Hank Kaestner: *The Birds of Taiwan*

Silver Feather Goes to King

continued from page 1

Nature Conservancy on whose board he served for 10 years, 2 as chair, and to Audubon. Warren served on the Audubon Vermont Board from its inception in 2000 to 2014. He was president of its precursor, Vermont Audubon Council, from 1997 to 1999 and received the National Audubon Charles H. Callison Award in 2005. Warren has been an OCAS Board member since 1991, an officer from 1996 to the present, and *Otter Tracks* Editor since 1996. He has kept *Otter Tracks* bold, fresh, contemporary, and compelling. The power of his narrative usually carries the day. His passion is contagious, and we are, one and all, grateful to be heirs to his legacy. 🐾



Prairie Warbler in Vermont
photo by Tyler Pockette

2016 VT Photo Big Year by Tyler Pockette

When I was 12 years old, I received a scholarship from the Otter Creek Audubon Society to attend an Audubon camp that my family wasn't able to afford. I had been enamored with nature, especially birds, since I was 5 so this opportunity opened the door for me to pursue a career in conservation that I didn't know existed. Now, 15 years later, with a degree and several years of work in wildlife biology, I find myself wanting to return that opportunity that was given to me.

Early this year, I decided to use my passion for birds as a way to raise funds to pay for the same scholarship that was awarded to me. I have since been on a yearlong quest to photograph as many species of birds in the state of Vermont as I possibly can, while accepting donations either in the form of a pledged amount per species to be paid at the end of the year, or an up-front amount chosen by the donor. My goal was to photograph 240 species while raising \$500 to repay the cost of the scholarship that was given to me. I hope you will follow along as I track down new bird species over the next 2 months. Find my Flickr photo page by googling "2016 VT photo big year" and catch up on all the bird species I've tracked down this year, or even feel free to donate to the cause! Send me an email at tylerpockette4@gmail.com if you're interested in contributing. Thanks! 🐾

Solitary Sandpipers Live up to their Name

By Ron Payne

This past May during Birdathon, my partners and I saw a sandpiper very close to us on the edge of a flooded field in Leicester. I immediately called out, "Solitary Sandpiper." When one of my partners asked how I knew it was a Solitary Sandpiper, I replied, "Because it's alone."

Amusing as that joke may or may not be, there is truth behind it. The "solitary" part of the Solitary Sandpiper's name refers to the species' habit of migrating alone, unlike other sandpiper species, which generally travel in flocks. Handsome and elegant mid-sized sandpipers, the real way to ID them is by their prominent eye-ring, dark back and wings, and yellow/green legs. Their tail also has white outer feathers with dark horizontal lines that stand out clearly while it's in flight.

Migration is the only time of year we see Solitary Sandpipers in Addison County. They travel to and from the boreal forests in the north, where they exhibit some other fairly unique behaviors. They, along with their close Eurasian cousins, Green Sandpipers, are the only sandpiper species that regularly nest in trees. However, they are not nest builders. Instead, the male searches spruce trees on the edges of ponds for the abandoned nest of another bird to take over. American Robin, Rusty Blackbird, Eastern Kingbird, Gray Jay and Cedar Waxwing are the species whose nests are most frequently adopted by Solitary Sandpipers.



Solitary Sandpiper

photo by Gordon E. Robertson

Once selected, the female scrapes out the nest lining until it is suitable to her, and lays four eggs, which she and the male incubate. After rearing their chicks, they once again fly south in a solitary fashion, thus living up to their name, and making my birdathon day joke appropriate. Much more appropriate than later in the day when I was asked how I identified a Spotted Sandpiper, to which I replied, "because we spotted it." 🐾

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