



Otter Tracks

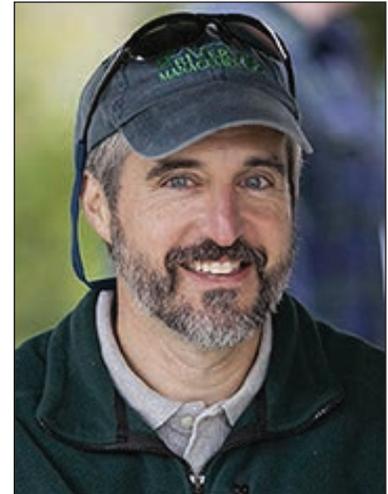
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Audubon Vermont Transitions

Since 2000 Jim Shallow has been at the helm of Audubon Vermont as its Managing Director. Jim has taken a position with the Vermont Chapter of The Nature Conservancy as the Director of Strategic Conservation Initiatives, a new position that aims to take full advantage of his considerable interests and abilities. Those of us who regularly attend the OCAS Annual Dinner will miss hearing Jim's spirited reports on the work accomplished by Audubon Vermont in the past year. We wish him well in his new position.

Following a brief but thorough search for a successor, Audubon Vermont's new Executive Director will be David Mears, whose name is familiar to many of us in his capacity from 2011 to 2015 as the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation. He has a JD and a Master's degree from Vermont Law School and has held a variety of legal positions for the State of Texas, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington Office of the Attorney General, and Vermont Law School, where he was Vice Dean for Faculty from 2016 to 2017 and Associate Dean for Environmental Programs from 2017 to the present.



David Mears, Audubon Vermont's new executive director Photo courtesy of David Mears

Curt Alpeter, chair of the Audubon Vermont Board of Directors and one of the search committee members, said of Mears: "He is deeply committed to conservation, has spent his professional career teaching and fighting for the environment, and is a proven leader." We hope you will join us in welcoming him to OCAS and Audubon Vermont at our Annual Dinner on November 8th.



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

OTTER CREEK AUDUBON SOCIETY
PO Box 938
Middlebury, VT 05753
Ron Payne, President
Warren King, Editor
388-4082

Winslow Colwell, Design and Layout
www.wcolwell.com

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OCAS Patches!

by Ron Payne

The Otter Creek Audubon Society has a new way for you to show your support for our organization: a decorative logo patch. Featuring a Green Heron ready to strike, drawn by Gary Starr, this eye catching, colorful patch measures three inches in diameter, and has an iron-on backing perfect for adding to clothing, hats, bags or any other cloth item.

We chose the Green Heron for this patch for its beauty, because it can be found living in the Otter Creek basin; and being a member of the heron family, it echos the Great Egret logo of our partners at the National Audubon Society. Also, because it is a lesser known bird, the Green Heron acts as a great conversation starter.

If you would like one or more of these patches, we are selling them for just \$3.00 each, and they can be acquired by contacting Gary Starr at 802-388-6552, or by asking for them at any of our outings and events.

Otter Creek Audubon Society

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2017-2018**

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Trump's Campaign Against Environmental Protection

Editorial by
Warren King



VIEWPOINT

In the last year the Trump Administration has undertaken a systematic, comprehensive revision of the regulations that limit environmental pollution or curb climate change. The near continuous flow of decisions, proposals, revisions and budgets has made it difficult to keep track of them all.

On its website, the National Geographic Society has provided the public with a running report of the more significant changes: "How President Trump is Changing Environmental Policy."

This editorial borrows heavily from that report, with this editor's thanks for compiling valuable documentation for public scrutiny. New postings are released as the Trump Administration actions affecting the environment take place. Here is a summary of the announcements thus far in 2018.

January 10, 2018: Several U.S. government agencies systematically altered websites to delete all mention of "climate change".

January 15, 2018: Nine of twelve members of the National Park System Advisory Board resign after Interior Secretary Zinke refused to meet with them.

February 26, 2018: The Trump Administration announced it is considering reorganizing EPA's National Center for Environmental Research, which oversees Science to Achieve Results (STAR), funding which helps support Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research Centers, which analyze and fund the relationship between pollution and children's health. STAR has received plaudits from the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine.

March 16, 2018: FEMA removed "climate change" from its strategic plan.

April 24, 2018: EPA Administrator Pruitt proposed a rule requiring the EPA to consider in its rulemaking only scientific studies that are publicly available, reducing significantly the amount of data the EPA would need to consider in its rulemaking process.

May 9, 2018: The Trump Administration has terminated NOAA's Carbon Monitoring System (CMS), the program that monitors global carbon emissions to determine if signatories to the global Paris Agreement are conforming to their pledges. Loss of CMS will slow but not end the process of verification.

July 5, 2018: EPA Administrator Pruitt resigns due to multiple ethical scandals.

July 19, 2018: The Trump Administration proposed changes to the 1973 Endangered Species Act that would forbid reference to economic impacts of listing endangered and threatened species. The changes would also end identical treatment for endangered and threatened species. Future protection of threatened species would be applied case by case as the National Marine Fisheries Service does presently for threatened species.

August 2, 2018: The Department of Transportation and the EPA announced plans to roll back former President Obama's average fuel efficiency standards on vehicles made from 2012 to 2025 from 54 miles per hour to a proposed 2021 standard of 34 miles per gallon. Increased passenger safety was cited as the reason for the change.

August 21, 2018: President Trump's promise to weaken air pollution rules on coal-fired power plants was carried out by dismantling former president Obama's Affordable Clean Energy Rule and gives regulatory authority to each individual state. Since 2010 over 200 coal plants have been retired. Obama's Clean Power Plan would have cut emissions 32 percent below 2005 levels. Trump's plan will cut emissions 1.5 percent. 🐾

Bicknell's Thrush

by Gary Starr

On Tuesday, June 19, 2018, a birding group organized through OCAS traveled to Stowe and Mount Mansfield to observe Chris Rimmer and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) team band birds, including Bicknell's Thrush. Twelve participants gathered at the Toll Road at 4:30 PM and were escorted to Parking Lot A close to the top of the mountain near the iconic chin. There, the VCE crew began setting up mist nets in anticipation of the evening bird activity and dusk chorus. The weather was pleasant but the wind was strong.

When birding internationally, Kathy and I have predictably been asked where we were from. When answering Vermont, the birders in our group invariably ask us about Bicknell's Thrush. Because of extensive studies and habitat requirements, this bird is well known throughout the birding community.

Along with Bicknell's Thrush the group heard and saw many of the typical mountain top birds, including White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Blackpoll Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, White-winged Crossbill and Purple Finch. The most unusual bird banded was a female Black-throated Blue Warbler. A full list of birds seen and pictures can be accessed through Jeff Hullstrung's eBird posting.

At 9:00 PM our group retraced our drive

down the Toll Road and most spent the night at the delightful Northern Lights Lodge. We repeated the Toll Road ascent at 5:00 a.m. the following morning where the mist nets were set and the banding process continued. We were not the only people interested in the banding that day.

Broadcast crews from WCAX and NBC Boston were on hand for interviews and filming. Everyone had a chance to observe and release the banded birds. We returned to the Northern Lights Lodge for a great buffet breakfast and then made our way home.

Interesting information about Bicknell's Thrush:

- They winter on four islands in the Caribbean: Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and Cuba.
- The island wintering habitats have been degraded, putting additional stress on the population. Males tend to overwinter in high elevation montane forests. Females overwinter in more disturbed, wetter broadleaf forests.



Bicknell's Thrush Photo by Gary Starr

- Twice as many males as females are banded on Mt. Mansfield, corresponding to the specific type of habitat loss on their wintering grounds.
- The high elevation montane spruce and fir nesting areas are disappearing in the Northeast. For every degree of the earth's warming, the elevation of the spruce-fir forest goes up 500 feet, leaving less and less nesting territory.
- Swainson's Thrush is beginning to enter the Bicknell's breeding territory.
- One Bicknell's Thrush banded on Mt. Mansfield was recaptured there eight years later.

To learn more and support VCE, please go to their website at vtecostudies.org.



Chris and feathered friend. Photo courtesy of MUHS website



Exciting News Flash!!!!

The Entomological Society of America has just awarded Chris Johnstone their national President's Teaching Award! Chris is a biology teacher at Middlebury Union High School. Two years ago he applied for and received an OCAS Environmental Education Grant to help fund a hands-on insect biodiversity study for his students. As Chris said, "Our project is really the reason why I was selected. The committee thought the project had excellent value in teaching about insects, biology, and even just the scientific process. Without the help of the OCAS grant, we might never have developed the project." As part of his award he will be fully funded to attend the ESA national conference in Vancouver, BC. Congratulations, Chris!!! What an honor!!!

Scott Weidensaul at OCAS' Annual Dinner by Carol Ramsayer

OCAS is already planning for our annual meeting and dinner on Thursday November 8th, and this year we will be welcoming renowned ornithologist and author Scott Weidensaul as our featured speaker. Perhaps the best known of his two dozen books is *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds*, which was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize in 2000. Most recently, the *Peterson Reference Guide to Owls of North America and the Caribbean* which he wrote was published in 2015. Scott is currently working on a new book looking at global bird migration and conservation.

Scott is known to many OCAS and Rutland County Audubon members through his association with Hog Island Audubon Camp. Several of us have attended various summer camp sessions where he was the director. We all enthusiastically agree that Scott is a delightful person, an engaging speaker and a dedicated naturalist with a storehouse of knowledge. We remember the rich experiences we had as we listened to his evening presentations, learned from him as we hiked wooded trails, searched for gull nests on an offshore island, and assisted as he banded thrushes in support of his research. He has stories to share for every bird imaginable. (And his recounting of a grizzly bear encounter was enough to have my husband and me sign up for a week in Camp Denali, Alaska, this past June! He serves as a guest naturalist there on alternate years.)

At our annual dinner we will hear some of these stories as Scott talks about his Snowy Owl research project begun in 2013-2014. That winter brought an irruption of Snowy Owls to the Northeast and Midwest, and thus a unique opportunity to learn more about their natural history. To do so, Scott and his colleagues founded Project SNOWStorm. Since that winter they have tagged 70

Snowy Owls in 14 states and provinces, fitting them with GPS/GSM transmitters. The data they gathered led to unexpected discoveries about the owl's life history, which he will share with us on November 8th.

In his 30 years as a licensed bird bander Scott has focused his research on the movements of other species as well. Each fall, Northern Saw-whet Owls are banded by 3 Pennsylvania research crews under Scott's direction. That project has banded 11,000 owls, adding significantly to our knowledge of their migration patterns. Another project bands western hummingbirds that are increasingly appearing in the east, well out of their traditional ranges. And since 2015, Scott's Critical Connections project uses tiny geolocators to track migration patterns of various birds that nest in Alaska and winter as far south as Northern Argentina and Bolivia.

We are delighted to have such an engaging and enthusiastic speaker for our annual dinner. Please keep an eye out for your mailed invitation in late September, and until then save the evening of Thursday, November 8th. It will be an exciting opportunity to renew friendships and to learn about Scott's fascinating work in tracking and conservation. 🐾



Scott and Amy Weidensaul leading a trip in Alaska
Photo by Carol Ramsayer



Ryley Olsen Studying Terns at Hog Island Camp
Photo courtesy of Ryley Olsen

Hog Island Audubon Camp: Outstanding Experience by Ryley Olsen

John Muir once said, "In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks." This statement could not apply to anywhere more than it does to the Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine. I'm Ryley Olsen, and in 2018 Otter Creek Audubon Society awarded me a scholarship to attend the Coastal Maine Bird Studies session at Hog Island.

For bird and nature lovers everywhere, this camp is like living a dream. We campers were constantly on the go, learning new things about birds and the environment. Activities included bird watching, sound recording, tide pooling, banding, and much more!

We made several excursions to locations near Hog Island. On one such adventure the teen campers spent a day on Eastern Egg Rock, a protected island sanctuary home to hundreds of seabirds. Upon landing, the cries of the nesting terns suddenly filled the air as they swooped above us (and at us) to defend their eggs and chicks. How often does one get to see these precious nests, let alone a whole island of them?

Hog Island has touched the lives of nature enthusiasts from all across the country, and every summer when people step back onto the mainland, they return home changed, with a deeper connection to the island, the birds, and the whole natural world around them. 🐾

(Right) Common Tern Bringing Home the Bacon to Eastern Egg Rock
Photo by Ryley Olsen

September – December 2018 OCAS Calendar of Events

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16 11 AM–2 PM **HAWK WATCH** at Buck Mountain, Waltham. Meet at 10:30 AM at Vergennes Park and Ride, junction of Routes 22A and 7, Vergennes, or at 11 at the trail-head on Route 66. Carpool to Route 66 if possible; parking there is extremely limited. Led by Ron Payne and Warren King. Call Warren at 388-4082 for more information or if in doubt about the weather.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6 9:30 AM–4 PM **DEAD CREEK WILDLIFE DAY.** Call 802/241-3700 for information.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8 5:30–8:45 PM **OCAS ANNUAL DINNER AND MEETING.** The speaker is Scott Weidensaul. (See the article in this issue about Scott.) Reservations are needed for dinner at 6. No fee for talk at 7:15. Dinner will be at the Middlebury College Kirk Alumni Center at 217 Golf Course Rd. off Route 30. Call Sue Rasmussen at 897-5411 for reservations. OCAS members will receive a separate invitation by mail.

ADDISON COUNTY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15 **FERRISBURGH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT.** Call Mike Winslow at 877-6586 for details.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15 **MT. ABE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT.** Call Randy or Cathy Durand at 453-4370 for details.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16 **MIDDLEBURY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT.** Call Jim or Kris Andrews at 352-4734 for details.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 5 **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 388-6019.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 8–10 AM

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 8–10 AM

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 8–10 AM

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8, 8–10 AM

In Their Own Words

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Outdoor learning is a joyful experience for this Shoreham sixth grader.

Photo by Nancy Wollum

SHOREHAM – Lake Champlain Maritime Museum’s On-Water Paddling Ecology:

“As you probably know as educators, real learning comes from students taking in information from various sources, making connections to their lives and synthesizing those experiences into new and original ideas and learning. It was thrilling for me to see this happen on this trip; the kids really got a LOT out of it and will live with this experience for a long time. Thank you for the wonderful, very special experiences you have provided my students.” (...and a student comment: “I can’t wait to tell my family I paddled to New York!”)

ROBINSON ELEMENTARY IN STARKSBORO – waterproof notebooks and pocket guides:

“Environmental Education is so valuable! We were able to meet all goals listed in my grant proposal by... becoming in tune with nature in our increasingly “wired” world... being comfortable with silence while using senses to nature journal.”

WHITING SUDBURY LEARNING ACADEMY – busing to Sudbury ECO outdoor classroom:

“This grant has brought so many things to our learning. We are able to incorporate math, literacy, social studies and science standards into our outdoor experience and make connections. Without this grant, we would surely not have the same diversity in our outdoor learning experience... This grant made all of this possible and from the bottom of our little hearts, we thank you so very much!” 🐾

Environmental Education Grants Update *In Their Words*

As the spring of 2018 progressed, it was exciting to see teachers' proposals for Environmental Education Grants evolve into meaningful outdoor learning experiences for their students. As part of the wrap-up for their grants, teachers are asked to submit a photo and a summary of the completed project. We would like to share a few of these comments as the teachers express their appreciation.

ADDISON CENTRAL – *Green Mountain Audubon field trip:*

“The teachers and students at Addison Central School want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to go into the woods where we could see real animals in action in their own habitat... Thanks to your generous donation the students at our school had an exciting hands-on experience. “

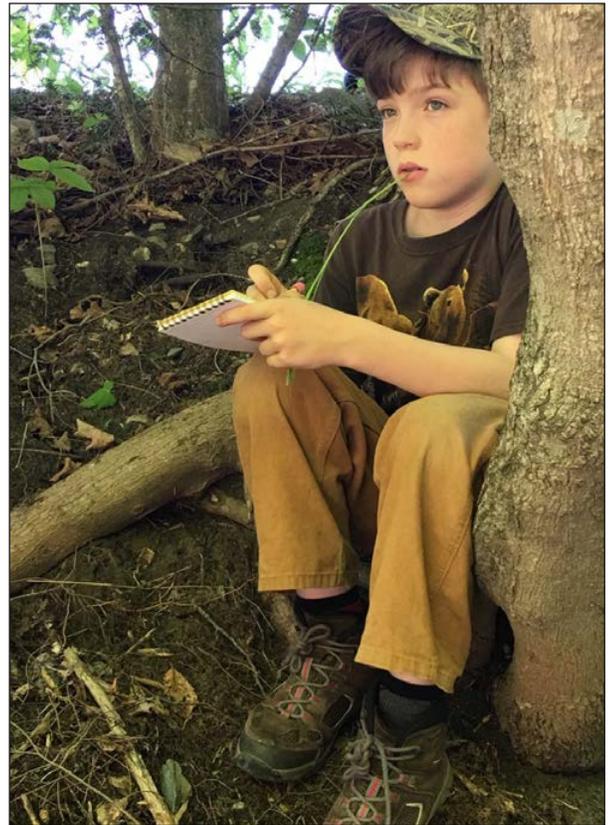
BRIDGE SCHOOL – *field trips to the New Haven River watershed:*

“This series of field trips, with transportation funded by this award, gave students the opportunity to examine the dynamic of trout habitats and create a lasting connection with the ecology of Addison County's trout habitats.”

BRISTOL ELEMENTARY – *field trips to Green Mt Audubon and Birds of VT and the Bristol Watershed property:*

“It was hands down our best field trip of the school year... Thank you so much for this incredible gift - it was very imperative to connect our teaching to the natural world.”

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Waterproof field books allowed for year-round observations for the Starksboro 3/4 class. Photo by Ruth Beecher

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Otter Creek Audubon Society

PO Box 938

Middlebury, VT 05753