



Otter Tracks

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22nd Annual
Great Backyard Bird Count

February 15-18, 2019

Join In! Count birds in your backyard, local park, or wherever you spot a bird, and submit your observations online.

birdcount.org

House Finch. Photo: Deborah Bittico/Great Backyard Bird Count.



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 2019 Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) takes place Friday, February 15 through Monday, February 18. The GBBC works with eBird to provide global coverage. It's easy to participate: count the birds in your backyard, your favorite birding spot, even traveling, and then submit your list on-line. You can no longer mail in your observations so **before you submit a list you must create a free GBBC account.** Go to BirdCount.org. You'll find downloadable instructions to create your free account, to enter your observations, and other opportunities. If you are already registered with eBird or Project Feederwatch, use the same login information. There's a tally sheet inserted in this issue, but remember to create your GBBC account to report sightings. Help provide a 4-day snapshot of bird distribution and abundance around the globe.

Here's what you do:

-  Count the highest total of each bird species for at least a 15-minute period in your yard, or wherever you want. Taking the highest total avoids duplicate counting.
-  Create your GBBC account and send your totals for one or more days during the GBBC period to BirdCount.org. Use a separate checklist for each day or each site on a given day. The on-line checklist is user-friendly. If you don't have Internet access, ask a friend to create an account and submit your list for you.

National Audubon collaborates with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada to bring GBBC to you. To continue monitoring through the winter, participate in Project FeederWatch: feederwatch.org.

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Hog Island Scholarship Available

Here's news for Addison County educators or teens (age 14-17) who are keen to experience 5 days at the renowned Hog Island Audubon Camp. The application period for the OCAS \$800 scholarship is **still open!** Email Carol at cgramsmac@mac.com for more info, and for links to the sessions entitled "Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week" or "Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens." Hog Island is fantastic! 🐾

Endangered Species Act Under Attack

Editorial by
Warren King



VIEWPOINT

The Endangered Species Act has kept 99 percent of its listed species from going extinct since Congress enabled it in 1973. Despite its success, efforts to revise it reached a peak of intensity late in 2018 to take advantage of Republican control of both houses of Congress. It remains a favorite of the public, receiving 79 to 90 percent support in four national polls from 1996 to 2015.

Since 2011, when the Republican Party took power in the House, 308 bills were introduced to dismantle critical species protection, 110 of them since Trump was elected.

Trump supporters, in collaboration with the fossil fuel industry, other corporations and the hunting lobby, have put together bills and regulatory changes to:

1. Add economic constraints to what has been an entirely science-based process for new listings,
2. Reduce requirements for interagency consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service,
3. Remove automatic endangered level protection for threatened species,
4. Allow removal of listed species prior to achieving recovery plan goals,
5. Require critical habitat to include only habitat presently occupied without regard to historic or recent distribution,
6. Make it difficult to list any species at risk from climate change,
7. Require that the same threats apply to a species across its entire range,
8. Shift control of conservation measures, including management of endangered and threatened species, to state and local governments,
9. Accelerate decisions on species' removal from or addition to the Act, and
10. Limit the power of the courts to overturn decisions and to protect threatened or endangered species.

Any one of these changes could result in the extinction of one or more species. Taken as a whole they negate much of the work undertaken in the U.S. on behalf of endangered and threatened species over the last 45 years. A number of these bills have passed the House or the Senate. Three have become law, including one to prohibit the Greater Sage Grouse from being listed. The key to this treatment lies in the co-occurrence of the species with extensive oil and gas reserves, and the presumed willingness of state governments to bow more readily to oil and gas industry demands.

The most comprehensively detrimental bill would strip protection from every endangered species until Congress passes a resolution of approval, removes protection for 1099 listed species found only within the borders of one state (out of 2244 listed species, 1618 occur in the U.S.), and prevents a citizen's ability to submit petitions to protect species under the Endangered Species Act.

Former Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke took things in hand on his first day at the office by rolling back an Obama-era regulation banning the use of lead ammunition in national wildlife refuges, which he was hired to manage, including refuges occupied by the endangered California Condor. More condors die from lead poisoning than all other causes combined. 🐾

**A Californian Condor in flight, photographed in
Zion National Park, Utah.**

photo: Phil Armitage



Bigger and Better Blueberries



A UVM graduate student and the director of the UVM Gund Institute for Environment have collaborated on a project comparing the role of honeybees and native wild bees in pollinating blueberries. Their conclusion is that wild bees do a better job of pollinating blueberries than honeybees.

Wild bees are native bees; honeybees are exotic in North America, having been imported initially from Europe in 1622. Wild bees, bumblebees in particular, are able to vibrate their wings at a frequency that releases a shower of pollen, something honeybees are unable to do. Honeybees must use other, less effective methods of releasing pollen. In a sample of nine Vermont blueberry farms, plants pollinated by wild bees produced six percent more and 12 percent larger and plumper blueberries than honeybee-pollinated plants. Wild bees benefited production by an average of six percent in the study. Berries pollinated by wild bees also were ready for harvest two and a half days earlier than berries pollinated by honeybees.

The study was undertaken in Vermont because wild honeybees are scarce here. In many parts of the country wild honeybee numbers skew the berry productivity data excessively. The researchers recommend encouraging natural wild bee habitat using

native flowering vegetation, mowing and employing pesticides only if essential, and distributing wild native bee boxes, if you are willing to manage them.

Other studies by one of the authors indicate that between 2008 and 2013, wild bee populations declined by 23 percent in key U.S. agricultural areas. The pollination that would have been done by these wild bees would need to be done using rented hives of honeybees, adding considerable expense to the cost of raising crops. And neonicotinoid pesticides (neonics) affect wild bees as much as or more than honeybees, which is likely to have contributed to their decline.

Neonics attack the central nervous system of bees and other insects and inhibit birds' ability to navigate. Corn sprayed with neonics have resulted in increased death rates of bees, posing a threat to the future of pollinating insects, which are responsible for production of one-third of the food grown around the world.

The three most widely used neonics were banned in the European Union in 2018. Jamie Rapaport Clark of Defenders of Wildlife said, "The Trump administration's approval to use pesticides and genetically modified crops is an insult to our national wildlife refuges and the wildlife that rely on them." 🐾

Wisdom Again



Wisdom is the name given to a Laysan Albatross that has been breaking records for years. She produced an egg shortly after she returned to Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge in the Hawaiian Northwestern Islands on November 29, 2018. She is at least 68 years old. She is not only the oldest known banded wild bird, she is also the oldest known bird in the wild. She has produced at least 30 to 35 eggs, one per year. Her mate's name is Akeakamai, meaning, appropriately, lover of wisdom. Prior to Akeakamai she had another mate. Laysan Albatrosses are monogamous, faithful to one mate as long as the mate is alive and contributing to the brooding and feeding of the young. This requires both birds alternating since they fly hundreds of miles and a number of days at sea finding fish, squid and flying fish eggs, the last named a favorite of albatross chicks. One bird cares for the chick while the other is at sea recovering from its two-week long fast on land.

Although Laysan Albatrosses frequently skip a year after successfully raising a young, Wisdom and Akeakamai have not been wasting any time. They have reared chicks three years in a row. 🐾

"Wisdom" with newly hatched chick at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, March 2011
Photo by John Klavitter/U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Sign Up for 2019 Salamander Escorts

On warm, wet nights from mid-March to mid-April frogs and salamanders move from their wintering sites on high ground to breeding sites in wetlands to mate and lay eggs. Their route to the nearest vernal pool sometimes takes them across a road.

This is the sixteenth spring that Otter Creek Audubon and the Salisbury Conservation Commission will patrol an amphibian crossing site in Salisbury. Across Vermont, groups of concerned individuals attempt to alter amphibians' lethal odds by moving them off the road during nights of significant movement. At the most dangerous crossings amphibians may suffer 50 percent mortality, but the crossing we monitor has little traffic. This site retains not only large numbers of amphibians but also remarkable species diversity: four salamander and three frog species. If we happen to get a "Big Night", we'll move more than a thousand amphibians in a two-hour period. The site affords all who

participate an opportunity to experience this remarkable natural phenomenon at first hand.

You can witness and help perpetuate this migration if you sign up for the 2019 amphibian email alert. The 2019 window is Monday, March 18 to Sunday, April 7. You'll receive an email alert on the morning of a projected big night and then a confirming email at about 6 pm. Movement starts around 8:15 pm and can run for several hours. Volunteers may arrive and leave when they wish and are responsible for their own safety and the safety of others in their group. Upon arrival OCAS provides species identification tips and a reminder of appropriate behavior. With your help we'll record the numbers of each species we move for two hours. Sign up at kinglet@together.net even if you were on the list in another year. 🐾



Environmental Education Grant Winners Announced



Last fall we invited Addison County educators to participate in the OCAS Environmental Education Grant program. We encouraged teachers to develop proposals to get their students outside – giving children opportunities for hands-on learning in nature. The response was exciting! Sixteen teachers from 13 Addison County schools applied, requesting a total of \$8757. That amount far exceeded our budget, but we were able to fund \$4,500 toward giving 478 students enriching outdoor learning experiences. Grants ranged from \$200 to \$600. Here's what these students are looking forward to in the year ahead.

Addison Central School First and second graders will visit the Birds of Vermont Museum and participate in the “Spring Discovery” program at Audubon Vermont, following up their field trip with a school pollinator and seed garden.

Bridge School All students participate in the Trout in the Classroom program, in which they raise brook trout from eggs to the fry stage. Their grant funds pay for transportation to the Salisbury Fish Hatchery.

Bristol Elementary School The 1st and 3rd grades will participate in the “All About Birds” program at Audubon Vermont, as well as visit the Birds of Vermont Museum.

Lincoln Community School New to our grants program, this school will take their 5th and 6th graders aboard the *Melosira* research vessel for the UVM Lake Champlain Live program. Students will learn about water quality, watersheds, career opportunities and human impact issues.

Mary Hogan Elementary Three 1st grade classes will enjoy a live animal visit from VINS. They'll learn about adaptations by watching the raptors and handling various preserved wings, feet, skulls, etc.

Mt. Abe Union Middle School Eighth graders will learn about the big cats of Vermont as part of their endangered species unit. Grant funds will go toward a presentation and tracking by renowned tracker Sue Morse.

Quarry Hill School This pre-school has a large pine tree in their play yard. A platform will be built into its base – just right to be

a child-sized bird nest or bird blind!

Ripton Elementary The Southern Vermont Natural History Museum will bring a live turtle and an owl to the younger grades to show how an animal's structure helps it to survive in the natural world.

Salisbury Community and **Otter Valley Union High School** This exciting collaboration between two schools brings 4th graders and Moosalamoo students together for two hikes along the Long Trail.

Shoreham Elementary “Let's Go Fishing Vermont” will teach after-schoolers water ecology, fishing ethics and water conservancy – as they learn to fish with practice rods. Funds will purchase the rods; the group's instruction is free.

Shoreham Elementary Grades 3 – 6 will visit the new Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area's visitor center and trails, learning about stewardship. The hope is that the students will later bring their families to this local nature center.

Vergennes Union Elementary A fall field trip will be all about insects when 1st graders visit Audubon Vermont. They'll learn about insect life cycles, habitat impact, diversity, and how birds and insects are connected. This is a new school to our grant program.

Weybridge Elementary The grade 5 & 6 class will participate in Lake Champlain Maritime Museum's full-day paddling ecology program. It covers water quality, watershed issues and the fish/food web – and provides students a unique canoeing experience.

Wren's Nest Forest Preschool We were unable to fund their hoped for Abenaki storytelling and tracking event. However, our grant funds will go toward nature-based supplies (field guides, outdoor gear, etc.) to aid in the school's mission of “getting kids outside.”

OCAS enthusiastically applauds the excellent work of the teachers of these Addison County schools as they strive to provide their students with exceptional outdoor learning experiences. To contribute to OCAS' Environmental Education Grants, a good opportunity is the OCAS Bird-a-thon, held in May. 🐾

February – May 2019 OCAS Calendar of Events

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15
to
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT.
See article this issue, page 1, and
www.birdcount.org.

MONDAY, MARCH 18
to SUNDAY, APRIL 7

SALAMANDER ESCORTS. See article,
this issue. Contact Warren
or Barry King 388-4082 or
kinglet@together.net to sign up for the volunteer amphibian
email alert list, *even if you participated last year*.

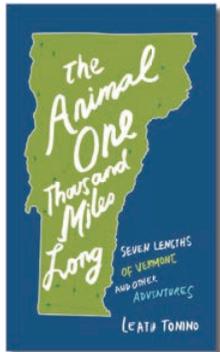
SUNDAY, MAY 5
7:30-10:30 AM

WARBLER WARM-UP. Ron Payne
and Chris Runcie 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 Ron at 388-6019 if in doubt about the weather.

SUNDAY, MAY 5
to SUNDAY, MAY 19

OTTER CREEK AUDUBON
BIRDATHON. See further informa-
tion in the May 2019 *Otter Tracks*
or call Gary or Kathy Starr at 388-6552.

Book Review



The Animal One Thousand Miles Long

by Leah Tonino
Trinity University
Press, 2016. 203 pgs

Review by
Warren King

Here's a modest book about one person's Vermont that you'll have no trouble relating to. It takes the form of a series of outdoor-related essays, including the author's experiences traversing the state north to south or vice versa in seven unlikely ways. He hikes it, hitches it, skis it, bikes it, paddles it, swims it, and flies it, looking for wilderness and settling for the diversity of nature-related experiences Vermont offers him. Vermont is small enough that you'll know one or two of the folks he encounters along the way.

He does a Christmas Bird Count, visits Dead Creek, spends time on Camel's Hump, rides a logging train, visits a ghost town and the Four Brothers, kayaks Champlain in winter, jack jumps at Sugarbush, competes in a biathlon, reflects on Rokeby and home, and skates the Little Otter before getting serious about experiencing Vermont end to end. The language is unexpectedly colorful. You'll appreciate his offbeat perspectives. 🐾

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, FEBRUARY 9, 8-10 AM
SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 8-10 AM
SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 8-10 AM
SATURDAY, MAY 11, 7-9 AM

ELEVENTH ANNUAL CABIN FEVER LECTURE SERIES

(Second Thursdays in January, February and March)
Downstairs at Ilsley Library, 75 Main Street, Middlebury

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 7 PM
ANTARCTICA BIRDING ADVENTURE

A travelogue of Gary and Kathy Starr's trip to Tierra del Fuego and the southern terminus of the Andes, the Falklands, South Georgia, the Shetland Islands and the Antarctic Peninsula

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 7 PM
CITIZEN SCIENCE

Nathaniel Sharp, Citizen Science Outreach Naturalist at the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, will tell us about nature projects *you* can participate in.

Wind Impacts from Climate Change on Migrants

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology was curious about the impacts of climate change on the ability of migratory birds to continue to undertake their migrations. To get some answers, they combined data from 143 weather radar stations and the recent report by the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) on anticipated changes to wind speed and direction. They learned that by 2100 south winds will become stronger when most birds undertake their migrations. Westerly winds, more variable than southerly winds, will become somewhat stronger during the northward migration and weaken during the southern migration.

A consequence of these changes will be that birds flying north may arrive earlier and will be in better shape, having worked less to come north. But arriving earlier could mean they arrive prior to the appearance of important food supplies. Conversely, south-bound migrants may have to work harder to reach their southern destination. Uncooperative winds may even force birds to postpone migration for one or more days.

These changes in wind patterns will take place gradually. Birds will have an opportunity to adapt to them gradually over a matter of decades. 🐾

2018 Addison County Christmas Bird Count Results

(note: CW = count week)

	Ferrisburgh CBC	Middlebury CBC	Mt. Abe CBC
Total species	86	72	52
Total birds	15,477	15,659	1329
Field birders	46	42	12
Feeder watchers	3	19	11
Owling teams	6	5	1
Unique sightings	1 Winter Wren	1 Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1 Chipping Sparrow
	1 Wilson's Snipe	1 Fish Crow	
	1 Eastern Towhee (CW)	1 Yellow-throated Warbler (CW)	
	2 Common Grackles	1 Harris's Sparrow (CW)	
Unusual numbers	5 Turkey Vultures	28 Double-crested Cormorants	3 Bald Eagles
			4 Red-tailed Hawks
			2 Red-bellied Woodpeckers
			375 Black-capped Chickadees
Northern irruptors	57 Cedar Waxwings	144 Cedar Waxwings	57 Cedar Waxwings
	0 Bohemian Waxwings	112 Bohemian Waxwings	2 Bohemian Waxwings
	11 Snow Buntings	1 Snow Bunting	0 Snow Buntings
	15 Evening Grosbeaks	1 Evening Grosbeak	27 Evening Grosbeaks
	8 Pine Grosbeaks	6 Pine Grosbeaks	30 Pine Grosbeaks
	240 Common Redpolls	373 Common Redpolls	8 Common Redpolls
		1 Hoary Redpoll	
	44 Pine Siskins	1 Pine Siskin	1 Pine Siskin

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Otter Tracks

Otter Creek Audubon Society

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