



Otter Tracks

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Birders at the Watershed Center celebrating the Warbler Warm-Up.
photo by Carol Ramsayer

VT Fish and Wildlife Rare Species Status Changes

On February 11th, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department announced the recovery and delisting of the Bald Eagle in Vermont, ten years after it was listed as endangered here. Only one pair bred in Vermont in 2008 but by 2020, when the list revision process began, biologists counted 64 fledgling eagles in Vermont. There were a total of 75 fledglings in the recovery region, which included all of Vermont and nearby portions of New Hampshire and New York. Despite delisting, monitoring of the Vermont population will continue. Nationally, the Bald Eagle was listed as endangered in 1967 and was delisted in 2007. Its decline nearly nationwide was attributed largely to widespread use of the chemical DDT. DDT was cancelled for most uses in 1972. It caused severe eggshell thinning leading to nest failure in many raptors.



Also included in its Feb. 11th announcement, the Fish and Wildlife Department delisted the Canada Black Snakeroot from endangered status and added Rue Anemone, Houghton's Sedge and American Bumblebee to the endangered list. The Eastern Meadowlark was added to the list as threatened following declines of 55 percent or more in the last 25 years, due to more intensive grassland management.

Critical habitat was listed for the state-endangered Common Tern in Vermont. The three Lake Champlain islands on which the species breeds in Vermont are all owned or managed by Audubon Vermont. Also listed as critical habitat was a Vermont cave where large numbers of endangered bats hibernate, and four Lake Champlain beaches that provide nesting habitat for threatened Spiny Softshell Turtles. 🐾

IPCC 6th Assessment Reports from Groups 2 and 3

In the past eight months, the IPCC's 6th Assessment's three Working Groups have each released a report. Last August, the Group 1 Report called climate change unequivocal and holding promise of intensification of future impacts. In February, Working Group 2's report summarized the science of climate change and provided clarification of its current and future dimensions, its current status, and its anticipated impacts, adaptations and vulnerability. Climate scientists have heightened their ability to attribute extreme weather events to climate change. Climate change is increasing faster now than in the past 30 years. It will continue to increase regardless of our actions over the next 30 years. If we fail to act with sufficient speed and impact, the current proposed target of 1.5 degrees C will give way to an actual rise of 3 to 6 degrees C by 2100. Events like 2021's heat dome in the Pacific

Northwest, considered a once-in-a-century event, will take place about every five years.

Working Group 3's report, focusing on mitigation, was released in April. It examines the sources of emissions and emission reduction, relating the impact of national climate pledges to long-term emissions goals. It notes that although emissions during 2010-2019 were higher than any previous decade, the rate of growth between 2010 and 2019 (1.3 percent) was lower than between 2000 and 2009 (2.1 percent). An increased share of emissions can be attributed to sources in urban areas. Emission reductions from fossil fuels and industrial processes were outweighed by emission increases from heightened activity levels in industry, energy supply, transport, agriculture and buildings.

A final synthesis report is scheduled for release in September 2022. 🐾



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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NPR Life Kit: Eight Simple Ways to Help Birds

An article on National Public Radio dated April 14th by Audrey Nguyen offers eight simple ways that we can all help birds. She quotes Miyoko Chu, the director of communications at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, who says “If we’re seeing them decline, then we know something is wrong with our environment and that should concern us, because our health is tied up in the same environment.” Recalling the 2019 study published by the Cornell Lab that found that there were three billion fewer breeding birds in 2019 than there were in 1970, she emphasizes that this is one of every four birds gone in a span of 50 years.

Here are eight ways to help reduce bird habitat loss and degradation:

1. **Grow native plants.** Audubon’s Plants for Birds program will help you in choosing native plants to grow.
2. **Reduce pesticide use** on lawns, fields, and bird habitats of all sorts. Ask nurseries and home improvement stores for less toxic options.
3. **Purchase bird-friendly products**, such as bird-friendly certified coffee.
4. **Advocate for bird-friendly environmental policies.** Advocate for policies that fund environmental protection, and vote for people who prioritize environmental issues.
5. **Keep your cat indoors.** Free-ranging cats kill 1.3 to 4 billion birds annually. Or use a leash. Cornell’s Chu also says that cats kept inside are entertained by watching live bird cams such as these: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/>
6. **Make your windows more visible to birds.** The American Bird Conservancy estimates 44 percent of fatal window strikes are at homes or buildings 1 to 3 stories high. Here’s their website with information and solutions. <https://abcbirds.org/glass-collisions/>
7. **Turn off lights at night, especially during migration.** See Audubon’s “Lights Out” program.
8. **Clean your feeders regularly.** 🐾

Education Happenings by Carol Ramsayer

Our Environmental Education Grants program has been going strong during the pandemic, but other programs have waited patiently for our comfort level for indoor events to return.

Bring on the Puffins! What a joy it will be this summer to again be sending educators to Hog Island Audubon Camp. Having each won a \$1000 OCAS scholarship to the session entitled *Sharing Nature: An Educator’s Week*, our two campers will be immersed in birds amid the beauty of the Maine Coast. Jen Grilly (Bridge School) has been waiting patiently since she won her scholarship in 2020; Addison Tate (Willowell) is this year’s winner.

Calling all beginning birders! Well, the Beginning Birder’s Walk is back! June 18th is the date; 9:00 until about 11:00 is the time. We will divide into 3 groups, plus 1 family group, and explore the richness of this part of the TAM, looking and listening for birds and whatever nature gifts come our way. Jointly held by OCAS and Middlebury Area Land Trust, experienced birders will lead us. As always, there will be a surprise station and hike-appropriate snacks. Bring binoculars or borrow ours. Call 713/818-7033 with questions.



Lincoln Community School students learn winter survival skills

photo by Carol Ramsayer

Outdoor learning – wahoo! We will bring hands-on stations outdoors to Nancy Wollum’s 2nd graders (Shoreham) again this year. Touching real skulls, study skins, and feet teach kids about adaptations. Amy Clapp (Salisbury) will host our bird nests program. This will be a motivational jump start to her 4th graders’ Bird-a-thon. Also, a homeschool group has requested a bird walk in Wright Park. 🐾

OCAS Calendar of Events

May – September 2022

**SUN, MAY 1
TO TUES, MAY 31**

OCAS BIRDATHON Our main fundraiser of the year. OCAS teams identify as many species as they can under social distancing and self-imposed rules in a 24-hour period. OCAS members are encouraged to count bird species on a day of their choice. Ask friends to support your efforts or efforts of a board member at an amount per species or with a flat sum. Report your efforts and send raised funds to OCAS Treasurer Kathy Starr, 782 Weybridge Rd, Weybridge VT 05753. Contributions to OCAS are tax deductible. See insert, this issue.

**SUN, MAY 8
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 802-388-6019 if in doubt about the weather.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 18
9 - 11 AM**

BEGINNING BIRDERS' WALK Jointly sponsored with MALT at Wright Park. Led by experienced naturalists. All ages welcome. Meet at Wright Park (north-west from the Middlebury Green on Seymour St., then just before Pulp Mill covered bridge, turn right on Seymour St. Ext. to parking area at end.) Call Carol Ramsayer at 713/818-7033 with questions.

Looking Ahead to 2022 Environmental Education Grants

In 2022 OCAS will offer eight grants to Addison County educators. Seven schools, from preschool to high school level, have been awarded a total of \$4742 to support teacher-designed projects that will reach 225 children. For example, the Bridge School will purchase gear (snowshoes, binoculars, compasses) to enrich weekly Outdoor Environmental Education outings. At Bristol Elementary, 1st and 3rd graders will have field trips to the Birds of Vermont Museum and Audubon Vermont in Huntington, giving them full days to explore the woods, fields and wetlands there. Quarry Hill School will purchase supplies to expand last year's naturalist curriculum. Mary Hogan Preschool and Otter Creek Child Center will outfit their preschoolers with supplies for small individual backpacks. Watch for them on their walks as they explore Middlebury green spaces! Shoreham Elementary 2nd graders will be inspired by nature magazines written at their own reading level. And Willowell Foundation's high school students have extraordinary adventures ahead with two tracking workshops led by renowned naturalist Sue Morse.

Thank you, educators, for keeping nature learning vital for our Addison County youth. 🐾

WORKSHOP SERIES: HABITAT CONNECTIVITY AND BIODIVERSITY IN THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY

*Sponsored by The Vermont Master Naturalists Program,
Middlebury Area Land Trust, and Otter Creek Audubon.*

**WED, MAY 18
7:00-8:00 PM**

HABITAT CONNECTIVITY IN BIRD POPULATIONS USING GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS), GEOLOCATORS AND MOTUS WILDLIFE TRACKING NETWORK Mark LaBarr, Conservation Program Manager for Audubon Vermont, explores new tools to track migration patterns and manage priority bird populations. Mark will highlight the role of habitat connectivity and biodiversity in our own backyards, drawing on examples of Audubon's work with Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers and their hybrids on the Ganley-Roper property and surrounding properties in Weybridge.

SAT, MAY 21

BLUE-WINGED AND GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER BANDING DEMONSTRATION. Mark LaBarr will lead a bird banding workshop on the Roper-Ganley land in Weybridge. Limited to 20 participants. This workshop is FREE, but participants must register through this link: <https://tinyurl.com/3ep9skyr>.

**SAT, JUNE 4
7:30 AM -10 AM**

BIRD-BANDING ON HURD GRASSLAND, WEYBRIDGE, WITH MARK LABARR. A drop-in event for all ages, but RSVP required. Please sign up on the MALT website for either the May 21 or June 4 workshop but not both.

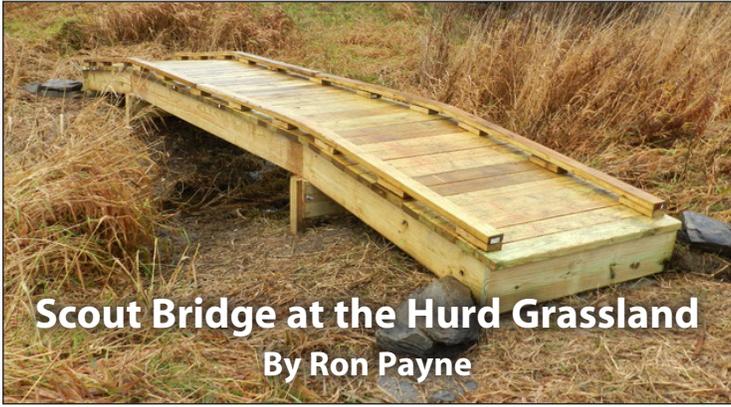
**WED, JUNE 8
7-8 PM**

THE BIGGER PICTURE: HABITAT CONNECTIVITY AND BIODIVERSITY MAPPING OF THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY, an online workshop via Zoom with Monica Pryzperhart of the Vermont Master Naturalist Program. To join: <https://tinyurl.com/2p8tjb4z>

OCAS-MALT 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. Please bring a mask. For information call 388-1007 or 388-6019.

Saturday, May 14, 7-9 AM
Saturday, June 11, 7-9 AM
Saturday, July 9, 7-9 AM
Saturday, August 13, 7-9 AM
Saturday, September 10, 7-9 AM



Scout Bridge at the Hurd Grassland
By Ron Payne

Over several weekends in the fall of 2021, boys and girls from Scout Troop 536, constructed a footbridge at our Hurd Grassland property in Weybridge. This bridge allows informal access to the main trails from Rt. 23 and has already seen a fair amount of usage over the winter.

This project started as a brainstorm from one of the Hurd Grassland neighbors who suggested that a bridge over the swale would allow them to walk to work at the College. We agreed as it fit well with our goals for improving access for the property. I recently discovered that such a bridge was in the original management objectives given to Gale Hurd in 2004 when OCAS first consulted about the property.

Just as we began plans for acquiring a prefabricated bridge, word about the project got to the Scouts and they offered to do the construction for us. We were more than pleased to have them do it. We financed the purchase of the lumber. Under the leadership of Al Thalen, they designed and built what we believe will be a long-lasting, beneficial feature of the property. We thank them for all their hard work. 🐾 photo by Ron Payne

Amphibians on the Move

For the 15th year Otter Creek Audubon teamed up with the Salisbury Conservation Commission and Jim Andrews of the Vermont Atlas of Reptiles and Amphibians to identify, count, and move amphibians migrating en masse across a short stretch of road in Salisbury. The road lies between the amphibians' wooded upland wintering sites and their breeding sites in Leicester Swamp. When conditions are warm and wet enough in late March and early April, hundreds move in a span of a few hours in the dark to breed in the swamp. The return trip is less concentrated, from one day up to weeks later, depending on the species. The migration provides an outstanding opportunity to witness the migration of animals that are largely unseen most of the year.

This year two nights offered ideal conditions. In two hours on March 31st, 57 volunteers identified and counted the movement

of 919 amphibians of four salamander species and three frog species. On April 7th, 61 volunteers identified and counted 477 amphibians, also of



Blue-spotted group mole salamander

photo by Kiley Briggs

four salamander and three frog species. The data are compiled and analyzed by Jim Andrews of the Vermont Atlas of Reptiles and Amphibians. 🐾

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