



Otter Creek Audubon Society

February 2023

Otter Tracks

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Be a salamander crossing escort!
See article page 3.

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

birdcount.org

Red-headed Woodpecker
Photo: Marry Soley/Macaulay Library



Great Backyard Bird Count

26th Annual • Feb 17-20, 2023



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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The 2023 Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) takes place Friday, February 17th through Monday, February 20th. 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. **Before you submit a list you must create a free GBBC account.** Go to BirdCount.org to find everything you need to take part. If you are already registered with eBird or Project Feederwatch, use your login information. 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.

National Audubon collaborates with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada to bring GBBC to you. 



Otter Creek Audubon Society

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Join Audubon's Action Center

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The Significance of Peatlands

Editorial by
Warren King



VIEWPOINT

Peatlands cover three percent of the land on earth, about half of the earth's wetlands. Sixteen percent of the peatlands have been drained since 1970. Most of the peatlands are in northern North America, Europe and Russia, where the climate is low in temperature but high in precipitation. Parts of South America, Africa, the Caribbean, Australia and southeast Asia, areas of high temperature and high precipitation, also have extensive peatland. Temperate and subarctic peatlands are formed mainly from mosses, hornworts and liverworts. In the tropics peatlands are formed from leaves, branches, trunks, roots and grasslands.

Peatlands are significant in a time of changing climate because they store 33 percent of the world's carbon, twice as much as all the earth's forests combined. When drained, peatlands release the carbon they sequestered twenty times faster than it was sequestered. Carbon dioxide emissions from drained and burned peatlands account for 10 percent of the earth's fuel emissions.

Recent studies in Africa's central Congo basin, at 42 million acres the world's largest tropical wetland, revealed that 5000 years ago the climate became drier and the peatlands began to release carbon. After 3000 years of carbon release the local climate once more became more humid and returned to sequestering carbon. This peatland and others around the world are likely to begin releasing carbon, contributing significantly to the global rise of atmospheric carbon and consequent increase in global temperatures. 🐾

Managing Woodlots for Maple and Songbirds

Steam will soon rise from local sugarhouses and not long thereafter, the first migratory songbirds will return. By the time the woods are in full-song, sugar makers will have switched from boiling working their woods to improve production. Sometimes this management comes at a cost to the birds since maple monoculture isn't ideal habitat for songbirds. And songbirds need help. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology determined that migratory bird species in the U.S. have declined by a third, a distressing one billion birds.

A dozen years ago, Audubon Vermont's Steve Hagenbuch considered the connection between sugaring and songbirds. He'd already initiated a highly successful forest management program called *Foresters for the Birds*. It wasn't a big stretch to imagine that similar techniques could benefit birds while still allowing sugar makers to turn a profit. The resulting program is *Bird-Friendly Maple*. Its goals are to help sugar makers manage their lands for birds, forest health and sap production; to educate the public about the connection between the sugar-bush and bird nesting habitat; and to provide

an incentive for sugar makers who participate.

Audubon Vermont's *Bird Friendly Maple Project* includes participation by the Vermont Sugar Makers' Association and the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. Its management goals have steps to enhance structural and species diversity, including retention of standing dead and down trees, logs, and dense understories. The list of bird species targeted by the program includes Ovenbird, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker, American Redstart, Wood Thrush and Veery. Maple producers who enroll in the program agree to adhere to its criteria and in exchange, can promote their products as "Bird Friendly" using the Bird Friendly Maple label and other materials. Assessment of the program began in 2020 and will continue.

We consumers can help by buying Bird Friendly maple products to support the sugar makers in the program. Look for the colorful yellow label and enjoy your syrup as you anticipate the arrival of that spring chorus. With your help, it's a win for the sugar makers, for the forests, and for the birds. 🐾

OCAS Calendar of Events February – May 2023

NOTE: The Annual Cabin Fever Lecture Series will not take place in 2023.

FEBRUARY 17-20, 2023 26TH ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT. See related article.

MONDAY, MARCH 20 SALAMANDER ESCORTS See article, TO this issue. Contact SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2023 kinglet@together.net to sign up even if you participated previously.

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. Beginning birders are welcome. Come for all or part of the walk! For information, including the latest COVID constraints, call 802-388-6019 or 802-388-1007.

Saturday, February 11, 8-10 AM

Saturday, March 11, 8-10 AM

Saturday, April 8, 8-10 AM

Saturday, May 13, 7-9 AM

Sign Up for 2023 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. At the most dangerous crossings amphibians may suffer 50 percent mortality. Throughout Vermont, concerned groups try to help.

Otter Creek Audubon and the Salisbury Conservation Commission will monitor an amphibian crossing site in Salisbury again for two nights this year. The site we monitor has little car traffic but often has large numbers of amphibians and a 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. We aim to be there for two nights between March 20 and April 19. If you sign up, you’ll get an email in the morning if the forecast seems promising and a confirmation at about 6 pm. The main 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, Jim Andrews and OCAS will provide 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 a previous year. 🐾

From a Book Club to Biomimicry!

By Carol Ramsayer

OCAS is pleased to announce that thirteen Environmental Education Grants have been awarded to Addison County educators for use during 2023.

Although school district funding for bus trips is limited, eight OCAS grants will still make it possible for students to have field trip adventures out in the natural world. Bridge School students will take 3 seasonal trips to Wright Park. Bristol 1st graders will enjoy activities along the trails of Audubon Vermont and the Birds of Vermont Museum. Grade 5/6 from Ferrisburgh will study the ecology of woodland ecosystems. Vergennes’ Evergreen Preschoolers will explore Bristol’s Watershed property. Mary Hogan kindergarteners will have a spring field trip to the Robert Frost Trail, and Mary Hogan preschoolers will explore Battell Woods plant life.

Given the freedom to design their own projects, educators often create unique experiences for their students. For example, a Middlebury Union Middle School project will guide students through the creation of a permaculture/food forest – which includes an outdoor classroom. A homeschool group, “Wild Roots,” will practice nature skills as they read *My Side of the Mountain* for their book club. Their grant will pay for books, as well as a trip to VINS to see live raptors. Salisbury Community School, which every year holds a Bird-a-thon led by teacher Amy Clapp, will purchase *Stokes Beginners Guides* for the 4th graders and their kindergarten buddies. They will all take 2 field trips to Amy’s Master Naturalist training sites.

Some projects bring nature closer to the classroom. Mary Hogan preschoolers are establishing a bird friendly habitat outside their window. Quarry Hill will make improvements to their permanent outdoor classroom. Ripton K-3 will have a live-animal visit from Southern VT Natural History Museum to learn about biomimicry. Finally, the popular VINS naturalists will bring their live raptors to Mary Hogan first graders.

Teachers regularly express their gratitude for the support of these OCAS grants. As one teacher so eloquently wrote, “Reflecting on the opportunity Otter Creek has given us has filled me with a wave of appreciation for what you all do. It’s an honor to deliver environmental education to my lovely students and we feel so lucky to have incredible educational opportunities funded by Otter Creek.” (Camie Thompson, Willowell) 🐾



Mary Hogan first graders enjoy a live-raptor presentation from a VINS naturalist.

photo credit Mary Hogan First Grade Teachers

Dusky Seaside Sparrow by Warren King



I visited the Merritt Island area on Florida's east coast to look for birds during my college spring vacation in 1963. Top on my list was the Dusky Seaside Sparrow, a threatened subspecies of the Seaside Sparrow. At that time Merritt Island was mostly covered with coastal scrub and was largely undeveloped. After a few minutes' walk in the scrub I was within ten yards of a large sparrow with underparts covered with very dark vertical streaks and with a bold yellow spot between its eye and bill, unquestionably a Dusky Seaside Sparrow. I also had great looks at a river otter, the first I had ever seen. I didn't realize then that that first good look at the Dusky would be the only view I'd get that trip – or ever.

Seaside Sparrows occur along the eastern North American shore from the Canadian Maritimes to the southern tip of Texas. The species has been divided into 11 subspecies, of which one, the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow, is endangered and another, the Dusky Seaside Sparrow, is now extinct.

Never abundant, the Dusky subspecies had only been recorded in the Merritt Island-Upper St. John's River area of the Florida east coast. The marshy coastland provided the habitat and food supply the birds needed. Unfortunately, it was also a breeding ground for mosquitoes – which the increasing human population did not want. Over the years, chemical controls, flooding and draining decreased the mosquito population; the combination proved too much for these sparrows. Development in the area by NASA starting in the '60's proved to be too much. Although portions of the area were protected by inclusion in the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge in 1963 and the Canaveral National Seashore in 1975, it was too late for the Dusky Seaside Sparrow. By 1980 only 5 birds remained, all in captivity and all males. The last one died in 1987. 🐾

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PO Box 938

Middlebury, VT 05753