



Northeast Kingdom Audubon

A Chapter Of the National Audubon Society

Spring 2006

The mission of Northeast Kingdom Audubon is to foster the stewardship and enjoyment of birds, other wildlife and natural habitats.

Notes from the President

Thanks to the talent and efforts of our own Shelly Guy, Northeast Kingdom Audubon now has an excellent, user-friendly website at www.nekaudubon.org. Topics to explore include a list of our board members and officers, how to join the chapter, upcoming events, bird sightings, camp program descriptions, Christmas Bird Count results, a description of our Windsong Wildlife Sanctuary, past and present newsletters, "Birding on the Web," a photo gallery, and "Bird Notes." "Bird Notes" is a new column written by Carolyn Boardman appearing in *The Caledonian Record* on the last Tuesday of each month. Be sure to look for it! We also send out Events Calendar updates via email and if you would like to receive these, send your email address to me: airie@kingcon.com. You will get just two or three (blind) emails a month with chapter events, notices of our monthly Information and Planning Meetings and occasional other bird related notes.

Our **camp scholarships** this year are awarded to Carrie Harvey of East Hardwick and Emma Rose Kaplan of Peacham. Both girls will go to the Audubon youth camp on Hog Island off the coast of Maine. We are always impressed with the high-quality essays our applicants submit and it's difficult to only be able to select two each year. The \$1,800 our chapter needs to raise to send these children to camp comes from our BIRDATHON at the end of May, so please give as generously as you can!



"Discovering Birds" Workshops to be Hosted by the Fairbanks Museum

Readers of this newsletter appreciate the beauty of birds and their place in our environment, but many of us find the deeper study and understanding of bird life daunting. Even identifying birds on one's own can be an activity fraught with frustration, delusion, and defeat.

This spring, the Fairbanks Museum will host a series of workshops intended to introduce interested participants to the lives of birds. "DISCOVERING BIRDS: Introduction to a Lifelong Passion" will deepen participants' understanding of Northeast Kingdom birds and their environment. This series of five workshops, hosted by Museum Director Charlie Browne, will cover topics on bird biology, birding tools and techniques, and avian behavior and will examine the characteristics of many of the more common bird families. Charlie says, "I hope that workshop participants will develop the basic knowledge and skills to become capable, independent observers of birds."

Participants may enroll in the individual workshops (\$20 per workshop) or the entire series of five workshops (\$80). Pre-registration is requested. To register or for more information, call the Museum at 802.748.2372. Each workshop will take place at the Museum and will include handouts, recommended readings, learning activities, and birding experiences. The workshop schedule is as follows:

May 3, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. BIRDING BASICS

How to observe birds in natural settings, optics, field guides, birding ethics. Bird Family Focus: Waterfowl, Waders, and Shorebirds.

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May 10, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. BIRD BIOLOGY AND ECOLOGY for Non-Scientists

Flight, feathers, nesting, migration, and metabolism. Bird Family Focus: Hawks, Owls, and Upland Game Birds.

May 17, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. OBSERVING BIRD BEHAVIOR

Bird song, territorial display, feeding and reproductive strategies. Bird Family Focus: Corvidae (Crows and Ravens), Flycatchers, Chickadees.

May 24, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. BIRD HABITATS and CONSERVATION

Natural communities of the Northeast Kingdom, endangered and threatened birds, population trends. Bird Family Focus: Thrushes, Sparrows, and Blackbirds.

May 27, 7 a.m. - noon BIRDS IN THE FIELD

Birding in some of the Northeast Kingdom's hotspots, field study and research opportunities. Bird Family Focus: Warblers.

Bird Chatter: Abundance Can Translate into Indifference *by Bill Marshall*

The commonplace and familiar are often taken for granted, if not dismissed or neglected outright. That was my attitude toward the American crow. During the '06 Christmas Bird Count, the one bird I saw the most was the crow and I heard myself saying with disappointment, "It's just a crow." A few years ago the crow was the most counted bird in the nation-wide Christmas Bird Count. Abundance can translate into indifference—an attitude with potentially dire consequences. Let's remember that the skies were clouded with the migration of passenger pigeons; now, they are extinct.

The American crow is well-known, widespread, common and obvious. What is not known as well is how complex its life is. One of its most intriguing and fascinating traits is the crow's habit of roosting during the winter months. Many of us have seen the crowns of trees blackened by roosting crows. It is common to see hundreds congregating at dusk. What we may not know is that those hundreds can often multiply into tens of thousands and in Fort Cobb, Oklahoma, there is a roost that is estimated at two million!

Roosting only takes place during the winter months prior to mating and nesting. Various ornithologists have speculated on the reasons for this behavior: some have argued that the roosting spot represents proximity to a favorable and reliable food source. Others have suggested that there is strength in numbers against predators, most notably the great horned owl. Still, others have offered the idea that the roost becomes an information center. Crows that have had less success in foraging can follow others to favorable feeding sites.

The crow approaches the roost in a staged manner. It will gather in a tree with its immediate family that often includes up to five years of siblings. This cluster, then, proceeds to the nocturnal roost where the family separates and merges with the much larger population.

Roosts can be a common feature on the landscape and it has been determined that some roosts are over a hundred years old!

The roosting behaviors of the crow hint at the complex family structure that exists among crows. Crows move about the landscape in family units. Younger crows will remain with their parents up to five years since the average initial mating age for males is around four. Since there is only one clutch per year, there can be as many as five nesting seasons that create a family unit. What is remarkable is that the various siblings of the family hunt for and provide food for the nestlings. This suggests a complex family structure of identity and interdependence.

This sense of identity can extend beyond their own species. As Kevin McGowen, an ornithologist with the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, has observed: "Crows have one endearing trait not shared by other birds. They will get to know people as individuals." McGowen, who is an expert on crows, cited experiences where he has been followed away from his home to an entirely different context by crows that obviously know him as an individual.

Space does not permit elaborating on other intriguing facts. It will have to suffice to point out that crows demonstrate loyalty by mating for life. They are highly adaptable with a remarkable geographical range. They are versatile in their eating habits; of course, some humans include them in their eating habits. While most crows die during their first year, others have lived into their teens and the oldest recorded crow was 29½ years old.

Perhaps your interest in a familiar bird of the Vermont landscape has been aroused. If so, you can learn more by going to our website at www.nekaudubon.org and click on Birding on the Web. With knowledge the ordinary can become extraordinary.

Upcoming Events • April – June 2006

All activities and Board Meetings are open to the public. Events are listed in our newsletter and in local newspapers, but may be updated or change. We appreciate a \$3/member or \$5/non-member donation and pre-registration for trips and programs. To learn more about the NEK Audubon Chapter visit our website: www.nekaudubon.org.

Monday, April 3: Informational and Planning Meeting 4:30- 6 p.m. Fairbanks Museum Classroom. Open to all.

Saturday, April 29 (all day) Trip to Coventry, Lake Memphremagog and (in the afternoon) the Wenlock Wildlife Mgt Area. We'll look for boreal species and waterfowl. Bring a bag lunch. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the White Supermarket parking lot by Agway on Rte. 5, exit 23 off I-91 in Lyndonville. Pre-register with Tom at 626-9071 or thomas.barriman@verizon.net

Monday, May 1: Informational and Planning Meeting 4:30- 6 p.m. Fairbanks Museum Classroom. Open to all.

Wednesday Evenings in May and Saturday Morning, May 27: Discovering Birds: Introduction to a Lifelong Passion with Charlie Browne. A series of workshops designed to deepen understanding of birds and their environments. Pre-registration requested; \$20 per workshop or \$80 for all five. Sponsored by the Fairbanks Museum: 1302 Main Street, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819; 802-748-2372; www.fairbanksmuseum.org.

Saturday, May 6: (all day) Trip to the Champlain Valley in search of early migrants. We'll start at Red Rock Park in Burlington and head south to the Dead Creek refuge. Bring a bag lunch. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the West Danville parking lot (jct. of rte. 2 and 15) Pre-register with Tom at 626-9071 or thomas.barriman@verizon.net.

Saturday May 13: MIGRATORY BIRD DAY. Details to follow.

Sunday, May 14: 8:00 a.m. - 12: 00 noon NEK bird-walk at the Blue Mountain School in Wells River. Meet at the school parking lot off rte. 302 exit 17 of I-91 at 8:00am or coming from the north at the Fairbanks Museum at 7:30am and we'll carpool. Pre-register with Tom at 626-9071 or thomas.barriman@verizon.net

Saturday May 20: 7:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Trip to the Pondicherry Wildlife Refuge in New Hampshire. We'll meet up with Dave Govatski from the Ammonoosuc Audubon Chapter and bird the refuge. Bring a bag lunch and meet at the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury. Pre-register with Tom at 626-9071 or thomas.barriman@verizon.net

Sunday May 28: (all day) Birdathon at various locations in the Northeast Kingdom. Details on BIRDATHON insert. Contact Tom Berriman at 626-9071 or thomas.barriman@verizon.net

Saturday, June 3: Hardwick Trails Bird Trip on the new trail system behind the Hazen Union School. Meet at 6:30 a.m. in the West Danville parking lot (at the jct of Rtes. 2 and 15) or at the trailhead behind the school at 7 a.m. Pre-register with Norma: 472-8724 nspaulding@vtlink.net or Airie 748-8515; airie@kingcon.com

Monday, June 6: Informational and Planning Meeting 4:30 – 6 p.m. Fairbanks Museum Classroom. Open to all.

ANNUAL MEETING

3:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, July 30

Hazen Union School in Hardwick, VT

Norma and Ron Wiesen will speak and lead a walk on the

**History, Terrain and Plant Life
of the Hardwick Trails**

Followed by a potluck supper.

Open to all • Come join us!

Directions: In Hardwick (by the Village Laundromat), turn right on N. Main Street. At .2 mile see Hazen Union School on the left. We'll meet in the library.

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS / 2005-2006

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1302 Main Street
St. Johnsbury, Vermont 05819

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How to join Northeast Kingdom Audubon

There are two ways to become a member:

1. To join the National Audubon Society (first time): send \$20 (or more) payable to the National Audubon Society to: Audubon Vermont, 255 Sherman Hollow Road, Huntington, VT 05462.

phone: 802-434-3068 email: vermont@audubon.org; website: www.audubon.org

When you join the National Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of our NEK Audubon Chapter member and we receive the entire first year's membership money for our chapter's use. You may opt for: a) No Audubon magazine; b) No telemarketing calls; c) No national solicitations; d) Local (VT) appeals only; e) Anonymity ... by so indicating on your application.

2. To join Northeast Kingdom Audubon only: Send \$10 or more yearly (honor system!) to: NEK Audubon, Charlie Browne, Treasurer, 1302 Main Street, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819

No matter how you become a member, you will receive a newsletter three times a year and may attend our Board Meetings, which are usually held on the first Monday of each month from 4:30-6:00 at the Fairbanks Museum. Whether or not you are a member, if you send your email address to airie@kingcon.com you will receive our Updated Events Calendars and local notices. Remember to keep us informed of changes in your email address. You can expect about one email per month. Visit the NEK Audubon chapter website, www.nekaudubon.org for lots more information!