



# NORTHEAST KINGDOM AUDUBON

A Chapter Of The National Audubon Society

Spring 2004

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

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## Notes from the President

At our March chapter meeting Matteo Burani informed us about a proposal to extend a specific amount of land designated as wilderness in the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF). Large tracks of land, free of development, roads, logging and motors, provide critical habitat for pine marten, black bear, northern goshawk, Neotropical songbirds and other species which need interior forest or areas free from edge predation. Contrary to what some would believe, the amount of timber on these lands is inconsequential, as only 1% of the annual cut comes from the GMNF. The proposed sites also avoid existing snowmobile trails as much as possible. At present Vermont has only about 60,000 acres or about 1% with this designation, whereas the national average is about 4%. Designated lands would continue to be available for backcountry activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, canoeing, snowshoeing, x-c skiing, birding and nature study. It's important to write Letters to the Editor and contact legislators so that this important proposal can become a reality. For more information call Peter Sterling at (802) 279-6840, or on the web to to: [www.vermontwilderness.org](http://www.vermontwilderness.org).

This year we awarded three students our NEK Audubon camp scholarships. Rigel Garrison-Botsford of South Strafford and Kate Roosa of Barnet each won a \$700 scholarship for the High Pond Youth Camp in Brandon, Vermont. Megan McGill of Lyndonville won the \$800 scholarship for the youth camp at Hog Island off the Maine coast. With many excellent applications this year, it was difficult to select just three winners. These scholarships are entirely funded by our Birdathon. For years we've given young people this chance learn

about the natural world and develop their conservation ethic. All are welcome to join us on May 23 or make a contribution to support this annual endeavor!

## Bird Chatter

This winter's sightings have not been as dramatic as previous winters although I cannot easily dismiss the cascading spirals of snow geese over Lake Champlain or the fierce hoverings of northern harrier hawks above snow-blanketed cornfields.

What has been personally noteworthy and satisfying is the pleasure gained by sharing a winter with certain species of birds that have frequented our birdfeeders and trees that surround our home. Early mornings and late winter afternoons have been occupied by filling the feeders with sunflower seeds, scattering cracked corn on wooden trays, and stuffing wired cages with suet. These rituals established a routine for the day and forced me to focus on the habits of the creatures that frequent these feeding stations.

Some birds that took up permanent residence around our home, while others stopped by momentarily on a voyage to wherever: evening grosbeaks, tufted tit mice, white and red-breasted nuthatches, mourning doves, snow buntings, Bohemian waxwings, downy and hairy woodpeckers, redpolls, pigeons, blue jays, crows, pine siskins, and chickadees. Below are a few glimpses of our permanent and transient winter neighbors.

The black-capped chickadees that ranked second in Vermont in total numbers (2,271) during the Great Backyard Bird Count spent the winter nights in the pine woods that edge our backyard and their days dancing about the lilacs where the feeders

hang. They often numbered over twenty at a time, taking turns, not terribly aggressive, cautious, yet remarkably tame. At one point, my wife had two chickadees feed out of her hand. Their kinetic energy is astounding, as they hop, twirl, hang upside down in acrobatic movements. There are few examples of hyperactivity that are more vivid than the perpetual fluttering of these winter neighbors.

Then there are the mourning doves. What gorgeous and regal creatures! They, too, spent the winter nights in the pine grove and their days perched in numbers up to twenty-five in one of our full-sized apple trees. Their dark markings and soft rosey-brown overtones made them, at times, nearly invisible on the apple branches. Glancing for a moment, I would not see them. Focusing more intently, suddenly, they appeared, arranged in among the tree's branches as subtle tree ornaments, shoulders down, necks retracted, sitting patiently without motion. While the chickadees spent the day at the feeders, the doves would arrive in the early dawning of the morning and in the disappearing light of the late afternoon. They fed on the cracked corn on the ground feeders and would retreat to the woods with any threatening intrusion.

Mid-winter, we were invaded! I had not previously seen the invaders, but their numbers and

their voraciousness made them immediately a subject of interest and marvel. I describe none other than the common redpoll, which, by the way, ranked number one (3,229) in the Vermont Great Backyard Bird Count – outnumbering the chickadee by nearly a thousand! The redpoll is a beautiful bird, slender, adorned by a red cap. But ... watching them swarm on the bag of thistle, hanging onto each other and nastily warding off their own, I, for one, would not want to invite them to my birthday party.

There were moments of surprise and delight. One day, we had the thrill of observing a gathering of 25 or more snow buntings in the apple tree and around the ground feeder. Their white feathers and soft yellow-orange markings make them a gorgeous creature. Their predominately white plumage in winter explains why they are also named snowflake. As quickly as they arrived, they disappeared at the end of the day, not to be seen for the rest of the winter.

We experienced a similar flash in time when we looked out to a wild crabapple tree adorned with frozen apples and saw a large flock of birds. At first, we guessed cedar waxwings, but later learned that we had been treated to a sighting of Bohemian waxwings. They gorged themselves on fallen apples and apples hanging from the trees. Within an hour, they were satiated and flew off, not to be seen again.

One final note: I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to the injured blue jay that came early to the feeders and stayed late each day. Early in the winter, we noticed its left leg with a useless limp foot drooping from its socket. It would land on the ground feeder with noteworthy nimbleness but with an obvious listing to the left. While other blue jays would fight for a space on the tray, deference was given to this injured bird. It did not seem to have to fight off other blue jays and it would hunker down and gather a lot of food before flying and perching lopsided on the nearby apple tree. It was a tough winter, bitterly cold at times, but this individual blue jay persisted, stayed focused and endured. There's a lesson to be learned in that behavior.

— Bill Marshall

## NORTHEAST KINGDOM AUDUBON BOARD OF DIRECTORS / 2003-2004

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## Upcoming Events April - July 2004

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All activities are open to the public. Events are listed in our newsletter and in local newspapers, but may be updated or change. NEK Audubon Information and Planning Meetings will be held: **Monday, May 3, Monday, June 7 and Monday September 13** from 4:30-6pm in the Fairbanks Museum classroom and are open to all.

**Saturday April 17** - Search for migrating birds in the **Champlain Valley**. Meet at 7am at Joe's Pond Park and Ride, West Danville, intersection of rte. 15 and rte. 2. Bring a bag lunch. \$5 donation (more if you can/less if you can't) and pre-registration. Contact Tom 626-9071, [thomas.barriman@verizon.net](mailto:thomas.barriman@verizon.net), or Dwight 626-5891.

**Saturday April 24** - **Boreal Habitat of the NEK**: Meet at 7am White's Supermarket parking lot, rte. 5 south of Lyndonville next to Agway. Half-day trip. \$5 donation (more if you can/less if you can't) and pre-registration. Contact Tom 626-9071, [thomas.barriman@verizon.net](mailto:thomas.barriman@verizon.net), or Dwight at 626-5891.

**Wednesday May 5, 7-10 am** - **NEK Audubon & Fairbanks Museum: Blue Mountain Union School Nature Trail and Connecticut River Birding Trail**: 7-10am. Meet at back of the parking lot at Blue Mountain Union School, U.S. 302, Wells River. \$5 donation (more if you can/less if you can't) and pre-registration. Contact Charlie Browne [cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org](mailto:cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org) 748-2372.

**Friday May 7** - **Loon talk and slideshow presentation with Ray and Evelyn Richer**: Fairbanks Museum 7:30-9pm. \$5 donation (more if you can/less if you can't) and pre-registration. Sponsored by **NEK Audubon, the Green Mountain Club, and the Fairbanks Museum**. Contact Airie Lindsay [airie@kingcon.com](mailto:airie@kingcon.com) 748-8515.

**Saturday May 8, 7am-1pm** - **NEK Audubon & Fairbanks Museum: Down by the River**: Beautiful Birding Spots Along the Connecticut River in Barnet. Meet at the Barnet end of the Barnet/North Monroe Bridge. \$5 donation (more if you can/less if you can't) and pre-registration. Contact Charlie Browne [cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org](mailto:cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org) 748-2372.

**Wednesday May 12, 7-9am** - **NEK Audubon & Fairbanks Museum: Hidden Habitats along the River**: near the White Village in Lower Waterford. Meet at the Lower Waterford Church. We request a \$5 donation (more if you can/less if you can't) and pre-registration. Contact Charlie Browne [cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org](mailto:cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org) 748-2372.

**Saturday May 15, 7-10 am** - **NEK Audubon & Fairbanks Museum: Oxbows, Meadows and Floodplain Forests in Guildhall**: Meet at the Intersection of US 2 and VT 102. \$5 donation (more if you can/less if you can't) and pre-registration. Contact Charlie Browne [cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org](mailto:cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org) 748-2372.

**Thursday, May 20, 7-11am** - **NEK Audubon & Fairbanks Museum: Victory Basin Wildlife Management Area**: Meet at Damon's Crossing Parking Area. \$5 donation (more if you can/less if you can't) and pre-registration. Contact Charlie Browne [cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org](mailto:cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org) 748-2372.

**Sunday, May 23, NEK AUDUBON BIRDATHON** all over the Kingdom. Details to come.

**Wednesday, May 26, 6-10am** - **The Conte Refuge and Molly Beattie Bog. NEK Audubon/Fairbanks Museum**: Meet at the Junction of VT 105 and Stone Dam Road. Contact Charlie Browne [cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org](mailto:cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org) 748-2372.

**Saturday, June 5, 9:30am-2:30pm** - **Applicants' Hike up Wheeler Mountain**: This is especially for our Camp Scholarship Applicants and their families. We'll look and listen for Neotropical migrants as we climb up through hardwoods and softwoods to the spectacular vista from the rock outcropping at the summit. This hike is quite steep in spots, but an easier route is available if needed. Meet at the Fairbanks Museum at 9:30 to carpool. Hike is open to all. No charge.

**Saturday June 19, 7am** - **High elevation breeders on Mt. Mansfield**: Meet at the West Danville Park & Ride at the junction of Rtes 2 and 15. We'll drive up the Toll Road looking for Black Poll Warblers, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Swainson's Thrush and Bicknell's Thrush. We'll return in the early afternoon. \$5 donation (more if you can/less if you can't) and pre-registration. Contact Tom 626-9071; [thomas.barriman@verizon.net](mailto:thomas.barriman@verizon.net), or Dwight at 626-5891.

**Saturday June 26, 8am-noon** - **Black-backed Woodpecker Survey in Victory Bog**: (Rain date June 27) Mark LaBarr will use playback tapes to locate birds and bird nests. We'll carpool from the Fairbanks Museum at 7:15am, Copp's Store at 7:45 and at Damon's Crossing in Victory Bog at 8am. **Preregister by Wednesday, June 23** with Airie [airie@kingcon.com](mailto:airie@kingcon.com) (748-8515) or MLaBARR@audubon.org. Suggested donation \$3 members/\$5 non-members.

**Sunday July 25, 3-6pm** - **ANNUAL MEETING**: Roy Pilcher will show slides on Nesting Birds of Vermont. Bird walk, short business meeting and potluck supper to follow. Everyone is welcome, but please call Thema White (592-3566) or contact Airie Lindsay [airie@kingcon.com](mailto:airie@kingcon.com) (748-8515) to register.