



# NORTHEAST KINGDOM AUDUBON

A Chapter Of The National Audubon Society

Spring / Summer 2003

The mission of Northeast Kingdom Audubon is to foster the stewardship and enjoyment of birds, wildlife and their natural habitat

## The Great Backyard Bird Count Tally

Despite earlier sightings of a parakeet in the town of St. Johnsbury, no parakeets were found during the annual Great Backyard Bird Count hosted by The National Audubon Society & Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology from February 14 to February 17 of this year.

Below is summarized the top ten species of birds counted this year in Vermont:

Black-capped Chickadee	3,553
American Goldfinch	2,930
Blue Jay	2,504
Mourning Dove	1,911
Dark-eyed Junco	1,012
American Tree Sparrow	736
American Crow	731
European Starling	618
Downy Woodpecker	586
Northern Cardinal	569

If you would like to see this year's full report, log on to: [www.birdsource.org](http://www.birdsource.org)



## Audubon Board of Directors

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## Bird Chatter

It was 7:30 in the morning. I had just sat down next to the large windows that overlook our gardens and brook. Coffee in one hand and an ear to the radio, I was about to pick up the newspaper when Donna yelled, "What was that? Quick, come here. There's a big bird down among the trees by the brook."

Sure enough, perched among the trees was a large, hawk-like bird. We grabbed the binoculars and Donna raced for The Sibley Guide to Birds. Looking through the binoculars, it was clear it was not a red-tailed hawk, an owl, an errant osprey, or a Cooper's hawk.

Fortunately, it obliged us by sitting motionless as we rapidly thumbed through the guide. There were certain clear markings: the throat, breast, and belly were pale white with fine, gray vertical barring. The eye was an orange-red. The crown was an unmistakable black. But the clincher was a bold white line of feathers above the eyes.

We had in our sights a northern goshawk! Donna read as I rattled off its markings. She had just said, "They are known to ambush their prey and seize them in mid-air" when the goshawk turned abruptly to its left, rose up the hill by the brook, shot across our driveway in close pursuit of a smaller bird, and disappeared around the corner of our house.

We had been treated to an unusual event, at least in Vermont. In fact, one source mentioned that these birds are "present, but uncommon in Vermont ... not likely to be seen except by

extensive searching over several days.”

The Northern Goshawk is the largest and most aggressive of the three accipiters (sharp-shinned hawk and the Cooper’s hawk being the other two). They are a top-level predator with tremendous short bursts of speed that enable it to catch squirrels, jays, snowshoe rabbits and songbirds. As such, they play a vital role in the forest food web. The female is larger than the male and can have a wingspan of 42”. They are noted for their long bodies up to 19”, their long narrow, rudder-like tails, and their flight pattern that includes several quick flaps and short glides.

These hawks inhabit mature coniferous forests throughout Canada, the Northeast, Northwest and the Southwest. Old, closed canopies allow them to build up to 9 nests during the breeding season. Even though, they build multiple nests, they tend to use only one nest per season, leaving the rest for other birds such as spotted owls, great gray owls, and Cooper’s hawks to occupy. They have a clutch of 2 to 5 white to pale blue eggs that incubate for 36 to 38 days with fledging taking place within 35 to 42 days. It is during the nesting times that these birds are most vulnerable to large hawks, owls, bears and lynx.

When I saw the goshawk streak by our driveway, there was no doubt in my mind that this bird was agile, fierce and aggressive. Its long, rudder-like tail gives it acrobatic ability to spin around trees and dive under shrubs and brush. And beware! They are fiercely aggressive when it comes to defending their nests. Ask my brother-in-law, who was reduced to flattening himself to the ground as a goshawk bombed him when he approached a nest of fledglings!

– Bill Marshall



“No parks. They’re too crowded!”

## Surveys and Projects

In addition to walks, trips and programs, many of our Northeast Kingdom Audubon chapter members are involved in surveys and projects. We welcome anyone who is able to devote some time to participate. Training is provided, so you don't need to be an expert.

The Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) is in the process of creating a second **Breeding Bird Atlas of Vermont**. Over the course of five seasons, we will work in teams to document evidence of breeding birds in Caledonia and Essex counties. The time commitment is variable, but not overwhelming. Our goal is to learn more and contribute to a data base that will help people better understand the nature of our shifting bird populations, be it due to environment, disease, or habitat changes. If you are interested, contact Libby Hillhouse (Caledonia) [bobolink@kingcon.com](mailto:bobolink@kingcon.com), 592-3547; Lou Bushey (Caledonia) [louis.bushey@anrmail.state.vt.us](mailto:louis.bushey@anrmail.state.vt.us) 751-0110; or Matt Langlais (Essex) [matt.langlais@anrmail.state.vt.us](mailto:matt.langlais@anrmail.state.vt.us) 752-0110.

**The Connecticut River Birding Trail (CRBT)**, a string of documented birding sites, currently encompasses a block in the upper Connecticut River watershed of central Vermont and New Hampshire. Bill Shepard, Project Coordinator, recently met with a group at the Fairbanks Museum to discuss expanding the trail up through the Northeast Kingdom. Our chapter nominated and volunteered to explore a number of sites to be included. With this non-profit conservation initiative, the CRBT project hopes to inspire more people to enjoy the land and protect these places. For more information contact Bill Shepard c/o CRBT, 104 Railroad Row, White River Jct., VT 05001, (802) 291-9100 ext. 107; [www.birdtrail.org](http://www.birdtrail.org).

Last August, Mark LaBarr led a walk in the Victory Basin Wildlife Management Area as the

start of an **Important Bird Area (IBA) Monitoring Program**. Within a couple of hours, we saw all three of the target species: gray jays, boreal chickadees and a black-backed woodpecker. NEK Audubon will revisit Victory Bog 2-3 times each year to document the occurrence and abundance of these birds. To participate or for more information, contact Airie Lindsay ([airie@kingcon.com](mailto:airie@kingcon.com), (748-8515), or Mark LaBarr ([mlabarr@audubon.org](mailto:mlabarr@audubon.org) 434-3068).

Despite their elegance and popularity, butterflies remain largely a mystery in Vermont. Kent McFarland, a conservation biologist at VINS, notes that "Butterflies are glistening indicators of environmental quality," and is about to conduct a **Vermont Butterfly Survey**. Anyone with a sharp eye can contribute. To join the

survey and learn about training sessions/materials, contact Kent McFarland at (802) 457- 2779 or Bryan Pfeiffer at (802) 454-4640, or visit [www.vinsweb.org/conservation/vbs](http://www.vinsweb.org/conservation/vbs).

## West Nile Virus

The West Nile Virus can spread to wildlife, domestic animals and the human population. As soon as the mosquito season is upon us, Vermont's Department of Health will again run a West Nile Virus Surveillance Program. Watch for a hotline number and notices on how to take any dead birds you discover, to the central office on Eastern Avenue in St. Johnsbury to be tested. For more information contact the Vermont Health Department at 748-5151 or 1-800-952-2936.

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## . . . Upcoming Events at Northeast Kingdom Audubon . . .

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**Saturday May 3:** 7-9 am **Down By the River** An introduction to springtime migration. Meet at the Barnet - Monroe Bridge. \$5 suggested donation.

**Monday May 5:** **NEK Audubon Board Meeting** 4:30-6 pm Fairbanks Museum

**Wednesday May 14:** 5-8 pm **Birding Back Roads and Backyards** Thrushes, warblers, and other evening songsters. Meet at the Fairbanks Museum to carpool to sites nearby. \$5.00 suggested donation.

**Sunday May 25:** 7-10 am **Northeast Kingdom BIRDATHON** Mark your calendar, details to come on this big day celebrating Northeast Kingdom birding. A special NEK Audubon fundraising event!

**Thursday May 29:** 5-9 pm **Birding and Wildflower Walk on Darling Hill** followed by **Appreciating Nature** a presentation by David Dobbs, author of the Northern Forest, at the Inn at Mountain View Farm. Pre-registration required. Bring a picnic! \$10.00 suggested donation. Call the Fairbanks Museum at (802) 748-2372.

**Saturday May 31:** 7-11 am **Pondicherry Refuge** Jefferson, NH, one of the finest undiscovered birding spots in the northeast. Meet at the Fairbanks Museum at 6 am or at the Junction of US 2 and NH Rt 116 at 7 am \$5.00 suggested donation.

**Monday June 2:** **NEK Audubon Board Meeting** 4:30-6 pm Fairbanks Museum

**Sunday June 8:** 7-10 am **Birds of the Nulhegan Basin** Join us for a walk in the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge. Meet at Wenlock Crossing, VT Rte. 105. \$5.00 suggested donation.

**Saturday July 26:** **NEK Audubon's ANNUAL MEETING** **Explore Butterflies and Moths with Michael Sabourin**. Everyone is welcome to join us for a walk, short business meeting and potluck brunch at Thelma White's house in East Peacham from 9-Noon. RSVP by Thursday, July 24: Thelma (592-3566) or Airie (748-8515) [airie@kingcon.com](mailto:airie@kingcon.com).

All NEK Audubon activities and Board Meetings are open to the public. Most events are listed in our Newsletter and in local newspapers. Notices are occasionally updated and may change. Contact Airie Lindsay [airie@kingcon.com](mailto:airie@kingcon.com) (802) 748-8518 or Charlie Browne (802) 748-2372 [cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org](mailto:cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org) for details.