



# NORTHEAST KINGDOM AUDUBON

A Chapter Of The National Audubon Society

Winter 2009

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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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## President's Notes:

### *Four Airie Lindsay Camp Scholarships to be offered this summer*

As winter settles, we are focusing on the Airie Lindsay Camp Scholarship Program. We are pleased to announce that NEK Audubon will provide four scholarships for summer 2009. There will be three scholarships available for attendance at the Acadia Institute of Oceanography at Seal Harbor, Maine, ([www.acadia-insitute.org](http://www.acadia-insitute.org)), and one for Camp Chewonki, located in Wiscasset, Maine ([www.chewonki.org](http://www.chewonki.org)). Young people attending the Acadia Institute programs will participate in a hands-on curriculum that focuses on oceanography. The Acadia Institute offers a 6-day introductory program for 10-12 year olds. They, also, have a more extensive 14-day program, geared for youth ages 12-15. The scholarship recipient to Camp Chewonki will work on activities to enhance their understanding about climate change and renewable energy systems. The 8-day Chewonki program for 13-15 year old campers includes a 3-day sail along the Maine Coast!

Many, many thanks to all who have donated to the Airie Lindsay Camp Scholarship Fund. Feedback from last year's families tells us that our scholarship recipients' experiences are tremendous and deeply appreciated. For more specific information, for applications to be considered for a scholarship, or if you know of a deserving young person, please go to [www.nekaudubon.org](http://www.nekaudubon.org) or call Laura at 802-751-7671.

The Board is also very excited about two new possibilities this spring. We have been busy planning a three-part series that will bring **natural history speakers** to our local area. We are very pleased to be partners in this endeavor with the Fairbanks Museum.

In addition, the Fairbanks Museum and NEK Audubon are developing a new partnership with the North Branch Nature Center and the St. Johnsbury Recreation Department to offer a **youth birding**

**series** this spring.

Please remember the Great Backyard Bird Count, sponsored by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, will be February 13-16, 2009. More information is available at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org).

—Laura Whittlesey Tobin

## Ringling in the New Year with the Barnet Christmas Bird Count

Nineteen intrepid observers ventured out in subzero temperatures and numbing wind chills on New Year's Day to count the winter birds to be found from St. Johnsbury to Ryegate and from Peacham to Lyman, N.H. The Barnet Christmas Bird Count circle encompasses stretches of open water along the Connecticut River, windswept farmlands, dense conifer forests, frigid hollows, sugar woods, and busy bird feeding stations. This year some 44 species were counted and nearly 4000 individual birds. Highlights included Bohemian Waxwings and White-winged Crossbills in Waterford and a Northern Mockingbird in Passumpsic. This year Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches were abundant, Purple Finches completely absent, and raptors extremely scarce. The complete count list is available at: [www.nekaudubon.org](http://www.nekaudubon.org)

Mark your calendar for January 1, 2010, to join us for a brisk day in the field and be part of an international scientific effort.

—Charlie Browne

### NEK Audubon Board Of Directors 2008-2009

#### Officers:

Laura Tobin, President  
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(802) 434-3068, [dparker@audubon.org](mailto:dparker@audubon.org)

## Bird Chatter:

### Cardinals

by John L. Stanizzi

#### For Carol –

I had seen them in the tree,  
and heard they mate for life.  
so I hung a bird feeder  
and waited.  
By the third day,  
sparrows and purple finches  
hovered and jockeyed  
like a swarm of bees  
fighting over one flower.  
So I hung another feeder,  
but the squabbling continued  
and the seed spilled  
like a shower  
of tiny meteors  
onto the ground  
where starlings  
had congregated,  
and blue jays,  
annoyed with the world,  
disrupted everyone  
except the mourning doves,  
who ambled around  
like plump old women  
poking for the firmest  
head of lettuce.  
Then early one evening  
they came  
the only ones —  
she stood  
on the periphery  
of the small galaxy of seeds;  
he hopped among the nuggets,  
calmly chose  
one seed at a time,  
carried it to her,  
placed it in her beak;  
she, head tilted,  
accepted it  
Then, they fluffed,  
hopped together,  
did it all over again.  
And filled with love,  
I phoned to tell you,  
over and over,  
about each time  
he celebrated  
being there,  
all alone,  
with her.

— from *Ecstasy Among Ghosts*, Antrim House, 2008

### Prosaic Addendum to John L. Stanizzi's poem

We have a Northern Cardinal residing with us this winter. His crimson presence became apparent just around the December holidays and he has been hanging out by the birdfeeders with the blue jays, juncos and goldfinches, absent, as far as we can tell, a mate.

But, yes, Stanizzi was accurate; cardinals do mate for life and they do “mate feed,” particularly during nesting and mating season. Most notably, the male transfers seeds to his mate, while the female builds the nest and does most of the incubating.

Cardinals have been expanding steadily northward and westward and have become regular residents of New York and New England since mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. If a cardinal is spotted, you're in luck since they do not migrate and will most likely come spring be building a nest nearby in dense shrubbery or a small tree 1 to 15 feet above the ground. Two sittings normally occur each year with 2 to 5 white and brown speckled eggs. Incubation lasts from 11 to 13 days and chicks fledge within 9 to 11 days.

Cardinals share the same ordeal that many nesting birds endure — female brown-headed cowbirds will remove cardinal eggs and lay their own eggs in place of the cardinal eggs.

Interestingly, the brightest red males have the highest reproductive success. Coloration is, in part, attributed to diet, which includes insects, spiders, wild fruits, berries, weed seeds, and black-oil sunflower seeds.

—Bill Marshall

### The Book Corner:

From time to time, we will be including in our newsletter books on natural phenomenon that our board members are reading. Below are two that Charlie Browne, Director of the Fairbanks Museum, is enjoying:

***Speciation in Birds***, by Trevor Price. This is a dense, thorough, and fascinating treatment of how species evolve and why birds make excellent study subjects for this complex field of inquiry. The reader with sufficient endurance will be rewarded with a new way of looking at, and thinking about, birds and a profound new view of how evolutionary biology works.

***The Extravagant Universe***, by Robert Kirshner. Supernovae are relatively rare occurrences and even more rarely visible to Earth-bound observers, but in Bob Kirshner's extraordinary treatise, supernovae become the portal into contemporary understanding of the expanding universe. This book is a mind-bending delight, full of astonishing cosmology and the creative, often humorous, processes of science.

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## Upcoming Events • February - April 2009

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All activities and board meetings are open to the public. We appreciate pre-registration for trips and programs. Events may be updated or changed. Check our website, [www.nekaudubon.org](http://www.nekaudubon.org) for any changes. **A note about our field trips:** We go regardless of the weather (unless the weather would in some way pose a danger) - so dress appropriately! If you have any doubt about the trip being cancelled call Tom at 626-9071. Sometimes the bad weather brings out the best birds.

We report all our bird sightings to: [www.ebird.org/VINS](http://www.ebird.org/VINS).

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**February 13-16: Great Backyard Bird Count**, sponsored by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. More information is available at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org).

**Saturday, February 21:** NEK Audubon field trip to the **Lake Champlain Valley**. We'll hike the causeway out from South Hero, looking for wintering waterfowl. This is an all-day trip that starts at 6 a.m. at the Joe's Pond/ West Danville parking area, junction of Rtes. 2 and 15. To register call Tom at 626-9071 or email him at [thomas.berriman@verizon.net](mailto:thomas.berriman@verizon.net).

**Sunday, March 29:** NEK Audubon field trip to **Victory Basin**. We'll snowshoe hike from the Damon's Crossing trail. Meet at Damon's Crossing at 8 a.m. Call Tom at 626-9071 or email [thomas.berriman@verizon.net](mailto:thomas.berriman@verizon.net) to register.

**Sunday, April 19:** NEK Audubon field trip to **Wenlock Wildlife Mgt. Area**. We'll hike the Moose Bog Trail and South America Pond Road. Meet at White's/Agway parking lot at 7 a.m. (exit 23 of I-91). Call Tom at 626-9071 or email [thomas.berriman@verizon.net](mailto:thomas.berriman@verizon.net) to register.

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### 2008 Field Trips Recap:

Winter weather conditions in January and February and again in November and December of 2008 caused the cancellations of 4 field trips this year. Even attempts to reschedule proved a bust as snowstorms and strong winds seemed to follow the pattern of our chapter's scheduled trips. Two attempts to get to the Maine coast this past month failed; it was the first time in several years we did not make it to that coast for wintering waterfowl.

A trip in August to Dead Creek to see shore birds was cancelled for lack of participants and later rescheduled for a week later with only two people participating. It turned out to be a fantastic day with many surprises. While the list was short on shore birds, a **Peregrine Falcon** flying along Lake Champlain, two **Red-necked Phalaropes**, **Horned Larks** and a **Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow** were observed at the refuge and a tip from another birder led us to Bristol and a family of **Sandhill Cranes** (male and female with two young).

We did make it to Plum Island in August to catch the shore bird migration south and managed to find 13 species of shore birds still in breeding plumage. The highlights were **Black-bellied Plover**, **Semipalmated Plover**, **Piping Plover**, **Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Willet**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Stilt Sandpipers** and **Short-billed Dowitchers**. We also had **Least Terns** and **Common Terns**. On the ride home (working from a tip on the list serve) we stopped in Newmarket, N.H. to see the pair of **Mississippi Kites** that were nesting there.

Mid-October at Dead Creek the **Snow Goose** show never disappoints and the **American Coot**, **Bonaparte's Gulls**, **Rusty Blackbird**, **Northern Harrier's**, **American Pipit** and a late **Red-necked Phalarope** helped round out the trip.

—Tom Berriman



# NORTHEAST KINGDOM AUDUBON

1302 Main Street  
St. Johnsbury, Vermont 05819

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## Two ways to join Northeast Kingdom Audubon

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**1. 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](mailto:vermont@audubon.org); website: [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)  
When you join the National Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of our NEK Audubon Chapter. 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. 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

We recommend that you join National Audubon, but no matter how you become a member, you will receive a newsletter three times a year and are welcome to attend our board meetings, which are usually held on the first Monday of each month from 4:30-6:00 p.m. at the Fairbanks Museum. Whether or not you are a member, send your email address to Laura at [stonesandstars@verizon.net](mailto:stonesandstars@verizon.net) or call 802-751-7671 to receive updated events calendars and notices of board meetings. Please keep us informed of changes in your email address. You can expect about one email notice per month.

For more information on our chapter and birding in the area, visit the NEK Audubon chapter website, [www.nekaudubon.org](http://www.nekaudubon.org).