



NORTHEAST KINGDOM AUDUBON

A Chapter Of The National Audubon Society Winter/Early Spring 2004

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

Notes from the President

On New Year's Day, many of us here in the Northeast Kingdom participated in Audubon's longest running tradition, the 104th annual **Christmas Bird Count**. Charlie Browne coordinated seventeen volunteers covering a 15-mile diameter circle centered on Barnet. Altogether we saw 4,408 birds of which 926 were chickadees. Interestingly we did not see one Purple Finch or Cedar Waxwing! The Christmas Bird Count takes place throughout the Western Hemisphere between December 14 and January 5. It provides important data on the trends and health of local bird populations. For a detailed list of what was seen on the various CBCs go to: www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/regional/regional_ed.html

NEK Audubon again seeks scholarship applicants for Audubon Summer Camps. We've expanded our offerings this year to include the Youth Camp, Mountain Journeys and Take P.A.R.T (ages 10-18) in Vermont, and the Youth Camp (ages 10-13) and a Workshop for Educators at Hog Island, off the coast of Maine. With top-notch instructors and high caliber campers, everyone who goes has a wonderful time, learns a lot, and builds on the ethic of conservation and respect for wildlife and habitat. Laura Broome and Dounia Bredes won last year's scholarships, and both gave fine presentations on their camp experiences at our annual Campers' Presentation evening at the Dowser's Hall last November. If you know anyone who might be interested in

applying for one of these scholarships, please share the application included with this newsletter, or contact me.

Ernie Howard, of **Howard's Lawn and Garden** in St. Johnsbury Center, gave NEK Audubon a generous percentage of all seed sold at our **Second Annual Birdseed Sale** on the last Saturday in October. The money is used in our chapter's programs, our wildlife sanctuary, or toward the camp scholarships. We thank Ernie for his generosity and hope that our readers will continue to buy birdseed and other products from him year round!

Bird Chatter

We had just arrived at Sandbar State Park, southern entrance to the Lake Champlain islands and one stop among many on our NEK Audubon excursion to the northern environs of the Champlain Valley. Some of us had been momentarily distracted from our mission of bird gazing while we searched for the "facilities". Suddenly, Donna hollered, "Bill, hurry up! You've got to see this." I looked up into a cloudless sky and initially saw nothing but a rich blue backdrop. Then, there they were—a string of birds that undulated back and forth, illuminated by the sun as pure white specters against the sky. Then, there was another string, waving back and forth, constantly changing formation—a white string of pearls gliding back and forth by the air currents. The movement was like the gentle casting of a fly

fisherman's line.

"What are they?" I asked as I bent the back of my head toward my shoulders, straining to get a better angle on a flock of birds that were at a considerable altitude.

"They're snow geese!"

This was my first encounter, albeit a distant encounter, and one that did not let me see much that would assure future identification with any accuracy.

This, however, was not to be our only encounter of the day. An even more spectacular viewing was to happen when we stopped at Isle La Motte near Alburg. We were walking along the lake's shore when Dwight Cargill, our trip leader, spotted a white line out in the water, on the distant horizon. Without his expertise, I would have dismissed this line as the distant shore, but, in fact, it was a flock of snow geese that had alighted on the water.

What happened next left us all with our mouths agape. Descending from the skies was a steady stream of snow geese. At the highest altitudes, they were invisible, but, as they descended, they would become visible because of the angle of

the sun, then, disappear, and, then, reappear.

There were hundreds dropping from the sky in a long cylinder that looked like a helix similar to models I had seen of DNA structures. It was a downpour of snow geese on a perfectly sunfilled, cloudless day. I wouldn't have been surprised if a rainbow had suddenly appeared.

I later learned that we need not worry about a diminishing population of snow geese. These birds are flourishing; in fact, they are becoming a problem similar to Canada geese. Their numbers are straining the ability of the Arctic tundra, their summer breeding grounds, to sustain them. While their numbers are increasing in Vermont during migration because of the cornfields and easy access to Lake Champlain bays where they spend the nights resting, protected from predators, they are presenting an overpopulation problem in the salt marshes from Texas to Louisiana. The Texas Parks and Wildlife authorities had estimated a population of over 3 million snow geese in 1998 and had liberalized regulations to allow the bagging of 20 birds a day.

If you have the good fortune to get closer to a snow goose than we did, here are some distinguishing features: white plumage with black wing tips, pink legs and feet, a pink bill that includes a black patch along the mandibles. The snow goose has a wingspan of 58", one clutch of 4 to 8 eggs, and a fledging period of 45 to 49 days. To confuse matters, they do exhibit different plumage colors at different ages and it has been determined that the blue goose, once considered a separate species, is one variation of the snow goose.

If, however, only seen from a distance, these creatures still present a magnificent spectacle as they pass through Vermont at great altitudes, accent the skies with their graceful lines, and allow us to be amazed as they descend temporarily to our freshwater marshes on their flights to the south.

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2003-2004

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~ Bill Marshall

Upcoming Events late January - April 2004

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 request a \$5 donation (more if you can, less if you can't) and pre-registration for trips and programs.** Contact Airie Lindsay airie@kingcon.com (802) 748-8518 for details, and/or how to join NEK Audubon.

Saturday, January 24: Victory Bog half-day trek. Meet at the Fairbanks Museum at 9am to carpool, or at the Damon's Crossing Parking Area 5.5 miles north of North Concord on the Victory/Gallup Mills Road at 9:45am. We'll look for animal tracks, Grey Jays, Boreal Chickadees, Black-backed Woodpeckers, White-winged Crossbills, Pine Grosbeaks, and more.

Monday, February 2: Information and Planning Meeting, 4:30-6pm Fairbanks Museum

February 6 - 8 (Friday-Sunday): Bird trip to Rhode Island to see over-wintering coastal birds. Reservations are needed at the Newport Motel 6 (#1219) 1-800-466-8356. Departure time/place TBA. Call Dwight at 626-5891 by Friday, January 16 to pre-register.

February 13 - 16: GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT Anyone can participate in this important survey. For more information go to www.vt.audubon.org or call the State Office at 802-434-3068.

Saturday (afternoon-evening), February 28: See and Listen; Who Gives a Hoot Owling in the Champlain Valley. Meet at the Joe's Pond Park and Ride, intersection of rte. 15 and 2, across from store West Danville at 2pm. Bring snack. Contact Tom @ 626-9071 thomas.barriman@verizon.net

Monday, March 1: APPLICATIONS DUE for Audubon Camp Scholarships! This year we'll send two students ages 10-18 and one middle school teacher. Applications/brochures are at the Fairbanks Museum and local libraries or contact airie@kingcon.com; 748-8515.

Monday, March 1: Information and Planning Meeting, 4:30-6pm Fairbanks Museum

Saturday, March 13: 9am-noon: Tracking Trek in the Roy Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Meet at the boat launch parking area at the south end of Harvey's Lake. Otters (?), bobcats, foxes, snowshoe hares, squirrels, weasels, mink, turkeys and ruffed grouse make homes in this area. Bring snowshoes or cross-country skis, warm clothing and a snack. Contact Libby at bobolink@kingcon.com; 592-3547, or airie@kingcon.com 748-8515.

Saturday March 27: Discover what early arrivals are migrating through the Champlain Valley. Meet at the Joe's Pond Park and Ride, intersection of rte. 15 and 2, across from store West Danville at 7am. Bring a bag lunch. Contact Dwight at 626-5891 or Tom @ 626-9071 thomas.barriman@verizon.net

Saturday, March 27: Audubon Vermont (State) Board meeting. Location/Time TBA

Monday, April 5: Information and Planning Meeting, 4:30-6 pm Fairbanks Museum

Saturday, April 10: Hawk Watch includes 1-hour hike to hawk watching location. 8:30am meet at White's Supermarket parking lot next to Agway south end of Lyndonville rte. 5. Bring bag lunch. Contact Tom @ 626-9071; thomas.barriman@verizon.net

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 2. Bring a bag lunch. Contact Tom @ 626-9071; thomas.barriman@verizon.net

Saturday, April 24: Boreal Habitat of the NEK. Meet at White's Supermarket parking lot, rte 5 south of Lyndonville next to Agway at 7am. Half-day trip. Contact Tom@626-9071; thomas.barriman@verizon.net