

# High Peaks Audubon

Adirondack-Champlain Region of New York State

Mission: To conserve and restore natural ecosystems in the Adirondacks, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the Earth's biological diversity.

Volume 34 Number 3

September-November 2006

**Saturday, September 16th, 1:00 p.m.**

**Antarctica**

**Paul Smiths Visitor Interpretative Center**

**Mushroom Walk With Bernie Carr 10:00 a.m.**

**HPAS Board Meeting 11:30 a.m.**

A Research Scientist with the Glaciology Group of the Geophysics Department at the University of Washington, Seattle, Richard Brandt has studied everything from the optical properties of East Antarctic sea-ice to the physical properties of snow.

**Sunday, October 8th, 2006, 2:00 p.m.**

***Spitsbergen: Realm of the Polar Bear***

**Paul Smiths Visitor Interpretative Center**

Larry Master, Lake Placid resident, Chief Zoologist for *Nature Serve* ([www.natureserve.org](http://www.natureserve.org)) and outstanding wildlife photographer will present an illustrated talk about the wildlife and climate of Spitsbergen. Polar bears, walrus, seals, reindeer, arctic fox, whales and colonies of sea birds co-exist in the scenic fjords of the Svalbard Archipelago, only 500 miles from the North Pole. Although mostly uninhabited, human activities have had an enormous impact on the wildlife of these islands, first through whaling, and more recently as a result of global warming.



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All Photographs by Larry Master. Polar Bear Family, above; Dovkie, right

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High Peaks Audubon Society, Inc.  
A chapter of National Audubon Society  
serving the Adirondack/Champlain region  
of northern New York, including Clinton,  
Essex, Franklin and Hamilton counties.

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**Saturday, November 4th, 2006, 2:00 p.m.**  
**Valcour Island Lighthouse: History & Restoration**  
**Lake Forest**

Join us for Linda and Roger Harwood's fascinating PowerPoint presentation about the Valcour Island Lighthouse, first lit in 1874 and, after an elaborate restoration, relit in 2005. Built to help ships navigate the shipping channel between Valcour Island and Peru, this lighthouse was the last one built on the lake and the last one owned by the state. The Harwoods' presentation includes aerial images of all the lighthouses on Lake Champlain and, of course, lovely land- and waterscapes.

**Bark Eater Raffle Winner**

At the HPAS Annual Event/Outing at the Miner Institute's Altona Flat Rock, Brian Glidden, a student at Plattsburgh State whom HPAS nominated for the New York State Ornithological Society's Lillian Stoner Award, reached into a shopping bag full of raffle tickets, agitated them thoroughly and pulled out a ticket purchased by Mary Roden-Tice, who teaches at Plattsburgh State. Mary was thrilled to win as she loves to hike the high peaks, a two-hour commute from Plattsburgh where she lives, and knows the Bark Eater.

The raffle brought in more than \$1,500.

**Thanks again, Joe Pete Wilson!**

*Monarch Butterfly***Message from the President**

I recently submitted the HPAS Annual Report for Audubon New York. One benchmark requested was volunteer hours. I immediately thought that this was probably more than a few hundred. Silly me. When I sat down and roughly tabulated those hours it was clearly more than one thousand, a number which encouraged me to make a more accurate determination. Things to consider: hours spent by members and speakers to travel to and from and attend meetings; hours spent by members and field trip leaders to attend and lead field trips; hours spent by members communicating information electronically; hours spent by members on various mailings: Newsletter, fundraising and raffle letters; hours spent by committee chairs and officers in fulfilling their responsibilities... You get the idea. The final tally (probably minus many small details) is over two thousand hours per year volunteered by HPAS members. Thank you for your valuable time.

**-Pat Thaxton**

## September-October Field Trips

### Saturday, September 9, 2006 Massawepie Mire– Boreal Birds Piercefield-Colton

**Time:** 7:00 a.m.

**Meet:** At the Boy Scout sign on Route 3. (Sign is on the left after traveling approximately 11 miles from the intersection of Route 30 and Route 3 in Tupper Lake. If traveling from the west, the sign is on the right just under 6 miles from the intersection of Route 3 and 56.)

**Leaders:** Joan Collins & Peter O'Shea

**Distance:** 4 miles on a level dirt road through the mire. For those that want to continue, we will also hike 2 miles round trip on the Mountaineer Trail south of Massawepie Lake.

**Bring:** Hiking boots, food, water, sunscreen, binoculars, and insect repellent.

**Register** by calling the Newcomb VIC at (518) 582-2000 or Joan Collins at (315) 261-4246.

Jointly sponsored by St. Lawrence-Adirondack Audubon, High Peaks Audubon, and the Visitor Interpretive Center at Newcomb.

*Long-tailed Duck*



*Larry Master*

### Saturday, September 9 Nun-da-ga-o Ridge in Keene

**Time:** 8 a.m. – 2 p.m.

**Directions:** Meet at the Crows Clearing Trailhead parking lot in Keene.

**Bring:** Water, lunch/snacks, sunscreen, rain gear, hiking boots, binoculars.

**Distance:** A loop trail of app. 5-6 miles with numerous outstanding views from which we can watch for migrating birds; mostly short ups and downs after initial short, steep approach to Big Crow and later to Weston Mountain (moderate difficulty), the trail is unmarked.

**Hike Leaders:** HPAS Members Pat & John Thaxton

**Register:** By calling 518.576.4232; or email: [jpthax5317@aol.com](mailto:jpthax5317@aol.com)

*Arctic Fox*



*Larry Master*

### Saturday, October 28th Coon Mt./Champlain Valley

**Time:** 8:00 a.m.

**Directions:** Meet at the Westport boat launch

**Bring:** Water, lunch, sunscreen, raingear, hiking boots, binoculars

**Distance:** The hike up Coon Mt. is short and easy through woods, then slightly steep near the top on a rocky path. If the wind is right it may be good for migrating raptors. Lake Champlain and the surrounding countryside are good for migrating and early winter species.

**Hike Leaders:** HPAS members Pat & John Thaxton

**Register:** Call (518) 576-4232 or email: [jpthax5317@aol.com](mailto:jpthax5317@aol.com)

*Walrus*



*Larry Master*



## Book Review

### An Inconvenient Truth

#### The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It

By Al Gore

Rodale

326 pp; \$21.95

Profusely illustrated with marvelous photographs, charts and diagrams, *An Inconvenient Truth* is a superb summary of global warming and an impassioned call for serious action to address what Al Gore calls a "planetary emergency."

The book's design reminded me of a slick, clean, classy magazine or corporate annual report, with the graphics and the text riding perfectly at anchor. Gore explains one complicated scenario after another, much of the time with two-page spreads that clearly encapsulate a global warming theory and its supporting data. One spread, for example, features a graph depicting how many days a year trucks can drive on the tundra in Alaska (down to 80 from 225 in 1970), a photo of a truck on the tundra, a photo of a truck stuck in thawed tundra and four succinct paragraphs summarizing this unfortunate trend.

The text in this and most other spreads is large and clean, the prose a model of clarity. Gore also presents a series of before and after pictures of major glaciers that demonstrate powerfully the overwhelmingly obvious impact of warming trends on glaciers. The various spreads and foldouts function like information modules, reader-friendly factoids one can absorb in one take.

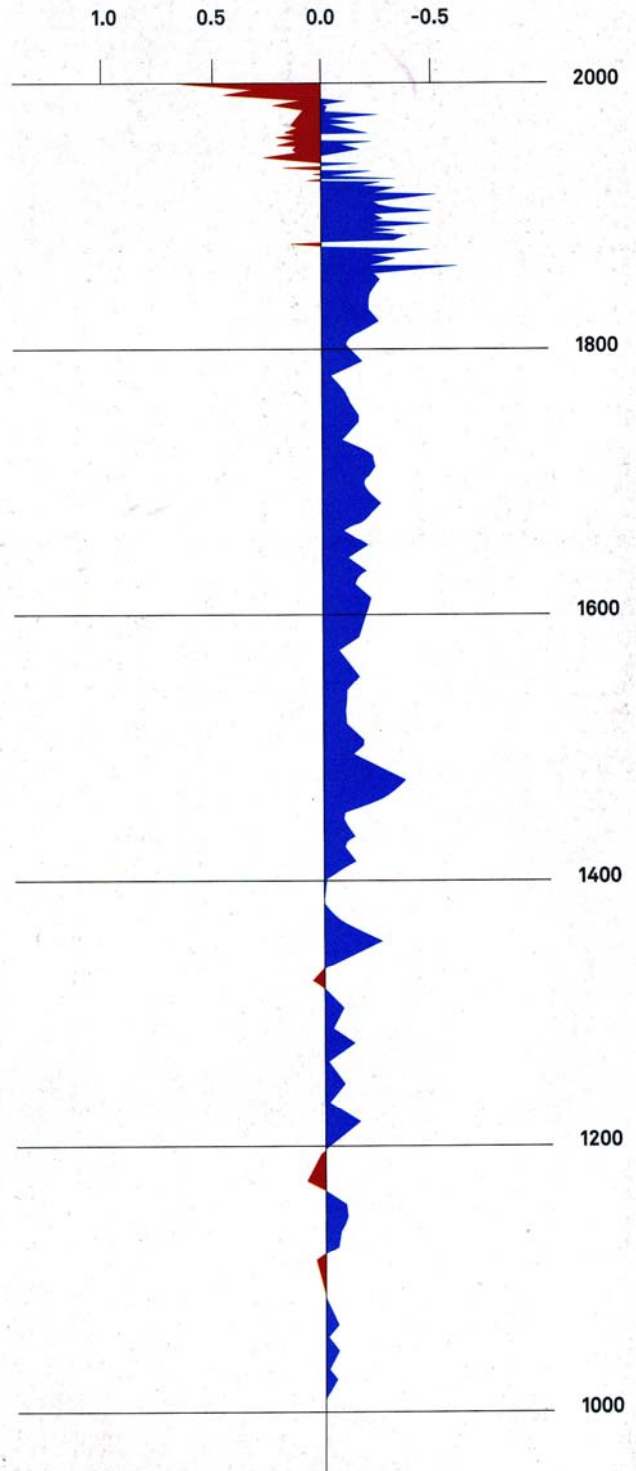
The text includes as well several short essays set in regular-size type; these expand on asides in the spreads and range from a definition of greenhouse gases to a biographical sketch of a pioneer greenhouse gas scientist to a sad portrait of Gore's beloved sister, a heavy smoker who died of lung cancer in her forties. In the piece about his sister he makes absolutely chilling comparisons between the campaigns of disinformation deployed by tobacco companies thirty years ago and those being fielded so aggressively today by the oil industry and the disheartening number of politicians so in thrall to its agenda.

Though Gore presents his case relentlessly he never sounds shrill or hysterical, even when he mentions George W. Bush's appointment of an oil industry lobbyist with no science background to vet the writing of a senior scientist at NASA and delete any mention of global warming. I'm sure Gore felt as furious about that as I did but in this book he keeps his cool; he builds a strong case, he doesn't rant. He also brings to the table an obvious mastery of a large and complex subject, which he has been studying since 1968, when Roger Revelle, a professor at Harvard, showed his class a graph of atmospheric carbon dioxide levels based on samples he had taken at the summit of Muana Loa in Hawaii. The graph looks like something a CEO would love to show the compensation committee and the shareholders.

You can pick up *An Inconvenient Truth* for five minutes and learn something that in less thoughtful presentations probably went in one of your ears and out the other. I put the book down wondering at how honest and decent a man Al Gore seems, how deeply concerned, how scary.

-John Thaxton

1000 YEARS OF NORTHERN HEMISPHERE  
TEMPERATURE (°C)



*The shading on the right of the center axis indicates colder temperatures, the shading on the left side indicates warmer temperatures. It's a no-brainer.*

Graph adapted from *An Inconvenient Truth*

## Book Review

### **Birds of Franklin County, New York, Birding Trail Map**

by John M. C. Peterson

photos by Jeff Nadler, Brandt Ryder

Published 2006 by County of Franklin, New York

Mike Peterson's annotated checklist completes the list of birding guides to the four counties of northeastern NY state. These counties are among the most favored destinations for both birds and vacationers. Habitats of these counties range from agricultural lands to the north where one may find Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper Sparrow and Gray Partridge to the boreal bogs and forest of the central and southern areas where Spruce Grouse, Gray Jay and Palm Warbler may be found at or near their southern limits in North America.

*Birds of Franklin County, New York* follows the format and appearance of the recent *Birds of Hamilton County, New York*, with accompanying Birding Trail Map. It lists each of the historically recorded 280 species of the county in AOU checklist order. Each entry describes the species's seasonal abundance, breeding status, typical early and late migration dates, maxima and minima and locations of significant sightings or habitats of the species. The 4 inch by 9 inch (10 cm x 23cm) format is printed on durable glossy stock, with beautiful cover photographs of some of the region's birds. It is easily slipped into a shirt or jacket pocket and will hold up to field use reasonably well. Locations described in the text are indicated on the map and 12 short birding trips are outlined and described briefly.

Mike has been an enthusiastic supporter of North Country birding through his activities in High Peaks Audubon, as Compiler of Christmas Bird Counts, Regional Editor of the "Kingbird," Regional Coordinator for New York State's Breeding Bird Atlas and his Crown Point NY bird banding project. Let's grab his trail guide and some binoculars and get out there birding!

As either a practical guide or reference for one's bookshelf *Birds of Franklin County, New York* is invaluable and available for no charge from Franklin County Tourism, 10 Elm Street, Suite 2, Malone, NY, USA, 12953 (518-483-9470 or 1-800-709-4895.)

**-Dan Nickerson**  
Freeport, Maine



*American Goldfinch*

*Larry Master*

## Poetry Corner

### My November Guest

My sorrow, when she's here with me,  
Thinks these dark days of autumn rain  
Are beautiful as days can be;  
She loves the bare, the withered tree;  
She walks the sodden pasture lane.

Her pleasure will not let me stay,  
She talks and I am fain to list:  
She's glad the birds are gone away,  
She's glad her simple worsted grey  
Is silver now with clinging mist.

The desolate, deserted trees,  
The faded earth, the heavy sky,  
The beauties she so truly sees,  
She thinks I have no eye for these,  
And vexes me for reason why.

Not yesterday I learned to know  
The love of bare November days  
Before the coming of the snow,  
But it were vain to tell her so,  
And they are better for her praise.

**-Robert Frost**

## Crown Point Banding Station

Despite the record rains in May, Mike Peterson not only operated the Crown Point Banding station for the 31st consecutive year but also wound up tying 1993 for the second best season in terms of variety. Mike, with help from his wife, Susan, Gordon Howard, Gary Lee, Robert Wei and other volunteers banded a total of 870 birds of 63 species. Some highlights of the season included the first Hairy Woodpecker ever banded at the station and 16 previously banded birds recaptured, including an American Goldfinch that is now at least 7 years, 11 months old. Twenty-two species of warbler got caught in the nets, tying the great season of '96 for warbler variety. Mike attributed the rich variety of warblers to the green ash clearing project proposed by the Crown Point Banding Association.

On the seventh consecutive day of rain since setting up the station, with a heavy downpour replete with hail forcing the birds and the banders to hunker down to wait out the storm, Mike, Susan and Gary Lee managed to band 220 birds of 28 species (15 of them warblers).

Over 250 people visited the station, including students from Barstow School in Vermont, Lake Placid Elementary and Middle Schools and Newcomb Central School. About 100 of these got to hold and release a bird after it was banded, and each will receive a Polaroid photo of the bird in their hand and a certificate of authenticity.

**-John Thaxton**

## Book Review

### *Birds of Clinton County, 2nd Edition, First Supplement*

William E. Krueger

\$5.00

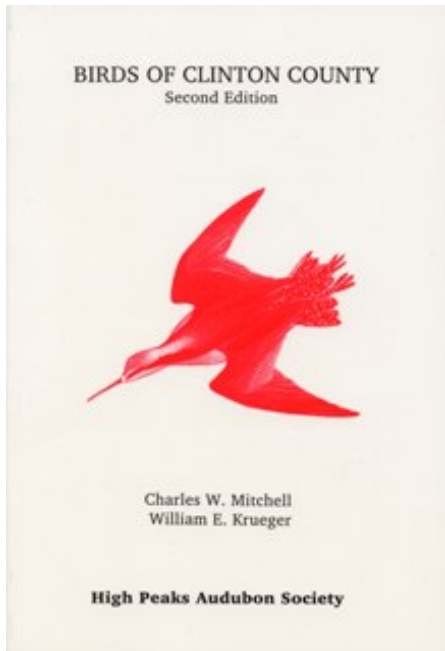
(Available from the author—40 Colligan Point Rd, Plattsburgh, NY 12901-7112)

An outstanding supplement to the 1997 HPAS's *Birds of Clinton County, 2nd Edition*, by Charles W. Mitchell and William E. Krueger, this 8.5 X 11 inch, spiral bound, 41 page work features a half dozen color photographs and all manner of useful, interesting information. Inspired by the data gathered by Atlas 2000 volunteers, who confirmed breeding for 16 new species and upgraded evidence for 17 others, and by significant changes in the taxonomic order of the American Ornithologists' Union's *Checklist of North American Birds, 7th Edition, 44th Supplement*, Bill Krueger went to work and significantly enhanced our knowledge of Clinton County birds. Chapters include *Species Reported Since 1997, Breeding Status Changes, Races and Subspecies* and *New Areas*.

Some of the exciting new species seen in Clinton County since 1997 include Western Grebe, Cinnamon Teal, Purple Gallinule, Dovekie, Western Tanager and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Many of the upgrades are as exciting as they are heartening: Bald Eagle, Breeding Confirmed-FL; Merlin, Breeding Confirmed-FL; Peregrine Falcon, Breeding Confirmed-NY; Short-eared Owl, Breeding Confirmed-ON. Among the probable breeders Krueger lists Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Barn Owl and Tennessee Warbler. This is exciting stuff, presented carefully, articulately and clearly.

New birding spots include Miner Flat Rock, The Gulf and Gadway Cement barrens, the Trail off Point au Fer Road and Monty's Bay Wildlife Management area.

-John Thaxton



Get your copy of *Birds of Clinton, Second Edition*, by Charles W. Mitchell and William E. Krueger for a donation of \$10.00 to High Peaks Audubon Society, Inc. c/o Brown, PO Box 241, Vermontville, NY 12989-0241

## Get a Free Copy of *Adirondack Explorer*



A valuable resource for people interested in hiking, paddling, cross country skiing, camping, cycling, birding and otherwise enjoying the Adirondack Park, *Adirondack Explorer* offers a bi-monthly smorgasbord of where to/when to/how to activity oriented articles. Occasionally controversial, the *Explorer* also features articles about sometimes sensitive environmental and political issues, as well as in depth interviews with influential Adirondack decision makers. The publication represents a lively forum of ideas and opinions about all things Adirondack, weighs in consistently on the environmentalist side of the fence and has developed a deserved reputation as a high-quality, outdoor-oriented Adirondack publication.

The publisher of *Adirondack Explorer* has offered to send a free copy to any HPAS member who calls and asks for one: 1.888.888.4970—ask for Andreas Mowka.

## Become A Member of HPAS Just \$15 a year

Benefits include: quarterly newsletter, nine monthly program meetings, field trips, Adirondack Birding Festivals, website, CBCs and more...

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## Is This The Canary In The Coal Mine?

Desperate times may indeed call for desperate measures, but the coefficient of desperation among the world's polar bears seems poised to soar clear off the charts.

During 25 years of aerial surveys of the Alaskan coastline researchers from the U.S. Minerals Management Service usually noted a polar bear swimming far from pack ice approximately every other year. In September 2004, when the pack ice set a record by retreating 160 miles from the coast, researchers saw 10 polar bears swimming 60 miles from the nearest ice floe; other observers in the region saw 41 swimming bears the same day. The USMMS researchers flew over the same area a few days later after a bad storm and saw 4 dead polar bears floating on the surface, then extrapolated, factoring in the other observations, that perhaps 40 bears had drowned in that storm. Two USMMS researchers noted that from 1979-1991 87% of polar bears spotted were on ice floes, whereas from 1992-2004 only 33% of bears spotted were on ice.

Weekly aerial surveys by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been documenting stunningly large congregations of polar bears on Alaska's beaches between Barrow and the Canadian border, with as many as 200 animals in attendance, many of them gathered around carcasses discarded by whale hunters. The polar bears would rather be eating seals, but as the arctic warms up and the ice floes get fewer and farther between, they eat whatever they can get their paws on, including each other.

Researchers working for the World Wildlife Fund in Yakulia, on Russia's northeast coast, documented cannibalism among the polar bears in the area, and a Canadian scientist reported watching a male polar bear smash in a female's den, drag her out and eat her. Her cubs suffocated in the collapsed den. A U.S. Geological Survey and Canadian Wildlife Service study published in 2006 documented the first ever decline in the polar bear population in Hudson Bay, from 1,194 in 1987 to 935 in 2004—a 22% drop.

Richard Steiner, a professor of marine-biology at the University of Alaska put it like this: "For anyone who has wondered how global warming and reduced sea ice will affect polar bears, the answer is simple—they die."

**-John Thaxton**



## Editor's Note

Although I hadn't planned it, when I sat down after an extended pacing session to put this newsletter together I realized that it had a very strong thematic focus: Global Warming. What with *An Inconvenient Truth* hitting the charts as a book and a movie, and with our September and October programs featuring climate-conscious presentations on Antarctica and Spitsbergen, it dawned on me, or rather banged me over the head, that everyone's talking about Global Warming. This very morning I read in *The New York Times* that Jay Lawrence of the National Climactic Data Center announced, or maybe leaked, that the first six months of 2006 were the warmest such stretch in the continental United States for any year since climate record-keeping began. He went on to say: "The long-term trend we're seeing cannot be explained without the influence of greenhouse gases."

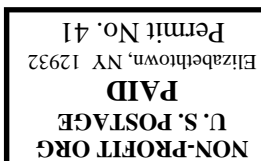
Another story in this morning's *Times* reported numerous sightings of a manatee in the Hudson River; someone saw it off Chelsea Piers in Manhattan, someone else spotted it near Sleepy Hollow just below the Tapanzee Bridge. A *Times* editorial about the endangered sea mammal said that although manatees do migrate to some extent seeing one in the Hudson River is like seeing a moose on Myrtle Beach. Or perhaps like seeing a Baltimore oriole for the first time last year on the 30th consecutive Saranac Lake Christmas Bird Count, or seeing an Empidonax flycatcher for the first time last year on the Ferrisburgh, Vermont Christmas Bird Count, or seeing a Ruby-crowned kinglet for the first time last year on the Elizabethtown Christmas Bird Count.

Who needs canaries?

Because it's made such a splash, and because it's so good and so relevant, I reviewed Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* for this issue. You'll also find inside reviews of Bill Krueger's supplement to HPAS's *Birds of Clinton County, Second Edition* and Mike Peterson's *Birds of Franklin County*, which is available free for the asking. A copy of *Adirondack Explorer* is also free for the asking, no strings attached.

Graphically this issue represents something of a departure as I wanted to try doing an all photography newsletter, and I could hardly have enlisted someone better to feature than Larry Master, whose images of Spitsbergen wildlife speak for themselves. Larry's giving a presentation in October at the Paul Smiths Visitor Interpretative Center and I hope this sneak preview whets your appetite to attend a presentation about an awesome wilderness area in the far north where, this year, the pack ice melted two months sooner than expected and the young bears, obviously undernourished, have yet to turn from white to pale yellow.

**-John Thaxton**



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