

Northern New York Audubon

Serving the Adirondack, Champlain, St. Lawrence 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 36 Number 4

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Saturday, January 10th, 2009, 1:00 p.m.

The Wild Center

Tippu Tip's Lost Empire:

Exploration and Conservation of the Democratic Republic of Congo's Lomami Rainforest

Speakers: John and Terese Hart



Over a century ago, in the last decades of the 19th century, the upper Congo River was the scene of a brief but epic struggle pitting western European colonial expansion, newly arrived in the region, against established Arab and Swahili slave and ivory empires, based in Zanzibar, on the east coast of the continent.

Caught in the middle of this struggle were the region's Africans, some of whom were forced into slavery as porters to carry out the vast plunder of ivory, and others who were killed as they fought to save their forests and its wealth. This was the first draining of populations from a little-known but large forest region lying between three major rivers of central Congo: the Lualaba, the Lomami and the Tshuapa. The region was not fully mapped until the 20th century.

It was only in the very north of this area that ivory hunting was replaced by the tapping of wild rubber and eventually the Belgian colonists even tried plantation agriculture. But in the Lomami basin at the end of the colonial era these commercial attempts were dropped and the sparsely settled regions slipped from view. Today, as then, the forests between these three rivers remains a vast, thinly settled area in the very heart of the continent.

In early 2007, John and Terese Hart, with their international and Congolese field teams, undertook the first biological exploration of the Lomami landscape, which covers about 25,000 sq kilometers, and provided a first look at the landscape's people and wildlife, some of which were never before documented. The inspiration for this work were the still unknown distributions of two of Congo's most unique forest species, animals found only in the Democratic Republic of Congo: the bonobo, or pygmy chimpanzee, and the okapi, Congo's rain forest giraffe. The Harts have now found these animals through much of the forest, but they have also found threats spreading rapidly into this previously seldom visited area: diamond prospectors and commercial bush meat hunters.

The Harts' presentation will provide a window on this little known world, and the challenges of conserving its unique biological heritage.

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Short-eared owl David Speiser

NNYAS

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Northern New York Audubon Society,
Inc.

A chapter of National Audubon Society
serving the Adirondack, Champlain and
St. Lawrence regions of northern New
York, including Clinton, Essex, Franklin,
Hamilton and St. Lawrence counties.

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Audubon's 109th Annual Christmas Bird Count Ferrisburgh (VT/NY) CBC

Saturday, December 20 The Ferrisburgh count circle includes a swath of Lake Champlain shoreline as far west as Route 22. For information contact John & Pat Thaxton: JPThax5317@aol.com or 518.576.4232.

Plattsburgh (NY) CBC

Sunday, December 14. The count circle is centered on Route 9 just south of the entrance to the former Plattsburgh Air Base. As the participants in this count do not meet before dispersing to their territories, contact Judy Heintz at (518) 563-5273 or heintzjf@northnet.org to arrange for a territory.

Elizabethtown (NY) CBC

Saturday, December 27 If you are interested in participating in this year's count, please contact Matthew Medler at etowncbc@yahoo.com or (802) 999-1438 no later than December 7th. The count dinner will be held at the lovingly refurbished Deer's Head Inn at 5:00 p.m. (bar opens at 4:00).

Saranac Lake (NY) CBC

Saturday, January 3, 53rd year of this count! Meet in the parking lot at Howard Johnson's on Route 86 in Lake Placid at 7:00 a.m. sharp, or (preferably) contact the compiler, Larry Master (617) 285-9086; larry@masterimages.org. ahead of time if you plan to participate. A festive count dinner will be held at a location TBD in Lake Placid on Saturday evening,

Massena, NY – Cornwall, ON CBC

The Massena-Cornwall CBC will be held on **Saturday, December 27, 2008.** The count circle will be divided into 5 sectors, 2 on the Ontario side and 3 on the New York side. If you would like to participate, **please contact Nobi Ackerman at (315) 265-6774.**



Long-tailed Duck David Speiser

NCPR to Highlight Birds

North Country Public Radio (NCPR) will be featuring monthly programs on North Country birding topics. Todd Moe interviewed Joan Collins and Mary Beth Warburton on migration for October. They climbed Azure Mountain on a brisk fall day to tape the program. The 13-minute piece aired on October 29th – you can find the segment on the NCPR web site at NCPR.org. Todd interviewed Geoff LeBaron, National Audubon Christmas Bird Count Director, for a piece that aired on November 4th. Stay tuned to NCPR for more birding information!

--Joan Collins

Saturday, January 10, 2009
Wild Center
Tupper Lake (Franklin Co.)

Participants will snowshoe the trails at the Wild Center museum along the edge of the Raquette River. This trip precedes the 1 p.m. talk *Tippu Tip's Lost Empire*, John and Terese Hart's fascinating program on the Lomami Rain Forest described on the cover of this issue. The Wild Center will provide snow shoes for anyone who doesn't have them.

Time: 10:30 a.m. to noon

Location: Meet at the Wild Center entrance

Leader: Joan Collins

Register by calling Joan at (315) 261-4246 or email jecol-lins@twcny.rr.com

Saturday, January 24, 2009
Leonard Pond Trail
Colton (St. Lawrence Co.)

Participants will cross country ski 5 miles round-trip on a wide, level trail in mixed forest and boreal habitat. We will end the trip at the famous "Backwoods Inn" for lunch!

Time: 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. plus lunch at the Backwoods Inn

Location: Meet at the trailhead on Route 56 (2.5 miles north of the Route 3-Route 56 intersection)

Leaders: Joan Collins & Eileen Wheeler

Register by calling Joan at (315) 261-4246 or email jecol-lins@twcny.rr.com



Northern Harrier David Speiser



Pine Siskin David Speiser

Saturday, January 31, 2009
Arbutus Lake (Huntington Forest)
Newcomb (Essex Co.)

Participants will snowshoe a 2 mile loop around the shore of Arbutus Lake in the Huntington Wildlife Forest. This flat trail goes through mostly softwood and mixed wood forest. There is the possibility that Red and White-winged Crossbills will be in the softwoods along the trail. Those interested can stay and have their lunch in Huntington Lodge which is currently being renovated.

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location: Meet at the Adirondack Ecological Center, 6312 State Route 28N (10 miles east of Long Lake, 1.7 west of Newcomb VIC)

Leader: Charlotte Demers

Register: cdemers@esf.edu or (518)582-2157

Saturday, February 21, 2009
Ski Trip to Santanoni Great Camp

A lovely, moderate-level ski to a storied destination, this ten-mile round-trip is a classic Adirondack winter journey to an historic Great Camp. The dirt road trail is not groomed for skiing.

Time: 11 a.m.

Bring: Appropriate layers of apparel for the weather and temperature, skis, water, lunch or snacks.

Meet: At the parking lot for the Santanoni Great Camp off Route 28N in Newcomb.

Leaders: NNYAS members Pat & John Thaxton

Registration: Contact Pat & John Thaxton: 518.576.4232; email: jpthax5317@aol.com

NNYAS Board of Directors Meeting

Saturday, January 10, 2009, 2:30 p.m.

NNYAS board of directors meetings are open to the entire membership; they are an excellent forum for exchanging ideas about our increasingly dynamic Audubon chapter. Contact President Charlotte Demers (cdemers@esf.edu) for more information.

Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation 2008 Grant

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/ Northern New York Audubon Society/Wild Center Summer Naturalist Grant (\$4,500) underwrote half the salary (The Wild Center underwrote the other half) of a *Summer Naturalist* who “floated” among visitors to the museum in order to create a positive and personal experience of the facility and its exhibits for as many people as possible. The Summer Naturalist’s training included a week of field identification and site visits with NNYAS board members, a 32 hour course to qualify as a Certified Interpretative Guide and numerous training sessions with TWC staff for museum-based programming. The Summer Naturalist, Elizabeth Rogers, who recently graduated Plattsburgh State College with a B.S. in Environmental Science, led 10 off-site field trips to locations like Bloomingdale Bog and Whiteface Mountain as well as 42 *Birding Basics Naturalist Walks* at TWC. She also conducted educational workshops for children and families; created a bird-focused program and delivered it to 30 children participating in a summer day camp; served as an *On Station Interpreter* on the Racquette River; conducted live animal encounters with TWC educational animals; presented programs at museum exhibits such as *Otter Falls*, *The Glacier*, *Oxbow* and *Deep Lake*; and assisted in program development and evaluation.

Ms. Rogers had a busy summer, which she described to the NNYAS board of directors with a difficult-to-describe combination of savvy and ebullience.

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon Society Avian Research Award (\$5,000) underwrote salaries and travel expenses for researchers working for the Wildlife Conservation Society’s *Boreal Bird Initiative* and *Adirondack Loon Program*.

This funding enabled WCS to hire an additional field technician to work in areas around the Spring Pond Bog/Kildare region and the Shingle Shanty tract near Long Lake. The Spring Pond Bog/Kildare region continued to serve as vital and productive habitat for several species of endangered boreal birds, in particular the rusty blackbird, which has experienced an 80 % decline in population in the United States over the past 20 years. A canary-in-the-coal mine species, the rusty blackbird’s ability to endure in the Adirondacks represents extremely refreshing news to the ornithological community. Kevin Jablonsky, a SUNY graduate student at the Adirondack Ecological Center, specializes in boreal birds and confirmed breeding rusty blackbirds in the Spring Pond Bog/Kildare region.

The Adirondack Loon Program’s continuing research contributed a significant amount of the data cited in a paper recently published in the journal *Ecotoxicology*. Data from blood samples, feathers and eggs collected in the Adirondacks confirmed a suite of suspicions about the effects of mercury pollution on loons, including:

1. Loons with high levels of mercury, or about 16% of the population, spent 14% less time on the nest than loons with normal levels of mercury; these unattended nests had higher rates of failure due to either chilling of eggs or predation by minks, otters, etc.
2. Loons with elevated mercury levels produced 41% fewer fledged young than loons with relatively low levels of mercury. The behavioral impacts of mercury included sluggishness that resulted in decreased foraging for fish by the adults for both themselves and their young.
3. Loons with elevated mercury levels have unevenly-sized flight feathers; birds with wing asymmetries of more than 5% must expend 20% more energy than normal birds to fly, a handicap that probably inhibits their ability to migrate and maintain a breeding territory.

Dr. Nina Schoch of the WCS’s Adirondack Loon program characterized these findings as proof positive that mercury from coal-burning plants and other sources, “. . . is having a significant impact on the environment and the health of its most charismatic denizens, and potentially, to humans, too.” Dr. Schoch and WCS expressed the need for a law mandating nationwide regulation of mercury emissions in addition to the current stringent regulations in place in many northeastern states, noting that the U.S. District Court of Appeals recently struck down the EPA’s proposed Cap-and-Trade Rule for mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants because it has caused localized “hotspots of mercury, a highly toxic pollutant.”

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon Society Great Adirondack Birding Celebration Annual Lecture (\$1,500) was delivered by Lang Elliott, a noted author, recordist and photographer.

The GABC has evolved into an extremely popular and highly visible three day event, and Mr. Elliott’s lecture served as its centerpiece. The coordinator of the event, Lydia Wright of the APA’s Paul Smiths Visitors Interpretive Center, described the success of his lecture, which included numerous recordings made in the Madawaska/Paul Smiths region:

“His program attracted 140 attendees, nearly filling the 150 seat NYS APA Visitor Interpretive Center Auditorium to capacity; something never before accomplished during past GABC lectures.

“Funding from the Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation enabled GABC to attract a higher caliber speaker, which in turn enabled the celebration to attract a larger audience from a greater geographic range,” adding that

the event drew participants from thirteen states as well as Puerto Rico and two Canadian provinces.

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Grant (\$1,500) awarded \$500 to offset the expenses of two student wildlife rehabilitators who attended the New York State Wildlife Rehabilitation Council's fall meeting in Grand Island, NY and \$1000 to the NYS APA's Newcomb Visitor Interpretive Center for the construction of a raptor cage.

NNYAS continues to believe that the Adirondacks needs more wildlife rehabilitators, and that helping student rehabilitators, who pay all of their own expenses to attend the annual meeting and participate in its workshops, makes a great deal of conservation sense. The annual NYSWRC meeting provides invaluable opportunities for students to network with other rehabilitators and to attend critical workshops on the care and handling of wild animals.

At the first Wild Center anniversary celebration several HPAS board members couldn't help but notice that while most displays in the exhibition tent received brief looks and an occasional question from attendees, the raptor rehabilitation display drew a large crowd of children and adults. Hawks and owls not only fascinate people but also serve as compelling gateways to a wide-ranging host of conservation issues, with the result that NNYAS voted to buy the materials for the construction of a raptor cage at the Newcomb VIC. The cage will provide sorely needed space for raptors that need rehabilitating before getting released and for educational birds incapable of fending for themselves in the wild. Rehabilitators and VIC staff will use the educational birds to entertain and educate visitors about the status of Adirondack raptors and their habitats, which vary from threatened to thriving.

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon Society Education Grant (\$1,500) purchased ten pairs of binoculars (Eagle Optics matched the grant by donating an additional ten pairs of binoculars) for the Indian Creek Nature Center, a 320 acre tract of upland and marsh (in the NYS DEC *Upper and Lower Lakes Wildlife Management Area*) with a very active education component, and \$500 to the Elizabethtown/Lewis Central School to fund an innovative environmental science class.

The North Country Conservation Associates, Inc. Indian Creek Nature Center has held Conservation Field days for sixth grade students since 1965, as well as programs in environmental education for scouts, adults and college classes. NNYAS board members Joan Collins and Mary Beth Warburton lead popular nature walks for sixth graders and noted the need for good binoculars for the children, who reportedly couldn't believe their eyes while watching birds through quality binoculars.

HPAS awarded Rebecca Bosley, a science teacher at Elizabethtown/Lewis Central School, \$500 to purchase equipment for use in her innovative high school environmental science class. The across-grades class consists of sophomores, juniors and seniors, many of whom take the class because it is a non-regents science class perceived as easier than traditional science classes like chemistry. Several students in last year's class planned to major in environmental science or forestry in college. Entitled *Fire and Ice* the curriculum explores the Adirondacks from its origins in igneous rocks to its shaping by glaciers. Ms. Bosley secured permission from the NYS DEC to use a wildlife management area in Elizabethtown for field work that includes flora and fauna inventories and analyses of woodland and meadow habitats. She plans to deploy a birdcam for a bird experiment designed by the class and a hand-held GPS for pinpointing stands of invasive species such as purple loosestrife.

The Joseph and Joan Cullman/Northern New York Audubon Society Interactive Guide to Birding Hotspots in the Adirondacks (\$1,000) launched what we feel will evolve into a first-rate resource for anyone interested in birding in the Adirondacks.

NNYAS board members receive relentless requests about where and when to find particular birds in the Adirondacks, requests that are usually completely out of context and all but impossible to respond to meaningfully. So we began to talk about constructing an interactive birding guide easily accessible on our web site.

The construction process included starting a search for a web designer, developing a list of locations, researching photo and illustration archives, hiring a freelance artist to do maps and hiring experienced birders to write descriptions of locations, driving instructions to them and ancillary essays about salient issues such as not using bird recordings during nesting season. NNYAS will not compensate any board members for their work on this project, which we envision as a state-of-the-art resource created by extremely knowledgeable birders intimately familiar with the locations and birds they describe. No single individual could possibly put together as comprehensive and authoritative guide to Adirondack birding, nor could a book, for example, include as many tools (recordings, video clips) or be updated, revised or expanded virtually at will.



DS

Northern Harrier David Speiser

DS

12th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count

February 13th-16th 2009

Last year's GBBC consisted of 85,725 checklists and set a new record of 634 species sighted and another new record of 9,805,116 birds recorded

"Literally, there has never been a more detailed snapshot of a continental bird-distribution profile in history," said John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab of

Ornithology. "This is a cool, timeless project and this year it achieved real scale. Imagine ornithologists and ecologists 250

years from now comparing these data with their own. We will keep you posted of future results on this web site," he said. All ages and skill levels welcome

On October 27th a NYSEG crew of 8 linemen installed an osprey/bald eagle nesting platform in Wickham Marsh. For more information or to get started, go to <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/> Wickham Marsh (big thanks to John for his perseverance), Joan Collins and Mary Beth Warburton were featured on an NNYA segment on raptor watching and Mary Beth and Eileen Wheeler were interviewed for a Watertown Daily News article on a recent NNYA field trip. If you would like to become part of the NNYA Board of Directors, knowing you and your family have energy and talent would be a benefit to NNYA, consider nominating them to the board. Send your nomination to Pat

NYSEG positioned the platform about ten feet into the marsh and forty feet from the nearest tree, and at the end of the morning the bulldozer had to tow one of the cherry pickers back onto terra firma. Hikers and birders using that section of trail won't represent a threat to any nesting raptors, and the nearest tree, a tall, dead snag, will probably serve as a first-rate perch. With a spotting scope, observers on the platform across the marsh will have a clean look down into the nest--a bird's eye look, as it were.

--IT



2009 Waterfowl Count

January 17 & 18th, 2009

Join Kingbird Region 7 coordinator Mike Peterson, and count waterfowl. This important annual survey helps to

establish population trends and how they correlate with climate trends. In addition to finalizing the merger details, receiving and distributing another generous grant from the Joan and Joseph Cullman Foundation, hosting a great variety of lectures and field trips, your board members have recently received some well deserved publicity. John Thaxton was interviewed on Channel 3 News during the installation of the Osprey platform in Wickham Marsh (big thanks to John for his perseverance), Brian Swift, DEC coordinator of the project, is currently working on analyzing data from the counts as far back as 1995, the objective being to post the data and



White-breasted Nuthatch David Speiser

Conservatively Speaking

New York State has purchased over 20,000 acres in Clinton County from the Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy bought the property in 2005 from Domtar Industries, a Canadian lumber company. New York State followed through on its commitment, made four years ago, to acquire the 11 parcels with money from the Environmental Protection Fund. The sale includes 14,400 acres on Lyon Mountain, which includes important habitat for Bicknell's Thrush. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation has not yet given a designation for the parcels, but they will most likely be either Wild Forest or Wilderness.

The culminating publication of all the volunteer efforts in the first half of this decade to document breeding birds across our state, *The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State*, will be available in December. The book contains two maps per species – the current breeding bird map from 2000-2005, and a change map with a comparison to the first Atlas conducted in the first half of the 1980s. Watch for a book review in the March-May newsletter issue.

The NYS Ornithological Association (NYSOA) is undertaking an important project to scan all of the back issues of *The Kingbird*, New York State's ornithology journal, for online retrieval by article. Over 17,000 pages will be scanned. Online *Kingbird* article retrieval will be a huge benefit for any scientist or individual who needs to quickly find information about species in New York State.

--Joan Collins



Loggerhead Shrike David Speiser

Poetry Corner from *Burnt Norton*

Other echoes

Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
Round the corner. Through the first gate,
Into our first world, shall we follow
The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.
There they were, dignified, invisible,
Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,
And the bird called, in response to
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,
And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
Had the look of flowers that are looked at.
There they were our guests, accepted and accepting.
So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
To look down into the drained pool.
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
Go said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

--T.S. Eliot

Attention 12- to 17-year-olds Spend a week at Camp Colby or Pack Forest next summer for free

NNYAS announces its annual essay contest. Each year we sponsor two students to attend summer camp. This year we are sponsoring one camper at Camp Colby (ages 12 to 14) and one at Pack Forest (ages 15 to 17). Submit an essay of 250-300 words long about why you want to go to camp to: **Yvette Tillema, Northern New York Audubon Society, 10025 State Route 9N, Keene, NY 12942**

One winner will be selected by 1 February 2009 to spend a week at Camp Colby near Saranac Lake and one at Pack Forest in Warrensburg. Parents or guardians need to provide transportation to and from camp.

Deadline: Essays must be postmarked by 31 December 2008.

Be sure to include your name, address, age and telephone number.

For more information about the contest contact:

Yvette Tillema (518) 576-4251 or yvettetillema@mac.com

For more information about Camp Colby or Pack Forest, visit the DEC Youth Education Camp website:
www.dec.state.ny.us/website/education/edcamps/html

Editor's Note

From sixty feet directly above the trail that runs along the southern side of it Wickham Marsh looks nothing less than absolutely spectacular, a stunningly beautiful puzzle of glistening, cerulean water and buff, straw-colored stands of cattails. On the far side of the marsh scattered blasts of intense yellow aspen and birch leaves look like arboreal fireworks.

I had the pleasure of taking in this view courtesy of the NYSEG lineman crews that installed the osprey nesting platform at the edge of the marsh, in a spot clearly visible from the viewing platform nestled among the fireworks. Too bad we don't have the budget for a cherry-picker truck with a sixty foot boom.

I devoted considerable space to a description of the programs NNYAS funded with the 2008 Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation Grant, mostly out of pride in what we accomplished but also in hopes of hearing your reactions and suggestions. The Cullman Grant represents a major shot in the arm for programs that could too easily have fallen by the wayside as individuals and organizations collectively gasped at the depth of the economic crisis. That we managed to pull a few conservation initiatives out of the fire, and fund a few others we dreamed up on our own, owes itself entirely to the vision and generosity of the Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation.

If the newsletter looks a little cramped, with small type and no line spaces between articles on some pages, don't despair—I felt I needed to report on several things and we have a very full schedule of winter activities, from snowshoes and cross-county skis to five Christmas Bird Counts to The Great Backyard Bird Count and the 2009 Waterfowl Count, to say nothing of John and Therese Hart's fascinating program on the Congo's Lomami Rainforest. Doubling our membership and extending our geographical range generated, perforce, a surfeit of articles, so many, indeed, that I felt compelled by circumstance to cancel my plan to expand my Editor's Note from a half to two full pages. Oh well...

When somebody asked me the other day what the Audubon Society did during the winter, when all the birds were gone, I said that at a recent meeting the board of directors voted down a motion to collectively hibernate and, instead, promote and partake in some extremely valuable citizen science initiatives. As my interlocutor listened in astonishment until she completely glazed over, I wowed her with some fresh-on-my-mind-for-working-on-the-newsletter statistics about the number of species, and the number of individual birds, we see on Christmas Bird Counts, Waterfowl Counts and the Great Backyard Bird Count. It felt like a perchance-to-dream moment as my neighbor somnambulistically turned and walked out of the Post Office, without her mail.

You can see the color edition of this newsletter on our website: www.highpeaksaudubon.com. This issue features the work of David Speiser, an outstanding photographer known for schlepping around Central Park with a gigantic camera and lens. You can see more of David's work at www.lilibirds.com.

—**John Thaxton**