



Northern New York Audubon

Dec 2022 - Feb 2023 Newsletter

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Dear Friends -

Northern New York Audubon is dedicated to conserving and restoring natural ecosystems in the Adirondacks, focusing on habitat of particular importance to birds, other wildlife, humanity, and the Earth's biological diversity as a whole. As one of National Audubon's 27 local chapters in New York, NNYA's mission is to "promote the protection and proper management of birds, wildlife, and fragile ecosystems throughout Northern New York."

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Shelly Cihan Photo by Brendan Wiltse

We have **front page** news! Our very own Shelly Cihan was elected to serve as the Regional Director for the Atlantic Flyway North for National Audubon! This is a truly exciting and challenging opportunity for Shelly. National Audubon surely recognizes what we have known all along - Shelly is a natural leader! Her wonderful people skills have helped Northern New York Audubon grow into a dynamic organization with 13 board members. Shelly stepped down from the NNYA Vice President position but remains a valued board participant.

Please see our full write-up on page 3 and feel free to shower Shelly with congratulatory emails at nnya@nnya.org!

In September, board member Marian Bodine, was elected to the position of NNYA Vice President. Marian is a volunteer loon monitor, active outdoors woman and an obsessed birder!

Annual Appeal

It's that time of season when we kindly ask our members to support the amazing trips and programs that Northern New York Audubon offers each year. Please look for our annual appeal letter in your mailboxes and please consider making a generous donation. We are a fully volunteer organization. This year, contributions have made it possible for us to organize trips with expert bird guides; distribute grant funds for Adirondack based projects beneficial to bird species; develop new programs such as the farm grant; offer an Audubon camp stipend to an Adirondack based educator; work with local breweries to create bird themed brews; and publish a quarterly newsletter. Our board is extremely active and continues to develop new ways to promote bird and habitat conservation. In 2023, we hope to launch a youth engagement program to introduce young people to the joy of bird watching and the science of bird conservation. Our guest contributor in this newsletter is Meghan Bargabos, a SUNY Plattsburgh student. Meghan's article 'Beyond the Net; Student Perceptions of a Day in the Field with Songbirds' is both informative and a perfect example of how interactions with birds, wildlife and the environment can be transformative.



Exciting Times for the Farm Grant Program!

Northern New York Audubon introduced our pilot Farm Grant Program in the summer of 2021 through a short series of fundraising events at Hex and Hop Brewery and the Paul Smith's College VIC. The Farm Grant is an exciting new initiative that will allow NNYA to work with farmers to support conservation on working lands in the Northern Adirondacks and St. Lawrence and Champlain Valleys. It is our hope that this program will connect our members to local farms and connect local farms to the birds that are using their lands.



Hyla Howe

Photo by Matthew Adams

It is widely known that grassland and shrubland birds have faced steep declines over the last 50-70 years. Populations of grassland birds like the Bobolink, Grasshopper Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, and Northern Harrier have declined due to a loss of farmland in the Northeast and the disappearance of native prairie in the Great Plains States that traditionally served as their core habitat. Meanwhile, shrubland birds that rely on shrubby meadows and small pockets of early successional forest have faced a similar fate as beaver populations declined, forms of disturbance such as fire were suppressed, farms regrew into forest, and shrublands were paved over.

As commercial agriculture out west intensified over the last few decades, development and farmland abandonment increased in the Northeast - pushing grassland and shrubland birds out of former habitat throughout their once large range. Now, they navigate the ever-shifting habitat mosaic of the Northeast in search of suitable nesting areas, often finding them in the quiet corners of small farms. Many farmers are aware of charismatic species like Bobolinks, but may not notice Grasshopper Sparrows, Eastern Towhee, or Blue-winged Warblers. By educating farmers about the vital habitats that are already supporting birds on their farms and providing funding for improvements, we aim to protect and increase these small pockets throughout Northern New York.

Moving forward, we will have more opportunities for our members to learn about grassland and shrubland birds, including Grassland Bird Bike Rides with Bike ADK that will continue next summer. The application for farmers is now open, and we encourage farmers to attend one of our informational zoom sessions, happening on December 8th and 14th, to learn more about the program and the application process. For more information about the Farm Grant or to register for our upcoming zoom sessions, email farmgrant@nnya.org. Donations made to the Farm Grant through the end of December will go directly to farms that are applying this year, so please consider donating this holiday season.

Hyla Howe

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Northern New York Audubon
Executive Board

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Catherine Smith - Co-President
Marian Bodine - Vice President
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Mikayla Ploof
Mary Beth Warburton
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(Director Emeritus)
Pat Thaxton,
(Director Emeritus)

Shelly Cihan Joins the National Audubon Board

National Audubon Society's Board of Directors grew recently by adding active local Audubon board director Shelly Cihan to the flock. At a recent board meeting held in New Mexico, Cihan was officially voted in as Regional Director for the Atlantic Flyway North. National Audubon Society has a far reach, with board directors, members, and staff across the United States, and Central and South America. Shelly has served on the board of Northern New York Audubon for the last seven years in the roles of President, Vice President, and fundraising chair.

"When I first began engaging with Northern NY Audubon, I had no idea how much of an impact it would have on me personally," said Cihan. "My passion for birds and the environment has been fueled by Audubon for many years. I am grateful for this opportunity and very excited to use my knowledge and background to help spark others to get involved, whether it be in their own backyards throughout Northern NY or on a more national level."

Cihan is dedicated to environmental work and actively volunteers for several charitable environmental organizations. Over the years these have included Northern NY Audubon, the Audubon Council of NYS, National Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, the Ausable River Association, Adopt a Highway program, Adirondack All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, All About Lakes, and Adirondack Wilderness Advocates. During her time with the Audubon Council of New York, Cihan founded the board's 'Birds of a Feather' program, which aims to connect and assist local chapters from across the state, and led discussions about how marketing can be an effective tool to promote non-profit growth, among other topics.

In addition to her roles with Audubon, Cihan is the founder of Rooted Rock Marketing, a full-service marketing agency located in the village of Saranac Lake. "I am most looking forward to finding ways to weave my unique marketing background in with Audubon's mission and future goals," said Cihan.

"Shelly has been nothing short of amazing for Northern New York Audubon," said co-President Catherine Smith. "Most recently her initiative of protecting New York State endangered Spruce Grouse through the launch of a specialty beer, brewed in partnership with Raquette River Brewing, brought together bird enthusiasts, craft beer lovers, and outdoor recreationalists."

"And her engaging ideas didn't stop there! Shelly has also brought bird-themed trivia nights and annual birding outings to the Northern NY Audubon territory," added co-President Janet Mihuc. "Our Audubon territory has been so lucky to have Shelly for the last seven years, and we can't wait to see what she does on a national level."

Congratulations Shelly!

Janelle Jones

The Federal Duck Stamp

The 2022-2023 issue of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, more commonly known as the Federal Duck Stamp, became available for purchase this past June. Now in its 88th year, the very first Federal Duck Stamp was issued in 1934 when Congress passed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act. The purpose of the law was to provide for the acquisition and preservation of wetlands and waterfowl habitat. By the Thirties, years of over hunting, no bag limits, and the ecological disaster of the Dust Bowl had driven many waterfowl species to the brink of extinction as the potholes and wetlands of the Midwest dried up and disappeared. Concerned waterfowl hunters became the driving force behind the passage of the Act, which almost immediately provided substantial funding for the purchase of wetlands across the country. Since its inception, the Federal Duck Stamp has provided over \$1.1 billion dollars to strategically acquire wetlands and critical breeding, feeding and resting habitat for waterfowl and other associated species of birds and wildlife. Regardless of your views toward hunting, the Federal Duck Stamp is one of the most successful conservation programs in the country.



James Hautman

Some other interesting facts about the Federal Duck Stamp –

The very first Duck Stamp was designed by Jay N. "Ding" Darling, a Pulitzer prize-winning political cartoonist, avid waterfowl hunter and namesake of the "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge in Florida.

Since 1949, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service holds a contest to determine the design of each year's Stamp. The contest is open to U.S. artists 18 years or older and since 1990 one family, the Hautman brothers – James, Joseph, and Robert - have won the contest 12 times!

The Duck Stamp can be used for admission to any Federal Wildlife Refuge that charges an entrance fee.

Over 98% of the cost of the Federal Duck Stamp goes toward the purchase of wetland habitat, making it one of the most cost-effective ways to contribute to conservation and habitat preservation efforts.

Since its inception, the proceeds from the sale of the Duck Stamp have resulted in the purchase and preservation of over six million acres of wetland habitat.

The Federal Duck Stamp can be purchased at (most) U.S. Post Offices, sporting goods stores, national wildlife refuges, or online.

Jeff Biby

Beyond the Net: Student Perceptions of a Day in the Field with Songbirds

Birds are almost always observed from a distance. They are seen soaring high above the canopy, fluttering between branches, or wading through the water. Their songs and calls are heard, but still seldom distinguished through thick leaves. When an animal that seems so out of reach is suddenly gently grasped in your hand, a new appreciation and deep connection with the bird is made. This fall, students from SUNY Plattsburgh joined with members of the birding community including staff from the Albany Pine Bush and Preserve Conservation Director and Field Ecologist/Entomologist (Neil Gifford and Amanda Dillon, respectively), NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation Fish and Wildlife Technician I (Amanda Stickles), and Adirondack Land Trust- Stewardship Manager (Derek Rogers) to demonstrate mist netting techniques, bird identification, and avian metric collection including aging, gender, health (fat), and feather molt. Holding a bird in hand is a rare and powerful experience, and the students from SUNY Plattsburgh expressed admiration for both the birds and the scientific process of banding.



The experts and students

Bird banding and migration:

In the wake of a rapidly changing climate, the need for conservation efforts focused on migratory animals is paramount. Bird banding is a technique used to identify individual birds. Each lightweight band is engraved with a unique number, which can be used to identify birds that are re-captured in different locations. Researchers can learn important information about a re-captured bird's life, such as how far it travels and how long it lives. On this particular morning, we captured a single red-eyed vireo, eastern phoebe, song sparrow, swamp sparrow, Swainson's thrush, and two each of gray catbirds, ruby-crowned kinglets, and black-capped chickadees. An incredibly exciting visitor to the net was a belted kingfisher, which unfortunately escaped from the net while being handled. We recorded information about their age (after hatch year or hatch year), weight, measurements, sex, plumage, and skull ossification. In order to determine skull ossification, we separated the feathers on the head either by blowing air through a straw or shifting the feathers with our hands. We are able to age the birds by determining how much the skull has ossified, or fused together. Birds can also be aged by molt limits and plumage, such as using primary and/or secondary coverts, rectrices, the mouth/bill, and body plumage. Body plumage is also used to sex the birds.



Determining fat on a black-capped chickadee

Proper handling of birds:

In order to band birds, the most commonly used capture technique is mist netting. In the early morning hours, we splayed a delicate and near-invisible net between two metal poles flanking the periphery of a wetland in proximity to riparian forest. This technique is very useful in catching smaller songbirds, which unsuspectingly fly into the net, become entangled, and are retrieved with the aid of a trained scientist. Once captured, birds are transported in breathable cloth bags, to a nearby banding station for processing. The class learned the delicate balance of grip strength needed to maintain hold of the bird, while not applying too much pressure on these fragile species. Our mentors demonstrated the two most common bird handling grips, specifically the bander and photographer grips. The bander's grip involves grasping the bird with your non-dominant hand (so the dominant hand is available for banding), with the bird's back against your palm. The bird's head is gently held between the index and middle finger to prevent the bird from struggling. From this position, the bird's appendages can be inspected for useful pieces of information. The photographer's grip is less practical for banding, but is useful for photographs and is occasionally used when removing birds from the mist nets.



Devan Bushey releasing red-eyed vireo



Photographer's grip



Bander's grip

Beyond the Net, cont.

Student quotes about the banding experience:

“This was a life changing experience... I really liked the swamp sparrow because it was the first bird I got to hold.” - Zachary Hart

“This was an incredible opportunity to not only observe but be directly involved in ongoing bird migration monitoring efforts.”- Anne Randall

“To me it was a really great day! I loved the opportunity to observe and even to an extent handle such amazing animals. At first, I was a bit worried of handling them because of how delicate they are. But once I found the appropriate grip to hold that little bird, it was really amazing. Such a lively creature, it was truly a privilege to be able to get as close to them as I did”- RJ Leahy



RJ Leahy releasing gray catbird

As we thanked the professionals for sharing their time and expertise with our wildlife class and headed to the vans, there was an excited chatter among the group. Most students had previously not been as enthusiastic towards birds, as class had up to that point only surveyed at a distance through binoculars and by sound. However, upon handling and feeling their tiny heartbeats, we more deeply valued these species for their delicate beauty, ecologically vital role in ecosystem services (e.g., pollination, seed dispersal), and as sentinels to our changing world.

Meghan Bargabos

Winter Birding

Anyone who birds late fall into winter realizes that things slow down. Many birds have migrated to their winter homes and only the heartiest species remain. However, there are also opportunities to see different birds than we normally have and this is very exciting! For example, last year was a banner year for Razorbills around Port Henry and The Crown Point State Historic Site. If they will come back this year remains to be seen. Last year was also a great year for Short-eared Owls in the “ Magic Triangle” near Whallonsburg. Starting near the end of November, 5 or 6 owls were seen hunting at dusk. The Magic Triangle is comprised of Clark, Cross and Lake Shore Road. There was also a Snowy Owl down in that area that stayed for quite a while.

Another exciting report that comes out each year is the “Winter Finch Forecast”. Birders across the US and Canada report on cone crops from different trees in their area. Basically, if the forests of Ontario cannot feed the hungry Finches, they will come down here looking for food. Each year, there are predictions as to which finches may come in numbers. The report looks at Red and White-Winged Crossbills, Pine Grosbeaks, Evening Grosbeaks, Redpolls, Pine Siskins and others. It can be very exciting to have an irruption of one or more of these species.

There are always large rafts of different ducks along Lake Champlain from Ausable Point to Crown Point and further south. We will have large rafts of Greater and Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye and Bufflehead. Mixed in with these rafts can be Tufted Duck, Barrow’s Goldeneye, Northern Pintail, Redhead and other less common ducks. I won’t lie, picking out some of these ducks at a distance can be challenging, even with a spotting scope. If you are interested in learning and seeing some of these I would suggest going on a NNYA field trip if there is one offered over the winter or early spring. I also highly recommend the online classes offered by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. I have taken many of these myself and learned a lot. Another opportunity is to volunteer to help out with a Christmas Bird Count in your area. If you are a newer birder, you will be paired with more experienced birders, it is a good way to learn.

Get out and enjoy some winter birding!

Betsy Miner



Short-eared Owl, Larry Master

Mikayla's Maine Adventure

I woke up at 7:59 am sharp after working a long night before at the brewery on January 10th, 2022 to secure tickets on a lobster boat sized vessel that would bring Amanda and myself 10 miles out to Machias Seal Island. Tickets are never guaranteed, and they sell out pretty quickly. This year they sold out in just 45 minutes. We were lucky to get the date we wanted! Fast forward five months to June when we shove off from Bloomingdale NY on our way to spend a week adventuring the coast of Maine, the most exciting part to be the chartered puffin boat ride off the Bold Coast - if the weather holds out for us that is. That's right, we bought tickets 5 months in advance for an adventure we weren't even sure we were going to be able to go on. In our case it turned out to be worth it. We arrived at the docks of Bold Coast Charter Company bright and early on the 7th of June ready to ride the tide out with 14 other people.

Captain Andy made sure to tell us that even though it is a beautiful day here on dry land, the sea may have other things in store and we still may not be able to disembark onto the island when we arrive. We didn't care. You could practically see the excitement steaming off us in the early morning sun. As we headed out of the Bay we began our birding adventure with a pretty amazing sighting of the American Eagle.

Once we made our way the salty 10 miles out to Machias Seal Island it was pretty clear to almost everyone that the sea had decided we would be stuck to the boats on this day and would not get the chance to land on the island. Thankfully, Captain Andy is full of adventure. He loaded up our skiff anyway with the first round of excited birders (us included) and took us towards shore just in case we could catch a break in the waves.

Unfortunately, the unpredictability of the sea made it nearly impossible for us to land on the seaweed and barnacle covered stairs that led to the research center on the island. We were able to, as Captain Andy put it, putz around the island and experience the sea birds well...at sea. We saw plenty of Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills, and Common Murres swimming alongside the boats and navigating the sky like pros. As the day went on we saw Arctic Terns and even a few Common Eiders. Because there were so many of us, and not a very large skiff, we took turns exploring the water and engaging with the sea birds. Amanda and I were lucky enough to be able to go out twice with our cameras to really get up close and personal with the birds. To say we were excited was an understatement.

At one point we were floating around the island, minding our own business, when a little group of puffins decided they were interested in us. They swam up to us nice and slow, circled the boat, made some cute noises at us and just watched us as we watched them. I was so close to the little guys I could have scooped one out of the water as a souvenir and taken it home.

It was amazing to see so many different species of sea birds co-mingling in such close proximity to each other; A razorbill would call and a murre would respond, a puffin would dive and the murre would follow close behind, even the Terns and Eiders would take note of what the others were up to and follow close behind.

We were able to spend the better part of the day watching the birds from the larger boat, the Barbara Frost, and the skiff and then unfortunately had to end our adventure and head back to shore. Thankfully though, our Captain had another treat up his sleeve. We went to a neighboring island and were able to catch a few harbor seals napping on the rocks and even a few playing in the waves.

In our case it turned out to be worth it. The poor birders the following day weren't able to even get on the boat because of some crazy ocean storms that blew in.



The island and the skiff



Mikayla in the skiff



Puffin



Murre, Razorbill, Puffin

Winter Birding Weekend in the Adirondacks!

Saturday & Sunday, January 28-29, 2023

Enjoy a weekend of birding trips in the Adirondacks this winter. Participants will look for winter irruptive species such as Bohemian Waxwings, Evening Grosbeaks, and Pine Grosbeaks, along with year-round boreal residents such as Ruffed Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, Canada Jay, and Boreal Chickadee. There is a bumper seed crop on the Ash Trees which has already enticed large numbers of Evening Grosbeaks into the Adirondacks this fall. While cones are in short supply this winter, there is an abundance of fruit to attract Bohemian Waxwings and Pine Grosbeaks. And of course, we will be on the lookout for northern owls also!

Field Trips: Joan Collins will lead field trips on both days. Both Saturday and Sunday morning, meet outside the Adirondack Hotel at 7 a.m. (near the bridge over Long Lake on Route 30). Participants can drive in their own vehicles, or car-pool, if they are comfortable, to reduce the number of cars in the train.

Social Dinner: This year, we are once again adding a social dinner back into the weekend plan! On Saturday evening, we can gather in the Adirondack Hotel dining room at 6 p.m. to enjoy a meal together.

Registration: required to attend the field trips. Call the Long Lake Parks and Recreation Department at 518-624-3077 to register. There is a maximum of 25 participants for each field trip.

Places to Stay: A few possible places to stay in Long Lake (central Adirondacks)

- Adirondack Hotel (near the bridge over Long Lake) – hotel with a restaurant: <https://adirondackhotel.com/>
 - Long View Lodge (on the southern end of the lake) – lodge with a restaurant: <https://thelongviewlodge.com/>
 - Shamrock Motel and Cottages (motel units or cabins on the lake with kitchens): <http://www.shamrockmotellonglake.com/>
 - Motel Long Lake and Cottages - recently renovated motel units or cabins on the lake with kitchens): <https://www.motellonglake.com/>
- For more places to stay check Airbnb.

Breakfast/Lunch: Stewarts opens at 5 a.m. and offers quick breakfast items. Depending on the itineraries for Saturday and Sunday, lunch can be ordered (if needed) from the Adirondack Trading Post in Long Lake, the new Newcomb Café, or Well Dressed Food in Tupper Lake (menus will be provided in the morning).

The Winter Birding Weekend is sponsored by the Long Lake Parks and Recreation Department and cosponsored by Northern New York Audubon.



Larry Master

Christmas Bird Counts

Elizabethtown

Date: Saturday, December 17, 2022

Contact: Betsy Miner or Mar Bodine at corgiforest@gmail.com or marbo59@verizon.net

Note from coordinators: Tentative plan to hold a compilation dinner this year.

Ferrisburg, Vermont (New York side)

Date: Saturday, December 17, 2022

Contact: John and Pat Thaxton at jpthax5317@gmail.com

Massena-Cornwall

Date: Saturday, December 17, 2022

Contact: Eileen Wheeler at eiwheeler@yahoo.com

Note from coordinator: We will likely meet afterwards for a compilation.

Plattsburgh

Date: Sunday, December 18, 2022

Contact: Michael Burgess at michael.b.burgess@plattsburgh.edu

Note from coordinator: The count is centered near the Plattsburgh International airport, and the circle includes a portion of the western shoreline of Grand Isle, VT, plus numerous exceptional birding hot spots. Stay tuned for additional details.

Potsdam-Canton

Date: Wednesday, December 28, 2022

Contact: jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

Note from coordinator: Whether to hold an in-person compilation will be decided closer to count day.

Saranac Lake

Date: Sunday, January 1, 2023

Contact: Steven Langdon at sflangdon@gmail.com

Note from coordinator: The Saranac Lake CBC is centered in Ray Brook and includes the villages of Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, and Bloomingdale.

Northern New York Audubon Newsletter

A Note About Membership

Our work would not be possible without the support of our members.

So - a heartfelt

Thank You!

to all of you who generously support NNYA!

To renew your membership, or to become a new member, please visit

<https://www.NNYA.org/support-NNYA/>.



SUNY Plattsburgh student Meghan Bargabos with a gray catbird

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