

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 38 Number 4

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The 111th Annual Christmas Bird Count

The first time we did a Christmas Bird Count, on a warm, dreary, drizzly day, Mike Peterson told us not to worry about a thing and to drive up this manicured, private road that led to a few extremely fancy houses situated on a sheltered bay on Lake Champlain. So we blithely trespassed and started counting ducks until a grizzled-looking guy in a pickup with a gun rack featuring a 12-gauge pump shotgun drove over and told us to get the {expletive deleted} out of here, now. As Mike had instructed us, we dutifully informed the gentleman that we were with the High Peaks Audubon Society and hard at work counting birds for the Ferrisburgh Christmas Bird Count.

When he groaned and shifted his truck into “park” we complied with his wishes immediately, apologizing profusely and withdrawing post haste.

Since then we’ve participated in dozens of Christmas Bird Counts without a single threat of violence or other discomforts besides bone-chilling cold, blinding blizzards, hard rain, freezing rain, impenetrable haze and, well, the usual Adirondack slings and arrows. And we have had enormous amounts of fun even as we contributed to the avian records of the Adirondacks.

The records of the past one hundred-ten years of Christmas Bird Counts represents far and away the largest database in ornithology, and over the past several years, in my opinion, one of the most powerful arguments supporting the relentless rise in the planet’s temperature. A few years back we had an empidonax flycatcher on the Ferrisburgh CBC, two years ago we had a red-bellied woodpecker, unique records both and both strong indicators of a moderating climate. Two years ago the Elizabethtown CBC recorded its first gray catbird, and last year the Saranac Lake CBC had its first ruby-crowned kinglet (make that its first two ruby-crowned kinglets, recorded by different observers in different locations). See inside for details.

*All Photos this newsletter by Pete Defina
Hurricane Mountain*

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NNYA

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**Audubon's 111th Annual Christmas Bird Count
Ferrisburgh (VT/NY) CBC****Saturday, December 18th.** 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 19th.** 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@verizon.net to arrange for a territory.**Elizabethtown (NY) CBC****Sunday, December 19th.** If you are interested in participating in this year's count, please contact Charlotte Demers at: cdemers@frontiernet.net or (518) 582-2157. 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****Sunday, January 2nd, 55th 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 Sunday evening,**President's Message**

Hydrofracking—If you aren't familiar with the term, you will be soon. Hydrofracking (Hydraulic fracturing) was the topic at the fall Audubon Council of New York meeting, a featured segment on a recent *60 Minutes* program and even the focus of a murder investigation on an episode of the TV show *CSI*. In its simplest form, hydrofracking is a way of fracturing rocks in an effort to extract oil and/or gas. Deep wells are drilled, and with the use of millions of gallons of water and a large number of chemicals (597 by one researcher's count), cracks and fissures are created and maintained. There is interest in using this process to access natural gas deposits in southern New York, where a geologic feature, the Marcellus Shale Formation (MSF), possibly contains 262 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Hydrofracking is being used in the MSF in Pennsylvania with questionable environmental and human health outcomes. There is a wealth of information on the Internet about hydrofracking, and I strongly encourage our members to become informed on the topic. I hope to be providing more info on hydrofracking in the coming months, but it is important that we act now to put a temporary moratorium on hydrofracking in New York State. While the Senate has recently passed a bill placing a moratorium on hydrofracking until May 2011, the Assembly bill has yet to be passed. Please take the time to write or email your Assembly member and the Governor-elect and ask them to support a moratorium on hydrofracking. This would allow the State time to assess the environmental impacts of the process and to develop enforceable regulations to help ensure safe and proper hydrofracking operations. It is important that our State legislators recognize the importance of this issue and that they act quickly.

On a happier note, my favorite time of year approaches: CBC time! Check the newsletter for the dates of a Christmas Bird Count near you (or not so near). The CBC has been in existence since 1900 when 25 counts were conducted. In recent years the number of counts has been over 1,800. Please contact a CBC compiler and volunteer to help with a count. It's a great way to meet people, enjoy the outdoors (or the indoors if you count birds at your feeder) and participate in this International citizen science program.

—Charlotte Demers

2011 Great Backyard Bird Count February 18-February 21

This year's Great Backyard Bird Count will take place from Friday, February 18th through Monday, February 21st.

This annual four-day event engages bird watchers of all ages and skill levels in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as fifteen minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like on each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds. The website will be adding updated GBBC materials for the next count as they become available.

Watch the power point presentation, visit the special page for kids, print a regional tally sheet, check out the top birds reported in the last GBBC, download the GBBC poster.

Participants count birds anywhere for as little or as long as they wish during the four-day period. They tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time. To report their counts, they fill out an online checklist at the Great Backyard Bird Count website.

As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or anywhere in the United States and Canada. They can also see how this year's numbers compare with those from previous years. Participants may also send in photographs of the birds they see. A selection of images is posted in the online photo gallery.

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to document the complex distribution of so many species in such a short time.

Data from the GBBC can help answer many pressing question about birds:

How will this winter's snow and cold temperatures influence bird populations? Where are winter finches and other irruptive species that appear in large numbers during some years but not others? How will the timing of birds' migrations compare with past years? How are bird diseases, such as West Nile Virus, affecting birds in different regions?

Go to: www.birdsource.org/gbbc/

Whiteface Mt. from Craig Woods Golf Course



Sunday, February 6, 2011 Leonard Pond Trail X-Country Ski Colton (St. Lawrence County)

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.

Bring: Lunch, water, warm clothes

Leaders: Joan Collins & Mary Beth Warburton

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

Register: by calling Joan at (518) 624-5528 ; email:

Joan.Collins@Frontier.com or Mary Beth at (315) 268-0150

or by email: mbwarburton@verizon.net

Saturday, January 22, 2011 Newcomb Visitor Interpretive Center Newcomb (Essex County)

Join President Charlotte Demers for a snowshoe on the Newcomb VIC's five miles of trails through mixed forest habitats, including riparian stretches along the upper Hudson River and lakeshore habitats along Newcomb Lake.

Time: 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Leader: Charlotte Demers

Bring: Water, warm clothes, lunch (optional)

Meet: At the Newcomb Visitors Interpretive Center

Register: Email Charlotte @ cdemers@frontiernet.net

Saturday January 29, 2011 (Snow Date January 30, 2011)

Bloomington Bog Bloomington (Franklin County)

Participants will hike several miles on level terrain along the old railroad bed that runs through Bloomington Bog. Watch for boreal birds, like gray jay and black-backed woodpecker, and perhaps some irruptives, like crossbills or redpolls.

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Leader: Melanie McCormick

Location: Meet at the intersection of Oregon Plains and Bigelow Roads

Bring: Water, food, binoculars and appropriate clothing

Register: Email Melanie @ mruddyduck@aol.com

Saturday, February 26, 2011 Ski Trip to Santanoni Great Camp Newcomb (Essex County)

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

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation 2010 Grant

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon/Wild Center Summer Intern Naturalist Grant (\$5000) underwrote half the salary (The Wild Center underwrote the other half) of a summer Intern 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 Intern Naturalist’s training included a week of field identification and site visits with NNYA board members and associates, a 32 hour course to qualify as a Certified Interpretative Guide, numerous training sessions with TWC staff for museum-based programming and a course in the administration of Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation. This year’s Summer Intern, Katie Christman, led 11 off-site trips to Bloomingdale Bog and Whiteface Mountain (attended by an average of 10 for a total of 110) as well as 31 Adirondack Birding Basics walks at TWC (attended by an average of 15 and totaling 375 participants). Katie also did Bird-in-Hand programs with TWC’s resident ravens twice a week and usually attracted 50-120 people each time. A recently certified animal rehabilitator, Katie especially loved working with TWC’s animals.

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon Avian Research Award (\$1200) underwrote the salary of a field assistant to work with Melanie McCormack on her master’s thesis study investigating the occupancy of rusty blackbirds in Adirondack locations recorded in long-term avian monitoring projects such as the Breeding Bird Survey and Audubon Christmas Bird Counts. Rusty blackbird populations have declined nationwide by a stunning ninety percent since 1960, and by an ominous twenty-three percent in the Adirondacks between 1985 and 2005, the completion dates of the two Breeding Bird Atlases of New York State. Highly secretive and wont to nest in difficult-to-access, boggy and marshy wetland habitats, rusty blackbirds usually prove impossible to detect other than during the beginning of the breeding season, when males sing to establish territories, attract mates and repel competing male conspecifics. Melanie and her field assistant, Dominique Biondi, a recent graduate of Paul Smiths College, conducted 161 surveys within 18 different wetland complexes, detecting rusty blackbirds at 12 locations in 7 of the 18 wetlands, with the highest number of birds occurring in the Spring Pond Bog and Massawepie Bog complexes, the largest boreal wetlands in the Adirondacks. These preliminary data suggest that rusty blackbirds do far better in larger wetland complexes than in smaller patches of habitat, and the next step in analyzing these records involves looking at such factors as habitat type, wetland size, survey conditions and human impacts in order to determine what specific factors correlate with healthy rusty blackbird populations. Many Adirondack birders look forward to reading Melanie’s thesis.

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon/Great Adirondack Birding Celebration Annual Lecture (\$1500) was delivered by Dr. Peter Marra of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center at the National Zoological Park. Entitled *Science in the Urban Jungle: Neighborhood Nestwatch*, Dr. Marra’s talk described this program he started as an attempt to begin quantifying avian nest survival along an urbanization gradient using citizen- and scientist-generated data. The program involves recruiting observers in and around Washington, D.C. and training them to find and monitor any of eight focal species—gray catbird, American robin, northern mockingbird, Carolina chickadee, song sparrow, Carolina wren, house wren and northern cardinal—that breed within an urban/suburban land-use matrix. Thus far data indicate that citizen Nestwatch participants had no negative impact on birds and their nests and provided estimates of nest survival comparable to those provided by Smithsonian scientists. The program involves capturing and using a unique set of color bands to identify individual birds, with the result that Nestwatchers can track birds from year to year and report birds from elsewhere by noting their arrays of band colors. Sifting through several years of data Dr. Marra discovered that nest survivability increases with proximity to urbanization, probably because of decreases in kinds and numbers of predators

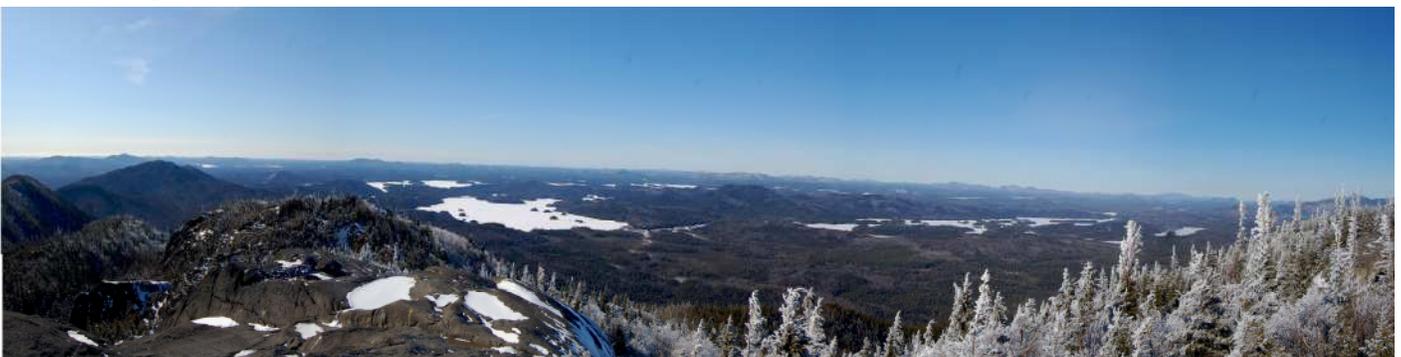
and regardless of introduced invasive predators, such as house cats. Dr. Marra described a future study that will recruit cat owners willing to let scientists fit their pets with collars equipped with small video cameras designed to activate only when a cat pounces, the better to prove that house cats let outside kill birds, which, alas, people who let their cats out invariably deny—not their cat.

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Foundation/Northern New York Audubon Lepidopteran Grant (\$500) partially underwrote *Project Silkmoth: A Survey of the Giant Silkmoths of Northern New York State*, a volunteer based survey documenting the presence of Giant Silkmoths (family *Saturniidae*) in New York State. Volunteers submitted sightings and photographs that Dr. Janet Mihuc, the lead investigator, incorporated into a sightings database that will generate occurrence maps for each of the twelve species that may or should occur in northern New York State, defined as north of a line from Oswego to Utica to Saratoga Springs. The results of *Project Silkmoth* will become part of the *Adirondack All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventory Database* and serve as a baseline for future studies on the geographic distribution of these moths, which live one year or less, most of the time as caterpillars or pupae. Dr. Mihuc created a web site with preliminary occurrence maps, field-guide photographs of the moths and numerous links to resources with more information about these stunningly beautiful Lepidoptera, which scientists suspect have steadily declined over the past few decades. During the 2010 survey period volunteers submitted thirty sightings from seven counties in northern New York, where five of the twelve focal species occurred, with *Luna*, *Polyphe-mus* and *Rosy Maple* species occurring more frequently than *Cecropia* or *lo* moths.

www.projectsilkmoth.org.

The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon Boreal and Montane Studies Grant (\$3200) underwrote support for field technicians and science staff to study the presence of Bicknell's thrush and other high-elevation species on Whiteface Mountain. The project, conducted by the Wildlife Conservation Society Adirondack program, surveyed focal montane species before and after the Whiteface Mountain ski area construction/expansion in order to elucidate the impacts of ski area expansion on these montane avian species. WCS has conducted this work for the past six years in partnership with the Olympic Regional Development Authority, and this year's field work provides a third year of post-construction data, which will improve the quality of this dataset and enhance WCS's ability to draw from it reliable conclusions about the potential impacts of ski trail development. WCS technicians performed this year's work between June 5th and June 15th, between the hours of 4:30 and 6:30 a.m., when Bicknell's thrushes do most of their singing and calling, and returned to established sampling points in five different treatment points—existing glades, proposed glades, existing trails, the newly expanded Lookout Mountain trail area and several control areas. This study should significantly enhance our understanding of the effects of ski trail expansion on Bicknell's thrush and other montane forest birds on Whiteface Mountain as a result of multi-year pre- and post-trail construction data; improve science-based guidance to aid in decision-making regarding high-elevation projects (e.g. ski area development, wind tower development) that are being proposed in the Northeast; and increase protection for a globally rare species via a Whiteface Mountain habitat management plan orchestrated by ORDA in coordination with WCS and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. A final report synthesizing the seven-year project is forthcoming from WCS.

Ampersand Mountain



Northern New York Audubon Threatened Species Grant (\$2700)

Northern New York Audubon awarded its Threatened Species Grant to Angelina Ross for her ongoing study:

Evaluating Spruce Grouse Management in the Lowland Boreal Forests with Respect to Spruce Grouse and Other Boreal Forest Bird Obligates in the Adirondack Region.

The grant provided support for a field technician to study the effects of spruce grouse forest management on spruce grouse habitat use and relative abundances of boreal forest songbirds. The project, conducted by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, was focused on assessing effectiveness of three distinct forest treatments for spruce grouse occupancy, songbird diversity and abundance, and invertebrate diversity and abundance. Also included in the study was evaluating habitat between treatments and comparing these measures to known occupied habitat.

Spruce grouse or sign have been observed at both the treated and control sites, but only at fringes of the treated sites during the breeding season. Surveyors began measuring correlates of grouse use before and after treatments took place to increase power of statistical tests. Various measures of grouse habitat were taken, including canopy cover, tree and sapling density, age, height and diameter. Also included were measures of ground and shrub cover.

In 2010, indices of invertebrate diversity and abundance were measured as forage for young spruce grouse in each treatment to compare (1) among different treatment types and (2) among treatments and grouse home ranges at control sites. Data have not yet been analyzed, but preliminary results indicate that forest stands thinned to lesser degrees generally contained more invertebrates and densities are more similar to densities within grouse home ranges.

Treatments had begun to respond by an increase in ground cover by the end of the first year post-harvest (2009). Researchers anticipate that treatments will have better spruce grouse nesting microsites and more food for young within the next five years. A report is forthcoming.

Board of Directors Meeting

The next NNYA Board of Directors meeting will take place on Saturday, January 22nd at 12:00 p.m. at The Newcomb Visitors Interpretive Center. Board meetings are open to all members, and the directors welcome any and all input from members at large. Please feel free to attend the next meeting, which will focus on a variety of topics, from board members' ideas about strategic goals for NNYA to an update on financial and membership numbers.

A snowshoe from 9:00-11:00 a.m. on the trails of the Newcomb Visitors' Interpretive Center will precede the board meeting, and although you should feel welcome to attend both, the board cordially invites you to take part in either.

The board looks forward to fresh member ideas.

NNYA \$300 Program Grant Tracking Adirondack Wildlife In Winter

The Wild Center
January 21st & 22nd

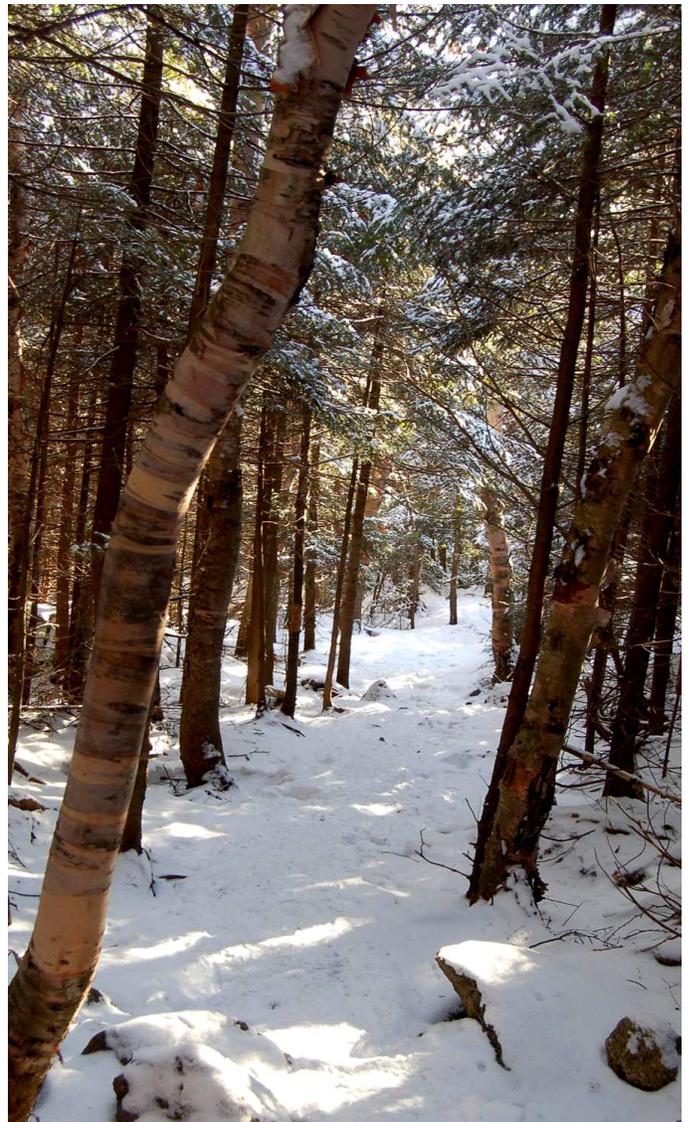
Speaker: Susan Morse

On Friday, January 21st at 7:00 p.m. in the Wild Center's Flammer Theatre Join Susan Morse—a nationally recognized naturalist and founder of *Keeping Track* for a lecture on North American Carnivores. **Free.**

On Saturday, January 22nd, 9:00 am—4:30 pm Join Susan Morse and Wild Center Staff for a full day tracking workshop. The Adirondacks in winter offer a unique opportunity for learning about wildlife through tracking. Topics include tracking basics, wildlife winter ecology, animal behavior, winter animal adaptations and forest ecology. Snowshoes are provided. **Cost: \$45.00.**

For more information contact Jen Kretser at:
jkretser@wildcenter.org

Trail to Ampersand Mountain





Paul Smiths

Winter Finch Forecast

Every autumn a group of serious birders begins to assemble cone crop assessments and, based on shared findings, a prediction of which northern species of finches will migrate south for the winter to take advantage of abundant food.

These irruptive species, like redpolls and crossbills, tend to rely on different species of trees for their food, with the result that huge numbers of some species will move south while others will remain in the north.

Here are some general comments about this year's various cone and seed crops and their probable effect on winter finch movements:

The main food-source trees in the boreal forest for finches are white and black spruce, white birch and mountain ash, and as one moves south into mixed coniferous/deciduous forest eastern white pine and hemlock begin to become a factor as a sustaining food source.

This year's white spruce cone crop in the boreal forests of Canada amounts to something of a bumper crop, an excellent source of food that white-winged crossbills and pine siskins have indulged in all summer and, it seems, will probably continue to do so right through the winter. So don't expect big numbers of pine siskins like we've had in recent years.

Nor should we expect large movements of pine grosbeaks south this year, as the mountain ash berry crop seems poised to break records and keep pine grosbeaks in the high-north. This abundance of mountain ash berries will also likely keep Bohemian waxwings on the far northern stretches of their territory.

But don't despair: common and hoary redpolls will probably irrupt into southern Canada and the border states in order to take advantage of an abundant white birch seed crop. Redpolls evidently had an extremely successful breeding year, with many observers reporting second and third broods, and some research suggests the redpoll movements have more to do with reproductive success than food sources. In any case, they love black oil sunflower seeds and if the forecasters prove correct you should see plenty of them at your feeders this winter. This will be an interesting species to monitor on the Great Backyard Bird Count. —JT

Poetry Corner Corvids

The **Corvids** are a funny bunch—
Eating carrion for lunch—
It's gotta stink would be my hunch.

And feast they do—it's quite a trick—
To keep it down and not get sick—
I guess it makes their feathers slick.

It can't be good for vocal chords—
Never have they won awards—
With voices sharp as two-edged swords.

Black-on-Black's the standard plot—
Photogs take artistic shots—
But musical the birds are "Not."

Common Raven with royal cloak—
Tries to sound like normal folk—
Yet only gives a grunt-like croak

There was one bird that made a score—
Had a star upon his door—
His famous line was "Nevermore."

Chihuahuan Raven's the cowboy's pet—
Flies in deserts seldom wet—
He'll never make it to The Met.

Northwestern Crow is much the same—
Geography is in his name—
But as for singing—Pretty Lame.

Fish Crow tries his best you know—
Wants to greet you with "Hello"—
Yet only utters a curt Uh-Oh.

American Crow can give you pause—
To wonder why his song has flaws?
Be caws!

--COOx2

{*Editor's note: Our poet's nom de plume reflects the limitations imposed on acquirers of New Jersey License Vanity License Plates, which can only have five characters—unable to secure cuckoo, his favorite bird, the author chose COO" (not carbon dioxide) plus the multiplier x and the numeral 2, signifying, perforce, "COO COO"*}



Editor's Note

As I watched the tree branches all around the house bowing farther and farther down for the weight of the heavy, wet snow, and when the lower limbs of the conifers lining my driveway finally lay down on the ground, I realized the “no-significant-accumulations” forecast for the area didn’t apply to chez moi, whether for my altitude or attitude I dared not conjecture. So I called my wife in Elizabethtown, eight miles distant and fourteen hundred feet down, only to discover that a moderate rain started falling in mid-morning and persisted even as we spoke. I guessed we had six inches of snow and predicted two more.

She called back later to say she had a ride home, and I offered to meet her at the bottom of the town road, a half mile from 9N to our house, but I never made it to the town road because it took me forty minutes to walk the quarter-mile of my driveway, which looked like one of those car washes, thick with blindingly dense and soapy stalactites, I used to drive through in the Bronx, the last place, no doubt, such car washes remained legal. I spent most of the time tugging on snow covered limbs until they shed enough snow to rise up out of the way, and several times several of the larger limbs lifted me three feet off the ground as they rebounded, causing me, despite my enfilades of invective, to laugh out loud and giggle like a little kid, too magnanimous of spirit, naturally, to get genuinely angry at a tree.

It’s Christmas Bird Count time and I detail inside the times and dates for anyone who wants to participate in this fun and genuinely important citizen science project, and I included as well the dates and times of this season’s field trips, which include a couple of cross-country skis and a snowshoe.

As I have for the past several winter issues, I included here a summary of research projects that the board awarded Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation grants, an exciting and important mix of fascinating studies, from an evaluation of silk moth populations in northern New York to a vital investigation of difficult-to-study rusty blackbirds to the continuing Wildlife Conservation Society’s evaluation of ski area expansion on montane avian species. This is important work, undertaken, perforce, under less than hospitable conditions, such as slogging through partially frozen bogs in April because that’s the best time to find rusty blackbirds, or schlepping around in the krummholz on Whiteface, on bone-chilling, drizzly days, because that’s the window to inventory male Bicknell’s thrushes advertising and defending territories.

Every member should take pride in the fact that the Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation continues to have confidence in our ability to identify and monitor vitally important grass-roots, real-time conservation and education initiatives.

Make sure to read president Charlotte Demers message about hydrofracking, which, as she said at a recent board meeting, is here.

I illustrated this issue with the work of Pete Defina, a photographer with a poet’s eye.

—John Thaxton