

# 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.*

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## Audubon's 113th Christmas Bird Count

Important and exciting news for the Christmas Bird Count program: After nearly two years of internal discussions, budget modeling, head-scratching, and intense decision-making, two major changes will come to the Christmas Bird Count Program effective with this year's CBC.

First, the CBC is now a free program. Audubon will no longer charge CBC participants the \$5.00 fee.

Second, to minimize the effects of the loss of fee income, *American Birds* will no longer be printed on paper and mailed to participants, and Audubon will move to an online delivery of the summary results of the CBC.

To help Audubon make these important decisions regarding the Christmas Bird Count program, they invited people involved with the count to participate in an online survey earlier this year. The results from the survey included responders who said they understood the fee and didn't mind paying it, but the main thrust of most comments called the fee a major obstacle to the program, and sent a strong message that eliminating the fee would result in more people getting involved with the program, more counts taking place and more accurate data compiled.

The survey also discovered that most people didn't read most of the CBC results compiled in *American Birds* and would much prefer an interactive, online version of the magazine. The forthcoming *American Birds* interactive web presence will include photos, summaries and features, all of which will appear online as they are completed.

While the integrity of the CBC is crucial to maintain for its bird trend data, it has become equally important for its ability to engage people in other citizen science projects. Toward that end Audubon will be expanding its Citizen Science projects, and the CBC will, of course, be a cornerstone program.

## Audubon's 16th Great Backyard Bird Count February 15th-18th

When bird watchers joined this year's Great Backyard Bird Count, they recorded the most unusual winter for birds in the count's 15-year history. With 17.4 million bird observations on 104,000 checklists, this was the most detailed four-day snapshot ever recorded for birdlife in the U.S. and Canada. Participants recorded 623 species, during February 17-20, including an influx of Snowy Owls from the arctic, early-migrating Sandhill Cranes, and Belted Kingfishers in northern areas that might normally be frozen over.

This February the GBBC is going global and being integrated with eBird, and participants can enter data from anywhere in the world. Other new features include improved visual interfaces on the GBBC site, with interactive maps that will allow users to explore bird observations in much greater detail than ever before.

This change means participants will create a free account in order to enter bird checklists for the GBBC, starting in 2013. This only has to be done once, and people already using eBird can use the same username and login information to participate in the GBBC.

"Citizen scientists are helping us document changes to birds, starting in our own backyards," said Audubon chief scientist Gary Langham.



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Northern New York Audubon, Inc.

A chapter of National Audubon Society  
serving the Adirondack, Champlain and  
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York, including Clinton, Essex, Franklin,  
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## Audubon's 113<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count

### Ferrisburgh (VT/NY) CBC

**Saturday, December 15th.** The Ferrisburgh count circle includes a swath of Lake Champlain shoreline as far west as Route 22. For information contact John & Pat Thaxton: [JPThax5317@gmail.com](mailto:JPThax5317@gmail.com) or 518.576.4232.

### Plattsburgh (NY) CBC

**Sunday, December 16th.** 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 [heintz.judith@gmail.com](mailto:heintz.judith@gmail.com) to arrange for a territory.

### Elizabethtown (NY) CBC

**Saturday, December 22nd.** If you are interested in participating in this year's count, please contact Charlotte Demers at: [cdemers@frontiernet.net](mailto: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).

### Massena, N.Y.-Cornwall, ON CBC

**Saturday, December 22nd** Join us for the 41st annual Massena portion of the Massena-Cornwall CBC on December 22nd. A little more than half of the circle is on the US side of the border. 78 species were found last year setting many new records for our count. We look forward to a festive count dinner in Massena afterwards. Call Eileen Wheeler at 315-386-2482 or email: [eiwheeler@yahoo.com](mailto:eiwheeler@yahoo.com).

### Saranac Lake (NY) CBC

**Sunday, December 30th.** 57<sup>th</sup> 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; [lawrencemaster@gmail.com](mailto:lawrencemaster@gmail.com). ahead of time if you plan to participate. A festive count dinner will be held at a location TBD on Sunday evening,

### Saturday January 19, 2013

#### Arbutus Lake

#### Newcomb

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.

**Time:** 10:00 am

**Meet:** Meet at the Adirondack Interpretive Center, 5922 State Route 28N Newcomb, NY

**Leader:** Charlotte Demers

**Registration:** Email to [cdemers@frontiernet.net](mailto:cdemers@frontiernet.net) or call the AIC at (518) 582-2000

### Saturday February 2, 2012

#### Adirondack Interpretive Center

#### Newcomb

After checking out the birds at the AIC feeder, which in recent winters included redpolls, evening grosbeaks, chickadees and nuthatches, we will head out to the Sucker Brook trail. This 1.0-mile trail runs along the outlet to Rich Lake providing opportunities to glimpse mink and otter in the open water. The surrounding hardwood forest is a great place to spot woodpeckers.

**Time:** 10:00 a.m.

**Meet:** At the Adirondack Interpretive Center, 5922 State Rt 28N Newcomb, NY

**Leader:** Charlotte Demers

**Registration:** Email to [cdemers@frontiernet.net](mailto:cdemers@frontiernet.net) or call the AIC at (518) 582-2000

## President's Message

I am writing to ask our membership for some much needed help. No, I am not asking you to write us a check; I am asking for your valuable time. Northern New York Audubon is presently seeking nominations for its Board of Directors. Your current Board consists of a fabulous group of individuals that do a tremendous job keeping this organization active, relevant and engaged in important conservation issues. When new terms begin in July 2013, many of us will need to step down from the board when our terms expire. There are no prerequisites to being a member of the Board of Directors. You don't need to have experience with other non-profits, have a special skill set, or even be an excellent birder (I certainly am not). All you need is a desire to help this organization grow and continue to achieve its mission statement: "To conserve and restore natural ecosystems in the Adirondack, Champlain and St. Lawrence regions of New York State, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the Earth's biological diversity." Our meetings, which typically last 2 hours, are held six times a year, so we meet about every other month. At these meetings, we listen to Committee Reports, conduct the fiscal business of the organization, and discuss conservation issues that are germane to our region. We also make determinations on how best to spend our grant monies, selecting projects that help promote conservation and education in our area. Being a member of the Board requires nothing more than a willingness to contribute a small amount of time (about 50 hours/year) to an organization that endeavors to "promote the protection and proper management of birds, other wildlife and their habitats through advocacy and education." If you are interested in serving as a member of the Board, consider nominating yourself (perfectly acceptable). If you know someone who would be a benefit to this organization, nominate them as a candidate and the Nominating Committee will contact them to determine their interest. Please don't hesitate to contact me with questions or nomination suggestions.

And, as always, this time of year, I strongly encourage everyone to participate in some of the great Citizen Science programs that are available; Christmas Bird Counts, Project Feeder Watch and the Great Backyard Bird Count (Feb. 15-18, 2013). These three projects are fabulous ways to make your love of watching birds inform our understanding of their behavior, movement and population changes.

—Charlotte Demers



**NNYA maintains a very active Facebook site, complete with information about field trips, programs, festivals and celebrations.**

**Friend us on Facebook!**

## Saturday February 23, 2013

### Cross-Country Ski

#### Connery Pond to Whiteface Landing

This six-mile round-trip passes through some beautiful woods, past a lovely pond and ends up at the extremely scenic Whiteface Landing at the north end of Lake Placid. As Tony Goodwin puts it in *Classic Adirondack Ski Tours*: "The skiing has enough ups and downs to keep experienced skiers from being totally bored while not terrifying less experienced skiers." We'd classify the trail as suitable for experienced beginners and light intermediate skiers.

**Time:** 9:00 a.m.

**Meet:** The Trailhead is located on Rt. 86, 3.1 miles east of the stoplight at the junction of Rts. 86 & 73 in Lake Placid and is marked with a DEC sign—if the trailhead is not plowed, park on the road.

**Bring:** Lunch

**Leaders:** Pat & John Thaxton

**Registration:** Contact Pat or John by calling (518)576-4232 or by emailing: [jpthax5317@gmail.com](mailto:jpthax5317@gmail.com).



*Connery Pond*

### DEC Camp Scholarship

Win a week at Camp Colby in Saranac Lake or Pack Forest in Warrensburg! Boys and girls ages 11 to 17 are eligible.

Learn about the environment, enjoy traditional camp activities such as swimming, canoeing, hiking, and archery. Sportsman education is also available.

Write a short essay about why you'd like to go to camp to be considered for a \$350.00 scholarship. Be sure to tell us about yourself and include your age, year in school, address, and phone number.

For more information, consult the DEC website at [www.dec.ny.gov/education](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education). Please send your entry to Eileen Wheeler, 585 Pink School Rd., Canton, NY 13617 or email [eiwheeler@yahoo.com](mailto:eiwheeler@yahoo.com) by March 1, 2013.

# The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation 2012 Grant

- **The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon Avian Research Award (\$3,000)** helped support the Wildlife Conservation Society's ongoing investigation of the impacts of exurban development on passerine and piciform bird populations in the Adirondack Park, with an emphasis on how a suite of species react to houses, power lines, lawns, driveways and the human activities associated with them. Previous work in this study found that while some generalist species, such as crows and jays and grackles, benefited from exurban development, the more specialized species that require very particular sorts of habitat and food resources, like winter wren and Swainson's thrush, experienced increasingly negative breeding success as proximity to development increased. Half of this award underwrote the work of Dr. Chad Seewagen, whose work with the physiological health and physiological response of birds to exurban development will significantly enhance the WCS community level analyses and provide a unique and synergistic perspective on avian physiology apropos of habitat. Specifically, Dr. Seewagen collected blood samples and analyzed hematocrit volume and plasma triglyceride levels to assess energy levels; uric acid levels to determine dietary protein content; and heterophil:lymphocyte ratios to measure chronic stress. He collected samples primarily from ovenbirds, a species sufficiently abundant in both developed areas and undeveloped reference sites to make graphic physiological comparisons. We look forward to reviewing the results of this WCS/Dr. Seewagen work.
- **The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon/Great Adirondack Birding Celebration Annual Lecture (\$750)** featured Richard Crossley, whose revolutionary new field guide to birds, *The Crossley ID Guide* (Princeton University Press), created an unprecedented sensation when published last year. Crossley took more than ten thousand photos for the book, which consists of astonishing, digitally photoshopped montages of every North American species of bird, with each plate depicting a given species in every phase of development and plumage variation, at all times of year and in the appropriate habitat. In what must surely have amounted to a Herculean effort (it required hitchhiking more than a hundred thousand miles), Crossley managed to put the project together, and to the surprise and delight of everyone at his lecture he absolutely charmed the full-house audience at the Paul Smiths VIC. His personable, funny, self-deprecating narrative of his relationship to birding elicited multiple salvos of hearty laughter, and the stunning series of photos he projected as he spoke elicited an eyebrow-raising number of gasps from the audience.
- **The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon/Hamilton County Boreal Birding Festival Annual Lecture (\$750)** presented Dr. Bruce Beehler, Vice President, Indonesia-Pacific Islands, Conservation International, who spoke at the Adirondack Museum about his work in Papua New Guinea and its relationship to his experiences in the Adirondacks, where he developed a sterling reputation right out of college with the 1974 publication of his *Birds of the Adirondack Park* (Adirondack Mountain Club). Dr. Beehler went to summer camp in the Adirondacks and went on to spend essentially all his free time hiking and climbing and birding in the mountains. Since graduating college he has made more than fifty trips to Papua New Guinea, where he and his team discovered several bird species unknown to science and where he has documented species previously considered extinct, such as Berlepsch's Six Wired Bird of Paradise, and discovered previously unknown species, such as the waffled honey eater. These exotic places and species notwithstanding, Dr. Beehler described his work in the Adirondacks and in Papua New Guinea's Foja Mountains as though a quick drive could get him from one range to the other. The large crowd marveled at a 60-Minutes video clip of an exotic lyre bird performing its mind-bogglingly elaborate courtship display.
- **The Joseph and Joan Cullman/Northern New York Audubon Boreal Bird Studies Award (\$1,500)** underwrote a study of rusty blackbird populations in the Adirondacks, the southernmost extreme of its range in North America, by searching for nesting birds in specific locations where they had previously nested, such as Massawepie Mire, Wanakena, Minerva, Moose River Plains, Shingle Shanty Preserve and Research Station and Spring Pond Bog. Despite observations of nesting rusty blackbirds in these locations as recently as 2011, only one pair, apparently not nesting, was detected in Massawepie and a single adult bird in Shingle Shanty, which suggests, perhaps, the continuing precipitous decline in the Adirondacks of rusty blackbirds, which have declined in North America by a stunning ninety percent since 1960. The study compared results with similar work in Maine, where researchers detected 40 rusty blackbirds at 200 wetland sites, indicating the extremely warm winter of 2011-2012 might have driven the birds farther north, an assumption in keeping with research correlating the Pacific Decadal Oscillation with a rusty blackbird range retraction of approximately 84 miles from its southern limit over the past 40 years. The principal researcher, Stacy McNulty, Research Associate and Associate Director of

Adirondack Ecological Center, entitled her research paper, *Rusty Blackbirds (Euphagus carolinus) in Adirondack Park: Needle in a Haystack, or Just Missing?*

- **The Joseph and Joan Cullman/Northern New York Audubon Boreal and Montane Studies Award (\$2,250)** supported a technician and an intern who developed two new routes for the Adirondack component of Mountain Birdwatch, a huge citizen science initiative designed to monitor populations of sensitive bird species in the balsam fir-dominated high-elevation forests of New York and New England, with a particular focus on Bicknell's Thrush, the region's only endemic songbird. Administered by the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, Mountain Birdwatch deploys thirty percent of its technicians and volunteers in the Adirondacks (where all of the program's ten focal species, including blackpoll warbler, yellow-bellied flycatcher and other boreals, live), with the goal of serving as the primary database for these populations by following a recently enhanced and statistically more rigorous protocol designed to substantiate science-based conservation decision-making. The Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land have established protective management zones based on Mountain Birdwatch datasets, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service have come to rely on these datasets to make conservation recommendations for rare and threatened species. The two researchers this summer established new routes on Gothics Mountain and Armstrong by conducting bird surveys at designated points and measuring habitat variables, such as canopy height and composition, amount of ground and shrub cover and the basal area of stems in the vicinity of each survey station. Volunteers, either camping or hiking in the dark in order to reach the summits by 4:00 a.m. (when Bicknell's thrush sings and calls more often than at other times of day and becomes, perforce, more easily detected) will survey these routes in 2013.
- **The Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/Northern New York Audubon Climatology Research Grant (\$1,000)** went to Dr. Elaina M. Tuttle, of Indiana State University, who for the past twenty-five years has amassed detailed behavioral, physiological, ecological and evolutionary data on white-throated sparrows, which she suggests serves as the ideal model for the study of the evolutionary effects of global climate change, primarily because the species occurs in two distinct color morphs, each of which exhibits significant variation in sexual behavior as well as brood success/mortality depending on temperature. They occur as either tan- or white-stripe morphs (as distinguished by the color of their crown stripes) and mate disassortatively, with white-stripe males choosing tan-stripe females and vice versa, and the proportion of pair types changes with climate, with white-stripe/tan-stripe pairs experiencing greater reproductive success after a mild winter followed by a cool spring, and vice versa for tan-stripe/white-stripe pairs. The difference owes itself to differing sexual strategies, with white-stripe males investing heavily in securing additional mating possibilities through song, aggression and territorial intrusion, and tan-stripe males investing heavily in parental care. Dr. Tuttle's work, conducted for the past twenty-five years at the Cranberry Lake Biological Research Station in the Adirondack Park, consisted this summer of logging more than eight thousand hours in the field, monitoring ninety-eight sparrow nests, banding over one hundred thirty birds, documenting three thousand behavioral observations via GPS and studying parental behavior, social interactions, immune responses, parasite loads, hormonal levels and nest site selection. Dr. Tuttle wrote: "The data gathered this year were essential for strengthening and testing a structural equation climate model we developed, as 2012 was one of the warmest years on record and led to extremes in both predation and parasite levels. Cullman/ NNYA funds helped support two student researchers, Lindsay Forette from the University of New England, and Maddie Dennie from Purdue University. Both students were immersed in the project and participated in all aspects of the research, including observations of behavior (often lasting many hours), the finding of new pairs and nests, mist-netting, banding birds, processing birds, collecting blood and semen samples (for paternity, hormonal and fertility assays), and using a resource-grade GPS."
- **Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/NNYA Citizen Science Outreach Grant (\$500)** supported the development of educational materials for the All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, a collaborative, volunteer group dedicated to surveying the diversity of life and connecting people to natural communities through participation in biological inventories in the Adirondack Park. The ATBI functions by organizing groups to focus on specific groups of organisms, which they then inventory by deploying expert, volunteer workers and dozens of citizen scientists in an intensive, twenty-four hour search for several designated taxa. The educational materials produced included laminated photo ID cards for the Fungal Taxonomic Working Group, bound, laminated images of fungi and plants, and field guides for the Avian Taxonomic Working Group, as well as other related materials meant to facilitate ATBI's Saranac Lake Bioblitz, which, this July, involved scores of volunteers and documented six hundred-seventy species of flora and fauna.
- **Joseph and Joan Cullman Conservation Foundation/NNYA Education Grant (\$500)** underwrote the implementation of the *Living Bird Exhibit, Phase Two* by the Northern Forest Institute, an initiative that involved the acquisition of eight additional bird feeders as well as several hundred feet of American Bird Conservancy Bird-Tape, a reflective material proven to decrease bird mortality from window strikes. The additional feeders will allow for an enhanced variety of foods, the better to attract a wider spectrum of species, and facilitate longer feeding sessions uninterrupted by humans refilling the feeders. Last year's grant to the Northern Forest Institute and its *Living Bird Exhibit* at SUNY ESF's Newcomb Adirondack Interpretive Center financed the purchase of snacks and beverages intended to generate a self-sustaining bird seed program, with the proceeds from sales dedicated to buying bird seed and the profits reinvested to perpetuate the program. The scheme worked, and the NFI reports that it began the bird feeding season with a full inventory of comestibles for sale as well as more cash than originally awarded to start the program.

## The Mysterious Decline of the Rusty Blackbird

Anyone who has been birding the Adirondacks for more than a decade has probably noticed the precipitous decline of Rusty Blackbird records in recent years. In spring and fall flocks of hundreds used to pass through the Champlain Valley, and in summer their high-pitched call echoed from wetlands across the Adirondacks. But in recent years Rusty Blackbirds have become a rare sight both in migration and in breeding season. So what happened?

It seems that such a question is not so simple to answer. In 2009 I began networking with a group of researchers known as the Rusty Blackbird Working Group, which was assembled by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center to help focus research on this declining species. In 2010 I conducted point counts throughout the Adirondacks with the support of the Cullman Foundation and found only 15 birds in 148 point counts. Since then similar point counts have been done in other regions by members of the working group, and it turns out that they are just as rare in other areas of the northeast, though they are still fairly common in Alaska. In addition to being sparse they can also be tricky to find—the birds are quiet and stealthy once they begin nesting, and they don't often return to the same place to nest year after year. This makes them a difficult bird to study, making the mystery of the decline very difficult to solve. But when you focus more than a dozen researchers on a single species you are bound to answer some questions, especially when you put all of them in a room together as was done at the Northeast Bird Conservation Conference this past October.

It turns out that there is no one major factor causing the decline of this species, but instead there are a number of smaller factors, some of which likely play a greater role than others. Breeding bird survey data shows the range of the Rusty Blackbird contracting along the southern edge of the boreal forest, in places like the Adirondacks, the northeast, and the southern edges of Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia. This decline has been linked with climate change by looking at one of the main indicators of climate change, the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, the timing of which coincides with the species' decline beginning in the mid-1970's. Climate change has also been linked to changes in dragonfly populations, which are a major food source for Rusties on the breeding grounds. Studies of mercury levels in the species across its range show that individuals from the northeast population have the highest levels of the toxin, and these levels are higher than any other songbird species, a result of its predatory diet of macroinvertebrates. Such high levels have been shown to reduce breeding success of Common Loons and may be having the same effect on Rusty Blackbirds. Another study by the working group found that Rusties have an elevated number of blood parasites, an indicator of stress in birds, on both the breeding and wintering grounds. The wintering grounds pose other challenges to the species, including loss of floodplain forests in the Mississippi River Valley where the largest concentrations of the birds overwinter, and the loss of pecan groves, which provide an important winter food source. There may also be a threat of habitat loss along the species' migratory route, as the use of geolocators to track the species' migration revealed that some birds spend a number of days refueling in

the prairie pothole region of the U.S., a sensitive area to human development and climate change.

So the result of research so far is that we have even more questions than we started with, but we are definitely moving toward a greater understanding of the species' ecology in all aspects of its life cycle, which will eventually move us toward preserving habitat for the species. Research on the wintering grounds has shown us that shallow water, leaf litter, and pecan groves are important, and we can now work to conserve habitats that provide these features. The breeding grounds are a little trickier, as it's still not clear why the species has disappeared from wetlands in the Adirondacks and the rest of the northeast. More research is needed to determine whether this is a factor of changing water levels, reduced prey populations, or a response to climate change. So what can you do to help? Keep an eye out for Rusty Blackbirds, and report your sightings to e-bird so that researchers can see where the birds are (and aren't), which helps them focus their research efforts. They are a tricky bird to find, and so few remain in the Adirondacks that every sighting helps. Research is ongoing and in a few more years we hope to have more answers than questions to solving the mystery of the species' decline.

--Melanie McCormack



*Rusty Blackbird*

## Poetry Corner

### from *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*

#### VIII

I know noble accents  
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;  
But I know, too,  
That the blackbird is involved  
In what I know.

#### IX

When the Blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.

—Wallace Stevens

## The Bicknell's Thrush Habitat Protection Fund at the Adirondack Community Trust

Launching a new effort to protect the rare Bicknell's Thrush, an alliance of North American scientists and conservationists is taking the unusual step of funding a team of Dominican biologists to work in the migratory songbird's Caribbean wintering habitat.

The Bicknell's Thrush Habitat Protection Fund has awarded a \$5,000.00 grant to Grupo Jaragua, whose biologists will study the thrush in forested mountains on the Dominican Republic's border with Haiti. The grant recognizes a need to protect the songbird across its entire range, particularly in its threatened winter destinations.

"The Bicknell's thrush has two homes—one here in North America and the other in the Caribbean Basin," said Chris Rimmer, executive director of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, a research group working to conserve the thrush. "Our efforts to protect this vulnerable songbird can't stop at the water's edge. We need to concentrate our work where the threats are most severe and imminent."

Brown, speckled and reclusive, Bicknell's Thrush is one of North America's rarest nesting songbirds. Each spring it makes a 1,200-mile journey north from only four Caribbean islands to breed in restricted high mountain and coastal forest sites in the northeastern United States and Canada. In early fall, the thrush begins a demanding return trip to the Caribbean region.

The songbird's small population and fragmented distribution may compound its ability to withstand cumulative threats from charcoal production and unsustainable agriculture and forestry practices in the Caribbean, as well as climate change, mercury contamination and habitat loss in North America. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering listing Bicknell's Thrush as a federally endangered species.

Grupa Jaragua, a non-profit conservation group based in the Dominican Republic, will use the grant to search for Bicknell's Thrushes, map their habitat, and assess conservation threats in the southern Sierra de Bahoruco, a crucial wintering area for the songbird. Results from the work, which is planned to include volunteers from communities in and around the thrush's habitat, will inform the effective conservation of dwindling forests in this region on the Haitian border.

During the past two decades, biologists have focused most of their research on Bicknell's Thrush breeding grounds in the United States and Canada. The grant to Grupo Jaragua embraces a "full life-cycle" approach to conservation, a strategy researchers use for other migratory wildlife, such as Monarch butterflies and Atlantic salmon.

"Bicknell's Thrush benefits when we work directly with partners on the ground in Hispaniola," said Mike Berger, director of conservation and science for Audubon New York. "We hope this first grant inspires more donations to the fund so that we can continue innovative efforts to protect this remarkable songbird."

Sixto Inchaustegui, a senior scientist with Grupa Jaragua, said the grant would allow his team to establish an

essential local presence in a forest under heavy pressure from illegal agricultural expansion and charcoal production. "By better understanding Bicknell's Thrush and its conservation needs," he said, "Jaragua and our partners will more effectively tackle pressing issues that threaten all biodiversity in this sensitive region."

"Though they are more than a thousand miles away, Grupo Jaragua are our partners in ensuring that Bicknell's Thrush return to our Adirondack mountaintops each summer," said Zoe Smith, Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society Adirondack Program. "We congratulate Grupo Jaragua on their grant and look forward to being able to continue to support international conservation for wildlife through innovative approaches such as this fund."

"The grant was made possible by many donations to the Fund from corporations, organizations, and individuals who recognize that conserving local biodiversity may require supporting conservation efforts far from the northern forests," said Burger.

With a world population estimated at 100,000 or fewer individuals, which is low for a songbird and troubling to researchers, Bicknell's Thrush has a corps of scientists and conservation organizations working on its behalf.

The Bicknell's Thrush Habitat Protection Fund is a joint project of the Adirondack Council, Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Audubon New York, Vermont Center for Ecostudies, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. The Adirondack Community Trust (ACT) administers the fund and accepts donations at: <http://www.generousact.org/donate>.

The International Bicknell's Thrush Conservation Group (IBTCG) is an alliance of scientists, natural resource managers, and conservation planners advancing the study and conservation of Bicknell's thrush through science and international cooperation. In 2007, IBTCG issued a conservation plan for the songbird that recognizes the need to work across its entire range. The report is available at:

<http://www.bicknellsthrush.org/conservation>.

*(Press Release issued by Audubon New York and Vermont Center for Ecostudies)*

### Talk About Bicknell's Thrush...

This July Pat and I led a group from the New York State Ornithological Association up Whiteface in search of Bicknell's Thrush and other boreals. As we gawked at a cooperative Bicks, **Tommy Kirby**, a fourteen-year-old birder in the group, snapped a quick, but lovely, photo of the bird.



## Editor's Note

Although I think of myself as someone with an adamant tolerance for the tedious, I finally folded completely and eschewed all media input on the day of the Presidential election, having endured, I felt, all manner of intellectual and emotional indignities, what with the etch-a-sketch mendacities of the oleaginously protean Governor Romney and his Randian, Galt-ridden running mate, to say nothing of the profusion of pollsters spewing statistics like a tsunami of the tongue-tied, predicting everything from a Plutocratic Paradise to an E Pluribus Obama and any number of incalculable metrics there between, the consequences of which so addled my mind I drifted off to sleep contemplating the ever-changing tracts of never-changing space and believing, in my heart of hearts, that the American people couldn't possibly believe in Governor Romney.

Pat woke me in the morning and said, "308 to 204, It's over, Obama won."

I still can't believe the election actually ended, probably because the issues that all but tore the country apart still endure, and can anybody possibly imagine some sort of sociopolitical comity (*Comity Central*, anyone?), some grand agreement on what we as a society should prioritize in terms of revenues and expenditures?

I can't, and suspect our political leaders will very shortly offer us yet again their cataract of cant.

Talk about a cold and a broken hallelujah ...

I devoted a good deal of space to a couple of birds we should all be concerned about, specifically, Bicknell's thrush and Rusty Blackbird, the latter of which seems existentially doomed in our region, for reasons all manner of local scientists have struggled to understand, with painfully unsatisfying results. Melanie McCormack, who did her master's thesis on Rusty Blackbird, wrote an excellent article for this issue about the Rusty Blackbird Working group. Bicknell's thrush seems, if you pay attention to anecdotal evidence from people doing Mountain Bird Watch, in decline. This June, during the Hamilton County Bird Festival, Joan Collins led a hike up Blue Mountain, at 3:00 a. m., and although she usually gets fourteen or so Bicknell's thrushes on this journey this year she got only three, a depressing decline in this seriously, in my opinion, endangered species. Joan said that instead of Bicknell's thrushes she hears a plethora of Swainson's thrushes, an observation that recalled my own of seeing a complete decline of Bicknell's thrushes on Hurricane Mountain accompanied by a profusion of Swainson's thrushes.

The vicissitudes of reality notwithstanding, and the impact of the parch of climes anybody's guess, I hope, I imagine for all of us, that the atmosphere will deliver snow, in measured, reasonable amounts, enough to blanket the cross-country ski trails with a solid but not overwhelming base, enough, in other words, to make for a great skiing season.

Hey, get out there and do a Christmas Bird Count, stop thinking about it in the abstract—you don't need to be a serious, world-class birder to contribute to the most comprehensive bird database in the world. All you have to do is show up, and showing up, as Woody Allen tells us: "...is 99% of life."

—John Thaxton