



# Cayuga Bird Club NEWSLETTER

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APRIL 2007

## Thayer's Gulls: An Identification Challenge

BY ANNE MARIE JOHNSON, PHOTOS AND CAPTIONS BY TOM JOHNSON

Most of us struggle with gull identification, but some relish the challenge. If you are one of the latter, then Thayer's Gulls and Iceland Gulls are the birds for you. According to the Birds of North America (BNA), "the taxonomy of Iceland and Thayer's gulls is unsettled, and whether they should be treated as 1 or 2 species is disputed." The BNA goes on to say that Iceland and Thayer's Gulls cannot always be separated, that "variable plumage and overlap in all morphological characters complicates field identification of many individuals." Kumlien's Gull, a subspecies of the Iceland Gull, is particularly similar to Thayer's Gull. Who could ask for a better challenge?

Iceland Gulls have been spotted at Stewart Park and other lake access points and at the compost piles on Stevenson Road this winter (photos appeared in last month's newsletter). In March local birders found two individual Thayer's Gulls, a much rarer species in this area. Tom Johnson managed to get some amazing photographs of both individuals and created a web page that provides identification details along with photos

of these gulls. He gave me permission to print several of his photos and captions here. Visit his web page ([picasaweb.google.com/jaegermaster/NYThayersGull](http://picasaweb.google.com/jaegermaster/NYThayersGull)) to see a more complete collection of photos.

### Thayer's Gull #1

Tim Lenz found the first Thayer's Gull at Stewart Park on March 11. Tom and others relocated the gull at the compost piles on Stevenson Road the next day, when these photos were taken.

*Overall the Thayer's Gull (left bird in photo at right) was very pale in comparison to Herring Gulls (right and front) but with paler, brownish primary tips with pale edging. The Thayer's Gull was about the same size as most of the Herring Gulls (and was even larger than some).*



CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



Ann Mitchell

Rescued Rough-legged Hawk.

## Club Members Rescue Hawk

BY BILL BAKER

On February 22 Ann Mitchell and I were birding on the east side of the lake as far as Aurora. On the way back we found what turned out to be a Rough-legged Hawk that had been hit. I caught the bird, using a towel to wrap it, and Ann drove us first to the Lab and then, at Kevin McGowen's suggestion, to the Small Animal Clinic at the Vet school, where we left the bird.

I received a note from the Vet School on March 8 letting us know that the bird had been transferred to a rehabilitator and that it was "very active and doing great." They expect to be able to return the hawk to the wild. 🦅

## CAYUGA BIRD CLUB

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The Cayuga Bird Club meets on the second Monday of each month, September through June, at 7:30 P.M. in the Auditorium of the Johnson Center on Sapsucker Woods Road. All programs and field trips are free and open to the public. Membership costs \$15/year, payable in September. To join, send a check (made out to "Cayuga Bird Club") to Cayuga Bird Club Treasurer, c/o Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Bird club members receive the Cayuga Bird Club Newsletter monthly from September through June. Send newsletter submissions to Anne Marie Johnson, contact information above. Of particular interest are articles about local bird sightings, bird behavior, or birding hot spots, as well as original poetry, art, and photos.

*Chickadee illustration in masthead by Karen Confer, waxwing duck silhouette and illustration for native plants column by Lena Samsonenko.*

Visit the Cayuga Bird Club website at:

WWW.BIRDS.CORNELL.EDU/CAYUGABIRDCLUB

## *From the President*

Spring, so near, yet so far! Old Man Winter is trying to keep his cold air and snow about us, but there are signs of spring popping up regardless. My Winter Aconites and Crocuses are "peeking" through the snow, and the reports of migrating birds are starting to increase despite the weather. It may seem a bit early, but the spring bug has bitten me. I traveled down to Virginia the other day where the temperature was in the eighties and the grass not only was visible but was lush and verdant. The daffodils were blooming. I saw birds everywhere, already defending their territories, singing their lovely songs, and gathering nesting materials.

When I returned to Ithaca, despite a snow storm, I was overwhelmed by the number of messages I had received from the Cayugabirds email list announcing new sightings of migrants such as Fox Sparrows, Red-winged Blackbirds, Golden Eagles, Brown-headed Cowbirds, American Woodcocks, and our old friend, the Pacific Loon. I felt as if I had missed all the excitement of these new arrivals, but I know there are many more new birds to come in the next few months. I find spring in Ithaca to be like Christmas: each new day brings a surprise under or in a tree! I am certain you share with me the love and excitement of seeing what arrives each and every day. I hope you find the time to get out there and bird.

As I mentioned at our last meeting, we are finalizing the work on our brochure as well as on our website. We are attempting to give the club publications a fresher look and provide the same message in the brochure as on the web site. The web site essentially will function as before, but we hope the navigation will be easier for everyone. We also are incorporating the 501(c)(3) wording into the brochure and website, which will indicate that we are a non-profit organization. This designation means that people will be able to donate to the club and take a tax deduction. I hope all members spread the word so that we can ensure that the Cayuga Bird Club will remain fiscally strong and continue to be a positive influence in the birding community.

Happy Birding and hope to see you out there.

## Events Calendar

DATE	EVENT	DETAILS
<b>APR. 2</b> Monday 7:30 P.M.	<b>Monday Night Seminar</b> Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: John Robinson	John Robinson, from Wildlife Conservation Society, will present "The Biological Limits of Sustainable Hunting in the Tropics." People have harvested wildlife in tropical forests for thousands of years. In this talk John explores the biological limits of sustainable hunting and examines changes in recent years brought about by increased access to forest areas, changes in hunting practices, increased commercialization of the wild meat trade, and increased demand for bush meat.
<b>APR. 9</b> Monday 7:30 P.M.	<b>Cayuga Bird Club Meeting</b> Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Dan Lebbin	Dan Lebbin, Ph.D. candidate at Cornell University, will present "Habitat Specialization among South American Birds." Dan will introduce some South American birds and their habitats with photos from his travels in Peru and Ecuador. He will discuss his research on habitat specialization of Amazonian birds, focusing on a rich community of birds that specialize on native bamboo habitat in the Amazon of southeast Peru.
<b>APR. 14</b> Saturday 7:00 A.M.– noon	<b>Field Trip:</b> Early migrants Leader: Linda Clougherty Meet: Johnson Center*	Join Linda for this half day trip searching for early migrants. Contact Linda at <lindaclougherty@yahoo.com> or at 539-7546 with questions. NOTE date change from the last newsletter.
<b>APR. 16</b> Monday 7:30 P.M.	<b>Monday Night Seminar</b> Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Nina Schoch	Nina Schoch, from the Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program (ACLP), will present "Mercury and Migration: Conservation through the Lives of Adirondack Loons," an overview of the loon conservation efforts conducted in New York's Adirondack Park by the Wildlife Conservation Society and its partners in the ACLP. Using beautiful photographs and video clips, Nina will discuss the natural history of Common Loons and the ACLP's research on the impact of environmental mercury pollution.
<b>APR. 16</b> Monday	<b>Newsletter deadline</b>	Send newsletter submissions to Anne Marie Johnson, contact information on page 2.
<b>APR. 23</b> Monday 7:30 P.M.	<b>Monday Night Seminar</b> Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Christie Todd Whitman	Christie Todd Whitman, former governor of New Jersey and former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, will present "The Politics and Policies of Environmental Protection." Governor Whitman will address the issues confronting environmental protection and conservation. Her environmental legacy illustrates the challenges that politicians must overcome as government leaders and environmental stewards.
<b>APR. 28</b> Saturday 7:00 A.M.– 11:00 A.M.	<b>Field Trip:</b> Dryden area Leader: Gladys Birdsall Meet: Dryden Lake	Meet near the picnic area at Dryden Lake for this half day trip looking for waterfowl and early migrants. Dress for the weather and wear boots. Bring a snack. Call Gladys at 257-0130 for information.
<b>APR. 30</b> Monday 7:30 P.M.	<b>Monday Night Seminar</b> Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Katy Payne	Katy Payne, visiting fellow at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, will present "Louis Agassiz Fuertes: His Art, Life, and Letters." Louis Agassiz Fuertes was one of the influential early leaders at the Lab of Ornithology, even coining the name of the sanctuary "Sapsucker Woods." In this engrossing seminar, Katy, the artist's granddaughter, guides the audience through Fuertes' life by showing a selection of his paintings and sketches, reading a few bits from his letters, and talking about his life and times.

## Events Calendar continued

DATE	EVENT	DETAILS
<b>MAY 5</b> Saturday 7:00 A.M.– 11:00 A.M.	<b>Field Trip:</b> Ithaca area Leader: TBA Meet: Johnson Center*	This trip will look for early migrating warblers and sparrows in the Ithaca area. Dress for the weather and wear boots. Call Ann Mitchell at 277-2926 with questions.
<b>MAY 7</b> Monday 7:30 P.M.	<b>Monday Night Seminar</b> Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Jonathan Trouern-Trend	Jonathan Trouern-Trend, from the 188th Area Support Medical Battalion of the Connecticut National Guard and the American Red Cross, will present "Birding Babylon: a Soldier-Naturalist in Iraq." Jonathan will discuss the natural history of Iraq in the context of his deployment and as a crossroad of familiar palearctic birds as well as exotic Afrotropical and Oriental avifauna. He also will detail the revitalization of the Southern Mesopotamian marshes and address the nascent (but growing) Iraqi environmental movement.
<b>MAY 12</b> Saturday 7:00 A.M.– 12:00 noon	<b>Field Trip:</b> Dryden area Leader: Gladys Birdsall Meet: Johnson Center far parking lot	This is warbler migration time, and this trip will visit local sites, looking for warblers and other birds. Meet at the far parking lot at the Lab for this half day trip. Wear appropriate shoes or boots. Bring snack and water. Call Gladys at 257-0130 for information.
<b>MAY 14</b> Monday 7:30 P.M.	<b>Cayuga Bird Club Meeting</b> Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Marie Read	Natural history photographer and Ithacan Marie Read will present "Chasing Summer Down Under: Birding Travels in Australia." Marie and her husband, Peter Wrege, traveled around Australia from September to December, 2006, photographing birds, beasts, and habitats. She will share her adventures in this photographic safari.

\*Meet for field trips in the front parking lot.

## MINUTES: CAYUGA BIRD CLUB MEETING MARCH 12, 2007

BY SUZANNE HENDERSON

President Deirdre Anderson opened the meeting with a warm welcome to everyone. After inquiring about new members and non-members present, Deirdre told the group about a new, long distance member, Geoffrey Nulle. Geoffrey has enjoyed reading the bird club newsletter on the Linnaean Society website. He has very fond memories of birding in Ithaca in the 1950s when Arthur A. Allen and Peter Paul Kellogg were the prominent ornithologists. We are delighted to welcome Geoffrey as a member, reconnecting with Ithaca's birding enthusiasts.

Gladys Birdsall was thanked for bringing cookies to be enjoyed following the meeting. Linda Clougherty volunteered to provide cookies for the April 9 meeting.

### RECENT SIGHTINGS

- Golden Eagle, Killdeer, and Turkey Vulture at Mount Pleasant

- Eastern Towhee at the Lab of Ornithology
- Red-headed Woodpecker near Myers
- Bald Eagle on the ice and Peregrine Falcon at Stewart Park
- Short-eared Owls in the Ovid area
- Other sightings included: American Coot, Fish Crows, Eastern Bluebirds, Great Blue Herons, Eastern Phoebe, and female Red-winged Blackbird

### OLD BUSINESS

- The hosts of the Earth Day Celebration on April 21-22 are still looking for one or more volunteers to help with a guided bird walk in the morning of April 21. If interested, please contact Linette Short at <lshort@tompkins-co.org>.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

## MINUTES: MARCH MEETING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

- Deirdre reminded everyone that those interested in signing up for Steve Kress's Spring Field Ornithology course should do so soon. The club has many graduates of the course who highly recommend the experience.
- Laura Stenzler, Deirdre, Jane Graves, and Linda Clougherty will be getting together very soon to finish the new brochure, and they also hope to work on a new design for the website. Anyone interested in helping should contact Deirdre.
- The club still is entertaining ideas for worthy and creative projects to support or pursue. Anyone with ideas for an education, conservation, recreation, or community oriented bird related project should contact Deirdre.

### NEW BUSINESS

- Wonderful news for the bird club: Asher Hockett has volunteered to resume the duties as club webmaster. Deirdre thanked Asher for continuing in this vital position and invited anyone interested in helping Asher with these duties to contact her.
- John Confer shared with the group a special concern of conservationists: proposed development at the former Seneca Army Depot in Romulus, New York. The Seneca County Industrial Development Agency now owns the decommissioned military site, and that agency plans to sell a portion—an environmentally important 4,700 acres of shrub land—for conversion to corn farming for ethanol production. Several conservation groups oppose destruction of this shrub land. A major concern focuses on the impact such a loss of habitat could have on the rare white deer herd that lives there (250–300 animals), as well as the many bird species that use the shrub land year-round. Some conservationists believe that the Industrial Development Agency has pushed for this \$50–60 million dollar project, which will include a biomass and ethanol plant, without proper permits or a qualified environmental impact study. The environmental value of the shrub land seems to have been minimized. John plans to attend a public meeting scheduled for March 14 and will provide additional information to the club. He is not very optimistic, but he is willing to see what influence individuals, especially as members of groups, could bring to bear on this situation.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Deirdre reviewed upcoming trips and meetings.
- Although it is sad to find a dead bird, if you find a bird that appears to have died recently and to be in good condition, the specimen can be donated to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (CLO). Anne Hobbs said that specimens brought to the lab should be accompanied by an index card with information written in pencil that identifies the finder, the location where the bird was found, the date when the bird was found, and the cause of death, if known. Donating a dead bird to the CLO turns the unfortunate loss into a benefit for ornithology by providing a valued study skin.
- Susan Earle of the CLO's Urban Bird Studies is looking for someone willing to guide a group that will be visiting from downstate New York. The group has a special interest in warbler identification. Anyone interested in helping should contact Susan at <smb13@cornell.edu> to discuss a specific date and time.

### CAYUGA LAKE BASIN BIRD LIST

Reading of the Cayuga Lake Basin Bird List was completed by Marie Reed.

### EVENING PROGRAM

Rachel Vallender, a post doctoral student at CLO, shared some of her dissertation work with us in a program titled "Golden-winged Warblers—History, Hybridization, and Conservation." Rachel's field research of Golden-winged and Blue-winged warblers, and the many variations in hybridized birds, is impressive. Many questions remain unanswered regarding mate selection and the resulting combinations of plumages and bird songs where interbreeding occurs. Rachel remains on a quest to determine reliable DNA markers to differentiate the species. She also expressed the need to establish a genetic atlas to determine if or where pure populations of Blue-winged and Golden-winged warblers remain. There is clear evidence that Golden-winged Warbler populations have declined dramatically over the past 30 years while Blue-winged Warblers seem to be expanding territories at a rate of 3-5 miles per year. It also appears that the hybridization system has been increasing. The mysteries of hybridization where these warbler's ranges overlap remain intriguing. 🐦

# FIELD TRIP REPORT: CAYUGA LAKE, FEBRUARY 25

BY BOB MCGUIRE

Five of us (Ann Mitchell, Greg Heist, Steve Fast, Wes Blauvelt, and myself) left the Lab at 7:45 A.M. and headed around the lake. By the time we hit the Creamery at around 4:30 P.M., we had watched the temperature climb into the thirties, the sky almost clear, and the south breeze drop to almost nothing. Along the way we passed by and over (dead Rough-legged Hawk on Jerry Smith Road) a total of 69 species.

We started at East Shore Park where we quickly picked through Redheads and Common Goldeneyes while Tim Lenz showed Ann a Glaucous Gull on the ice edge near Stewart Park.

Drake Road produced a turkey, a mockingbird, and a cooperative Northern Shrike just across the road from the mockingbird. While we were watching the shrike through our scopes, a Common Raven flew over, vocalizing repeatedly.

At Myers we found White-winged Scoters, American Wigeons, Horned and Pied-billed grebes, Gadwalls, Tundra Swans, a Mute Swan, *Aythya* ducks, Eastern Bluebirds, Hooded Mergansers, and a Great Blue Heron. The highlight there was a gorgeous first-year Iceland Gull on the spit between the marina and Ladoga Park.

We stopped along Lansingville Road for good looks at two Lapland Longspurs in with a flock of Horned Larks (about 100) and several Snow Buntings.

From the boathouse at Aurora Bay, we quickly were able to pick out the Eared Grebe that winters there, feeding well offshore with two Horned Grebes. In all we counted nine Horned Grebes in the area, as well as a few goldeneye.

Factory Pond in Union Springs contained a lone Northern Shoveler along with Gadwall. We also found a Belted Kingfisher and a Cooper's Hawk there. A single Northern Pintail shared the small patch of open water at the pond's outlet with Mallards and Black Ducks.

Harris Park in Cayuga hosted a huge *Aythya* flock consisting mainly of Redheads with Canvasback, Ring-necked Ducks, both Scaup, and a few goldeneye. We ran into Tim again, counting the ducks until most of them flushed in a great swirling cloud. Numerous Tundra Swans were perched along the ice edge with four Mute Swans. From the Towpath Machine Shop parking lot, we noted many more Tundra Swans to the north as well as a couple of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

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# FIELD TRIP REPORT: CAYUGA LAKE, MARCH 10

BY ASHER HOCKETT

On Saturday March 10, our affable group of five was treated to unusually warm weather.

After checking around the Lab in vain for the oft-cited Red-shouldered Hawk, we went to Stewart Park where a considerable ice sheet reached nearly to the East Shore Marina. Beyond the ice we found Common Goldeneyes, Buffleheads, Redheads, scaup, Mute Swans, Common Mergansers, Hooded Mergansers, and the three regular gulls. In the park itself, we found Pileated and Downy woodpeckers and White-breasted Nuthatches.

Moving on to the East Shore Marina, we got better looks at some of the waterfowl but found nothing new. From there we headed to Drake Road where sightings included the dependable North-

ern Mockingbird, Wild Turkeys, White-throated Sparrows, and a Red-winged Blackbird.

Onward to the spit at Myers Point where we added American Black Ducks to our tally. In the marina and just offshore were *Aythias*, a Northern Pintail, American Wigeons, a Wood Duck, Tundra Swans, and American Coots. On Lansingville Road we found Snow Buntings and Horned Larks and a Turkey Vulture.

Lake Road, on the way to a break at the Triangle Diner, brought us a gorgeous male Northern Harrier, a flock of 40 American Robins, and a pair of Northern Flickers. After our diner stop, we went to Rafferty Road and added a male American Kestrel to our tally. Larry Hymes and I snuck up on

a soft cheeping sound that turned out to be a squeaky gutter on the barn. Next we headed to Ledyard Road, where we came across another Northern Mockingbird and a Snow Bunting.

We found a pair of Ring-necked Pheasants on Route 90, and from the bluffs on Long Point Road, we found a Red-necked Grebe, a distant Snow Goose, and more *Aythias*, which were everywhere that day. At the Wells College boathouse was a single Horned Grebe, and at the Factory Street pond in Union Springs were some Gadwall, a few call ducks, and numerous adult and first year Tundra Swans just offshore. The Mill Pond had a single, very close, Horned Grebe, affording us unusually close looks. In the creek beyond

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

## FIELD TRIP REPORT: CAYUGA LAKE, MARCH 10

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

the pond, Bill Baker spotted four Green-winged Teal.

The group, not really led by me but more by consensus, found its way to the Lettie Cook preserve, a place teeming with wildlife but only revealing a Red-bellied Woodpecker. Coming off Town-line Road, I spotted a motion over the railroad tracks. After looking through scopes, we decided that it was a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

We then went down to the Town Hall in Cayuga and walked out on the railroad bridge to scope sizable floats of mixed waterfowl

more closely. Ann Mitchell found us a White-winged Scoter (my first!), and we also found one or two Swamp Sparrows. The ice was broken by some very narrow channels, and in those channels the constant back and forth motion of thousands of ducks reminded me of one of those Where's Waldo glass tubes after being shaken up.

We stopped at Mudlock to see the Bald Eagles previously reported on a nest there. We found one perched and one on the nest. Then we went to the observation tower on the main pool at the Montezuma

National Wildlife Refuge where we saw two immature Bald Eagles.

Three trip participants left our little company at that point, and Ann and I continued down the West Shore to Dean's Cove, which had two Common Loons and a singing Carolina Wren. Then we headed to the Sheldrake boat launch just as a Double-crested Cormorant flew in.

By the time we returned to Ithaca, we had seen 12 Red-tailed Hawks and a total of 63 species. All in all it was a great day. 🐦

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## Join the Finger Lakes Land Trust Spring Bird Quest

BY MARK CHAO

By late May, as the great northward tide of migration finally subsides, birds will be busy throughout our

region with courtship, nest building, and rearing young. There surely is no better place to watch breeding birds than at the Finger Lakes Land Trust's 24 preserves. The land trust is delighted to announce the inaugural Finger Lakes Land Trust Spring Bird Quest, to be held over Memorial Day weekend.

### How to participate

**Registration:** A \$25 donation (\$15 for FLLT

members) is requested upon registration, and the deadline for registration is May 18.

**Pledges:** Registrants are urged to seek pledges to support the FLLT's efforts to protect important bird habitat in our region. Pledges may be flat sums or

amounts per bird species.

**Counting birds:** During the big weekend, participants will watch and listen for birds at FLLT preserves. Any bird species definitively identified in a FLLT preserve can be recorded for tallying pledge amounts.

**Walks for new birders:** Three free guided walks will be offered: one on May 26 at the McIlroy Bird Sanctuary (in Summerhill), one on May 26 at the Great Hill Nature Preserve (in Middlesex), and one on May 27 at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve (in West Danby). All walks will begin at 7:30 A.M. and will last about two hours.

**Wrap-up celebration:** On Monday, May 28, from 4:00 to 6:00 P.M., there will be an informal gathering

at the FLLT's Ithaca office where participants can share their findings and experiences and celebrate the close of the event. 🐦



Vocalizing Yellow-billed Cuckoo at Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

Mark Chao

### Why participate?

- To raise awareness of the diversity of local birds and the Finger Lake Land Trust's (FLLT) role in protecting them.
- To raise funds to sustain the FLLT's continued efforts to preserve vital bird habitat.

Saturday, May 26—Monday, May 28

To register or for more information,  
contact Emily Eisman at <emily@fllt.org>  
or at (607) 275-9487

# Thayer's Gulls: Thayer's Gull #1

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



*Sitting out in the snow near the compost piles on Stevenson Road.*



*This spread-wing shot shows the dark tail, dark secondary bar, and the primary pattern (pale inner vanes contrasting with dark outer vanes).*



*Typical Thayer's Gull tail, showing mottling only on the outermost rectrices (Kumlien's Gull generally shows a weak, heavily marbled/mottled tailband). Some Thayer's show lots of marbling into the middle of the tail, but this individual had a more "classic" dark band.*



*This photo shows the pale, Iceland Gull-like underside to the primaries (but with dark tips).*



*The tail and wing pattern are visible in flight (including contrasting inner primary window). Compare the shade of the tail to the adjacent first cycle Herring Gull (front right).*

## Thayer's Gull #2

On March 12 another Thayer's Gull was found by Glenn Seeholzer at the compost piles. Tom was there and photographed the bird to offer comparisons to the Thayer's Gull observed the prior day.



*This photo shows primary and tertial detail: dark centers to the tertials with some marbling/notching around the edges.*



*The primaries are dark with pale edging.*



*The angle in the photo above shows the solid dark tail with small amounts of marbling in the bases of the outer rectrices and the dark secondary bar.*

*This Thayer's is more petite and smaller billed than the other individual.*

## FIELD TRIP REPORT: CAYUGA LAKE, FEB. 25

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Hooded Mergansers and a passing River Otter! The osprey nest at Mud Lock was occupied by an adult Bald Eagle.

Next we headed around to the west side of the lake. We returned to the lake edge on Bonnie Banks Road, where Steve quickly spotted a group of nine Long-tailed Ducks and a few grebes. The grebes totaled nine, eight of which were Horned Grebes, and one we eventually identified as an Eared Grebe. Swimming alongside the Horned Grebes, the slight size difference between the two grebe species was quite apparent. In contrast to the Eared Grebe that we saw in Aurora Bay (quite dark), this one exhibited the light cheek patch one would expect on an Eared Grebe.

Our last lake stop was Sheldrake, where we noted an odd-looking goldeneye: between a Common and a Barrows (brownish head, mottled back) but with a small and round cheek spot. It was most likely a somewhat advanced juvenile male Common Goldeneye. We also found a cooperative Double-crested Cormorant, a Carolina Wren, and a one Common Loon. We more or less blew by the remaining *Aythya* flock in our rush to get to ice cream. By then we were hot and were afraid the Creamery might close before we got there.

One in our group found four year birds, and someone else found ten life birds during the trip! My thanks to Wes, who drove, and to all the others for good spotting. 🐦



## Native Plants for Native Birds: *Fagus grandifolia* (Beech)

BY JOEL BAINES, PHOTOS BY DAVID RUPPERT

Life for many woodland birds is, indeed, a Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). Beech trees are standouts in the winter landscape, as their elephantid, light grey bark contrasts with the light tan leaves that hang on throughout the long winter. An adult tree is a magnificent 50–90 feet high with a substantial trunk highlighted by what seem like (continuing on the elephant theme) tendons running underneath the surface. The alternately arranged leaves look like Ruffles potato chips, with dramatic serrations at the leaf edges given even more prominence by the leaf veins visible top and bottom.

Beech trees are one of the most important woodland trees for wildlife in our area. Often the adult trees are permeated by cavities in the trunk, which serve both as nest sites and secret watering holes for a variety of woodland birds. Larger trees support larger cavities giving rise to excellent natural nesting sites for Pileated Woodpeckers, Great Horned Owls, Northern Flickers, and many others.

The other reason the tree is important to wildlife is its annual seed crop. Three-sided, half inch long beechnuts are dropped from furry-looking burr coverings after frost, and two dozen species of birds, such as Ruffed Grouse, Wild Turkeys, and jays, as well as a variety of mammals, eat beech nuts cracked open by weather. These nuts are, of course, provided in abundance to confuse those animals who would bury (i.e. plant) them. Jays in particular are good beechnut planters, or forgetful ones depending on how you look at it. *Fagus grandifolia* also propagate from root sprouts, forming groves that expand outward from the parent tree with time.

Beech trees seem to relish our rich moist Ithaclay soil, possibly because the shallow roots make it unnecessary to deal with soil impenetrability. The tree is one



of the slowest growing species in the eastern forest, much slower than oak or sugar maple. Twenty year old specimens may only be 6–8 feet tall. Like the tortoise that eventually beat the hare to the finish line, however, beech trees overcome their ponderous growth habit by persistence. They benefit from a relatively long life and partial shade tolerance on their inevitable journey upwards into the forest canopy.

Perhaps more devious than the proverbial tortoise, beech trees also have allelopathic roots and produce dense shade, which combine to prevent competition from other vegetation that might otherwise deplete them of nutrients. As a result, they are virtually useless as a lawn tree, unless you like moss gardens. On the other hand, they restrain their murderous tendencies to their own immediate root zone and do not limit diversity.

Beech trees benefit from selective single tree logging, because other trees get cut more often, but beech trees may be completely eliminated by repeated, quick rotation clear cutting. Beech trees in the canopy are, in fact, the mark of a climax forest—very old, healthy, and diverse—perfect for supporting a variety of birds and wildlife.

Another advantage that beech trees can claim over other trees is their extraordinary deer resistance once they pass the seedling stage. Given the tendency for deer to mow down the annual crop of baby maples and oaks, beech may become the staple tree of humanely managed (and unmanaged) future forests. That's not so bad a legacy. We could all use a day at the... well you know. 🐾

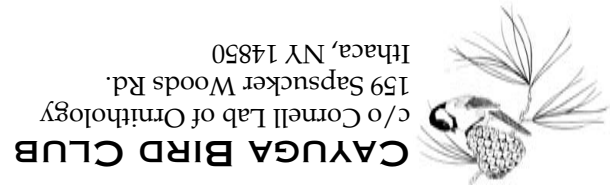


*Beech tree cavities commonly host woodland birds.*

*American Pipit at Myers Point, March 21.*



David Ruppert



**NEXT MEETING  
APRIL 9**

DAN LEBBIN, FEATURED SPEAKER  
“**HABITAT SPECIALIZATION AMONG  
SOUTH AMERICAN BIRDS**”

SEE INSIDE FOR DETAILS

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

THAYER’S GULLS: AN IDENTIFICATION  
CHALLENGE

CLUB MEMBERS RESCUE HAWK

EVENTS CALENDAR

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

JOIN THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST  
SPRING BIRD QUEST

NATIVE PLANTS FOR NATIVE BIRDS: *FAGUS  
GRANDIFOLIA* (BEECH)