



Cayuga Bird Club

NEWSLETTER

ESTABLISHED 1914

FEBRUARY 2007

ITHACA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2007

KEVIN J. MCGOWAN

The 107th Audubon Christmas Bird Count was held in Ithaca on 1 January 2007. It was a warmish day and typical of what might be expected after the second warmest December on record. The most unusual aspect of this count was that nothing was frozen. All of the outlying ponds, creeks, and puddles were open, attracting waterfowl off of the lake. Such a situation would be fairly insignificant except that the standard method of counting the flocking species that normally spend the night clustered on Cayuga Lake off of Stewart Park, such as Canada Geese and gulls, was impracticable. Usually we just get an accurate count of those species at Stewart Park before they head out to forage for the day. This year only a comparative handful slept on the big lake, and the geese at Stewart Park never left there all day. As a consequence, the counts from outlying areas mattered this year, and many participants were not aware that they should actually keep track.

The very windy conditions appeared at first to keep owls from calling, but our most dedicated owler, John Confer, reported that around 3:00 A.M. the wind calmed, and he came up with a good tally. Those numbers, combined with the efforts of others, as well as some cooperative daytime-calling individuals, resulted in an all-time high count of Eastern Screech-Owl and Barred Owl. Two calling Northern Saw-whet Owls found by Ryan Douglas and two Short-eared Owls tracked down by Paul Hurtado on the evening of the first made for a better than average owl year.

Three new species were added to the count: Bonaparte's Gull, Golden Eagle, and perhaps most surprising, Yellow Warbler. It was a moderately good year for halfhearties, although perhaps not quite as good as it seemed like it would be. Seen were Winter Wrens, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Towhee, and Field Sparrow. Other good birds included Red-throated Loon, Cackling Goose, Green-winged Teal, and Red-headed Woodpecker. Unusually

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Thursday morning, February 8, 1990
The morning sun breaks through a
frosty fog

By Caissa Willmer

Oh!
Lady Nature
How could you
Overwhelm us so?
Sashaying
Through the nightscape
Mistical
Magical
Misterious
Breathing silver over all
And when light breaks to reveal your mistchief —
So various there are not words
Or even figures to say all you have done —
Spruce and fir are hung with silver moss
Each leafless hardwood twig is etched
Silver pointed
Frosted white on white
Gossamer cobwebs
Diamond shards
An infinity of crystal

Oh
Lady Nature
Flitting and flirting
Across the winter world as though to say
Look!
Look!
Ain't I something!
Marvelous!
Amazing!
Oh
Lady Nature
Wasn't that a bit extravagant?
How could you
Overwhelm us so?

Caissa was a long-time bird club member and former editor of this newsletter.

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

February Speaker Profile:

Hans Slabbekoorn

There are close to 10,000 bird species in the world, each with its own vocal features. The enormous variety in bird sounds among species is determined by several factors, such as phylogenetic history, body size and shape, sexual selection, and interactions between species. Another factor that can also play an important role in shaping the design of acoustic bird signals is environmental selection. Sound transmission properties of the habitat may favor one set of acoustic features over another, and interference with ambient noise may drive vocalizations toward frequencies less affected by the background sounds.



Hans Slabbekoorn

Rainforest where Hans Slabbekoorn studied sound transmission.

In his presentation, "Birdsong, Ecology, and Speciation: from Tropical Forest to Urban Jungle," Hans Slabbekoorn, from the Institute of Biology Leiden at Leiden University in the Netherlands, will address both aspects of environmental selection and their consequences for evolutionary changes in songs of birds from three continents, and he will discuss implications for speciation in the tropical rainforest as well as the urban habitat. 🐦

30 years of Spring Field Ornithology

Join the 30th year of Spring Field Ornithology, an eight-week course that teaches bird identification. Students also learn about the natural history and fascinating behaviors of birds. Wednesday evening lectures are given by Stephen W. Kress and other Cornell Lab of Ornithology staff. Optional weekend field trips are led by Stephen and a flock of experienced birders. The course runs from March 28–May 20. Space is limited, so register early. Call Terry Mingle at 254-2452 or visit <www.birds.cornell.edu/sfo> to learn more. 🐦

Events Calendar

DATE	EVENT	DETAILS
FEB. 5 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Emily DuVal	Emily DuVal, from the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology, will present, "Cooperation in Courtship: the Dance of the Lance-tailed Manakin." Reproductive competition is the norm in the animal kingdom, but instead of fighting over females, male Lance-tailed Manakins team up to court mates cooperatively. Emily will describe the spectacular displays and the complex social behavior of these small tropical birds.
FEB. 10 Saturday 6:45 A.M.	Field Trip: Summer Hill Leader: Tom Johnson Meet: Johnson Center*	This half day trip will head first to Summer Hill and then to the south end of Cayuga Lake, perhaps going as far north as Aurora. Wear hiking boots and warm clothes. Contact Tom with questions, at <tbj4@cornell.edu>.
FEB. 12 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Cayuga Bird Club Meeting Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Hans Slabbekoorn	"Birdsong, Ecology, and Speciation: from Tropical Forest to Urban Jungle." See the speaker profile on page 2 for details.
FEB. 16-19	Great Backyard Bird Count	Participate in the tenth annual Great Backyard Bird Count sponsored by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Visit <www.birdsource.org/gbbc> to learn more.
FEB. 19 Monday	Newsletter deadline	Send newsletter submissions to Anne Marie Johnson, contact information on page 2.
FEB. 19 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Ken Dial	Ken Dial, from the University of Montana, will present, "On the Origin and Evolution of Avian Flight: Traditional Hypotheses Stifle Discovery." Ken's lab has integrated such diverse fields as life history, ecology, behavior, developmental biology, biomechanics, aerodynamics, and paleontology to reevaluate our understanding of the origin of avian flight.
FEB. 25 Saturday 7:30 A.M.	Field Trip: Cayuga Lake Leader: Bob McGuire Meet: Johnson Center*	Join this all day trip around Cayuga Lake. Dress warmly and bring lunch and snacks. Contact Bob with questions at 256-0460 or at <boju@lightlink.com>.
FEB. 26 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Gabriel Gargallo	Gabriel Gargallo, from the Catalan Ornithological Institute, will present, "Bird Monitoring and Bird Banding from a European Perspective: an Obsession for the Detail." In this seminar Gabriel will explain the benefits of combining different data sources using the New Catalan Breeding Bird Atlas. He will also show how amazingly consistent and precise the process of plumage replacement is for birds and its usefulness in aging birds.
MAR. 5 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Charles Walcott	Charles Walcott, from Cornell University, will present, "Territoriality in Common Loons: Behavior, Vocalizations and Fatal Fighting." Breeding loons defend their territory against intruders. These battles are sometimes fatal for males but not for females. Individual males have characteristic yodels, which are constant from year to year but change when the male changes territory. This lecture will explore the reasons behind these curious findings.
MAR. 10 Saturday 7:30 A.M.	Field Trip: Cayuga Lake Leader: Asher Hockett Meet: Johnson Center*	Asher will lead an all day trip around Cayuga Lake. Dress warmly and bring lunch and snacks. Contact Asher with questions at <asherhockett@hotmail.com> or at 592-4475.
MAR. 12 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Cayuga Bird Club Meeting Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Rachel Vallender	"Golden-winged Warbler's History, Hybridization, and Conservation." See next month's newsletter for details.

*Meet for field trips in the front parking lot.

MINUTES: CAYUGA BIRD CLUB MEETING

JANUARY 8, 2007

BY SUZANNE HENDERSON

Cayuga Bird Club Vice President Laura Stenzler conducted the meeting for President Deirdre Anderson (who was away in Africa). Laura welcomed everyone in attendance. Two new members introduced themselves. A visitor, Larry Klaes, introduced himself as the Nature/Science reporter for a local newspaper, *Tompkins Weekly*. The paper is free and also can be viewed online at <www.tompkinsweekly.com>. Larry told the group that he is working on an article about the bird club.

Laura thanked Jane Graves for providing cookies to be enjoyed after the meeting. Marie Read volunteered to provide cookies for the next meeting.

RECENT SIGHTINGS

- Merlin on Salt Road (in Lansing) dining on House Sparrows
- Pair of Great Horned Owls, Dryden Lake Trail
- Kingfisher behind Lowe's
- Merlin behind Tops
- Unexpectedly birdy area in flood control channel that flows near Tops, Wegmans, Lowe's, and Super 8 Motel (pack your binoculars with your shopping bags)

OLD BUSINESS

- Kevin McGowan gave a brief review of the Ithaca Christmas Bird Count. There were 84 species reported. He will provide a complete compilation and summary for the February newsletter. Laura thanked all the area coordinators and volunteers, who participated in the event. The dish-to-pass dinner at the Johnson Center that followed the count was as delicious a success as anticipated. Everyone was especially grateful to Kevin McGowan for compiling counts and providing an informative presentation of the early results.
- Laura reported that the amendment required for the club's Certificate of Incorporation has been received from New York State and that the official 501(c)(3) form has been submitted, which means all donations to the club are now officially tax deductible.

NEW BUSINESS

- Laura introduced Linnette Short to talk about the Earth Day Celebration for Tompkins County. Linnette is employed by Tompkins County Solid Waste Management and is also Vice President

of the Center for Environmental Sustainability. These groups will work together to host an Earth Day Celebration, which they hope to expand to two days this year: April 21 and 22. Plans for the celebration include a presentation from Carl and Lynn Leopold and a guided bird walk around the Cayuga Nature Trail. Linnette came to the meeting to tell the club about the celebration plans and to see if one or more volunteers from the club might be interested in leading the bird walk. Laura encouraged club members to think about it for a discussion at the February club meeting. For more information, contact Linnette at <lshort@tompkins-co.org>.

- Laura introduced Bill Evans from Old Bird, a nonprofit organization dedicated to monitoring night flight calls of migrating birds, to discuss his research on bird mortalities around communication towers. Bill reported that 5-50 million night migrating birds are killed each year by flying into communication towers. There are over 100,000 communications towers in the U.S. Bill cited figures ranging from 1,500 to 10,000 birds killed in a single night at many towers during peak migration times. Research has shown that towers with all flashing lights have significantly lower numbers of killed birds. Since 1998, Bill and others have worked to get the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to convert lights on all towers to flashing lights. The FCC has finally recognized tower kills as a serious human concern and has opened the issue to a public comment period through January 22, 2007. There is a petition to extend the comment period. Bill urged concerned groups and individuals to submit comments online. A Microsoft Word document also can be attached to a submission. The comment form on the FCC web site can be found from Bill's website: <www.towerkill.com>.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Laura reviewed upcoming trips and reminded everyone to dress for cold and windy conditions. Linda Clougherty talked about the trip she will lead to Amherst Island February 3-4 to search for wintering owls.
- Laura invited everyone to participate in the 10th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) to be

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JANUARY MINUTES

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held from February 16–19, 2007. The GBBC is a four day event sponsored by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Participants keep track of the highest number of each species seen during any or all of the four count days and then report their counts over the Internet at <www.birdsource.org/gbbc>.

CAYUGA LAKE BASIN BIRD LIST

Bob McGuire read the Cayuga Lake Basin Bird List and recorded responses. Many species not normally seen at this time of the year were reported.

EVENING PROGRAM

Kevin McGowan presented photographs submitted by club members. Most of the photographers were present to give information about the photos. 🐦

FIELD TRIP REPORT: CAYUGA LAKE AND RAFFERTY ROAD, DECEMBER 17

BY ANN MITCHELL

On December 17 I led a field trip to see Short-eared Owls. Twelve people joined me (including an 18 month old and a four year old) for the afternoon trip. The weather was mild for December, and it wasn't raining. That made it a great day for us but not necessarily a good one for finding birds. It was quite overcast, and by 3:30 P.M. it looked like the sun was going to set. The plan was to go from Stewart Park to Long Point, finding as many species of birds as we could, and then to Rafferty Road to look for Short-eared Owls at dusk.

Leaving Sapsucker Woods, we saw the resident Red-shouldered Hawk. It was a new species for some folks, which is always exciting. On the way to Stewart Park, there were soaring Turkey Vultures and a Red-tailed Hawk. At Stewart Park we saw two dozen Common Mergansers, two female Buffleheads, many Ring-billed Gulls, a couple of Black-backed Gulls, and many Canada Geese and Mallards. Just outside the park heading north, a Northern Mockingbird was in a tree across from the entrance.



Ann Mitchell

Field trip participants scanning for Short-eared Owls on Rafferty Road.

When we arrived at Myers we had good looks at a Long-tailed Duck, four Common Loons, and a Kingfisher. There were a couple of raptors on the road to Long Point, but we never had a good look at them because there was no safe place to stop along the road. We looked for Horned Larks on Center

Road to no avail. On Long Point Road there was a Rough-legged Hawk working the fields. We also saw a couple of Northern Harriers in the field to the north of Long Point. Since it was close to 4:00 P.M., we headed to Rafferty Road, arriving at 4:10 P.M.

While we were waiting for owls, Mickey Scilingo

arrived and watched for owls with us. At around 4:20 P.M., Mickey spotted a Northern Harrier over the field heading west. Then someone saw a Short-eared Owl being harassed by two Northern Harriers in the direction that the harrier flew. Shortly after that, Gladys Birdsall saw two Short-eared Owls flying in the same area. We wished one would land so that we could see it better, but we were happy that most everyone saw the owls, which made the trip quite successful. 🐦

FIELD TRIP REPORT: AROUND THE LAKE, JANUARY 14

BY DAVE NUTTER

On Sunday, January 14, Bob McGuire led a field trip around Cayuga Lake. He was joined by Ann Mitchell, Steve Fast, and me. We spent the day alternately wiping precipitation and condensation from our lenses, scraping ice off our tripods, paying homage to heater vents, and lamenting the short lifespan of those little exothermic-reaction chemical bags that are sold as hand and foot warmers. Nonetheless, a fine time was had by all, and we encountered at least 58 species by my reckoning.

Although the official start was at the Lab of Ornithology, I walked from home to meet the others at Stewart Park. The excitement (and the freezing rain) started

as I emerged from the woods of Renwick Sanctuary into the late gray dawn. In a willow next to the Cascadilla Boathouse sat a Cooper's Hawk. Pausing under the porch roof to dry my glasses for a better look, I heard numerous House Sparrows and European Starlings in the adjacent arborvitae bush where they roost. When about a dozen starlings flew out, the very first bird was nailed by the Cooper's Hawk, who flew with it to the ground behind the boathouse. As two more waves of Starlings emerged, I wondered if any of them were aware of what had happened or even that the hawk had been waiting for them. Later when our whole group walked around the Swan Pen to search for non-existent Yellow-rumped Warblers, the Cooper's flushed and carried its prey to the Jetty Woods. This was the first of three Cooper's Hawks for the day.

Moments later across the water we saw an immature Bald Eagle cruising low over Alan H. Treman State Marine Park. Perhaps this is the new method of enforcing the dog leash law on state park land, but we did not see it catch anything. This was the first of at least nine Bald Eagles we saw for the day. A Red-tailed Hawk, also perched near the Swan Pen, was the first of many (I lost count) for the day. Other birds of note that we saw at Stewart Park included a Northern Pintail, an American Wigeon, a Green-winged Teal, Common

Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes, American Coots, and a pair of Hooded Mergansers.

A swing by Portland Point added a Northern Mockingbird and Song Sparrow to our list. At Myers two female Lesser Scaup, four Pied-billed Grebes, and a Belted Kingfisher were at the private marina with many coots, and a Great Blue Heron stood in the pond by Ladoga.

On the way to King Ferry, we passed an American Kestrel on a wire, a couple of Brown-headed Cowbirds in a flock of starlings, and another Cooper's

Hawk, which sat in a tree in the middle of a field near the Triangle Diner. Another kestrel sat on the wire along Rafferty Road, where Steve and Ann encountered an overhead flock of "Fog Geese," which sound like Snow Geese but are only marginally and briefly visible and which give the impression of flying in multiple directions at once.

At Long Point State Park two Northern Flickers foraged on the lawn, a couple of Horned Grebes preened together to the south, and a Common Loon preened to the north. Bob played a Screech-owl recording in the brushy woods, which primarily resulted in a flock of Snow Geese flying past in the mist. As we left, we noticed that a Mute Swan had magically appeared in the bay to the north.

At the Wells College Boathouse we found the ubiquitous Canada Geese, American Black Ducks, and Mallards, plus three more Horned Grebes and another flock of Common Goldeneyes with Buffleheads. We did not find the Eared Grebe often seen there, but visibility was hampered by shimmer and chop. There was one thick-necked, dark-naped, tan goose with an odd-angled primary. I think it was a domestic Swan Goose, aka Chinese Goose, although it was not as darkly marked



Anne Mitchell

From left to right, Steve Fast, Bob McGuire, and Dave Nutter scan the main pool at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge.

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FIELD TRIP REPORT: AROUND THE LAKE, JANUARY 14

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Ann Mitchell

Peregrine Falcon perched on a utility pole in the mucklands on Route 31 just south of Savannah.

as Sibley shows (p. 89) nor as fancy as those I've seen on the west shore.

The Union Springs ponds held Mallards, Redheads, and Gadwalls. To the north by the new little lakeshore development with the fancy rock engraved "GORW-YDD," we encountered a few Canvasbacks and two Tundra Swans. Although the *Aythya* flock had been here on Thursday, this time we found them by the Village of Cayuga, with all five common species: Redhead (mostly), Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Canvasback, and Ring-necked Duck (so few that I personally missed them). A half-dozen Eastern Bluebirds beautified the road by Mud Lock.

At Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, the water

was open, but sadly the Wildlife Drive was not. We hiked out to the roofed but icy-floored observation platform to see many thousands of Snow Geese, hundreds of sleeping swans, distant *Aythya*, scattered Common Mergansers and American Black Ducks, and atop an immense (embellished?) muskrat lodge, two adult Bald Eagles.

From the Potatoes building at the mucklands on Route 31, we were excited to see a large falcon flying low far to our west. Eventually it settled onto a power pole, although it seemed to have difficulty gripping the icy crossbar, and resolved into an immature Peregrine Falcon. We resumed scanning the mucklands for some time before Bob said, "Look overhead." The peregrine had worked its way along the ditch and powerlines and landed above us on the nearest power pole, where we and a passerby admired and photographed it for several minutes before it took off to the north. Thousands of Snow Geese also flew north, but high overhead, and a couple of Northern Harriers cruised low in the distance. There were Snow Geese feeding in a crowd to our north, and Canada Geese and Mallards in various places. At least five Bald Eagles were perched in trees surrounding the mucklands. Steve noticed a distant flock of land birds low and far to our south. When we went to investigate, we also noticed nine Sandhill Cranes. The land birds turned out to be about 200 Snow Buntings, which were practically invisible as they crawled in corn stubble.

On our way home along the west shore of Cayuga Lake we swung through Sheldrake and topped off our list with a few Red-breasted Mergansers. To celebrate we stopped at the Cayuga Lake Creamery, and in defiance of the weather gods, we all had ice cream. 🐧

Eaton Birding Society celebrates 75 years

The Eaton Birding Society is having a 75th Anniversary Bird Art Exhibit at All Things Art in Canandaigua from February 23 to March 24. Everyone is invited to visit the exhibit and to attend the special activities scheduled throughout the exhibit.

February 23 6:00 P.M.–8:00 P.M.

Open house, light refreshments, and raffles

February 24 11:00 A.M.

Bird carving demonstration with Robin Salisbury

March 3 10:00 A.M.

Bluebird nestbox workshop with Charlie Rouse (cost is \$8, bring a hammer)

March 6 7:00 P.M.

Gardening to attract birds

March 10 11:00 A.M.

Raptors in the modern world with Anne Terninko and Paul Schnell

March 10 2:00 P.M.

Nature poetry with Maxwell Wheat, reception to follow

March 20 7:00 P.M.

Birds and birding basics with Bob Guthrie

Call the Eaton Bird Club at (315) 945-1371 after 7:00 P.M. for more information. 🐧

2007 ITHACA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

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high counts were reported for Pileated Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Cardinal, and Snow Goose. The previous high of 2 Snow Geese was shattered by the flock of 250 seen flying south over the count circle. South-flying groups from the tens of thousands of Snow Geese still hanging out at Montezuma were evident all day on this strange January first. The

group of 16 Turkey Vultures that had been seen roosting around Kendall for several weeks also shattered the old record of 2 set last year.

The final total was 85 species seen on the count day and 10 more in the count week. The 2007 count was a great one, but the total was behind the 88 tallied in 1976. However, with the 10 count-week birds, this might be considered the best ever Ithaca count.

Red-throated Loon	1 (3rd time)	Short-eared Owl	2
Common Loon	4	Northern Saw-whet Owl	2 (4th time)
Pied-billed Grebe	4	Belted Kingfisher	8
Double-crested Cormorant	count week	Red-headed Woodpecker	1 (3rd time)
Great Blue Heron	13	Red-bellied Woodpecker	156
Snow Goose	250 (high count)	Downy Woodpecker	492
Cackling Goose	4 (2nd time)	Hairy Woodpecker	138
Canada Goose	8551	Northern Flicker	39
Green-winged Teal	1 (5th time)	Pileated Woodpecker	44 (high count)
American Black Duck	19	Horned Lark	count week
Mallard	729	Blue Jay	996
Northern Pintail	1	American Crow	2686
Gadwall	count week	Fish Crow	18
American Wigeon	1	Common Raven	12
Canvasback	count week	Black-capped Chickadee	3976 (high count)
Redhead	count week	Tufted Titmouse	478 (high count)
Ring-necked Duck	count week	Red-breasted Nuthatch	77
Lesser Scaup	count week	White-breasted Nuthatch	500
Long-tailed Duck	count week	Brown Creeper	29
Common Goldeneye	17	Carolina Wren	38
Bufflehead	2	Winter Wren	3 (tied high count)
Hooded Merganser	5	Golden-crowned Kinglet	27
Common Merganser	87	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	2
Turkey Vulture	16 (4th time; high count)	Eastern Bluebird	162 (high count)
Northern Harrier	3	Hermit Thrush	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	American Robin	255
Cooper's Hawk	15	Northern Mockingbird	30
Northern Goshawk	1	Cedar Waxwing	927
Red-shouldered Hawk	2	Northern Shrike	1
Red-tailed Hawk	161	European Starling	5673
Rough-legged Hawk	5	Yellow-rumped Warbler	1
Golden Eagle	1 (new to count)	Yellow Warbler	1 (new to count)
American Kestrel	4	Northern Cardinal	620 (high count)
Merlin	1	Eastern Towhee	1
Ring-necked Pheasant	3	American Tree Sparrow	462
Ruffed Grouse	21	Field Sparrow	1
Wild Turkey	146	Song Sparrow	89
American Coot	499	Swamp Sparrow	10
Bonaparte's Gull	1 (new to count)	White-throated Sparrow	112
Ring-billed Gull	1023	Dark-eyed Junco	866
Herring Gull	90	Snow Bunting	2
Great Black-backed Gull	18	Red-winged Blackbird	3
Rock Pigeon	1265	Brown-headed Cowbird	count week
Mourning Dove	691	Purple Finch	9
Eastern Screech-Owl	41 (high count)	House Finch	612
Great Horned Owl	8	American Goldfinch	468
Barred Owl	5 (tied high count)	House Sparrow	1119



Native Plants for Native Birds: Rubus (brambles)

BY JOEL BAINES, PHOTOS BY DAVID RUPPERT

Of all the plants in this column, this group is probably the most familiar to the most casual of plant and bird watchers, with fruits and thorns that are readily identifiable. The genus *Rubus*, commonly called brambles, contains several members of a group of superficially similar plants that appear from open sunny places to woodland edges, with the fruits appearing at the Ithaca Farmers market in summer. Each cluster that we normally refer to as a berry or fruit is actually a cluster of miniature fruits, or drupelets, each with a single seed. The thorns can be long and vicious or demure and almost fuzzy.

Plant geneticists have seized on this group because of its economic importance and have created a dizzying array of subspecies and cultivars, each with its own perceived advantages. The ancestor of these plants is designed for optimal propagation: thorns keep herbivores from chopping down the canes thereby protecting the flowers and fruit. The flowers are fragrant to attract pollinators, and the prolific fruit is an exquisite treat for birds who then spread the seeds far and wide. Ripening fruit in summer make these plants an important food source for growing avian families. In my experience, catbirds, cardinals, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and bluebirds often will nest near a grove of brambles, visiting the patch daily for ripened fruit. The birds ignore the young green berries and select the red or black fully ripened specimens. Like many wild plants, the limited amount of highly palatable fruit at any given time ensures against a single catastrophic disaster that might wipe out the entire crop and also trains birds (or small mammals) to visit the plants as frequently as possible.



Dewberries (also known as black raspberries or black caps)

The white five-petaled flowers appear in April, with the fruit ripening from green to red and finally to black in some species. Many ripe raspberries are red, whereas ripe blackberries are deep purple to black. But how do you tell blackberries from black raspberries or dewberries (commonly called black caps)? In general, the drupelets of raspberries release from the core when picked by humans, leaving a round shell of attached drupelets with a hollow center. Blackberries, on the other



Blackberries

hand, retain their core when picked. A dewberry has a hollow core like the raspberry but is black instead of red. The dewberry is not as common as other brambles in our area and does not have upright canes but stays closer to the ground. It may have evolved to attract a different kind of bird or small mammal. For example, I have seen thrashers feasting on these on the ground in Texas. And yes, I liked them too.

Brambles are widely available in nurseries for planting. Although the varieties are a bit confusing, all are great bird plants. Plant the trimmed canes (usually cut to the ground in the nursery) in early spring, and they will grow vigorously given almost any soil. Better soil with more organic matter will reward the grower with larger plants and more fruit. Flowering and fruiting is mostly on second year canes, so the goal for the first year is to make a big bush. If there are some flowers in the first year, pinch them off so the plant spends its energy making canes. The second year is your (and the birds') first harvest year.

There are a variety of viruses that attack the plants, gradually decreasing vigor and the amount of fruit. Commercial growers replant with virus free stock periodically as a result. The viruses are more important to some cultivars than wild plants. On the other hand, wild plants produce fewer, smaller and less palatable (to humans at least) fruits.

Deer will eat young plants and the leaves and fruits of all plants, but thorned varieties discourage them. You do not want the canes from last year eaten during the winter because they are going to be fruiting canes the next year. The thorns harden by winter to help discourage the deer, but you could help with a little protection during the winter months and early spring when the shoots start to emerge. A grove of thorned brambles planted close together is very deer resistant because the outside plants guard the plants in the center. Therefore mass plantings are recommended if you have the space and a lot of deer. 🐾

European Goldfinch coming to a feeder in Ithaca, first discovered on January 27. Perhaps an escaped or released bird?



Dave Nutter

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Great Tit by Herman Berkhoudt,
London background by Philip Greenspun



NEXT MEETING FEBRUARY 12

HANS SLABBEKOORN, FEATURED SPEAKER

“BIRDSONG, ECOLOGY, AND SPECIATION:
FROM TROPICAL FOREST TO URBAN JUNGLE”

SEE INSIDE FOR DETAILS

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