



# Cayuga Bird Club

## NEWSLETTER

ESTABLISHED 1914

NOVEMBER 2009

### Gas Drilling Update Draft Impact Statement Released

BY SANDY PODULKA

On September 30, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) released its draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SGEIS). This 809-page document updates the regulations governing the new natural gas extraction methods to be used in the Marcellus Shale—the major gas-containing layer in our area. The public comment period is just 60 days, ending November 30. Few people have been able to wade through the daunting document thoroughly enough to fully understand the regulations. Even DEC personnel are not able to answer many questions about its content—there's just too much of it!

### Key regulations proposed in the SGEIS

Like most people, I still am struggling to understand the SGEIS. One important thing I have learned (and confirmed with the DEC) is that the precise chemicals used to drill a specific well will not be disclosed to the public. According to the draft SGEIS, if you want to know what chemicals were injected into a well on or under your own property, your neighbor's property, or a wild area, you must submit a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request. From that, you will receive a list of some of the products and chemicals used; the rest are considered proprietary and will not be disclosed to you, even if your well or surface water becomes contaminated, or you become sick. As far as I know, all drilling sites in the country currently

receive this protection from chemical disclosure, which has made it extremely difficult for citizens to prove that a gas company is responsible for contamination.

Some good news: the DEC plan requires that some of the most toxic fluids (the fracking fluid that comes back out of the well, called "flowback") be kept in steel tanks instead of open pits, when stored on-site. Unfortunately, these fluids may be stored off-site in

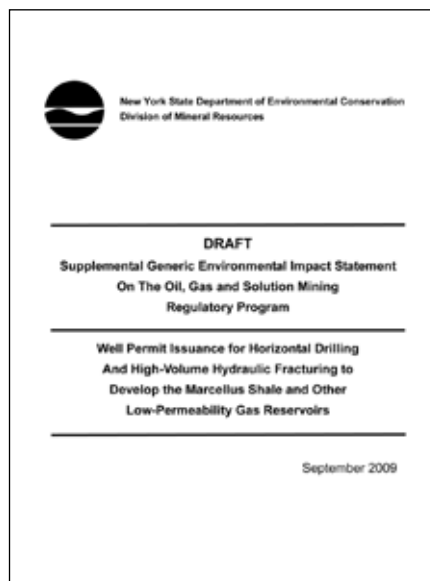
enormous open pits, up to 5 acres in area and holding up to 16 million gallons. These centralized facilities may hold flowback fluids from wells within a 4-mile radius. The DEC says that these pits "have the potential to qualify as a major source of Hazardous Air Pollutants due to certain chemicals." Other types of potentially-toxic fluids (drilling muds and cuttings) may be stored in open pits on-site. The draft SGEIS also allows fluid that comes out of a well over its lifetime (called "produced water" or "production brine"), which may contain benzene, heavy metals, radioactivity, and extremely high concentrations of salts, to be spread on roads for de-icing. Local municipalities can

choose whether or not to allow road spreading of production brines in their jurisdiction.

### Commenting on the SGEIS

Because of gas industry exemptions from most federal and local environmental laws, the regulations in the SGEIS are key to determining the future of our region; they dictate how many industrial practices that impair our health and degrade our environment will be allowed here. Thus, it is critical for each of us to read and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



## CAYUGA BIRD CLUB

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**Marty Schlabach** (2011)

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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 Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Johnson Center on Sapsucker Woods Road. All programs and field trips are free and open to the public. Membership costs \$15 per year, \$10 for students, 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, duck silhouette by Lena Samsonenko.*

Visit the Cayuga Bird Club website at:

[WWW.BIRDS.CORNELL.EDU/CAYUGABIRDCLUB](http://WWW.BIRDS.CORNELL.EDU/CAYUGABIRDCLUB)

## From the President

There is no better way to begin my term as president of the Cayuga Bird Club than to express my deep-felt thanks to all the people who, as volunteers, have kept the club alive over the past few years. First of all to Kim Kline who has served as treasurer and managed



all the membership records since before I was born (to birding, that is!). Then to Deirdre Anderson who moved the club into the modern era by establishing it as a not-for-profit organization. Susan Danskin has been the public face of the club and has done a great job of keeping all of its myriad activities on track. Ann Mitchell has coordinated most of the program and field trip activities that form the core of our operation. Anne Marie Johnson has maintained our newsletter for many years and, way beyond that, spearheaded the production and publication of Joel and David's recent book on native plants. No organization our size could exist without the support of recording and corresponding secretaries. I am thrilled to have Suzanne Henderson and Colleen Richards continuing in these positions. And not to forget, Matt Medler continues as our webmaster and Carol Schmidt as our publicity person. Thanks to all of you. I look forward to an exciting year of birding and bird club activities.

As I look out into the coming year, I can see a couple of things coming that have the potential to completely change the way we all do birding:

- A new form of natural gas prospecting—hydrofracking—will soon be upon us. A large portion of our county, including favorite birding sites and land adjacent to them, has been leased for drilling. At this point we do not know how much activity actually will occur. However, it could well mean the noise of drill rigs and compressors, increased truck traffic, forest fragmentation ("Welcome, cowbirds!"), accidents, spills, and so on. Sandy Podulka's article in the October Newsletter is a good introduction to the subject. And there are good websites: [www.shaleshock.org](http://www.shaleshock.org) and [www.tcgasmaps.org](http://www.tcgasmaps.org).
- Most of us are used to carrying a paper field guide and, by now, an ipod or mp3 device with bird sounds. This past year has seen the introduction of electronic field guides that reside in a cell

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

## Events Calendar

DATE	EVENT	DETAILS
<b>NOV. 8</b> Sunday 8:00 A.M.– 12:00 P.M.	<b>Field Trip: Summerhill</b> Leader: Susan Danskin Meet: Johnson Center*	This half-day trip to Summerhill will look for early winter migrants. Bring a snack and dress for the weather. Wear appropriate footwear for some walking. Contact Susan at 277-2622 or at danskin@twcny.com with any questions.
<b>NOV. 9</b> Monday 7:30 P.M.	<b>Cayuga Bird Club Meeting</b> Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Matt Carling	Much of what we know about the importance of geography, ecology, and behavior in the formation of new species has resulted from studies of birds. Nevertheless, we know relatively little about the genes important in bird speciation. In his presentation, "Bird Speciation: Insights from Lazuli and Indigo Buntings," Matt Carling will discuss what we can learn about the processes of speciation from studies of Indigo and Lazuli buntings. See the speaker profile on page 5 for more information.
<b>NOV. 16</b> Monday 7:30 P.M.	<b>Monday Night Seminar</b> Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Olivia Gentile	Author of <i>Life List</i> , which tells the true story of a housewife and cancer survivor who saw more bird species than anyone in history, Olivia Gentile will present "Birding Planet Earth: The Passion and Adventures of Phoebe Snetsinger." A book signing will follow the presentation.
<b>NOV. 19</b> Thursday	<b>Newsletter deadline</b>	Send newsletter submissions to Anne Marie Johnson, contact information on page 2. Note the early deadline to accommodate Thanksgiving.
<b>NOV. 21</b> Saturday 7:00 P.M.– 10:00 P.M.	<b>Field Trip: Owling</b> Leader: Meena Haribal Meet: Tops on Route 13	This trip will travel to Danby to listen for owls around the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve. Meet at the Tops parking lot on Route 13 South in downtown Ithaca. Be sure to <i>dress warmly</i> , in several layers. Contact Meena at meena_haribal@hotmail.com or at 215-4663 if you have questions.
<b>DEC. 5</b> Saturday 6:00 A.M.	<b>Field Trip: Niagara Falls</b> Leader: Kevin McGowan Meet: Johnson Center far parking lot (closest to Route 13)	Join this one-day trip to Niagara Falls, Ontario, to look for rare gulls and other species. The trip will return after dark. Bring <i>lots</i> of warm clothes, warm shoes or boots, shoe and hand warmers, and whatever else you need to keep warm. Bring snacks and/or lunch. There will be stops on the way to and from Niagara Falls to purchase food. Don't forget to bring your passport. This trip is for club members only. Contact Kevin at kjm2@cornell.edu or at 342-2430 to reserve a spot.
<b>DEC. 12</b> Saturday 2:00 P.M.	<b>Field Trip: Owling</b> Leader: Ann Mitchell Meet: Johnson Center*	After traveling to the Cayuga Lake Creamery to meet Michele Mannella who will guide the group to locations that have had Short-eared Owls in the past, this late-afternoon trip will search for owls and other birds until dusk. Michele has invited the group to her Bed & Breakfast in Interlaken afterwards for hot cider and cookies. Dress warmly. Contact Ann at alm9413@aol.com or at 277-2926 if you have questions.
<b>DEC. 14</b> Monday 7:30 P.M.	<b>Cayuga Bird Club Meeting</b> Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Ron Rohrbaugh	Ron Rohrbaugh, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Ivory-billed Woodpecker Research Project, will present "Lost and Found: When is a Species Really Extinct?" In recent years numerous birds from around the world, such as the Cebu Flowerpecker, have been rediscovered after going unseen for decades. Using the Ivory-billed Woodpecker as a case study, Ron will discuss the difficulties in searching for ultra-rare species and how complacency can lead to premature declarations of extinction.

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

# MINUTES: CAYUGA BIRD CLUB MEETING

## OCTOBER 12, 2009

BY SUZANNE HENDERSON

President Susan Danskin called the meeting to order, welcoming all members and guests in attendance. This being her last meeting as President, Susan thanked everyone for making her tenure as president a successful one, with special thanks to officers, the newsletter editor, and directors.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Susan reminded folks that club dues for new members and renewals should be submitted before the end of October in order to receive the monthly newsletter and to vote on any club business. Annual dues are \$15 per household, \$10 per student.
- Susan invited everyone to attend dinner with the invited program speaker at 5:30 P.M. on the evening of the meeting. Colleen Richards posts an invitation, announcing time and location, on the Cayugabirds-L email list. Anyone not subscribing to the email list may call Colleen to inquire about the location of the selected local restaurant.
- Susan thanked Caroline van Leer and Suzanne Henderson for providing cookies for the meeting. Shirley McAneny and Betty Rowley volunteered to bring cookies for the November 9 meeting. Starting in November, there will be a time to socialize and munch on cookies from 7:15-7:30 P.M., just prior to the meeting. Volunteers providing cookies need to arrive between 7:00 P.M. and 7:15 P.M. Members were invited to provide feedback about this new arrangement.

### NEW BUSINESS

- Bard Prentiss was unable to attend the meeting to present a report of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual New York State Ornithological meeting, held on Saturday, September 26, at the Montezuma Audubon Center. Highlights of the proceedings will be reported at a later date.
- Outgoing Treasurer, Kim Kline, was unable to attend the meeting to provide a Treasurer's Report. Her report was printed in the October club newsletter. Members with any questions regarding the Treasurer's Report may direct them to Kim or to the newly elected treasurer. Susan reminded people how much the club has benefited from the years Kim has spent as treasurer, especially her behind-the-scenes effort helping the club apply for and receive non-profit status.

- Susan presented the slate of candidates developed by the Nominating Committee for election as officers:

President: Bob McGuire  
Vice-president: Laura Stenzler  
Treasurer: Susan Danskin  
Recording Secretary: Suzanne Henderson  
Corresponding Secretary: Colleen Richards  
Director: Jane Graves

Susan invited nominations from the floor. None were presented. Bill McAneny made a motion to close the nominations and accept the slate as presented. Ann Mitchell seconded the motion. Members voted in favor of accepting the slate.

- Susan extended a special thank you to outgoing Director John Confer for his extensive service to the club. Susan again thanked Kim Kline for her many years as Treasurer and proposed that the club present Kim with a \$50 gift certificate to Borders bookstore. Bob McGuire made a motion that the club honor Kim with a \$50 gift certificate. Jane Graves seconded the motion. Members voted in favor.

### RECENT SIGHTINGS AND BASIN LIST

Susan Danskin read the Cayuga Lake Basin bird list, recording birds identified in the basin within the last week. Many migrants are still on the move through the region.

### EVENING PROGRAM

Susan extended a warm welcome to Jody Enck, a Research Associate in the Human Dimensions Research Unit of the Cornell Department of Natural Resources. Jody shared his experiences from a recent trip to El Cielo Biosphere Reserve and nearby areas in Gomez Farias, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Located about 250 miles southwest of Brownsville, Texas, El Cielo is the biggest and most important protected area in north-eastern Mexico. Encompassing more than 350,000 acres, the area has a wide diversity of topographical and biological conditions, supporting a tremendous variety of fauna and flora. Perhaps over half of the bird species in Mexico breed, winter, or migrate through this reserve. The northernmost cloud forest in the Western Hemisphere is in El Cielo, with lush tropical evergreen forests. Depending on elevation,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

# FIELD TRIP REPORT: SAPSUCKER WOODS AND FREESE ROAD, SEPTEMBER 9

BY ANN MITCHELL

I was joined by ten great birders for a morning walk through Sapsucker Woods and the garden plots on Freese Road. We spent a long time on the Wilson Trail North in Sapsucker Woods searching for warblers. We found a Pine Warbler and two Black-throated Green Warblers at the beginning of the trail. We also found a warbler that we identified as a "Baypoll Warbler" (Bay-breasted or Blackpoll).

We saw a couple of Red-eyed Vireos, and as we slowly walked around the trail, we also saw a Magnolia Warbler. We walked back on Sapsucker Woods Road to our cars. It was a very quiet morning. Maybe the cold morning made the birds extra quiet.

We then went to Freese Road and were joined by two other birders who had been scouring

the area. The gardens were hopping with sparrows but not much diversity in species. We saw many Song Sparrows (adult and juvenile); some were missing their tails. There were a number of Savannah Sparrows, a Field Sparrow here and there, a House Sparrow, and a juvenile Indigo Bunting. A kettle of Red-tailed Hawks could be seen in the distance.

By the end of the trip, we managed to see 32 species. Every person on the trip seemed to have a super time, and I thank them for joining me. The day was beautiful which helped make the outing quite enjoyable. 🐦

Kevin McGowan

## Thanksgiving 2003

By Inta Ezergailis

Coming out from the shadow of trees hugging the path and suddenly the sun, strong even warm on this cold windy day full against you. You lift up your face to it, close your eyes, enter the red field inside the lids, see

a bird fly across the screen – clear dark outline, wings spread wide. Afraid to lose sight of it you open your eyes, as it crosses your small horizon – and there it is – rough leg hovering on the wind, working it to perfection, bobbing gently, up and down, but not moving forward at all, the dark wrists clear, smooth loping wingbeats buteo lagopus. Enough to be thankful for.

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*Rough-legged Hawk*

## November Speaker Profile:

### Matt Carling

Matt Carling is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Fuller Evolutionary Biology Program at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Broadly speaking, his research seeks to understand the origin of bird biodiversity. By focusing on bird species that occasionally interbreed, such as Indigo and Lazuli buntings, Matt searches for the genes that allow the hybridizing species to maintain their unique identities. He combines state-of-the-art genetic techniques with old-fashioned field work to try to uncover the forces important in bird speciation. 🐦

## MINUTES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

other areas have semi-arid deciduous forests, rolling thorn scrub, very rocky limestone outcroppings, or spring-fed rivers. Jody brought a great photo selection showing some of the 204 species he saw in four days. He was familiar with some of the birds he encountered, but 125 were life birds for Jody. Just a few of the most memorable were Great Curassow, Blue-crowned Motmot, Elegant Trogon, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, and Pale-billed Woodpecker. Jody also showed some great photos of butterflies that were just too beautiful to ignore. 🐦

# ORNITHOLOGY ASSOCIATION MEETING REPORT

BY BARD PRENTISS

The delegates meeting at the New York State Ornithological Association's recent annual meeting in Montezuma was uneventful, with no matters requiring a vote. The meeting consisted of the usual committee reports and the election of officers and board members. The primary business of the board this year will be recruitment of new individual members.

As a newly elected board member, I will report more on this issue soon. The most noteworthy aspect of the meeting was Gerry Smith's announcement that Onondaga Audubon will host next year's meeting. A full report of this year's meeting will be included in the next issue of the association's newsletter, *New York Birder*. 🐦

## FIELD TRIP REPORT: CONNECTICUT HILL, SEPTEMBER 24

BY MEENA HARIBAL

Nine people joined me to look for warblers and other birds in Connecticut Hill and the Lighthouse Woods. It was very windy and cold, but we walked on Connecticut Hill Road to the highest point in Tompkins County and on Boyland Road. We stopped at various places, wherever we heard chickadees. Unfortunately, the chickadees were accompanied by very few non-chickadees. We saw a few birds: one each of Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet (heard only), along with usual resident birds. We also saw Downy Woodpeckers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

On the way in, we found three Red-tailed Hawks and watched them dive into grass, weeds, flowers, and pumpkin patches. There were a couple of Song Sparrows and Chipping Sparrows. We found American Robins in several locations feeding on the white fruits of dogwoods. From the meadows we watched zooming Turkey Vultures. They seemed to enjoy flying fast, taking advantage of the east wind. We enjoyed watching small clouds moving fast in one direction while large clouds higher up were

going in the other direction.

We observed many Blue Jays migrating or stopping over. At a pond we watched a couple of Red-breasted Nuthatches go back and forth from one side of the road to the other several times. We concluded that they probably were caching food somewhere.

From Connecticut Hill some of us headed to the Lighthouse Woods where we were lucky to find a mixed flock. We actually followed them into the woods. In this flock we found a beautiful Hooded Warbler (I think; I am the only one who got very good looks at it), Blackpoll Warbler, Black throated Green Warbler (could have been more than one), White-breasted Nuthatches, Tufted Titmouse, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, in addition to Hairy, Downy, and Red-bellied woodpeckers, and more. At the edge of the golf course, there was a pair of Eastern Bluebirds along with tons of Chipping Sparrows. On the lake, we heard a Belted Kingfisher and saw several Double-crested Cormorants, Great Black-backed Gulls, and Ring-billed Gulls.

In spite of wind and cold, we had beautiful blue skies and pleasant conversations throughout our trip. 🐦

## *President's Message*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

phone or other hand-held device. The guides provide illustrations of birds, text, range maps, and songs/calls all in one package that fits in your pocket. Several players are jumping into this field, including David Sibley and Audubon. Soon you will be able to purchase an entire guide, or even some portion of it, for far less than the cost of a book.

Finally, a plug for a couple of web sites: If you are not yet a follower of eBird (eBird.com), it is worth taking a look. The project leaders are continually refining and adding to the eBird offerings. You can use it to keep your bird lists (yard, trip, year, county – whatever), look up bird locations and movements, and now be alerted to rare bird sightings as soon as they happen. The Lab is also adapting their online bird guide, All About Birds, into a guide you can take into the field. The web site, [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org), provides detailed information about birds, including sound and video.

*Bob McGuire*

# FIELD TRIP REPORT: LOCAL HOTSPOTS, OCTOBER 10

BY BILL BAKER

I was joined by six people for a local morning field trip. The weather was quite cool, in the lower 40s, calm, and lightly raining almost the entire time. My initial plan had been to start in Sapsucker Woods and then visit the Freese Road gardens to look for sparrows, but due to the weather those plans changed.

We started in Sapsucker Woods on the Wilson trail and ended up spending the bulk of our time slowly doing that loop. As is often the case, the most productive area of the trail was between the Owen's and Sherwood platforms, where we found a variety of resident and migrant birds. From the Owens Platform we found Red-winged Blackbirds, Downy Woodpeckers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Song Sparrows, and American Crows. Once we entered the woods we spent a fair amount of time on the first section of trail near the

feeders. There was a nice variety of birds, and we took time to make sure the newer birders among us got good looks at everything. Here we found Hairy Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Robins, Gray Catbird, Black-throated Green Warbler, Dark-eyed Juncos, House Finches, and American Goldfinches. The section of trail right along the pond shore yielded Common Grackles, White-throated Sparrows, a female Purple Finch, more Red-winged Blackbirds, and perhaps another phoebe, though that may have been the same one we had seen earlier. The pond itself was very quiet, with just a couple of Mallards directly across from the Sherwood Platform.

We wound our way back toward the building, finding the

woods quiet bird-wise, though we did find Beechdrops (a parasitic plant found under Beech trees) still in bloom. We found another flock of mixed sparrows and a single Yellow-rumped Warbler just before returning to the building. The only new bird here was a Swamp Sparrow.

We took a brief break in the building where a couple of people decided they were cold and wet enough and headed home. At the suggestion of one of the trip participants, the four of us remaining made a brief foray to Stewart Park, where we found a stiff northwest wind, nearly horizontal rain and very few birds—a few Mallards, Canada Geese, and Ring-billed Gulls. The rain made viewing very difficult, and as everyone was cold and wet, we decided to call it a morning. 🐦

## Gas Drilling Update

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

comment on at least parts of the draft SGEIS. You can comment in writing, online, or orally at one of the four public hearings DEC has scheduled around the state. Because no public hearings were being held in Ithaca, the Tompkins County Council of Governments (TCCOG) is having one on the evening of November 19; all oral comments presented will become part of the official DEC record. TCCOG also will hold an informational session on the evening of November 5.

For how and where to comment on the SGEIS, articles analyzing the document, links to online copies, and locations where paper copies may be viewed, go to [www.tcgasmap.org](http://www.tcgasmap.org) and click on the button "Draft SGEIS Information."

If you think the public comment period should be extended, please call, fax, or email the

DEC, the governor, and your state and federal representatives. (Current contact information is listed on the [tcgasmap](http://tcgasmap.org) website.) Senator Gillibrand and Representative Hinchey have called for an extension of the comment period to 90 days, and Barbara Lifton has requested a 6-month period. Once the final SGEIS is out, numerous well permits are expected to be issued for high-volume hydraulic fracturing of wells in the Southern Tier.

## "Split Estate" documentary at Cornell Cinema

Cornell Cinema will show the chilling new documentary *Split Estate* on November 3 at 7:00 p.m. It follows the lives of many people living next to gas wells in Colorado and details their health problems. You can learn more about the film online at [www.splitestate.com](http://www.splitestate.com). 🐦

*Dunlin at Myers Park in Lansing, October 17, 2009.*



Ryan Douglas

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Hybrid Lazuli/Indigo Bunting, Doug Backlund



**NEXT MEETING NOVEMBER 9**

MATT CARLING FEATURED SPEAKER

“BIRD SPECIATION: INSIGHTS FROM LAZULI AND INDIGO BUNTINGS”

SEE INSIDE FOR DETAILS

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

GAS DRILLING UPDATE: DRAFT IMPACT STATEMENT RELEASED

EVENTS CALENDAR

MINUTES: OCTOBER MEETING

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

ORNITHOLOGY ASSOCIATION MEETING REPORT