



Cayuga Bird Club

Newsletter

October 2000

President's Message

The frost on the pumpkin and on everything else finally happened last night, and it brings to a close the official growing season. I have in the past placed newspaper pages over my hardy mums and have kept them going into November, not wanting to let their vibrant colors fade away. I am looking forward to the fall foliage colors soon to come.

The birds are moving through on their way to warmer places and better food supplies for the next five or six months. On my walks now the regulars are replaced with different birds almost daily, and sometimes there is practically no bird life at all that I see or hear.

The Fourth Annual Muckrace, held on September 16th, was a success again with 20 teams. Two teams tied for first with 114 species: the Ecology and Environment's Eagles from the Buffalo area and the Genessee Ornithological Society's team, the Windbirders. Over 170 species were seen for the day. A rare Connecticut Warbler was found on the Esker Brook Trail, and several teams heard two Sandhill Cranes on Carncross Road. Several teams heard the nocturnal flight calls of thrushes migrating. One team was thrilled to witness the thrushes as they descended at dawn, managing to get four different species. It was a sunny, cool, downright blustery at times, day for the Muckrace. The teams worked very hard to find birds this year, but the overwhelming consensus was how much fun was had by all involved.

October is the month we will see the waterfowl start to move in big numbers. Remember, Taughannock State Park is a good spot from which to watch all kinds of waterfowl migrate, but especially the Common Loon flights if you hit it on the right days. Think cold north winds, and dress like you are going to the tundra. If there is a flight, it's pretty exciting, and you forget the cold temporarily.

Our November meeting will include electing officers for this coming year. I hope members will come and participate. I have enjoyed being president for the club these past two years. This area has an incredible amount of activity

going on with birders of all caliber and interests. It is an exciting time to be involved with this "sport" of ours. The number of folks out there finding, reporting, and/or recording birds continues to grow. There is the computer with all sorts of incredible bird information available, birdlines galore, and the ease by which information can be collected for ongoing ornithology projects. There are those who do not have this technology but still get into the backyard birding, helping with citizen science projects, going on local bird trips, and coming to seminars. There have been some wonderful television programs on birds in their habitats. I always have enjoyed bird trips with new people who are just discovering the beauty and fascinating lives of birds.

Hope to see you at the meeting,

Club Officers

PRESIDENT	Gladys Birdsall	257-0130 (H)
VICE PRESIDENT	Linda Clougherty	539-7546 (H)
TREASURER	Kim Kline	844-3728 (H)
SECRETARY	(Position Open)	
NEWSLETTER	Caissa Willmer	272-2264 (H) jcw12@cornell.edu
FIELD TRIPS	Laura Stenzler Bard Prentiss Gladys Birdsall	539-6893 (H) 844-4691 (H) 257-0130 (H)
PUBLICITY	Carol Felton Schmitt	257-2382 (H) cfschmitt@aol.com
HISTORIAN	(Position Open)	
MEMBERSHIP	Linda Clougherty	539-7546 (H)
DIRECTORS	John Confer Kevin McGowan Ken Rosenberg	539-6308 (H) 844-3728 (H) 844-5176 (H)

The Cayuga Bird Club

The Cayuga Bird Club meets at 7:30 pm at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology on the second Monday of every month except July and August. Most meetings consist of a short business segment followed by a feature presentation. The Club also sponsors several field trips each month and publishes a monthly newsletter. Membership is \$10.00 per year and includes a one-year subscription to the CBC Newsletter. The year begins in September. To join, send a check to: Cayuga Bird Club, c/o Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850.

Call the **Finger Lakes Bird Line** for the latest in birding news...**254-2429**

Field Trip Report: MNWR, September 17, 2000

Submitted by Gladys Birdsall

Ten birders made the trek to Montezuma, starting at 2pm. It turned out to be a delightfully warm and sunny, though windy, day.

At the Main Pool, the afternoon sun made us work for the birds. There were American Coots, Wood and Black Ducks, Mallard, American Widgeon, Green and Blue-winged Teal, and Pied-billed Grebe. At the North Spring Pool, the more you looked, the more seemed to turn up. There were several Great Egrets, Great Blue Heron, Kingfisher, and what appeared to be a Yellowlegs, walking around the edges, mostly hidden by the dead tree stumps.

Two Bald Eagles were seen, an adult at Tschache Pool and an immature sitting along the edge of Mays Point Pool. Tschache Pool had many Cormorants. We did find the mostly white/albino-looking Cormorant, and we wondered if it was accepted by the others; it certainly stood out in the crowd.

Shorebirds at Mays Point included Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated and Stilt Sandpipers, and Dowitchers. There were many Great Egrets; with all our stops we probably saw close to 30 total. We also had an Osprey, Green Heron, and right at darkness, the Black-crowned Night Herons took the stage. There was a stream of Swallows that flew in right before dark, but it was obvious the numbers were down from what they had been just a couple weeks ago. It even appeared these birds might have kept going.

A Cornell graduate student from Lithuania managed to add six new birds to his North American bird list. It was a very enjoyable day to be out birding.

English Name Change

Submitted by Gladys Birdsall

A name change relevant to New York birders is the English name for the Oldsquaw Duck. It has been changed to Long-tailed Duck. The change was made by members of the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Union. Explanation of this change is found in the July 2000 issue (Vol. 117, No. 3, p. 848) of *The Auk*, which contains the 42nd Supplement to *The American Ornithologists' Union Checklist of North American Birds*. The explanation for the change is as follows:

“The Committee was petitioned by a group of biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska to change the English name of *Clangula himalayis* from Oldsquaw to Long-tailed Duck, the name used for the species outside of North America. The basis for the petition was that the species is declining in numbers in Alaska and conservation management plans require the help of Native Americans. The biologists were concerned that the name Oldsquaw would offend Native Americans. Requests to change the name had been made to the Committee in past years by some who consider the word “squaw” to be offensive. The Committee declines to consider political correctness alone in changing long-standing English names but is willing in this instance to adopt an alternative name that is in use in much of the world.”

Mudhens eclipsed! Rookie reports home Muckrace report from Geo Kloppel

I pulled in at the MNWR Visitors' Center about 10pm, expecting a night to remember. Conditions looked promising for a big flight of night-migrating thrushes. Only two years ago I learned that one does not need distinguished credentials to pick out the distinctive night flight calls of Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrushes. I still get a thrill out of hearing streams of these seldom-seen transients pass overhead. But my anticipations ran well beyond the thrushes. In two hours the 4th annual Montezuma Muckrace would begin. As a raw recruit for the CBC Mudhens, and no rapid-fire birding machine, I was wondering just how I would handle 21 hours of non-stop birding in the globally important 47,000-acre wetland complex.

However, the first order of business was to tilt back and relax. I had been by veterans to forget about sleep, but no one said I couldn't close my eyes and perform the little exercise that trips the day-counter in my bio-clock. It was after 11:30 when I opened them again, equipped with the somatic conviction that a new day was beginning. In fact I felt so refreshed and keenly awake that I immediately extracted the first of a number of lessons about birding - "Stay focused on the here and now!" - an important mantra for an inveterate daydreamer. A midnight snack followed, while I listened to night sounds and waited for Captain Tom Nix and fellow Mudhens Meena Haribal and Ben Fambrough to arrive. When they pulled up, I was enjoying a mixed flight of thrushes, the voices of various waterfowl in the marsh, and the first of a night-long string of Great Horned Owls.

From that midnight beginning it was a long, long pull to the finish at 9pm Meena and Ben have each provided bird-by-bird accounts elsewhere, so I won't replot that ground, but just hit a couple highlights and mention a few things I learned.

In the course of the night I concluded that most parts of the greater Montezuma area are much, much noisier than the hills of West Danby where I live. But in spite of the ubiquitous roar of 21st century transport, we racked up the thrushes. A few years ago this might have been quite a feat, but the Evansian know-how has since been circulated through the birding community, on the solid principle that sharing knowledge advances our sport for everyone's benefit. Various teams listening from diverse locations marveled at the thrushes overhead. There was general concurrence that we experienced a strong flight that night, and delight that, though we were miles apart, all had been together under the one sky.

About 2am we found ourselves out on the causeway leading to the west shore of Howland Island. A Virginia Rail called a couple of times for us, and in an effort to encourage it, we provided some claps. At once a brattling two-toned trumpet call erupted close at hand! In

the distance a second bird took up the alarm. We were stunned! We knew these calls - Sandhill Cranes —but neither moonlight nor jacklights would reveal the callers to our eyes. Now we found ourselves suspended between exultation and dread. What a great bird! But wouldn't it be challenged? We delayed marking the checklist, at risk of confounding the wish to be believed with the requirements for believing ourselves. Seventeen hours would pass before we summoned our courage. Later, during the compilation, we learned that two other teams also heard the Sandhills calling from the dark cornlands that night.

Onward we forged, making more night-stops, including lovely moonlit Crusoe Lake, and finally Helmer's Marsh, where the eastern sky brightened at the approach of dawn. The actual sunrise caught us at Tschache Pool. Clouds in the north glowed redly, and the whole marsh took spectacular golden fire. A shy rainbow appeared, and hundreds of thousands of Tree Swallows rose and sparkled in the sunlight. We did not make the mistake of focusing so tightly on identifying birds that these glories escaped us.

No day that begins so can be a loss. There was a persistent cold breeze. We cleaned up the ducks and most of the shorebirds early, but then struggled to find warblers. Even common birds gave us some difficulty. A number of anxious stops were unproductive. In the end, Ecology and Environment's EAGLES and the Genesee Ornithological Society's WINDBIRDERS tied at 114, and the LAKESIDE CHICKADEES topped the youth category with 103, while we found 102 species, placing sixth in the field. But only readers who were not there could suppose there was any lack of joy in Mudville that night. The serene evening gathering at May's Point, waiting for Black-crowned Night Herons, was followed by a convivial compilation-assembly at the Visitors' Center, which gave us opportunities to make or renew acquaintances, congratulate this year's winners, acknowledge the money raised for conservation, and reflect upon the great treasure that lies beyond the north end of Cayuga Lake. The final lesson I took home was that the Muckrace is not just some birding contest. It's a seasonal celebration of a unique complex of natural resources that deserves all the enlightened stewardship we can muster. And it's tremendous fun for birders at all levels. I can't wait to do it again!

[The following article appeared in the New York Times of September 26, 2000]

Looking at Birds, in Meticulous Detail

<http://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/26/science/>

26BIRD.html

By E. VERNON LAUX

CONCORD, Mass. Once in a great while, a natural history book changes the way people look at the world.

In 1838, John James Audubon's "Birds of America" was one, the first illustrated book of North American birds. In 1934, Roger Tory Peterson produced "Field Guide to the Birds," the first to use paintings and drawings to depict living birds as they appear in the field, with arrows pointing out specific markings.

Peterson's guide stood the publishing world on its head with its instant and widespread popularity. The Peterson system, as it has become known, spawned a series of highly useful guides that is still going strong.

Now comes "The Sibley Guide to Birds," an encyclopedic illustrated guide to the birds of North America. The book will be published next month, but birders and ornithologists who have seen it are already hailing it and its author, David Allen Sibley. . . .

"David has just raised the bar," said Pete Dunne, author of numerous books and director of the New Jersey Audubon Society's Cape May Bird Observatory. "This book represents the high-water mark for bird guides."

Simon Perkins, field ornithologist for the Massachusetts Audubon Society, calls the book "a quantum leap."

Each species is depicted in a clear and easy to understand way with multiple illustrations starting with the flying bird from above and below, a first for any bird guide and a feature that will be extremely useful to intermediate and advanced birders who often deal with birds overhead at migratory hot spots along either coast or inland.

And each species is shown in juvenile, immature, male and female plumages, both ordinary and breeding, more than other guides attempt.

Of course, no subject is ever going to look exactly like the illustration. A drawing is a composite of the artist's experience and a photograph is a record of a fleeting instant, a snapshot in time. Generally, though, paintings and drawings of birds can do much more than photographs

to emphasize field marks. And when the artist is a master birder, with an eye for detail and tremendous field experience, the results have a much greater chance of depicting what it is one may actually see when confronted with a certain species in the field.

Birds, specifically sketching, drawing and painting them, have been the central theme for Mr. Sibley's life from as far back as he remembers. He began observing birds when he was 7, and by 12 he was photographing birds in the hand, sketching birds and had already amassed an impressive volume of data.

More than 20 years ago, he began thinking about producing a field guide. "I wanted all plumages, age classes and sexes, of all species," he said. "I wanted to know and categorize everything about birds."

"David is one of the supreme field birders in the United States," said Dr. Noble S. Proctor, a professor of ornithology at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven and an author of an ornithological textbook.

That skill as a field observer, married with his gifts as an artist, has given the guide a distinctive, personal feel. Whereas most field guides are collaborative efforts, this one is the way Mr. Sibley wanted it, envisioned it and shaped it in more than a decade of work. It is the guide he always wished he could use.

Each species has its common and scientific names as well as its average measurements, including length, wingspan (also a first for a North American guide) and weight in both imperial and metric systems.

But as Mr. Sibley points out in his introduction and elsewhere in the book, birds are highly variable. "Do not expect any bird to look exactly like the illustrations," he said. . . .

Mr. Sibley . . . credit[s] Mr. Dunne of the Cape May center and Will Russell, who operates a natural history tour company called Wings, with enabling him to complete the project. Mr. Dunne hired Mr. Sibley as a hawk counter in Cape May, giving him a base from which to operate. And Mr. Russell hired him to conduct birding tours.

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Minutes of the Cayuga Bird Club, September, 2000

Submitted by Meena Madhav Haribal

The president of the club, Gladys Birdsall, welcomed all attendees to the bird club meeting and informed non-members about the club activities and subscription rates.

Members reported about interesting birds seen that week. Gladys reported some Accipiter sightings in Dryden. Bard Prentiss told about an electrocuted Osprey on Dryden Golf Course. Kevin McGowan reported seeing Great Egrets at TC3 and a pasture pond on Beam Hill road.

Gladys also announced the forthcoming club trips as well as the Monday night seminars of the Lab of Ornithology. She mentioned that Karen Confer has offered to redesign the CBC Chickadee logo. The members welcomed the idea and appreciated the offer. An announcement was made of the forthcoming Muckrace 2000 and its participants.

Cully Mower talked about the bird prints he had for sale to the members of bird club.

The president also reported on the Federation of New York Bird Clubs meeting held earlier in the week in Geneva. She said that 3 new clubs, including a youth club, had joined FNYBC. Matt Williams shared the Lillian Stoker award along with high school senior. Matt Williams was also commended for starting a new birdwatching club on the Cornell campus, which now has about 50 members. Also at the Federation meeting one of our club members, Kevin McGowan, gave a talk on identification of shorebirds and Tom Jassikoff of MNWR announced the planning of a butterfly garden at MNWR.

The President invited nominations for president and secretary of the club. She also reported that Linda Clougherty has showed a willingness to serve as secretary. Gladys concluded her remarks with an invitation to Kevin McGowan to read the basin list.

Addendum: Meena Haribal was the evening's speaker. She showed slides and described her recent visit to the Galapagos. Her talk and her slides provided rich and fascinating information about everything from the vegetation to the volcanic rock formations, the reptiles, and of course the birds. *The editor*

Expert birders who have seen the book call it a must-have guide or anyone interested in birds.

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Of course, there are a few complaints. Some expert birders say the book contains, if anything, too much information. And at 9.5 inches long and 2.65 pounds, it is more than some people will want to carry into the field. . . .

But Mr. Sibley's guide "is far and away the best single book on North American birds," said Denny Abbott, of

Stratham, N.H., a founding member of the American Birding Association.

Wayne Petersen, a field ornithologist at Massachusetts Audubon and vice president of the American Birding Association, said the book "once again raised the standard of excellence in a North American field guide."

"The Sibley Guide's open format, telegraphic field descriptions, consistency in artistic style and breadth of plumage coverage combine to give North American birders a guide reminiscent of those produced in the finest European tradition," Mr. Petersen said. "It's a gem!"

Cayuga Bird Club
c/o Cornell Lab of Ornithology
159 Sapsucker Woods Rd.
Ithaca, NY 14850

**Agenda: October Meeting of the CBC
Monday, 10/9/00**

7:30 pm Business Meeting

- a) Special bird sightings/stories to share
- b) Announcements
- c) Treasurers Report
- d) Election of Officers
- e) Speaker/program committee
- f) Other discussions

Refreshments after the meeting