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SUPPORTING CONSERVATION, THE VERMONT HABITAT STAMP

by Michael Walsh

We are fortunate to live in a region where a healthy mix of habitats exist. The Connecticut River, the myriad tributaries and streams that feed this beautiful river, beaver ponds and meadows, forests, grasslands, and even yards with bushes and trees are essential to a thriving ecosystem. We live in a healthy environment because it is important to us, but ecosystems are large, and a greater perspective is needed to ensure that fragmentation does not occur to the detriment of sensitive plant and animal communities.

Habitat degradation is a key factor in the decline of the health of our forests and the populations of animal species. The introduction of invasive species over the last 50 to 100 years has had a devastating impact on the quality of our forests, waterways, and grasslands. Public lands have been particularly impacted, especially forests that have been extensively logged, opening up areas to the establishment of invasive plant and animal species. Fortunately, Vermont's Fish and Wildlife Department (VTFWD) has a program to assist with habitat improvement: the Habitat Stamp Program.

Started in 2015, the Vermont Habitat Stamp Program is a donation-funded program that enables the state to improve habitat for Vermont's fish and wildlife species. It accomplishes this through invasive species removal, land purchases in sensitive areas, helping towns and private landowners improve their properties for native pollinators, songbirds, amphibians, bats, white-tailed deer, turkeys, and other wildlife, providing workshops, and partnering with area experts and organizations to ensure the best possible outcomes for environmental projects. Monies raised from sales of Vermont Habitat Stamps go to the Species and Habitat Conservation Fund. One of the best features of the Habitat Stamp Program is that for every dollar donated, the federal government chips in three. Now that's a deal!



What I like about the program is that some of the funds have gone to projects in our area. Two of the projects carried out last year were invasive species removal from the old apple orchard at the Windsor Grasslands Wildlife Management Area, in conjunction with AMAS, and the removal of a defunct dam on the Saxton's River.

continued on page 5 - Conservation



Conserving Nature – Educating Communities

Ascutney Mountain Audubon
is a Chapter of
Audubon Vermont and
the National Audubon Society
AMAS Serves the
Precision Valley Region of
Vermont and New Hampshire

Visit our Website at:

amasvt.org

or Contact us at:

amas@vermontel.net

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NOTE FORM THE PRESIDENT

I recently filled out the 2023 Annual Chapter Report for National Audubon. In answering all the questions and filling in data It reminded me of what a great chapter we have. The form gets filled out each year and in turn National sends our chapter money to help support our programs. We are a small chapter compared to many, but we do as much as we can for the communities in our chapter area. One of our programs is the Herrick's Cove Wildlife Festival that happens the first Sunday of May each year. We also host bird walks, support the upkeep of the North Springfield Bog and do two local Christmas Bird Counts. We also offer camp scholarships for kids going to Green Mountain Conservation Camps.

We have a website that has our most recent information. Sometimes walks or programs get added after the newsletter goes out so please check the website periodically to see what's new, amasvt.org.

Ellen Allman
President



22nd HERRICKS COVE WILDLIFE FESTIVAL

This year's festival will be held on Sunday May 5 at Harricks Cove. Herricks Cove is located off Exit 6 of I-91. Take 103 east to Rt. 5 north. After crossing the Williams River, turn right on the Herricks Cove Road. There will be a 7:00 AM bird walk and the gates open for the exhibits at 9:30 and close at 4:00. Go to our web site for a full list of Walks, Talks, Exhibits and Activities

<https://amasvt.org/herricks-cove-wildlife-festival>.

UP COMING SPRING WALKS

AMAS is planning the following Saturday bird walks. All trips are free and open to the public. Novice birders are always welcome. The meeting time for each walk will be 7 am. Rain date will be the following day (Sunday). Be sure to check the website, <https://amasvt.org/harbingerandevents> for more details about the walks and on how to reach each trail site.

Lake Runnemedede/Paradise Park, Windsor, VT. We will meet on **Saturday, May 11, 2024 at 7 am** at the entrance (Eddies Place) on Route 5. There is limited parking along Route 5 and additional parking at Price Chopper. Point of Contact is Marianne and Michael Walsh: (mwalsh@vermontel.net)

Ashuelot River Trail, Keene, NH. We will meet on **Saturday, May 18, 2024 at 7 am** at the end of Krif Rd at the junction with Krif Court where there is a pull-off parking area (42.9147, -72.2857) just before the gate to the Keene State Athletic Complex. We will head south on the trail through the floodplain of the Ashuelot River. Point of Contact is Marie Caduto at maleca333@ymail.com.

Windsor Grasslands Wildlife Management Area. We will meet on **Saturday, June 1, 2024 at 7 am** at the small parking lot on the corner of Marton Rd. and State Farm Rd. Driving Directions: At the Main Street (US Route 5) and State Street traffic light go west on State Street to the intersection with County Road. Here, continue straight onto Hunt Road and drive 2.2 miles to intersection with Marton Road. Turn right onto Marton Road and drive 1.2 miles to the hilltop overlooking large open fields to the east. Continue until the parking lot next to a red pump house at State Farm Rd. Point of Contact is Ken Cox (kencox5@gmail.com).

Runway Trail, North Springfield, VT. We will meet on **Saturday, June 15, 2024 at 7 am** at the Maple Street parking lot on the west side of the North Springfield Dam. From Rt. 106, turn onto Maple Street across from the North Springfield Citgo. The parking lot will be on your right. The trail is fairly flat. We will walk in and out the same trail so participants can turn around at any time. Point of Contact is Marianne and Michael Walsh: (mwalsh@vermontel.net)

2023 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SUMMARIES

Saxtons River CBC

Thank you all for a great day. Warm & pleasant for a change. 20 observers were in the field and 3 were watching feeders. We ended up with 64 species (7,203 individuals) and 3 additional species for count week (CW). The bird of the day was the Blue-headed Vireo found by Ken Cox in the manure pit at the Boggy Meadows Farm in Walpole. Two Killdeer flushed from the manure pit at the Chickering farm in Westmoreland was also a surprise. Gadwall seen during CW was a new species for the count. Hope you have a great holiday and looking forward to seeing you all again next year. Submitted by Don Clark.

The 2023 Springfield CBC

Birds are an excellent indicator of the state of our environment. More and more scientific studies are using specific bird species; trends in the overall diversity, number, or types of birds; or bird populations as a whole to determine the impacts habitat loss, change in weather patterns, or the introduction of invasive plant or predatory species have on various aspects of our ecosystem health. The Christmas Bird Count is a very powerful tool in determining medium to long term changes in our environment.

The Christmas Bird Count, or CBC, has evolved over the past 100 years to become one of the most powerful citizen science projects in the world. Started in 1900 by Frank Chapman and originally called the Christmas Bird Census, the CBC was proposed as an alternative to the Christmas Side Hunt, which involved shooting as many animals on Christmas day as possible, the winner having the greatest number of dead animals at the end of the day. The CBC had a slow start, with most censuses involving people reporting birds from their yards. By 1911, protocols began to be established to improve and standardized the methods and reporting. By the mid-1920s, the Census looked much the same as what we have today. In 1941, with the Audubon Society's assumption of the printing of the results, the name was changed to Christmas Bird Count to better reflect the type of data being collected. By 1950, over 400 counts were reported, and 25 years later, the number of counts more than doubled to 1600. Today, there are over 2600 counts worldwide.

The Springfield, VT, CBC was started relatively recently. In 1978, the first count was run, with 36 species reported on count day and a total of 3918 birds counted. Evening Grosbeaks were the stars of that count, with 835 reported. Since the inception of the Springfield CBC, Ascutney Mountain Audubon Society has run 46 consecutive counts.

This year's Springfield CBC was held on December 17th. Marianne Walsh was the compiler or leader of the count. We had a very good turnout of field and feeder participants again this year, allowing us better coverage of some of the larger sectors within our 15-mile diameter count circle. The weather was mild but threatening all day, with the rains finally starting around 2 PM and affecting the birding by 3 PM. Although we had a curtailed count day, we still did quite well with the birds.

The numbers tell the story of the 46th Springfield CBC. We had 56 total bird species on count day tying us for second highest on our count and five above the 10-yr running average. One of these was a new species to our count, an Orange-crowned Warbler, originally found by Stan McCumber. We had a total of 6861 birds, with 6800 found on the 14 field routes and 61 at the feeders. We had high counts for six species and tied high counts for two: Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Carolina Wren, Red Crossbill, Song Sparrow, and Orange-crowned Warbler were all high counts while we tied for high counts for

CBC continued on page 5

There is also the possibility of the program working with local landowners for habitat improvement, an aspect of the program I am looking into for our property.

If you would like more information on the Habitat Stamp Program, go to:

<https://vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Get%20Involved/Donate/Habitat-Stamp/2023-habitat-stamp-report.pdf>

A nice video clip from the Across the Fence television program featuring Mark LaBarr of Audubon Vermont and Andrea Shortsleeve, a biologist at the VTFWD, can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hs0K8cBYRoU>

Finally, if you would like to donate to the Habitat Stamp Program and receive the 2024 Habitat Stamp, go to: https://appengine.egov.com/apps/vt/vtfwd_habitatdonation

CBC continued from page 4

Red-bellied Woodpecker and Merlin. Dark-eyed Juncos were the most numerous species this year (1021), while chickadee numbers were still depressed (853, down from 943 last year). All this on a rain-shortened day!



Orange-crowned Warbler

Many thanks to all those who helped to make this year's Christmas Bird count a success. A special thanks to Hugh Putnam, a founder of the Springfield CBC and compiler for most of its history. This was his last count with us as he moves with his wife Bunni to another part of Vermont. Next year's count will occur on Sunday, December 15th. Join in the challenge and the fun and contribute towards the world's longest running citizen-science project. Email us at amas@vermontel.org if you would like to be involved. All are welcome!

Submitted by Michael Walsh

AMAS
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A Chapter Affiliate of the National Audubon Society

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