



Cayuga Bird Club

NEWSLETTER

ESTABLISHED 1914

FEBRUARY 2012

ITHACA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2012 REPORT

BY KEVIN MCGOWAN

The 2012 Ithaca Christmas Bird Count was another successful event, with 91 total species found during the day, plus two others found during the Count Week. Two new species were added to the overall list—an Orange-crowned Warbler found in the Ithaca Community Gardens and a Count Week Ross's Goose seen flying overhead with a migrating flock of Snow Geese.

Totals of resident woodland birds were generally down after a string of record-setting counts. The high winds during the day might have been a factor.

It was a generally good year for half-hearties, with records set or tied for Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Winter Wren, and Hermit Thrush. The most unusual southern species this year was Turkey Vulture

with a record-shattering total of 44. The vultures were seen in seven of the nine count areas, so double-counting was an issue to be dealt with. A count at the roosting site in Cayuga Heights later in the week found 40–45 vultures, which was used as a guide for the final total.

Thanks to all the participants and area compilers, and thanks to Linda Orkin and Bob McGuire for organizing the event.

TOTAL COUNT LIST:

Snow Goose	17	Wild Turkey	72
Ross's Goose	count week (new to count)	Red-throated Loon	1 (fourth count)
Cackling Goose	5 (high count)	Common Loon	6
Canada Goose	6702	Pied-billed Grebe	1
Gadwall	2	Horned Grebe	1
American Black Duck	31	Red-necked Grebe	2 (fifth count; tie high count)
Mallard	902	Double-crested Cormorant	2
Northern Pintail	2	Great Blue Heron	20 (tie high count)
Green-winged Teal	1	Turkey Vulture	44 (high count)
Canvasback	1	Bald Eagle	3 (tie high count)
Redhead	15	Northern Harrier	2
Ring-necked Duck	3	Sharp-shinned Hawk	8
Greater Scaup	1	Cooper's Hawk	11
Lesser Scaup	8	Northern Goshawk	1
Surf Scoter	1 (second count)	Red-tailed Hawk	150
Bufflehead	2	Rough-legged Hawk	7
Common Goldeneye	12	American Kestrel	6
Hooded Merganser	13	Merlin	3 (high count)
Common Merganser	48	American Coot	191
Red-breasted Merganser	1	Ring-billed Gull	550
Ruddy Duck	1		
Ruffed Grouse	15		

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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 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 and duck silhouette by Lena Samsonenko.

Visit the Cayuga Bird Club website at:

WWW.CAYUGABIRDCLUB.ORG

From the President

How many birds will we ever know as individuals? I have a flock of four crows that come to my platform feeder, and I am able to recognize two individuals, a crow tagged B-6 that I have observed for a year and a half, and a crow that has some white tertiary feathers. I like this feeling of recognizing individual birds in the wild. It is a rare occurrence.



What makes a bird recognizable? It could be some naturally occurring phenomena, such as the broken bill of the Common Loon that makes a regular appearance on the lake and is heralded each winter when it does so. There is a local Turkey Vulture with one almost totally white wing. We all get excited and post a message about the sighting whenever we are lucky enough to spot the vulture. We now have a page on our new website called "Old Friends" that has information about individual, recognizable local birds. It is a potent title for a page on wild birds.

A notable bird hanging out in an odd place could become recognizable, such as last year's New York Public Library Prothonotary Warbler that was there for at least a month and elicited much comment and conjecture. What could we learn if we looked at every bird we encounter with such intensity?

The bird that we come to recognize could be a very rare single bird making an appearance. There have been many discoveries of such birds in the past few months: a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch found in the Catskills, a Mountain Bluebird and a Grace's Warbler on Long Island, a Chaffinch in New Jersey. These birds, all extremely unlikely in the Northeast, attract many birders. Of course, I know that for many, these sightings are opportunities to expand a bird list. But I think there is more to it than that. People who went to see these birds often went more than one time, and many spent long hours observing them. People enjoy being able to know a bird, to know that it is the same bird they saw yesterday, or last week, and that it will be the same bird they could see tomorrow.

I try to remember to think of each bird that I look at as an individual, even if I am not able to distinguish it in any way. It opens up a new way of observing and thinking about birds. It has been recommended that we make a point of looking at each person's face as we make our way through our day, in order to increase our compassion for humanity. Many of us already do this with birds, observe them carefully, look at their face, and think of their life—their individual life.



Events Calendar

DATE	EVENT	DETAILS
FEB. 11 Saturday 7:30 A.M.– 4 P.M.	Field Trip: Cayuga Lake Leader: Bob McGuire Meet: Johnson Center*	Bob will lead a full-day trip, concentrating on Cayuga Lake but also visiting areas where birds have been reported. The trip will return by 4 P.M. Bring lunch and warm clothes. Contact Bob at bmcguire@clarityconnect.com if you have questions.
FEB. 12 Sunday 3 P.M.– dark	Field Trip: Short-eared Owls in the Ovid area Leader: Marty Schlabach, Mary Jean Welser, and Michele Mannella Meet: 8407 Powell Rd., Covert	This trip will start at Marty and Mary Jean's home on Powell Road in Covert and will carpool to the area around the intersection of Wycoff Road and Rock River Road in Ovid. The group will look for whatever can be found until it gets dark enough for Short-eared Owls to appear. Bring a spotting scope, if you have one, in case the owls are far off the road. The leaders will get permission to walk into the Beardsley farm, which is at the northeast corner of the intersection of Wycoff Road and Rock River Road. Directions to Marty and Mary Jean's place: From Ithaca, take Route 89 north. After the Cayuga Creamery (all birders know where that is!), take the first left onto County Road 141. Then take the next left onto Powell Road. Their house is the first one on the left, and number 8407 is on the mailbox. Contact Marty at (315) 521-4315 with any questions.
FEB. 13 Monday 5:30 P.M.	Speaker Dinner Restaurant to be determined	Join club members and friends at a local restaurant for dinner with the evening's speaker before the club meeting. Contact Colleen Richards at clr82@juno.com or at 347-4293 for the dinner location and to get on the reservation list.
FEB. 13 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Cayuga Bird Club Meeting Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Warren D. Allmon	Knowledge of the fossil record of birds has exploded in the past decade or so. We now know more about early bird evolution than ever before. But it's much more than just "feathered dinosaurs." In his presentation, "Bird Evolution: A View from the Fossil Record," Warren Allmon will talk about the recent discoveries and insights into the evolution of birds. See the speaker profile on page 5 for more details.
FEB. 17-20	Great Backyard Bird Count	Join thousands of participants across North America counting birds for this annual four-day event. Find more information at www.birdsource.org/gbbc .
FEB. 20 Monday	Newsletter deadline	Send newsletter submissions to Anne Marie Johnson, contact information on page 2.
FEB. 20 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Yula Kapetenakos	The introduction of a drug to treat cattle in Asia during the 1990s resulted in one of the most catastrophic bird population declines in modern history. With populations reduced to 1% of their former abundance, four species of Asian vulture may now be on the brink of extinction. Three of those species, Oriental White-rumped, Slender-billed, and Red-headed vultures, persist in low numbers in Cambodia. Employing genetic, mark-recapture methods, Yula Kapetenakos, PhD candidate at Cornell University, has acquired population information never before collected for these Cambodian populations. In her presentation, "The Race to Conserve Asia's Vultures," Yula will discuss her research on the demography and genetics of these critically endangered vultures.

*Meet for field trips in the front parking lot of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Johnson Center.

Events Calendar continued

DATE	EVENT	DETAILS
FEB. 25 Saturday 7:30 A.M.– 4 P.M.	Field Trip: Recent Hotspots Leader: Meena Haribal Meet: Johnson Center*	The weather is very changeable at this time of year, and birds can be moving, so we will decide on our destination the day of the trip—possibly around the lake, possibly upland habitats—wherever the birds lead us! We'll be out all day, so dress accordingly, and bring food and water. For further information, contact Meena at mmh3@cornell.edu.
FEB. 27 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Scott Weidensaul	Join naturalist Scott Weidensaul for a lighthearted exploration of his many avian research projects, from banding hawks and Saw-whet Owls to studying the migration of western hummingbirds that aren't supposed to be in the East in December (but are). Best of all, learn how anyone with some enthusiasm and time can make important contributions to the science and conservation of birds and can have a great time doing it. Scott Weidensaul, author of more than two dozen books on natural history, will present "Messing Around with Birds (for Fun and Science)." In addition to books like the Pulitzer Prize finalist <i>Living on the Wind</i> and his newest book, <i>The First Frontier: The Forgotten History of Struggle, Savagery and Endurance in Early America</i> , Weidensaul also writes for publications such as Audubon, Nature Conservancy, and National Wildlife.
MAR. 3 Saturday 7:30 A.M.– mid afternoon	Field Trip: Southern Highlands Leader: Matt Young Meet: Lime Hollow Nature Center	Matt will lead this joint trip with the Cortland Lime Hollow Bird Club to look for siskins, crossbills, Evening Grosbeaks, and redpolls in the Southern Highlands of Madison, Onondaga, and Chenango Counties, where all these species have been seen in past years. Matt will introduce us to these bird-rich areas that we seldom get to explore. The destination is subject to change, depending on where birds are being seen. For information and directions, contact Matt at grosbeak@clarityconnect.com. Dress appropriately, and bring food and drink.
MAR. 5 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Ben Freeman and Alexa Class	Ben Freeman and Alexa Class will present "Exploring the Avifauna of Papua New Guinea."
MAR. 12 Monday 5:30 P.M.	Speaker Dinner Restaurant to be determined	Join club members and friends at a local restaurant for dinner with the evening's speaker before the club meeting. Contact Colleen Richards at clr82@juno.com or at 347-4293 for the dinner location and to get on the reservation list.
MAR. 12 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Cayuga Bird Club Meeting Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: To be announced	See the March newsletter for more details.
MAR. 26 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Benjamin Clock	Benjamin Clock, Assistant Curator of the Macaulay Library Video Collection at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, will present "Scientific Collecting in the Digital Age: Macaulay Library Recording Expeditions Spanning the Continent." Benjamin will take the audience on a journey through the history of the library's expedition efforts to film and record the diversity of birds. He will trace recording expeditions from Arthur Allen's ground-breaking journeys to today's efforts to document birds of the world with high-resolution multimedia.

*Meet for field trips in the front parking lot of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Johnson Center.

February Speaker Profile: Warren D. Allmon

Warren D. Allmon is the Director of the Paleontological Research Institution (PRI) and its Museum of the Earth in Ithaca, and he is the Hunter R. Rawlings III Professor of Paleontology in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at Cornell University. He earned an undergraduate degree in Earth Sciences from Dartmouth College in 1982, and he earned a PhD in Earth and Planetary Sciences from Harvard University in 1988.

Warren became PRI's fourth director in 1992. Since then, he has been instrumental in rejuvenating PRI's internationally-known fossil collections; in starting its local, regional, and national programs in earth science education; and in planning and fundraising for the Museum of the Earth, PRI's \$11 million education and exhibit facility, which opened in September 2003. In November 2004, Allmon helped secure a formal agreement

of affiliation between PRI and Cornell, ending more than 70 years of official separation.

Warren is the author of more than 200 technical and popular publications. He is a Fellow of the Geological Society of America and the recipient of the 2004 Award for Outstanding Contribution to Public Understanding of Geoscience from the American Geological Institute. 🐦

FIELD TRIP REPORT: CAYUGA LAKE, JANUARY 7

BY BOB MCGUIRE

They must have known that the weather would be perfect because thirteen folks joined me for an all-day, around-the-lake trip to find out what birds the new year had to offer. The waterfowl hunting season was still on, so we did not find great numbers of anything, but we did find a great variety of species, 55 for the day.

We started out just after sunrise at Stewart Park, and with eight scopes among us, we quickly picked out Common and Red-throated loons, Double-crested Cormorant, Ruddy Duck, Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, Snow Goose, and Common Goldeneye.

Myers (the spit and marina) was also relatively empty, with only coots, a Horned Grebe, and large numbers of Mallards well offshore. One car detoured down Portland Point Road looking for the recently

seen shrike and found a Northern Mockingbird instead.

Along Route 90 in the vicinity of Rafferty Road, we passed two American Kestrels on wires and pulled over briefly to watch a pair of Ring-necked Pheasants disappear in the corn stubble. Aurora Bay (viewed from the boathouse) was sheltered from the south breeze, and the temperature hit 50 degrees. We all had good, close looks at any of seven Horned Grebes. There were several distant Common Loons, Buffleheads, Common Goldeneye, and American Black Ducks, as well as numerous Mallards. The Eared Grebe that Steve Fast reported that morning remained submerged the entire time we were there, and regrettably, we missed it.

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Paul Anderson

Field trip participants scanning Mill Spring Pond in Union Springs.

FIELD TRIP REPORT: CAYUGA LAKE

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The Mill Pond in Union Springs held small numbers of a variety of ducks, including American Wigeon, Gadwall, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, and Bufflehead. We never did find the large flock of *Aythya*s that had been loafing at the south end of the lake in recent days, and we found no Canvasbacks.

We stopped at the north end of the village of Cayuga to scan for swans and found that they had moved out into the lake. We were rewarded, however, by a flyover Merlin that perched briefly on one of the power poles before continuing west. Mud Lock gave us a Belted Kingfisher and a Bald Eagle.

From the Potato Building on the Mucklands, we found a pair of Northern Pintails among the hundreds of Canada Geese. We scanned for cranes and listened for Horned Larks but had no luck with either. We then drove down Van Dyne Spoor Road in hopes of a shrike but found a mockingbird instead, and we had great looks at a hovering Rough-legged Hawk.

From there we headed south, with stops along Upper Lake Road to scan the ice edge. There were hundreds of swans, most of them asleep, but we did get a few good looks at some faces, enough to decide that they were Tundra Swans. We stopped at Dean's Cove but were unable to find the resident Lesser

Black-backed Gull. Several large flocks of migrating Snow Geese passed in the distance, and a couple of people were able to pick out a Ross's Goose (by finding a really small bird with a shorter neck).

Our last stop was the Shel-drake area where we picked up a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers along Wyers Point Road and a Common Loon off the park. Surprisingly, the water south of the point was empty of geese, with only an occasional group of Mallards and American Black Ducks.

We encountered no snow anywhere, and with temps in the low 50s, it felt more like an early spring jaunt. Thanks to all who came along and helped each other with bird identification questions and birding app recommendations. 🐦



Paul Anderson

Trip participants scanning the mucklands from the "Potato Building."

FIELD TRIP REPORT: LOCAL HOTSPOTS, JANUARY 22

BY BILL BAKER

I was joined by 12 very hardy souls for this half-day trip on Sunday. It was 3 degrees when we met in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology parking lot. After a brief discussion, we decided to go up the west side of the lake to look for the Snowy Owl reported the day before. Although we didn't find the Snowy Owl, we did find a number of nice birds, with several people seeing life birds.

East Shore and Stewart Parks were very quiet, with the three expected gull species and Canada Geese but very little else. We did find several Common Mergansers at Stewart Park. The mist off the lake definitely interfered with viewing.

Next we drove to Ovid with hopes of a Snowy Owl but were disappointed, as were several other groups looking for the bird. We got good views of Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs on Wycoff Road near Rock River Road. Thanks to tips from various people, we had good views of a Short-eared Owl perched low in a small spruce in the first yard north of Wycoff Road on Rock River Road. The Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs, and Short-eared Owl were life birds for various people in the group.

We headed north on back roads and then to the lake on Route 128. We found a few ducks on the lake, including several American Black

Ducks. We initially overshot the ice edge, ending up north of it, but the benefits were a large number of Tundra Swans (roughly 200 or more) seen on the ice and an adult Bald Eagle being chased by crows at a turnaround place near Cayuga Lake State Park.

Our last stop was Red Jacket Yacht Club. Here we added two Snow Geese, a large number of Mallards, a male Greater Scaup, a couple of Gadwall, Hooded Merganser, Common Goldeneye, four more Bald Eagles, Common Loon, and a heard-but-not-seen Belted Kingfisher.

All in all we had a good, though very cold, morning of birding. 🐦

ITHACA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2012 REPORT: TOTAL COUNT LIST

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Herring Gull	298	Hermit Thrush	5 (high count)
Iceland Gull	1	American Robin	227
Great Black-Backed Gull	114	Northern Mockingbird	26
Rock Pigeon	1341	European Starling	5878
Mourning Dove	309	Cedar Waxwing	254
Eastern Screech-Owl	27	Orange-crowned Warbler	1 (new to count)
Great Horned Owl	21	American Tree Sparrow	164 (low)
Barred Owl	3	Song Sparrow	37
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1	Swamp Sparrow	2
Belted Kingfisher	10 (tie high count)	White-throated Sparrow	105
Red-bellied Woodpecker	136	Dark-eyed (S-Col.) Junco	830
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2	Northern Cardinal	275
Downy Woodpecker	275	Red-winged Blackbird	2
Hairy Woodpecker	118	Common Grackle	2
Northern (Y-Shaf.) Flicker	27	Brown-headed Cowbird	7
Pileated Woodpecker	26	Purple Finch	39
Northern Shrike	3	House Finch	401
Blue Jay	455	American Goldfinch	685
American Crow	2828	House Sparrow	1050
Fish Crow	9	TOTAL COUNT	27413
Common Raven	30	TOTAL SPECIES	91
Horned Lark	count week	MILES ON FOOT	193.3
Black-Capped Chickadee	2708	HOURS ON FOOT	176.15
Tufted Titmouse	336	MILES BY CAR	485.5
Red-breasted Nuthatch	36	HOURS BY CAR	86.07
White-breasted Nuthatch	286	OWLING MILES	66.1
Brown Creeper	30	OWLING HOURS	25.25
Carolina Wren	46	PARTICIPANTS	126
Winter Wren	3 (tie high count)	(without feeder watchers)	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	38	MAXIMUM PARTIES	78
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	2	MINIMUM PARTIES	76
Eastern Bluebird	90		

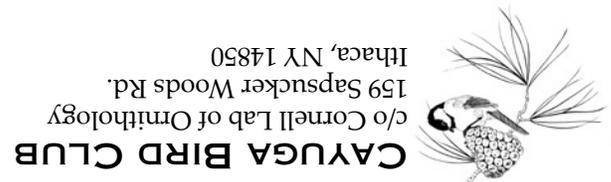
Western Grebe Spotted on Cayuga Lake

Scoping the lake from Myers Park in Lansing, Chris Wood found a Western Grebe on January 10. Several birders were able to see the bird that day, but as of late January, it had not been relocated. See Chris's notes about the discovery and identification as well as more photos on his eBird report: ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S9554251.

The sighting appears to be the first for Tompkins County and perhaps for Cayuga Lake. Dorothy McIlroy's Cayuga Lake Basin records list a report from 1969 in the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, documented in the July 1969 issue of *The Kingbird*. Dorothy's record card for the species also mentions two reports from Cayuga Lake in later years that were rejected by the New York State Avian Records Committee. That committee started reviewing reports in 1974, and although their website lists more than a dozen accepted reports for the state, including a few from upstate, there are no accepted reports listed for Cayuga Lake. Consequently, this sighting, although perhaps not a Cayuga Lake Basin record, appears to be the first documented report from the lake itself and from Tompkins County. 🐾



Chris Wood



**NEXT MEETING
FEBRUARY 13**

WARREN D. ALLMON,
FEATURED SPEAKER

“BIRD EVOLUTION: A VIEW FROM THE
FOSSIL RECORD”

SEE INSIDE FOR DETAILS

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