# OUTH HORE KIMMER

VOLUME 27. NUMBER 5 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 1997

#### TREASURER'S MESSAGE

Nancy Frame

Some of you may have noticed there is no President's Message in this month's *Skimmer*. That's because your hardworking president has been incapacitated with a leg injury and is currently confined to bed rest — I know we all wish her a speedy recovery. So, in lieu of a President's Message, this month we've got a Treasurer's Message:

Well, here it is 1997. A New Year and a new opportunity to make some environmental resolutions from which we can all benefit. South Shore Audubon has high hopes for 1997 and we need your help!

Anyone who has some free time and would like to volunteer will not only have our gratitude, but will also have the satisfaction that comes from contributing to your world in a positive manner.

There's lots of things to do. We need folks to volunteer for special events and festivals (Wildlife Festival March 15th & 16th, Earth Day, etc.), for a full day, a half day, two hours, or whatever you can spare. I've done this several times now and it's lots of fun. You don't need any special skills or knowledge and you get to meet lots of people in a good mood! Another project we're working on is the "Sump Thing" endeavor. With the cooperation of Nassau County and Rob Alvey of the Garden City Bird Sanctuary. we hope to be able to convert some of the over 500 sumps in Nassau County into bird sanctuaries as successfully as Rob did with the Garden City Bird Sanctuary. This is a big & task and is going to take time, but we hope with the support 4 of the community and folks like you and me, we can convert some of our precious open space into wildlife- \* friendly places. We will lend our full support in every way possible to anyone who wishes to start this project in their 🏖

Anyone who wishes to help in sustaining our bird populations can do so right from his/her own backyard by becoming a participant in Cornell's Project FeederWatch. Not only are you fulfilling the life-sustaining task of feeding the birds, but you are also helping the scientific commu-

#### **NEXT MEETING**

Sandy Brenner & Steve Goldberg

DATE: Tuesday, February 11, 1997

TIME: 8:00 P.M. (2) [Letter of the Month at 7:30]

PLACE: Freeport Memorial Library

Merrick Rd. & S. Ocean Ave.

SPEAKER: Louise Weisz
TOPIC: Endangered Species

This program will present theories of evolution and extinction, and information about current ecological trends as well as the direct and indirect causes of species endangerment. Possible ways to help solve the endangered species problem and reasons why it is important to conserve species diversity will be discussed. The program includes live reptiles and birds of prey that are residents of the Volunteers for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center in Caumsett State Park. Louise Weisz is a Volunteers for Wildlife Education Volunteer and the President of this Huntington-based group's Board of Directors. Join us for an educational and entertaining program, preceded by our usual chapter announcements and chaotic coffee break.

IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE WASTE, PLEASE
BRING COFFEE MUGS TO OUR MEETINGS

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nity to monitor species and population changes.

Then, of course, there's fund-raising! Anyone with any ideas, expertise, or just some time to spare: We can use your help! There's probably a dozen other things I've forgotten to mention, but I hope you get the idea, we need you! All you have to do is look on the back of your *Skimmer* and give any one of us a call. So get started and you too can make a difference this year.

Thanks for reading the *Skimmer*, and may we all have a happy and healthy new year.

[Editor's note: Thanks to Nancy for doing a fine job of
 filling in for Carole, even including some of Carole's

favorite words and phrases. I'd like to add that all of the people listed on the back page are volunteers. As editor, I'd be happy to hear from anyone who could contribute articles or drawings to this newsletter, do an occasional Monday morning or Friday afternoon trip to our printer in Island Park, or carry trays of *Skimmers* to Freeport on a Monday (Tuesday, if Monday's a post office holiday)].

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#### **BALD EAGLE TRIP**

The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County Marine Program, based in Southold, is sponsoring a Bald Eagle Exploration trip on March 1st, from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M. Their newsletter was sent to SSAS and contains the following announcement:

Accomplished naturalist, author, and educator John Turner [also co-founder of the Long Island Pine Barrens



Society, SSAS member, and speaker at our March 1996 meeting] will return to lead this trip, the third in a series of seasonal birding cruises. Departing out of Greenport [from Kokomo's Dock] on the Sunbeam Express, the cruise will cross Long Island Sound and travel up the Connecticut River to look for the majestic Bald Eagle, as well as other raptors and interesting

wildlife along the way.

To register, call 852-8660 (advance registration is required; last year seven SSAS people went on a bitterly cold and windy day, and saw 27 Bald Eagles). Cost is \$30 for adults and \$15 for children ages 12 and under.

#### HOUSE FINCH DISEASE SPREADS TO OTHER SPECIES

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*** 

[The following was sent to your editor by SSAS member Jeannette Miller, who spotted it in the Hampton Roads Bird Club's newsletter, *Bird Notes*. House Finch Disease was discovered a year or two ago; it came from Maryland poultry and causes blindness. It was originally thought that other species were immune; the eastern House Finches, whose numbers are decreasing, are genetically similar — they're all descended from cage birds that were released in the 1940s by New York pet shops that had been selling them as "Hollywood Finches."]

According to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Autumn 1996 newsletter, there have been reports of Mycoplasma gallisepticum ("House Finch Disease") in American Goldfinches in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Maryland, and Michigan, and one report in Michigan in a Downy Woodpecker. This disease is directly related to unclean bird feeders and birdbaths. Since many birds eat and poop in the same spot, it is imperative that we who choose to feed birds accept the responsibility of soap and water scrubbings of feeders and baths at least once a month.



All walks start at 9:30 A.M. except for Pelham Bay; no walk if it rains or snows or temperature is below 25°F. Any questions? Call Elliott at 486-7667.

Jan. 26	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Feb. 2	Pelham Bay for Owls (pull over to street
· 🛎	on extreme right after going through
<b>7</b>	Throgs Neck Bridge toll; meet at 9 A.M.)
Feb. 9	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Feb. 16	Zach's Bay Parking Field #4, N.E. corner
Feb. 23	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Mar. 2	Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
Mar. 9	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Mar. 16	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Mar. 23	Zach's Bay Parking Field #4, N.E. corner
Mar. 30	Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
Apr. 6	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Apr. 13	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Apr. 20	Hempstead Lake State Park (Exit 18, first
	parking lot south of Southern State
	Parkway)
Apr. 27	Zach's Bay Parking Field #4, N.E. corner
May 4	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
May 11	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
May 18	Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner



all-inclusive.

Explore the coast with the

### AMERICAN LITTORAL SOCIETY

NEW YORK AQUARIUM (Saturday, March 22) Meet at 10 A.M. at Aquarium entrance for 2-1/2 hour "behind-the-scenes" tour. Cost: \$12 (kids \$8).

SOUTH FLORIDA AND THE DRY TORTUGAS (April 26 – May 4) A tour of the Everglades including visits to Shark Valley, Flamingo, Loxahatchee Refuge, and Marathon Key, plus a three-day boat trip to the Tortugas Islands during peak migrant bird fallout. Activities include birding, snorkeling, butterfly watching, and having fun. Cost: \$1450,

ICELAND (June 21 – July 3) Tour the open wilderness by van; explore bird cliffs, geysers, glaciers, and volcanic areas; and stay at farmhouse inns. Great birding and photography opportunities. Leaders: Rob Villani and Don Riepe. Cost: \$2795, all-inclusive.

For information and free brochure contact: Don Riepe 28 West 9th Road Broad Channel, NY 11693 (718) 634-6467

#### **CONSERVATION REPORT**

Betty Borowsky

In an effort to educate politicians and the public about the close relationship between population growth, environmental degradation, and disease, National Audubon is expanding its Population and Habitat Campaign. National has assigned a staff person to deal with the issue at the federal level [Lindsay Aun, (303) 499-5155], and the New York State Field Office has hired someone expressly for this purpose [Alison Heaphy, (518) 869-9731].

We believe this is an extremely important issue, and this month we abstract some key facts from *Why Population Matters*, produced by the National Audubon Society:

- "Wild habitats that shelter endangered plants and animals are giving way to human activities and needs. Tens of thousands of species may be disappearing each year a rate thousands of times higher than is natural." Species that are not threatened today will inevitably become endangered tomorrow if this continues. Species extinctions not only signal the permanent loss of open spaces with the concomitant reduction in quality of life, but also remove the potential use of these species for the improvement of human health. Many life-saving drugs have been extracted from exotic species; undoubtedly many more remain to be discovered.
- "Humanity is rapidly changing the earth's atmosphere and thus its climate." There is strong evidence that excess consumption of fossil and other fuels (burning oil, forests, and other organic materials) has increased the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide functions like a blanket over the earth, keeping warm air from dissipating into space. Increasing the concentration of carbon dioxide increases the thickness of the blanket, and this increases the average temperature of the earth ("global warming"). Burning organic materials has also increased the concentrations of harmful gases (the various nitrogen and sulfur oxides, plus ozone and others) which destroy buildings and are harmful to the lungs. Increases in particulates (tiny balls of soot and dirt) may be responsible for the upsurge in asthma incidence and deaths. It is important to note that while much of the responsibility for this rests with the industrialized nations, many of the so-called third world nations are becoming industrialized as well. China in particular is becoming an important producer of the world's goods.
- "Population growth is a factor in the recent upsurge of infectious disease. By living and interacting in densely populated settlements, human beings make it easier for disease-causing microorganisms to move from one host to the next. Crowding, travel, and the increase of livestock—all associated with population growth—increase the opportunities for the spread of infection."

The fundamental principle that ties overpopulation to environmental destruction is pretty simple: the normal activities of a few people have little effect on the environment, but if you increase the number of people, and allow them to continue the same activities, these normal activi-

ties will start to impact the environment. For example, one campfire in the Adirondacks has virtually no impact on the environment. Not much wood is used up and so relatively little smoke, with its attendant load of gases,



is released into the atmosphere. A few campfires might even be somewhat helpful, since burning a couple of dead branches returns phosphorus, potassium, and micronutrients essential for plant growth more rapidly to the soil. But when many campfires are burning at once, too many dead branches (and often a few live ones) are removed, eliminating the branches' slow degradation into compost, and the air fills up with so much smoke that it can impact our health. Years ago we burned leaves in the fall in our village; this is not permitted today. In addition to the threat of a fire, there were days when there was so much smoke generated that air quality standards were breached. In general, the same principle applies to just about all human activities.

The relationship between uncontrolled population growth and its detrimental environmental effects was first pointed out clearly about 30 years ago by Dr. Paul Ehrlich, in his seminal book *The Population Bomb*. His message has gone largely unheeded, however, and since the date of publication the population of the world has grown by over a billion people. It is up to us to work out effective and humane strategies for controlling population growth.

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The Town of Oyster Bay announced a pilot textile recycling program last November. To participate, place used textiles in any paper or plastic bag (include overcoats, jackets, raincoats, belts, handbags, ski clothing, shirts, pants, skirts, dresses, suits, curtains, sheets, bed-



spreads, towels, pillowcases, paired shoes, and draperies; do not include rugs, carpets, pillows, industrial uniforms, disposable clothing, diapers, hospital or medical garments,

painter's drop cloths, rags, shop towels, wiping rags, or anything that is wet or has grease, mold, chemicals, or food waste on it).

Bring the bag to the Town's Old Bethpage Solid Waste Disposal Complex, located on Bethpage-Sweet Hollow Road off Round Swamp Road, south of the Old Bethpage Village Restoration, any weekday between 7 A.M. and 3 P.M. or on Homeowners' Cleanup Days. Please note that many charities also accept and recycle these items. For more information, call the Town of Oyster Bay's Department of Public Works' Division of Environmental Control at 677-5853.

#### **★**★ WELCOME NEW MEMBERS ★★

Marion Yavarkovsky

We are happy to welcome so many new members to our chapter. It is our hope that you will become active in our organization. There are weekly bird walks, monthly meetings, and many other activities. Please join us!

[For information on joining SSAS, please call our Membership Chairperson, Marion Yavarkovsky, at 379-2090. The best time to call is after 4 P.M., Monday through Friday.]

Baldwin	Catherine DeVivo, Ms. Cyndee
	Garabedian, Lenore Sanborn
Bayside	Derek Miles
Bellmore	Charles Chapman, Brenda
	Kramer, Joy McEwen,
	Charles W. Raftery
Bethpage	Jack E. Berkley, Harold Dieterle,
	Victoria I. Pfeiffer
Cedarhurst	
East Meadow	Ms. Veronica Molinelli
Elmont	Theodore J. van de Ven
Farmingdale	Lori L. Reese
	John R. Croake, Barbara Ruddy
Franklin Square	Heather Larson, John F. Lonardo
Freeport	George D. Peters
Garden City	Mr. Henry Drewitz, Dick
	Hampton, Maureen G. Hoch
Glen Cove	Harold & Harriet Katz
Hempstead	
Hicksville	Joyce France, Virginia Gebert,
	Ms. Patricia Hugger
Levittown	Diane Faiella, Valerie Koehler,
	Mr. John M. Micucci
Long Beach	Mary E. Atkins, William G.
	Eichholz, Paula E. Kennedy,
	Shirley Tydings
Lynbrook	Mary A. Waddell
Malverne	Joan G. Franks
Massapequa	Alexander Duncan, Brooks
	Finley, Lawrence Nagel,
	Lynn M. Piliero,
	M. E. Schuldes, K. & L.
<b>*</b>	Warren, Maureen Weaver
Merrick	Mrs. Edith Dolgow, Elaine &
	Richard Iandoli, Richard Seader
New York	
	Rita Correale, Simon Kotler,
	Marlene Karen Verber,
	Leon C. Weber
Plainview	Sheldon B. Estrin, David
	Offenberg, Dr. Barrett Sklar
Point Lookout	
Rockville Centre	M. A. Cannone, Dorothy Feit,
	Michelle Heller, Mr. Leicher

Seaford	Adrienne Fluckiger, Marion Gray, Maria Mc Inerney
Smithtown	•
Uniondale	Ryan McCarthy
Valley Stream	Regina DeMarino; Mr. Paul N.
	Massa; Mr. Daniel C.
0.0	Mayberger; Scheine, Fusco,
	Brandenstein & Rada; Sue
N 9	Sheftick, Louis G. Tomasulo
Wantagh	Ms. Mary E. Jawitz, Carol Ulloa
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	EMBERSHIP STATUS (800) 274-4201
	****************************
	N ACTIONLINE (800) 659-2622
	D UPDATES FROM WASHINGTON, DC
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	DISONING HOTLINE (800) 356-0560
<b>**********</b>	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •
	BRONX ZOO TRIP
On Saturday,	April 5th, SSAS will once again be
	Zoo/Wildlife Conservation Park, thanks
to arrangements n	nade by Diane Singer and Evelyn Blume.
Because the zoo is	nearby and the bumpy ride in the back
of one bus was so	memorable, we are once again using a
Children of the Control of the Contr	school bus for transportation, which
	reduces the cost to \$12 per person—less than the cost of tolls and parking if
	less than the cost of tolls and parking if
	mission will be an additional \$6.75 <del>(</del> \$3
for seniors).	
	eave from the Merrick Road Park Golf
	t in Merrick at 9 а.м. and return there at
	e expect to be led on morning and after-
	cents (our last trip, in April 1995, filled
•	is included a behind-the-scenes tour of
	s and guided tours of Jungle World and
•	ng lunch with you or buy fast-food zoo
cuisine.	
	made out to South Shore Audubon Society
	by March 5th (in the unlikely event that
	ough people signed up by then, the trip
	since SSAS doesn't subsidize bus trips).
	cks to Diane Singer, 118 Kent Road,
	11580 and include the following form:
×	
ADDRESS:	·
PHONE NUMBER	p.
	R:
NUMBER OF PE	OPLE:

AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **AUDUBON CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS**

SSAS will as usual be awarding two full scholarships, one to an adult and one to a child age 10-14, to attend an Audubon camp this summer. Applicants or their parents should be members in good standing and be interested in sharing their camp experiences with fellow members, the community, and/or schools; we typically get only a few applicants, so apply! Financial need is not a basis for receiving a scholarship; the winners must provide their own transportation. In addition to our scholarships, there are scholarships available from National Audubon Society (the Carl W. Buchheister Scholarship, for a teacher or activist; and another one for a professional classroom teacher); the deadline to apply for the NAS ones, which are for the Maine camp, is March 3rd. Please contact SSAS's Education Chairperson, Suzanne Lancer, at 536-6574 between 7 and 9 P.M. for details about all the scholarships; the deadline to apply for the chapter's ones is March 1st.

This year, the SSAS adult scholarship is for the Audubon Ecology Workshop in Connecticut. Here's the description, taken from last year's NAS brochure (by the time you read this, Suzanne should have copies of the 1997 edition): A Pileated Woodpecker (pictured) may be your alarm clock

as its drumming breaks the silence of the New England forest. This is one of nearly 100 avian species you could see during your stay here — though you'll do much more than identify birds. Our purpose is to learn how birds and all other species are tied together in an intricate web of life. You'll take leisurely hikes in utiful 510-acre nature sanctuary in Greenwich, magnificent deciduous and hemlock forests, across adows, alongside (and sometimes in) life-filled

our beautiful 510-acre nature sanctuary in Greenwich, through magnificent deciduous and hemlock forests, across lush meadows, alongside (and sometimes in) life-filled lakes, ponds, and streams. And you'll explore beach, intertidal, and marine ecosystems on Long Island Sound. Lecture and lab work supplement field studies, while optional classes might include nature photography and microcomputer use. There's also ample time for stargazing, book browsing, meadow lounging, and camp camaraderie. Many educators come to improve their professional skills in sessions that emphasize practical teaching techniques for school classes, youth groups, and local Audubon chapter education programs. These workshops offer total immersion in the major natural habitats and ecosystems of New England. Rustic facilities include a library, auditorium, and double-occupancy rooms furnished with private baths. Dates are June 29 to July 5; July 6-12, 13-19, and 20-26; July 27 to August 2; and August 3-9 and 10-

The Maine camp occupies the 333-acre Todd Wildlife Sanctuary on Hog Island in Muscongus Bay. The primary aim of Audubon's Youth Ecology Camp is to instill a love and respect for the natural world. Participants learn by doing — if we talk about something, we'll also see it, feel

it, touch it, experience it. Fifty young campers, led by ten instructors, hike through cathedral-like spruce—fir forests, search for organisms in tide pools, and learn about seabirds, seals, and other wildlife. The evenings are filled with night hikes, stargazing, special guests, and songfests. The Youth Ecology Camp will be offered from July 30 to August 9 and August 12–22.

# CHAPTER FINANCIAL REPORT

Each year, SSAS returns the Chapter Financial Report form sent to us by National Audubon Society. Our rookie volunteer accountant, Ben Borowsky, calculated the following numbers. His predecessor put items under different categories, so anyone trying to compare this to previous reports is in for a challenge.

Assets
Cash (Checking, Savings, etc.) \$9,274
Investments (Stocks, CDs, etc.)72,335
Total Assets as of 6/30/9681,609
Revenues
NAS Chapter Dues Share10,502
Grants/Contributions 1,005
Educational Events
Fund-raising Events
Interest and Investments
✓ Sales
Total Income45,133
Expenditures
Administration3,653
Newsletter/Postage/Mailing
Education Programs and Events891
Fund-raising
Contributions to National Audubon
Contributions to National Audubon
Contributions to National Audubon       1,530         Scholarships       1,950         Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary       3,845
Contributions to National Audubon
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SSAS Mission Statement — The mission of South Shore Audubon Society is to promote environmental education, and preserve and restore our environment, through responsible activism, for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

SSAS Post Office Statement — South Shore Skimmer is published monthly from September through December and February through June by South Shore Audubon Society, P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031.

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#### **DECLINING BIRD SPECIES**

[The following was an October 22nd press release from National Audubon Society.]

Ninety bird species, fully 14 percent of all American breeding bird species, are in decline or danger, it was announced by John Flicker, President of the National Audubon Society. This alarming deterioration in the numbers of American breeding avifauna has been documented by the first-ever WatchList, an annual count of birds undergoing unnatural population declines or rare birds suffering loss of habitat.

"With 90 species listed, including many birds familiar to most Americans, the WatchList is nothing less than a warning cry," said Flicker. "We fervently hope that the list will serve as a rallying point for millions who want to take action before these once common birds disappear."

Compiled by Partners In Flight and Audubon through the work of scientists and the observations of volunteer citizens, the WatchList documents noncyclical drops in bird populations and pinpoints rarer species whose habitats are threatened or disappearing. While not yet on the Endangered Species list,

WatchListed birds could soon join those less fortunate species. It is significant that even the Gray Catbird, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and Bobolink (pictured), birds that up until now have been thought of as common and abundant, are among the species listed.

"Millions of Americans enjoy birds, but take their presence for granted," said Frank Gill, Senior Vice President for Science of the National Audubon Society. "Birds are an indicator group and many on the WatchList show abnormal declines. We hope this accounting serves as a wake-up call to all people who are concerned about the health of the environment, not only for birds, but for themselves and their children. We further hope that American families will get a chance to see these increasingly rare birds both now and in the future."

The WatchList will be [was] published in the fall edition of *Field Notes*, Audubon's quarterly ornithology journal, and an article on the list will appear in the November/ December edition of *Audubon*, the Society's flagship publication [it's on page 89].

Audubon is offering an information kit which includes the WatchList, background on Project FeederWatch, and other material geared to help conserve birds across the nation. To receive a complimentary copy, call toll free: 1-888-AUDUBON.

Partners In Flight is a cooperative effort dedicated to the long-term well being of the birds of this continent and hemisphere, and the WatchList is an important tool developed to help achieve that goal. Partners In Flight participants include state and federal agencies, nongovernmental conservation organizations, scientists, and private industry.

#### THEODORE ROOSEVELT SANCTUARY

134 Cove Road Oyster Bay, NY 11771 (516) 922-3200

Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bird Sanctuary is owned by the National Audubon Society and operated by the Community and three local Audubon chapters, including South Shore Audubon Society. The following programs are open to the public. Space is limited and registration is required. All program fees are required at the time of registration.

Saturday, February 1st (1 to 2:30 P.M., ages 4 to 8) — Animal Tracking. Participants will make their own tracks and learn how to identify them out in the wild. Tracks in nature can tell you a story about what an animal was doing the night before. TRS members \$3, nonmembers \$5.

Sunday, February 9th (10 A.M. to 12 P.M., adults) — Bird Feeding Workshop. Learn the best foods to feed for different bird species. How can you make your home and yard attract wildlife? We will teach you to identify backyard birds and recommend equipment. TRS members \$6, nonmembers \$8.

Thursday, February 13th (7 to 9 P.M., adults) — Owl Prowl. You can meet live owls in the hand inside the center to start the evening. After an informative discussion about their natural history, we will take you on a nighttime hike to find wild owls. TRS members \$6, nonmembers \$8.

Sunday, February 16th (12 to 2 P.M., adults) — Owl Walk at Jones Beach. A Sanctuary naturalist will lead a field trip to find wintering owls, such as Snowy, Long-eared, Shorteared, and Saw-whet. TRS members \$6, nonmembers \$8.

Saturday, February 22nd (1 to 3 P.M.) — Maple Sugaring. Learn how to tap a Sugar Maple for syrup. We will tap our trees and give you a taste of the syrup. Discover trees, how they survive the winter, and how to identify them. TRS members \$5, nonmembers \$7.

Nature Day Camp. This is a fun, exciting, and interesting way for your child to spend the school break. Children can come for one to four days (February 17–20, 9 A.M. to 1 P.M.). Each day a different natural topic will be explored. Participants can meet an opossum, watch a flying hawk, make a bird feeder, walk through the forest, and learn to respect the natural environment while making new friends. \$100/week for TRS members, \$115/week for nonmembers, \$35/day.

Wildlife Festival at Planting Fields Arboretum. March 15th & 16th, details in the next Skimmer.

SSAS Visits TRS for Songbird Banding. April 12th, 9:30 to 11:30 A.M.; details in a *Skimmer* or two.

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RARE BIRD ALERT (212) 979-3070
<b>*******************************</b>
AUDUBON'S NY ACTIVIST HOTLINE (800) 414-ACTN
TAPE-RECORDED UPDATES FROM ALBANY

#### NORTHERN HAWK DWL

Mike Higgiston

A Northern Hawk Owl had been reported in central Vermont for a few weeks and I was anxious to try to see the bird. It's not often that one gets a chance to see this bird in such accommodating conditions. It was only about a five hour drive to the bird's location, the weather was reasonable with temperatures in the 40s, and there was no snow to be encountered. Since one usually finds the hawk owl at the Canadian border in the winter, certainly not the most optimum of situations, I felt fortunate that our present conditions were so favorable.

The Northern Hawk Owl inhabits the open coniferous forests of the far northern regions of Eurasia and North America. It can usually be seen perched on a post or top of a tree that commands an excellent view of the surrounding area. The hawk owl is diurnal in habits, mostly hunting by day. It is the most hawkish of the boreal owls, hunting

not only like an owl by perching on a post or tree and surveying the surrounding area, but also responding to prey like a hawk by flying swiftly through the forest, soaring like a falcon, or hovering like a kestrel. Though generally considered resident, its movements sometimes depend on the fluctuations of the voles and lemmings, its main prey. Populations seem to retreat

south regularly and birds are reported annually in the areas south of the boreal forest belt. They prefer to take up residence in groves of tall trees in cultivated areas and farms, and like to take mice from the hay put out for cattle. Peterson's field guide reports that a few of the hawk owls winter in the Canadian border states during flight years, while accidental sightings of the bird have been made in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Nebraska.

Three Northern Hawk Owls had been reported in central Vermont during the month of December. The locations of these three owls were very close together and I thought the situation afforded me the best opportunity to see these very elusive birds. I broached the idea to Bill Hollweg (Turtle Bill, but known in my house as Bill the Birder) and he seemed interested. Of course, our families both asked those most damning of questions and the first is always phrased in the form of an accusation: "You're driving five hours to see a bird and then driving five hours back home?" Then there's a pause and they decide to be comedians: "How do ya know it's gonna be there? Did you make a reservation? HaHaHa!" The final question has something to do with our sanity and is best left unsaid. So, with our families' loving encouragement ringing in our ears, we set out on the Saturday morning between Christmas and New Year's.

We left at 6 A.M. with bagels and coffee, and drove the NYS Thruway to Glens Falls. We then turned eastward toward Vermont, skirting the south end of Lake Champlain. Upon reaching Vermont, we found ourselves driving through farmland, rolling hills, and small towns. Excitement began to build when we reached the sign announcing the town of Bridport six miles ahead. The directions elicited from the Rare Bird Alert instructed us to drive north out of Bridport, turn right on Cross Road, and continue to the intersection of East Road, about a mile. There a horse farm was located and the bird had been frequenting the area in and around the horse farm. As we approached the sighting area, Bill joked that he hoped the bird was the kind we liked, one that was already staked out by other birders for us to view. We worked our way slowly along Cross Street toward East Street and I began scanning the high points of the landscape. I zoomed in on a round black ball on the top of a telephone pole and spotted the bird. I pointed it out and we both started laughing, remembering Bill's joke. We drove down the road a bit to get binoculars and gloves from the trunk, and returned to the bird and had long satisfying looks at the Northern Hawk Owl. The bird was very approachable and we stood on one side of the country road while he perched on a telephone wire on the other side. We even left the owl to follow a small flock of Tree Sparrows in the trees that lined both sides of the road. The flock also included a Downy Woodpecker, some Northern Cardinals, and some Blackcapped Chickadees. We returned to view the owl once more before turning homeward, another treasure hunt successfully completed.

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Our second and last birdseed sale is/was **Sunday**, **January 26th**, from 9:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. at Tackapausha Museum, on Washington Avenue in Seaford (between Merrick Road and Sunrise Highway). Although it's too late to preorder, bird feeders and extras of all 17 seed packages will be available. Proceeds benefit Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary. **HELP IS NEEDED** (see Treasurer's Message) to take orders and carry seed around the parking lot. To volunteer, just show up; you'll receive lots of thanks, a free fast-food lunch, and maybe a mention in the next *Skimmer*.

Seed - Feeders
Houses - Baths
Books - Gifts

FEEDESEED

WILD BIRD CENTER

"NEW YORK'S LARGEST WILD BIRD SPECIALTY STORE"

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A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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