



**Welcome New Members!**

Thomas Graf  
Anne Marie Haines  
Shirley Shannon

**February Meeting**

On Monday, February 13, 2006 at 7:30 p.m. Audubon Wildlife Society will hold its monthly meeting at the Audubon Senior Center, Oak Street and Oakland Ave. Refreshment volunteers are: Dorothy Cunliffe and Merilee Heffron.

This month's program will feature a presentation about the Orangutans of Borneo by Carol Ritchie. Carol has been a long-time volunteer for the Orangutan Foundation International (OFI). She first visited Borneo in 1988 to participate in efforts of OFI to save Orangutans from extinction. Since then she has made 10 additional trips, usually spending two months at a time, acting as a surrogate mom for one of the many orphaned orangutans. Wanting to further support OFI's efforts, a few years ago Carol began giving slide presentations to raise public awareness about the dire situation facing the orangutans.

To find out more about OFI's efforts visit:  
<http://www.orangutan.org>



Mellie, 1993 – photo by Carol Ritchie

**January Field Trip: Hamilton-Trenton Marsh**

*Homo sapiens* was the most common species observed during our January 21 trip to the Marsh. Nine members of the Club joined a large group from the Washington Crossing Audubon Society and Friends of the Marsh. The weather was great with temperatures in the low 50's and plenty of sun among thin clouds. The problem was the woodland birds which sent only a few representatives. Carolina Wren was present but Winter Wren, usually reliable, was absent. One Ruby-Crowned Kinglet was spotted fluttering in the reeds and the usual legion of woodpeckers was reduced to one or two Downeis, Red-Bellies and Hairies. Mockingbird, Gray Catbird and Cardinal rounded out the common species, again, one sighting of each. Raptors were few, just a Red-Tailed Hawk perched at a distance and later possibly the same one being chased by a crow. Two larger birds, perhaps eagles, were spotted but vanished before they could be conclusively identified. The Great-Horned Owls, nesters for at least the last two years, remained elusive – they were missed during the 12/31 Christmas Count also.

We did a little better on the water spotting a couple of Ringed-Neck Ducks, many Pintails and Gadwalls, some Widgeons, a pair of Common Mergansers and one Green-Winged Teal among the usual Canada Geese, Mallards and Mute Swans. There was a constant stream of Ring-Billed Gulls overhead all morning and it was a great day to be out but we had hoped for a much fatter list.

-John Maret

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Please send news items to Janet Goehner-Jacobs at [awspublicity@aol.com](mailto:awspublicity@aol.com)

[www.audubonwildlifesociety.org](http://www.audubonwildlifesociety.org)

**February Field Trip – Barnegat Lighthouse**  
**Saturday February 18, 2006 9:00am.**

This field trip will be lead by John Courtney. We will meet at 9:00am. Bring lunch. We will probably bird at the jetty until lunch and then afterwards go to a few places in the area. There are restrooms at the state park. For more information call John Courtney at 429-4987.

**Directions:** Go route 70 East to the circle with route 72 Eastbound. Follow 72 East all the way to the end at Long Beach Island. (Don't follow signs for Barnegat as it leads to the town not the state park.) When you get to the end of 72 make a left (North). Follow that road all the way to the end. If you can't go any further you should be at the lighthouse!



*Red-tailed Hawk is our most common raptor in our area. It is easily recognized as an adult by its belly band and red tail. -Photo by Chip Krilowicz*

**Conservation News: Petty's Island Update**

The development company, Cherokee, continues to work on their Petty's Island development scheme. However, Pennsauken still has not filed its eminent domain procedure.

The resident eagles are alive and well and have been observed around the Island in the beginning stages of their pair bonding rituals. The nest tree on Petty's succumbed to root rot and fell down this fall and the nest in Cramer Hill partially collapsed during some fall storms. However, the birds have started working on their Cramer Hill nest and Citgo built a nest platform on the Island's southern end to give the birds an option to return to "island resort" living. State and Cherokee hired observers are keeping tabs on the bird's activities (not collaboratively). There has been a successful nesting of American Kestrels on the Island this past year. State ENSP officials were very pleased with that discovery as well.

-Don Kirchhoffer

**Get Ready for the Great Backyard Bird Count!**  
**February 17-20, 2006**

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) returns for its ninth season February 17-20, 2006. The National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology encourage everyone to COUNT BIRDS WITH A BUDDY!

Bird enthusiasts of all ages can share their love of birds with a friend, a child, a scout troop, a class, or a co-worker-opening new eyes to the joy of birding and the fun of creating a unique snapshot of winter bird abundance and distribution across the continent. Every pair of eyes is needed and every birdy counts, whether in a backyard, on a high-rise balcony, in a park, or on any of the 730 million acres of public lands.

For nearly a decade, the GBBC has kept tabs on the ever-changing patterns of birds in winter. How far north will American Robins be reported this year? Will Sandhill Cranes migrate early or late? Introduced Eurasian Collared-Doves have been turning up in new states--where will they be this year? Native Red-bellied Woodpeckers have been spreading to the northeast--will the trend continue? Scientists also want more information on declining species, such as Rusty Blackbirds and Painted Buntings. While these species are suffering due to the continued destruction of their preferred habitats, other factors, such as mercury accumulation in Rusty Blackbirds, and removal of Painted Buntings for the illegal cage bird industry, may make a bad situation worse.

Tally Sheets Available Now: You can download printable tally sheets to familiarize yourself with the birds in your area, then fill them out when the event begins. Send your data online starting February 18.

<http://gbbc.birdsource.org/gbbcApps/checklist>

Participants enter their numbers online at <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>

Year-round, anyone can view results from past counts and learn how to participate by visiting <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>. There is no fee or registration for the event, which is sponsored by Wild Birds Unlimited.



Carolina Wren, *Thryothorus ludovicianus*

### **The “House” Wren**

The beautiful Victorian house on the river had become run down. Starlings nested in the porch soffits and squirrels peered out from the cornice roof. Then renovation began and the interlopers were routed. The house was gutted and the addition of an enclosed porch opened up the back of the structure for several months. The old attic with its 13-foot ceilings and eight tall windows became a trap. A Chimney Swift was found lying stiff and spread-winged on the narrow attic stairs. Starlings couldn't resist the opening in the exterior wall. They flew up but couldn't figure out how to get back down. Nervous, they flew listlessly from corner to corner. When a person appeared, they panicked, circumnavigating the room and hitting the windows. Opening the bottom windows didn't help right away: the birds flew to the cross sash and perched for a second, peering through two panes of glass instead of one and oblivious to the fresh air wafting in just below them. They kept repeating this process from window to window until they were caught and thrown outside or hit the open air by dumb luck. A young Red-Bellied Woodpecker couldn't find his way through the open window either but became even more panicked than the Starlings, fluttering pathetically against a pane of glass until a shirt was thrown over him. Never was a bird so glad to be free – he flew until he was out of sight. Then, in November, a new breed of bird arrived. He wasn't visible at first but his feet made a faint ticking noise as he hopped along the upper beams of the old house. His light step was un-panicked, calm, methodical. Finally, he stuck his head out from behind a board, showing a long, slightly down-curved beak, a bright eye with a white stripe running over it. A minute later he fluttered to the floor in front of a window, dropping a wasp from his beak. The insect, stunned by the cold and the sudden attack, crawled lethargically for a second before it was grabbed and thrashed against the old floor boards. Dust motes

erupted in the streaming light. The Carolina Wren cocked his head to one side then grabbed his unfortunate quarry again and continued his beating. Slowly, the wasp came apart. When it was in three pieces, the bird ate, swallowing each part separately, including the abdomen with its stinger. Finished, he flew back into the rafters, confident, at home. The wren came and went for days. Open windows were uninteresting; he left when he felt like it. Unlike his larger cousins, he'd perch on the sill, the wide world just a few inches away, tail cocked, jaunty, unconcerned and enjoying the view. He'd found an excellent hunting ground, preying on the late season insects that managed to survive the cold in the attic's recesses. Instead of staying in more familiar surroundings he'd turned a potential trap into an opportunity. After all, he was of the family *Troglodytidae*, cave-dweller, inhabitant of dark, narrow places. The beautiful old Victorian was just another woodpile to him.

-John Maret February, 2006

### **Black Storm**

On January 22, I drove to the Assumpink Wildlife Management Area. I entered on the western edge of the reserve wearing a bright red jacket. It was late afternoon and there might be hunters around who thought it was Saturday. The path crosses the Assumpink Creek and comes out of the woods at the corner of a huge field. Crops attractive to game are sown in the WMA and last year this field had been planted in corn. The ground was now covered with short stubble. I stopped to whistle some White-Throated Sparrows and a Towhee out of the brush then turned east into the open. I walked a few yards before noticing the landscape had been dramatically altered. In the distance was a dark hill towering over the trees that line the far edge of the field. I stopped to look more closely and saw the hill was undulating. It was an enormous flock of blackbirds, moving westward. As I watched, the vanguard arrived at open ground. Many of the birds stopped in the trees but most spilled over and turned parallel to the woods. A large Red-tailed Hawk was now flying like an apparition above them, rising and diving repeatedly, trying to knock some of the throng to the ground. I walked rapidly, stopping to raise my binoculars. Birds had now reached the woods near me, the flood wall of a sinuous black river that stretched forever into the pale blue sky. Most were Common Grackles but the setting sun also illuminated red epaulets and the stubby shapes of Starlings. When I cleared the tall hedgerow that splits the field in two I could see that thousands of the birds

had landed in the field to glean corn and chase bugs from the debris. Four Red-tails sat watching from the trees, too stunned or too sated to act. The feeding birds were spooky, frequently rising from the ground in unison as if a volcano had belched black smoke. When they launched themselves, their wings made a sound like distant surf. I watched, spellbound, for fifteen minutes before walking into the woods behind me. Every tall tree along the creek had sprouted black fruit and the dead leaves beside the path were spattered with whitewash. The birds called incessantly. I kept clapping my hands to move them from over my head; at one point a Cooper's Hawk appeared and did the job for me. The world seemed completely taken over by blackbirds and I was the sole human observer. By the time I came out of the woods the sun was at the horizon and only a small group of birds remained among the corn stubble, still watched by two Red-tails. I thought about the phenomenon whereby birds of several species, witnessing a black storm racing over the terrain like a tornado on its side, were compelled by the turbulence of wings to join. Although I've written it here, what I witnessed was really beyond description, birds by the tens of thousands, the largest gathering of living, moving creatures I've ever seen.

-John Maret

### **Bird Population Evolving**

Some of the most familiar visitors to local bird feeders this time of year were not nearly so frequent or familiar a generation ago. Northern cardinals, tufted titmice, mockingbirds and red-bellied woodpeckers are among the birds that moved in from the South within the last 50 years.

Other species, such as the raven, turkey vulture and American robin, have only begun overwintering here, rather than migrating south, in the past couple of decades.

Their expanding ranges have everything to do with our changing landscape and climate. The red-bellied woodpecker, for instance, has expanded north as forests have returned to land that had been clear-cut so cows could graze. As the trees mature, the woodpecker can access more of the food on which it relies, including insects, seeds, fruit and sap.

The suburbanites who fill feeders also provide ample food for the likes of mockingbirds, titmice and cardinals. The flip side to the changing landscape can be seen in the decline of grassland birds such as bobolinks and northern harriers.

As homes and forests have replaced farms, the resulting loss of grassland has led to a decline in bird species that nest or hunt in open fields.

"A lot of the birds that need more open space or transition areas between fields and heavy forests have changed," said Shannon Smiley, research and curatorial assistant at Mohonk Preserve's Daniel Smiley Research Center.

The other factor is climate. As the Daniel Smiley Research Center and others have documented, the growing season in the Northeast expanded by several days in the last century as temperatures warmed on average about two degrees. That leaves more time for species used to warmer climes to breed.

Black vultures were first documented breeding in New York in 1997, when veteran rock-climbing biologist Joseph Bridges spotted a nest on the Shawangunk Ridge in Ulster County. Within five years, the vultures joined the likes of turkey vultures and crows as the region's year-round carrion eaters. Vultures nest deep in rock fissures and are most easily identified by their odor; the nests smell like chicken coops.

In New York, it takes about four months from the time eggs are laid to the time the chicks fledge -- about two weeks longer than it takes in the South. It probably takes longer because the vultures have to wait until about April until temperatures warm enough here, whereas they nest year-round in the South, Bridges said. Even with the greater length of time they need to breed in New York, the expanding growing season has given them enough time.

"It's just temperature-dependent," Bridges said. "They start nesting later and develop more slowly." As some birds are harmed and others benefit as the landscape changes, not all wildlife will benefit from a warming climate.

Some species may not adjust. One concern scientists have about global warming is that some wildlife may not adjust to the changing climate, as it changes their existing habitat.

Birds are far more mobile than, say, amphibians. Frogs and salamanders dependent on isolated woodland pools may die out if roads or other barriers prevent them from migrating. Species like this may need natural corridors to serve as conduits, if they

are to find suitable habitat as their existing habitat shrinks and changes.

Even some birds whose ranges are expanding aren't necessarily healthy. The Kentucky warbler has been slowly expanding its range northward toward New York as Eastern forests mature, but at the same time its overall population is in decline as Southern forests are cleared.

As for the species on the increase, they all may not be greeted with the same welcome the colorful backyard birds have enjoyed. Black vultures nest locally only in cliffs. That's not so in the South.

"They'll nest in barns, in bushes, in the spaces between buildings," Bridges said. "They haven't moved into the city yet, thank God. But that's probably an eventuality if their population continues to expand."

- By Dan Shapley Poughkeepsie Journal 1/22/06

#### **Updating Rancocas's Checklist**

The checklist – that ubiquitous item of a birder's inventory – needs to be updated now and then. Bird distribution is an ongoing, flexible event that needs to be documented. Nesting ranges expand and contract, wintering birds maybe do not come as far south, and migrants utilizing new stop over areas to rest and feed all have to be charted.

Most birders probably have little knowledge with what goes on to either create a checklist from scratch or to update an existing one. I was asked to help with the NJAS Rancocas Nature Center's bird checklist. It was decided to also include the whole of Rancocas Woods while the list was being revised. I received a copy of the old checklist, dating from as early as 1977 for some species, as an Excel spreadsheet with an "X" in a monthly column for each of the 160 species on the list. But how to get started! I really had no clue. Maybe just keep birding the area for a few hours every week and see what my list was? How about pouring over the sighting sheets and seeing what birders were recording lately? Both of these options have merit and will probably be used to some extent during the year. But Tom Bailey, who has helped to create the both the Palmyra Nature Cove and a Burlington County checklist, suggested the best way is to probably just try and fill in the gaps so to speak. I was off!

My job now is to look for those species that are realistically expected for a certain month yet somehow are not noted. For example, Winter Wren is only on the checklist for Nov. and Dec. I walked the woods and brushy field behind the headquarters and had many. "X". I will keep trying to confirm this for every month possible for the coming year. As other examples, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Barred Owl are not down for Jan. I have been trying, but without success. Merlin, Green-winged Teal, and Pied-billed Grebe need some sightings for the winter here. For species like these, I have been spending time at the marsh overlooks along Rancocas Ave. and by walking the trails. Late afternoons and early mornings are best. I have enjoyed the sights and sounds of everything flying to and fro, but have failed to see these! I did have flyover Common Mergansers recently that I added to the Jan. column.

I hope I have conveyed some idea of what I will be doing in the coming year up there. It still needs to be decided what type of checklist will be produced out of all this. A bar graph is the best, but also the most difficult. We might put together a seasonal abundance chart or just leave it in the Excel monthly format. I will have more on that in later articles. Also needed to be decided is what to do with birds that obviously aren't in the area anymore like Ruffed Grouse and Pheasant.

For now,  
Sandra Keller

#### **Other Club Events:**

**Program:** Burlington County Natural Sciences Club, BCNSC presents, "Watching Whales" by the Marine Stranding Center. February 8, 2006. BCNSC meets the second Wednesday of the month, September through May at 7:45pm in Medford Twp. Safety Building, Court Room Union and Jones Sts. (off Rt. 70) Medford, NJ. For more information on BCNSC go visit:

<http://oldsquaw.tripod.com/index.html>

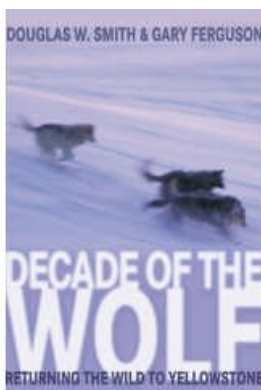
**Program:** Saddler's Woods Conservation Association presents "Using Native Plants Naturally: Planting Design Based on Plant Communities." Thursday March 23, 2006 7pm. Rohrer Camden County Branch Library 15 MacArthur Boulevard, Haddon Township, NJ. The presentation will include a slide show and talk focusing on native plantings and landscape restoration by John Nystedt, Director of Forest Management for Saddler's Woods Conservation Association. John is an associate at Andropogon Associates, Ltd. in Philadelphia, is a N.J. Certified Landscape Architect, and has 25 years of experience in landscape architecture and ecological planning. The presentation is free and open to the public. For more information contact Janet at (856) 869-7372 or [janet@saddlerswoods.org](mailto:janet@saddlerswoods.org) or visit <http://www.saddlerswoods.org>

**Good Books:**

**Decade of the Wolf:**

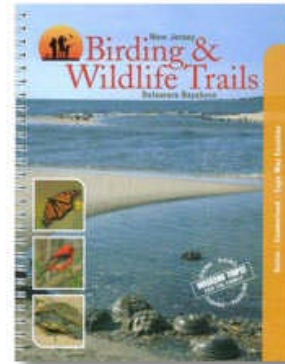
**Returning the Wild to Yellowstone**

by Douglas W. Smith and Gary Ferguson.  
Wolf biologist Smith and nature writer Ferguson deliver a compelling inside look at the Yellowstone Wolf Recovery Project. The book covers the 10 years that have passed since the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made the controversial decision to reintroduce wolves into the national park in 1995. Joan Ziegler and Pat Brundage have both read the book and give it the thumbs up! Of special interest to Joan was the accounts of how bringing back the predator, impacted the entire ecosystem. For example the Willow trees, which were on the decline due to an overabundance of elk, were once again flourishing thanks to the wolves.



**Delaware Bayshore Birding and Wildlife Trails Guide**

Have you ever wanted to spend some time outdoors enjoying nature, but didn't know where to go? If so, then the Delaware Bayshore Birding and Wildlife Trails is the perfect guide for you! The Delaware Bayshore Birding and Wildlife Trails (BWT) Guide is a collection of local driving loops that connect sites where people can go to view the area's wildlife and spend some time outdoors. The guides also list local businesses that encourage and recognize the importance of nature-based tourism. The guide highlights eateries, lodging, local arts and crafts, and alternative nature-related outdoor activities, with a goal of increasing nature-based tourism within the area. The BWT Guide is funded by the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT), and is a cooperative effort between New Jersey Audubon Society, NJDOT, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and New Jersey Office of Travel and Tourism. Copies of the guide are available at the Rancocas Nature Center. 794 Rancocas Road Mount Holly, NJ 08060 (609) 261-2495  
E-mail: [rancocas@njudubon.org](mailto:rancocas@njudubon.org)  
<http://www.njwildlifetrails.org>



**Nature Programs On TV:**

**Nature: Land of the Falling Lakes**

Airs on WHYY February 5th at 8:00pm. This episode of Nature brings you to the heart of Croatia where green forests lie between steep chalk cliffs and gorges, and a chain of lakes flows one into another across natural dams and a thousand waterfalls. Here, wolves, wild boar, and bears roam as they have done for centuries. To view a preview go to:

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/preview.html>

*NATURE* airs in most markets on Sunday nights at 8:00 p.m. Please check local listings.