



Volume 1

Issue 1

Fall, 2009



A project of
North Branch Nature Center

Vermont's Youth Birding Program

There is seldom a birdwatcher who regrets that they started birdwatching... only one who regrets that they didn't start earlier. In fact, trends indicate that this lifelong pastime being delayed until after the teen years. A 1994 study reported the average age of American Birding Association (ABA) members to be 53 years. A 1997 study puts the percentage of members under 31 at just 2.5%.

The reasons that youths are so under-represented in birdwatching are varied, but after months of planning and revamping, we are pleased to announce our newly improved **Feather Questers** youth birding program.

Our goal is to not only make birdwatching fun and accessible to youths, but to instill a life-long appreciation for nature and the outdoors. In order to achieve this goal, we have made several major changes that we hope will enhance the experience:

New Name

Our former title of *Youth Birding Program* didn't seem to roll off the tongue, and after a long search for a new name, **Feather Questers** stood out on top of the list. We will be having a logo contest to help establish our new look.

Membership

To further develop a feeling of community among our program participants, we have established a formal membership. For \$5 youths (\$10 supporting adults) will receive a membership card, member checklist, selected free programs, quarterly newsletter, and any other perks we can think of! Join between now and 12/31/09 to become a charter member.

Get a Lifer: Member Bird Checklist

In the spirit of friendly competition, we have started a checklist where prizes are awarded for milestones of birds seen (50, 100, etc.) as a Feather Questers member. See page 3 or visit our website for more info on becoming a member and receiving your bird checklist.

More Programs!

We have received interest in our program from a wide range of age groups and are seeking to expand our offerings to include at least two programs per month: both local and further afield, for younger and older ages, and for beginners and advanced birders.



Female Mallard with ducklings. Photo by Larry Clarfeld

To add to this excitement, in late June we received word that a grant was awarded by the Canaday Family Charitable Trust to help sustain our programming well into the future. All of these enhancements do little if we don't have participation, so we are

hoping to see you at an event in the near future. We have tons of great programs planned for this fall and always welcome your feedback and suggestions. See you this fall!

Submit Your Articles/Artwork for Our Newsletter

Do you have an interesting birding story? A favorite birding hotspot? Some ID tips? Questions? Artwork? We hope for this newsletter to become a publication *for* youth and *by* youth and would be happy to have your help. Contact Larry if you are interested. The submission deadline for the winter newsletter will be November 10.



Logo Contest

Vermont's Youth Birding Program is getting a new look. **We Need Your Help with Our Logo!**

We will have cool prizes for the contest winners and runners up, and the grand prize winner's logo will be featured on our website and in print as the official **Feather Questers** logo!

Deadline: December 31, 2009

For more information, visit our contest website at www.NorthBranchNatureCenter.org/contest.html

Tales From Texas

Excerpts from an journal by Alyssa Borowske

Installment 1: March 22, 2009

My name is Alyssa Borowske; I am a 23 year old North Branch Nature Center (Youth Birding) alumnae whose passion for birds led me from Central Vermont, to Iowa, Michigan, New Zealand and Texas, all en route to pursuing a career in avian ecology and conservation... For the next three months, I'll be sending updates from my current field season with Golden-cheeked Warblers (GCWA) in Kickapoo Cavern State Park, Texas...



Golden-cheeked Warbler photo by Dianne Dessecker .

...Cocky and confident as each individual GCWA appears, the species, as a whole, is endangered. Unlike for more adaptable—and therefore more abundant—species, only scrub country dominated by ashe-juniper trees which are at least five meters in height spells “breeding grounds” for the GCWAs; they typically nest in juniper trees and juniper bark is the nest construction material of choice...

...I am employed by Texas A & M University to assist a master's student with her field work. The thesis project is looking into the effect of habitat characteristics (namely tree species composition and density) on GCWA presence and productivity. This project involves mapping territories, searching for nests, banding individuals, and (hopefully) setting up nest cameras...

Installment 2: March 25

In the last few weeks, the Golden-cheeked Warblers (GCWAs) have returned to Texas after spending the winter in tropical Mexico and Central America... Our job has been to go out into the scrub, armed only with binoculars and a GPS unit, and search for birds.

Easy, right? The way it works is that, just before dawn each day, the whole crew drives out to a field site... For these initial surveys, we weave our way through the vegetation to the GPS points, stopping along the way to listen for and follow GCWAs! When we hear the tell-tale GCWA song, we deviate from the GPS points and follow the bird instead, marking waypoints as we go so

that we can create a map of each bird and his territory.

Following a GCWA is like playing endless game of Extreme Marco Polo... (and) yes during these daily solo journeys through the scrub, the

challenges are many and varied...

Installment 3: March 31

To a human, at least, each Golden-cheeked warbler (GCWA) looks and sounds downright identical... That's the situation, but there is an, albeit labor-intensive—solution to keep track of who the territory owners are: color banding!...

...Luckily, the practice is *almost* as simple as the theory...

Installment 5: April 17



Alyssa holding an Australian Magpie used for research.

Just a few weeks ago, our territory visits were relatively straightforward... For the last couple of weeks, however, this process of locating and stalking GCWAs has been growing progressively trickier. The difference? Two things: females and families. In turn, our field focus has shifted from mapping territories to evaluating productivity, or how far along in the nesting cycle a particular pair is.

You might think that having two birds to look for would make GCWA spotting easier, but that's not quite how it works....

Installment 9: June 15, 2009

After three and a half months, the Golden-cheeked warbler (GCWA) field season is actually coming to a close. Technically speaking, “State-wide” surveys for Black-capped vireos will continue through the end of June and vegetation surveys here at Kickapoo will continue through the end of July, but the GCWA field work is basically done and I, as a GCWA field tech (with another job lined up for the summer!) have just a few days left in Texas. Hard to believe! ...

To read the complete “Tales of Texas” journal, please visit our online discussion forum at:
www.NorthBranchNatureCenter.org/youthbird/discuss.html

Quiz: *Nothing Butt Birds*

Based on these bird butts, identify the species in each picture:

1



Taken in April at Marshfield, VT



Taken in February at NBNC, Montpelier, VT

2

3



Taken in May at Berlin, VT

Photos by Larry Clarfeld

Citizen Science Opportunity: Common Nighthawk Restoration

In addition to offering opportunities to see birds, we want to offer opportunities to help conserve our winged friends.

We hope to spearhead a new initiative to help restore nesting habitat for the Common Nighthawk.



The Common Nighthawk

Although once a regular sight throughout Vermont, the nighthawks have declined drastically in numbers. One potential cause of that decline is a conversion of flat, gravel roofs where the nighthawks nest to other roofing substrates such as rubber and PVC.

Our nighthawk program will replicate similar efforts in the northeast to install gravel sections on rooftops to attract nighthawks to nest, and help restore their populations. From choosing a site to contacting building owners to installing gravel "nest patches" to monitoring, we hope for the Feather Questers members to participate every step of the way.

We plan to hold an initial planning meeting this fall to discuss the project. Potential locations to install patches are scattered throughout the state and include Rutland, White River Junction, Montpelier, Williston and others.

If you think you may be interested in helping with this exciting conservation project, please contact us by phone or email using the contact info below.

Become a Member!

It's easy to become a member of Feather Questers and receive your member bird checklist. You can join one of three ways:

1. By Phone - just call us at (802) 229-6206 and we can get you registered and chat about birds.
2. By (e)Mail - log onto our website and you can find a registration form to be either emailed or snail-mailed back.
3. In Person - Stop into the Center any time we're open, take a look at the critter room, browse our birding library and register in person.

Thank you for supporting Feather Questers!

Upcoming Programs

All fall programs are free to members, but please register at least one week in advance.

NEK Beginners Birdwalk - Hardwick

Saturday, September 12, 9:00 am

Please join us for the final walk in a series for younger birders (ages 8 - 16). We'll learn how to use optics, how to identify some common birds, and maybe even see some rare birds! This program is sponsored by NEK Audubon, The Fairbanks Museum, The St. Johnsbury Recreation Program, and NBNC. For more information and to register please call Laura at 802-751-7671.

Shorebirding at Plum Island, MA

Sunday, September 13, all day

We will take a day-trip down to this birding hotspot in search of Dunlins and Dowitchers, Willets and Whimbrels, Gulls and Godwits and a host of rarities and vagrants that may show up. We will depart Montpelier at 6:00am, call to arrange carpooling or pick-up on route.

NBNC Bird Monitoring Walk

Saturdays, Sep 26, Oct 24, Nov 7, 7:00 am

Join us for a morning walk around the Nature Center to explore some of the passing migrants, lingering breeders and overwintering birds of our Montpelier property. All ages and experience levels welcome!

Dead Creek Wildlife Day

Saturday, October 3, 7:00 am and on

Please join other NBNC youth birders for a celebratory day including bird banding demonstrations, nature walks, animal demonstrations and more. We will also observe the Snow Goose Spectacle, with geese gathering by the thousands!



Saw-whet Owl Banding at Snake Mt

Friday, October 9, dusk - late
(rain date Sat. 10/10)

For years, Rodney Olsen has been banding the soda-can sized Saw-whet Owls at Snake Mountain in Addison as part of a long-term study. We invite you to join this opportunity to view these common yet seldom-seen birds. Directions and carpooling options available upon registration. Bring a thermos and wear layers!

Hawks in the Champlain Valley

Friday, October 23, 7:00 am to 3:00 pm

We hope you'll spend your day off from school visiting Mt. Philo, a hawkwatching hotspot, in the hopes of seeing migrants like Northern Goshawk and Golden Eagle. If south winds deter migrating hawks, we'll shift our focus to nearby Dead Creek in search of other birds like the elusive Ross's Goose. Wherever we end up, birding in the Champlain Valley is always fun and exciting!

We will have a full winter's worth of programs such as Christmas Bird Counts, Mid-winter Bald Eagle Survey, Great Backyard Bird Count and more. We also welcome suggestions for future field trips! Other upcoming programs will include:

Superbowl of Birding VI

Saturday, January 30, 2010, 5:00am - 5:00pm
(snow date: Sunday, January 31)

fee: TBD

We participated in this exciting event, in northern Massachusetts, for the first time last year and saw 59 species, more than any other youth team! This year, we may extend our trip to be a full weekend long, so it's never too early to start thinking about!

World Series of Birding XXVII

Thursday - Sunday, May 13 - 16, 2010

fee: TBD

A NBNC youth birding tradition of more than 10 years, we hope to have teams for both younger and older participants. Past competitors rave about this program and can attest that Cape May, NJ is indeed the perfect spot to see spring migration. It never hurts to plan far in advance, so tell us if you may be interested in joining this year! Beginners welcome.

Opportunities for Teachers

For Classroom Teachers: Beginning in the 2008/09 year we offered free outreach programs to public and private schools to introduce avian ecology and bird-watching to elementary age students. Please inquire about a newly expanded program offerings for the 2009/10 academic year.

For Homeschoolers: Birding is a great activity for homeschoolers and we can support your pursuit of birding as a scholastic and extracurricular activity. Some of our best and brightest youth birders have come from the homeschooling community, so inquire for your homeschooling group today.