



Volume 2
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 Issue 2
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 Winter, 2010/11



A project of
 North Branch Nature Center

Vermont's Youth Birding Program

A group of 27 bird enthusiasts set out on Christmas Day, 1900 to count the birds they saw. This simple act was the creation of a century-long crusade that engaged over 60,000 people this past season. Creator Frank Chapman recognized the potential of the bird count from the beginning. In the announcement of the sixth bird count Chapman proclaimed "...we are gradually accumulating a mass of exact information... having, consequently, a real scientific value." Now, 110 years later, the CBC has been cited in hundreds of papers and is now considered one of 24 major indicators of climate impacts by the EPA.

Originally proposed by Frank Chapman, the CBC was proposed as an alternative to the 'side hunt', a tradition of the times that involved two teams of men competing in a kill-competition to see which team can accrue the most animal carcasses. In Enosburg Falls, VT, the participants of an 1896 side hunt collected a bevy of over 550 birds and mammals. Not surprisingly, those numbers were drastically reduced in 1897 (see below). Through *Bird Lore*, the popular magazine Chapman published, he announced "a new kind of Christmas side hunt in the form of a Christmas bird-census".



Frank Chapman,
 inventor of the CBC

By 1902, the third year of the CBC, Vermonters were already participating. Gilbert H. Trafton spent six hours

RESULT OF ANNUAL HUNT AT ENOSBURG FALLS, VT., OCTOBER 9, 1896, "FOR POINTS."

<i>Captain Stetson and 19 men.</i>	<i>Captain Rublee and 19 men.</i>
128 gray squirrels.	84 gray squirrels.
145 red squirrels.	65 red squirrels.
34 partridges.	22 partridges.
4 owls.	2 owls.
14 blue jays.	11 blue jays.
3 crows.	2 crows.
18 woodpeckers.	23 woodpeckers.
2 hen hawks.	1 woodcock.
1 fox.	1 fox.
1 rabbit.	3 rabbits.
1 muskrat.	
Total, 12,100 "points."	Total, 7,695 "points."

on Christmas Day scouring Randolph Center for birds and tallying a shrike, two White-breasted Nuthatches, and a chickadee. "The number of birds seen was very small," remarked Trafton, "but it gives a fair indication of the winter bird-life here. I pass many days without seeing or hearing a single bird." This statement held true to Chapman's original intent to capture a census of observations both unusual and mundane, but thankfully, Vermont CBC's since then have produced plenty of birds both common and rare.



A Glaucous Gull seen at
 the 2010 Burlington CBC

The CBC in Vermont has come a long way since the first in 1902, which counted just four birds. In 2010, over 350 participants performed 17 counts tallying around 100,000 birds of over 100 species. The increase in popularity isn't isolated to Vermont. Increasing numbers of CBC's are being held in Latin America, the Caribbean Islands, and elsewhere. In 2009, a CBC was even held in Antarctica.

With its growth in size, the CBC has become a powerful tool in knowing and understanding the population trends of birds in winter. One can see the rise of Wild Turkey and the decline of Evening Grosbeak. We can even see the effects of climate change as species like Carolina Wren spread north. Only time will tell what other trends the CBC reveals, but for it to continue to be useful, we're counting on you to count the birds.



Some of the Feather Questers on the 2007
 Plainfield CBC pose at Spruce Mountain.

Naturally NICARAGUA!

A Teen Natural History & Service Learning Trip

Learn more about this exciting trip for teens ages 13 and up in the "Programs" section of this issue.



Quiz: *It's a Finch*

Among winters highlights are the irruptive finches. To ID a finch will be a cinch after you've aced your quarterly quiz!

1



Taken in November at Addison, VT



Taken in January at South Burlington, VT

2



Taken in December at Essex, VT

3

All Photos by Larry Clarfeld

Last Issue's Answers: 1. Purple Martin, 2. Black-crowned Night-heron, 3. Yellow-rumped Warbler

Trip Report: Saw-whet Banding

For the second year, Feather Questers partnered with Rodney Olsen, of Vergennes, to host "Owl Night". During owl nights, we set up mist nets and play the call of the Northern Saw-whet Owl to attract them as they pass through in migration. We then record information about each owl, place a metal band on the leg, and release them.

While we managed to band four owls last year, this year we banded a whopping 20 Saw-whets! Why the remarkable difference in number? Conditions were just about perfect on October 9, the night of the event. Clear skies, low wind, and lack of moon along with a favorable breeding season and an optimal mid-October date made for a productive night



John (age 8) of Shelburne releases a Saw-whet Owl.

During the busiest parts of the night, every participant had ample opportunities to help extract owls from the nets, record data, and release them. It was a truly unique experience to study these common, yet seldom-seen creatures of the night. Next time we hike though the woods, we'll think of all the hidden Saw-whets, watching down on us from the treetops as we pass them by.

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.

Upcoming Programs

All fall programs are *free* to members (unless otherwise noted), but please register at least one week in advance.

Plainfield Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 18th, Times TBD

Fee: \$5(to National Audubon if over 18, under 18 free)

For over 100 years, birders have taken part in this national citizen science project. We will scour the Montpelier area for every bird we can find, leaving no Chickadee un-counted in our attempt to "census" birds across North America. Bring warm clothes (layers), lunch, snacks, water, thermos. Optional potluck dinner after the count.

Mid-winter Bald Eagle Survey

Saturday, January 8, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Surveys of wintering Bald Eagles began in the late 1970's and continue to this day. We invite you to join in this effort to monitor eagles. Our transect will most likely cover the lower portion of the Winooski River, where several eagles wintered last year.

Superbowl of Birding VIII

Saturday - Sunday, January 29 - 30

fee: TBD

We participated in this exciting event, in northern Massachusetts, the past two years tallying cumulatively tallying 70 species! This year, we may extend our trip to be a full weekend long, so it's never too early to start thinking about! To be guaranteed a spot on the team, please register by December 16.

Great Backyard Bird Count

Sunday, February 20, 9:00 am - 3:00 pm

This nation-wide citizen science project is another way for us to get out and bird, and at the same time, gather valuable information for scientists. Unlike the CBC, however, we don't take a true census, we can spend as little or as much time as we want, wherever we want! We will keep our destination flexible (based on rarities that may be around) but save the date for another fun day of birding.

Winter Ducks

Sunday, March 20, 8:30 am - 12:30 pm

As winter slowly transitions into spring, we will venture to Lake Champlain in search of wintering and migrating ducks. Over 15 species may be present, and we'll search for the more elusive individuals such as Tufted Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye. To find out what specialties we see, you'll just have to join us!

Plus, coming this Spring...

NATURALLY NICARAGUA

A Teen Natural History & Service Learning Trip

North Branch Nature Center & Planting

Hope are collaborating to bring you a

brand new trip to experience both the

nature and culture of Nicaragua. This

trip is open to teens ages 13+ and

takes place April 15 - 25, 2011. Please

check out the trip website for a full

itinerary and to download an

application. Spaces are allocated on a

first-come first-served basis, send your

application in asap! (Keel-billed Toucan pictured above)

www.NorthBranchNatureCenter.org/nicaragua.html



The Youth Bird-a-thon

May, 2011

For the second year, the Feather Questers will host a 'big day' of birding on our home turf and attempt to find as many different types of birds as possible.

Participants in our bird-a-thon can also help raise money to support the Feather Questers by recruiting sponsors to pledge their support. Bird-a-thons are fun, lightly competitive opportunities to get outside during the peak of spring migration, and we hope you'll join us.

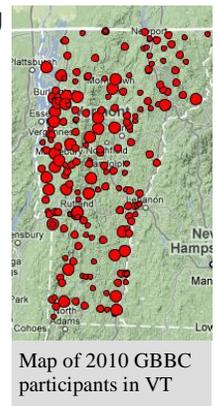
Opportunities for Teachers & Homeschoolers

Free classroom visits are available for teachers on a first-come, first-served basis. Program content is adjusted for different aged students.

The Great Schoolyard Bird Count

Friday, February 18

We hope you will consider bringing the nation-wide Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) citizen science project into your classroom this year! Children will be outfitted with binoculars and we will spend a class period counting whatever birds we can find. Plus, students will get to take part in this exciting study and learn how their efforts help scientists to learn more about our birds.



Birds & Winter Survival

Despite the harshness of New England winters, there are still plenty of active birds to observe. These birds have evolved fascinating strategies that allow them to survive. This program involves a short slideshow or discussion followed by a bird walk and scavenger hunt.