

# CHIP NOTES

The Newsletter of  
The Birds of Vermont Museum



Volume 23

Our Twenty-third Year

January 2009

## BOB SPEAR TO TURN 89

Bob Spear, the Founding Director of the Birds of Vermont Museum, will celebrate his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday on February 21<sup>st</sup>.

We pay a lot of attention to Bob's wood carving accomplishments over the past 88 years, but what of his other accomplishments? In 1969 Bob compiled *Birds of Vermont* which was published by the Green Mountain Audubon Society. *Birds of Vermont* was one of the early publications listing the status of all of Vermont's bird species, including the dates birds are seen in Vermont. The data to put together the book came from earlier lists and personal reports. Some of the published sources of information came from documents printed in the late 1880's. Other data from naturalists such as George Kirk, who had extensive field notes from 1901-1947, were used in this document.

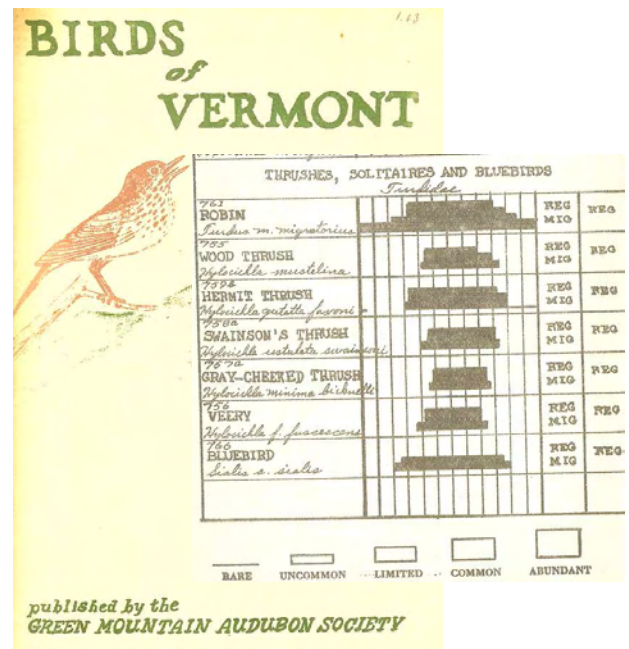
Bob drew all of the abundance charts by hand and hand wrote each Latin name. *Birds of Vermont* was updated and republished in 1976. The information was again updated and published in Murin and Pfeiffer's *Birdwatching in Vermont*, 2002. Many of the data can now be found electronically on Vermont ebird. Copies of *Birds of Vermont* are sometimes available through Amazon.com or Ebay.

When *Birds of Vermont* was first published several species were noted as increasing in Vermont. these included: Common Raven, Northern Cardinal, and Tufted Titmouse. In the most recent Breeding Bird Atlas draft results (2003-2007)<sup>1</sup> all three species showed signs of breeding in many locations throughout the state. A big increase from 1969. This type of information showing changes in populations demonstrates the importance of our collaborative records collected over the decades.

Bob's accomplishments go beyond woodcarving and we hope they continue for many more years. We plan on celebrating Bob's birthday at a party this summer. Look for more information in our spring newsletter.



Bob Spear wearing his "I've survived Damn near everything" pin at his 88th birthday party.



<sup>1</sup>Draft Atlas results from [http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bba/index.cfm?fa=explore.ProjectHome&BBA\\_ID=VT2003](http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bba/index.cfm?fa=explore.ProjectHome&BBA_ID=VT2003)

Excerpt for the original copy of *Birds of Vermont*, compiled by hand by Bob Spear and published in 1969.

## ROOST BOXES

A lot of emphasis is given to nest boxes. Attracting birds to your yard and watching them raise young is a great and enjoyable hobby. But, have you wondered what happens to these birds, if they don't migrate, in the winter? As I write this it is 11 degrees and the forecast is for a low of one degree. The chickadees outside my window are all over the trees, bushes, and bird feeders. I imagine they are eating seed, suet, and gleaning caterpillars and other invertebrates from the nooks and crannies of the tree bark. As darkness approaches they are no longer visible from my window. Where have they gone to spend the night? Many birds, such as chickadees, spend the night huddled in cavities. One way to help the birds in your backyard on these cold nights is to put up roosting boxes. Although not as popular or as widely known as nest boxes, roost boxes can play a vital role in the survival of local populations. Well built and well placed roost boxes can accommodate one or numerous birds overnight as they pile together to conserve heat.

A roost box looks similar to nest boxes with some crucial differences. The entrance hole is at the bottom of the box instead of the top so heat is not lost out of the hole. Because the emphasis is on conserving heat, roost boxes do not have ventilation holes. There are perches inside the boxes designed for small songbirds such as chickadees, and nuthatches, and titmice. Inside boxes designed for woodpeckers the edges are roughened or grooved. One exception to this design are roost boxes designed for bluebirds. Bluebirds will use nest boxes to spend winter nights in, and supposedly the birds just lay together in a heap on the floor. For bluebirds an entrance hole at the bottom could be dangerous as a predator could just reach in and remove one.

As with nest boxes the size of the entrance hole can limit the users. Entrance holes under 1 1/2 or 1 1/4 inches allow for smaller songbirds while excluding starlings. The larger holes can allow in starlings and woodpeckers. Boxes should be placed in locations that avoid strong winds and take advantage of winter's limited sunshine. Mature pines can work well because the branches can offer some protection against wind. Boxes should be placed between 8 and 15 feet off of the ground; although it is important that the box remains accessible for cleaning. Roost boxes left up for multiple years should be cleaned in late fall in case squirrels or wasps have moved in.

Plans to build a roost box can be found free on-line. Roost boxes are also available for purchase at myriad on line stores, in some local garden stores, or in the Birds of Vermont Museum's gift shop.



Roost box designed by Coveside Conservation Products and is available at the Museum's gift shop.

## THANK YOU MUSEUM MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

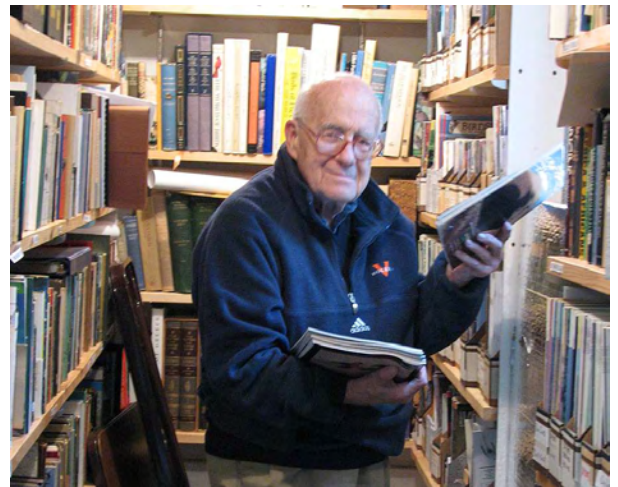
As we look back over the year, and think about all that has happened at the Museum, we can't help but be grateful to many people. Staff and Board Members would like to extend a big thank you to all who helped to promote birding and the art of wood carving in 2008. Our volunteers again collectively worked over 1000 hours this year! Museum volunteers play an important role in helping the Museum fulfill its mission.

Volunteers fill many roles here at the Museum. Many were docents, helping to educate the public about all birding matters while promoting the art of wood carving. In quieter moments volunteers worked on organizing the library, sorting out duplicate publications, organizing pictures and articles, creating bulletin board posters, creating educational posters, making signs, assisting with bulk mailings, photographing carvings, writing articles for the newsletter, organizing art shows, entering data, counting birds at the window, cleaning and vacuuming display cases, sweeping, raking leaves, assisting with website activities, and helping with school groups.

Outdoors, volunteers monitored birds, and maintained trails. We also found volunteers *working* as they helped out with our most sedentary event – the Big Sit, where we counted an impressive 30 species, an all time high. Many also promoted the Museum at off-site events, most recently gift wrapping at Barnes and Noble, and we appreciate all of these efforts.

Our larger events would not have been possible without the hard work of volunteers parking cars, selling food, leading walks, greeting and talking with visitors, supervising kids' activities, and cleaning up and vacuuming when it was all over!

**Thank you!**



Stewart Kirkaldy helping to organize the Museum's library.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING AND BOARD NEWS

The Museum's Board of Directors are all volunteers. We thank them for all the time they have donated to the Museum in 2008.

At the Birds of Vermont Museum Board of Directors' annual meeting officers were elected for the next year. We are grateful and pleased with our officers. Shirley Johnson continues as president, Dann Van der Vliet as treasurer and Becky Cozzens as secretary. A special thank you to Becky who has served as secretary since the Museum opened!

The Museum and the board have been following the 5-year strategic plan written and approved in 2006. We are currently rewriting and updating the plan for the next five years.

## RAFFLE WINNER

This year's raffle was won by Dave and Carol Walker of Winthrop Massachusetts. According to their letter, "It was a wonderful surprise when we learned we were winners. We will enjoy the many items that were enclosed."

For our 2009 season our raffle prize will be a pair of American Goldfinches carved out of Basswood by Ingrid Brown. Look for a picture of them in a future newsletter.

Check out the Museum's updated website at  
[www.birdsofvermont.org](http://www.birdsofvermont.org)

For bird sightings and other news check out the  
Museum's bird blog at  
<http://bovm.wordpress.com/>

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## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

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### Winter Birds of the Lake Champlain Basin

**February 7, 2009**

**Time:** 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

**Appropriate for:** adults and older children

**Location:** We will meet at the Vergennes Green (we will carpool from there)

**Fee:** \$25.00 for non-members, \$20.00 for members

Join Jim Andrews, herpetologist and long-time Champlain Valley birder, as we take a driving tour through the Champlain Basin and to the shores of Lake Champlain to spot some winter birds. We will carpool and stop at selected sites. Please call 802-434-2167 or email [museum@birdsofvermont.org](mailto:museum@birdsofvermont.org) to register.

### Great Backyard Bird Count

**February 13-16, 2009**

**Time:** All Day

**Appropriate for:** everyone

**Location:** Your own backyard.

The Great Backyard Bird Count, in its 12th year, is a citizen science project led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. The count goes from February 13 - 16 and anyone can participate from their own home or a nearby park.

### Bob's 89th Birthday

**February 21, 2009**

This year we plan to celebrate Bob's birthday in the summer! Look for information in future newsletters.

Those wishing to honor Bob's birthday are encouraged to make an \$89 contribution to the Birds of Vermont Museum. Checks can be mailed to the Museum at 900 Sherman Hollow Road, Huntington, VT 05462

**Thank you for your  
support and for honoring  
Bob in this way!**



Bob feeding the birds.

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## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS (CONTINUED)

### Volunteer Work Party

**May 2, 2009**

**Time:** 9:00 - 3:00

**Appropriate for:** everyone interested in volunteering at the Museum

Help the Museum prepare for the season by cleaning trails, painting, and getting ready for International Migratory Bird Day. Lunch will be served at noon.

### International Migratory Bird Day

**May 16, 2008**

**Time:** 10:00 - 4:00

**Appropriate for:** everyone

**Fee:** Free!

Audubon Vermont and the Birds of Vermont Museum are celebrating International Migratory Bird day with bird walks, bird banding demonstrations, a live bird show, a bird carving demonstration, and children's activities all day.

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## BIG SIT!

We had a record of 30 species at this year's Big Sit!  
Thank you to all the participants.

American Crow  
American Goldfinch  
American Robin  
Barred Owl  
Black-capped Chickadee,  
Blue-headed Vireo  
Blue Jay,  
Brown Creeper  
Canada Goose  
Common Raven  
Dark-eyed Junco  
Downy Woodpecker  
Eastern Screech  
European Starling  
Golden-crowned Kinglet  
Hairy Woodpecker  
Hermit Thrush  
Hooded Merganser  
Mourning Dove  
Pileated Woodpecker  
Pine Siskin

Purple Finch  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Swainson's Thrush  
Tufted Titmouse  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
Winter Wren  
Wood Duck

### WISH LIST

Subscriptions to bird-related magazines (or your old copies)  
Art supplies (\$30)  
Plastic bird skeleton for educational programs (\$300)  
Sponsorship of summer intern (\$3000)  
Please call 802-434-2167 for more information

## CARVING REPORT

After Bob finished his two-year Wild Turkey carving masterpiece in May, he decided to improve the lighting system in the Nesting Birds Gallery. This was a great in-between project which took Bob the summer months. As winter approached Bob returned to his workshop. In the past few months Bob completed four birds for the Wetland Dioramas, they are the Cattle Egret, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-necked Phalarope, and the Ruddy Duck. He is now taking another hiatus from carving and has begun working on the physical attributes of the Fall Wetland Diorama.

### Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*

The Cattle Egret is a rare Vermont visitor with no breeding records from the last Atlas. When it is here it is most often seen in the Champlain Valley with occasional records from the Connecticut River Valley. Although they nest near water with other Herons, they are mostly seen in dry fields where they feast on insects flushed by grazing animals and farm tractors. Such foraging is called commensal feeding. The Old World Cattle Egret is known for being a successful natural invader of North America having arrived in South America from Africa in 1880, successfully establishing their range in Florida in the 1940's, and being seen as far north as Southern Canada in the 1960's. Deforestation, irrigation, and the cattle industry aided their spread.

### Pied-billed Grebe, *Podilymbus podiceps*

This is the most common grebe found in New England and can be found breeding in Vermont. To escape danger the bird sinks below the water and surfaces elsewhere among aquatic vegetation. This disappearing act earned it the names "Water Witch" and "Hell-diver." Another fascinating fact about grebes in general is that their stomach content is up to 50% feathers. It appears that they can not digest fish bones well, and eat feathers by the hundreds which form balls and line their stomachs probably as protection. Even chicks just a few days old have feather-lined stomachs.



This Cattle Egret carving took Bob Spear 73 hours to complete.



This Pied-billed Grebe took Bob Spear 20 hours to complete.

## CARVING REPORT (continued)

### Red-necked Phalarope, *Phalaropus lobatus*

The Red-Necked Phalarope breeds in the Arctic and winters in tropical seas. They are seen occasionally in Vermont during migration. The best time to look for them is between August and October in the Champlain Valley. Due to their dense plumage which traps air and makes them unsinkable, they have developed an interesting feeding technique, which is to spin on the water surface to churn up the water and bring food to the top. This bird practices sequential polyandry, which means the female mates with a male, lays eggs, then lets him incubate and raise the young while she repeats this with other males.



This Red-necked Phalarope took Bob Spear 27 hours to complete.

### Ruddy Duck, *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Ruddy Ducks are primarily found in the western half of the United States and are rare in Vermont. They have been seen primarily in the Champlain Basin between March and June and October through December. This duck is known to be a brood parasite, often laying eggs in nests of Redheads, Canvasbacks, rails and grebes. The courtship display is interesting; the male makes bubbles by expelling air trapped in his plumage. They rarely fly except to migrate, preferring to sink underwater like grebes to escape danger.



This Ruddy Duck took Bob Spear 46 hours to complete.

Vermont bird information from Vermont ebird, and from the draft results of Vermont's 2003-2007 Breeding Bird Atlas.

## THE MUSEUM AWARDS HONOR ROLL STUDENTS

Along with many other local businesses the Museum has joined the Mount Mansfield Honor Roll Reward Program. Any honor roll student can receive a day pass to the Museum valid for the entire 2009 season.

## SAVE THESE DATES

Feb 7	Winter Birds of the Lake Champlain Basin call to register \$20
Feb 13-16	Great Backyard Bird Count
Feb 21	Bob Spear's 89th Birthday (party to be scheduled for the summer)
May 1	Museum Opens
May 2	Volunteer Day
May 16	International Migratory Bird Day

For additional information, or to register, please call 802-434-2167 or check out our website [www.birdsofvermont.org](http://www.birdsofvermont.org).

*The mission of the Birds of Vermont Museum is to educate children and adults about the environment through the study of birds and their habitats.*

## Board of Trustees 2009

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## Museum Staff

Ingrid Brown, Curator  
Bob Spear, Founding Director  
Erin Talmage, Museum Director

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