

CHIP NOTES

The Newsletter of
The Birds of Vermont Museum



Volume 20

Our Twentieth Year

Winter 2006

BOB SPEAR TO CELEBRATE 86TH BIRTHDAY COME EAT CAKE AND COUNT BIRDS!

Bob Spear, the Founding Director of the Birds of Vermont Museum, will celebrate his 86th birthday on February 21st. All friends and members of the Museum are invited to the Museum on Saturday, February 18th from 2-4 p.m. to help Bob celebrate with a birthday cake and fellowship.

The Museum is participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count, a citizen science project organized by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, on that same day from 12:00–4:00 p.m. Members and non-members who are interested in participating in the bird count are invited to the Museum to observe different species of birds. Come learn about backyard birds, practice identification skills, learn about other citizen science projects, and meet Bob Spear, Master Carver. Admission to the Museum is free on February 18th.

In 2005, participants nationwide sent in more than 52,000 checklists with a record breaking total count of more than 6 million birds. This project has become a major source of scientific information about North American bird populations, and is a classic example of the vital role citizens play in understanding bird populations.

Those wishing to honor Bob's birthday are encouraged to make an \$86 contribution to the Birds of Vermont Museum Fund at the Vermont Community Foundation. Checks should be made out to the Birds of Vermont Fund and mailed to the Museum.



Bob Spear hiked up Camels' Hump on September 27, 2005 with staff member, Erin Talmage, and board member Craig Reynolds. It was a beautiful fall day, with views east to the White Mountains and west to the Adirondacks.

BIG SIT!

On October 9, 2005 a team of volunteers and staff from the Museum watched birds from a 17 foot circle in the back garden as part of the 3rd annual Big Sit! The Big Sit, sponsored by the Bird Watchers Digest, is part of the citizen science program at the Museum, and is one of our largest fund raisers. During the twelve hour time frame, participants remain in a 17 foot wide circle to observe or hear as many species of birds as possible. Big Sit! events happen in 35 states and 7 countries with some circles seeing as many as 95 species.



Golden-crowned Kinglet carving by Bob Spear.

Although rainy and cool, birds, coffee, conversation, a plethora of donuts and great food from the volunteer lunch kept us happy. There is a reason the Big Sit! is known as “*Birding’s most sedentary event.*” I think it was one of the few birding events where birders weigh more after 12 hours of birding than before!

By 9:00 a.m., we had seen White-throated Sparrow, Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Canada Goose, Downy Woodpecker, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch, Tufted Titmouse, Hairy Woodpecker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Pileated Woodpecker, American Robin, Dark-eyed Junco, Mourning Dove, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Northern Flicker. Throughout the day, we added a few more species including Song Sparrow, Common Raven, White-crowned Sparrow, American Crow, Cooper’s Hawk and Golden-crowned Kinglet. The

BOARD ELECTS OFFICERS

At the November meeting of the Board of Directors, Jeff Landa was elected President, Becky Cozzens, Secretary, and David Sunshine, Treasurer. Landa has been a member of the Board for two years and was a member of a team from the Leadership Champlain program that studied the Museum in 2004. He is the Market Manager for Delta Dental.

Outgoing President Bob Johnson was honored for his two years as President of the Board. Johnson and Angelo Incerpi were elected to the Class of 2008. Continuing Board members include Charles Johnson, Shirley Johnson, Marty Hansen, Jim Osborn, Stephen Page, Mary Jane Russell, Craig Reynolds, and Bob Spear.

The museum would like to extend a sincere thank you to Dr. Robert Jervis. He served on the museum’s board for many years. In addition to serving on the board he collected the data and wrote the 2000 Baseline Report. He also created a laminated trail guide for the museum based on the information he had previously collected. We will miss Bob, but hope to see him as a volunteer.



Jeff Landa is the Birds of Vermont Museum’s new Board President.

big surprise of the day happened 19 minutes before our official end of the Big Sit! when a Northern Gannet flew overhead.

Thank you to Jim Osborn and Gale Lawrence for their third year of volunteering and fund raising for this event!

RUSSIAN VISITORS

Five Russians visited the Museum on December 15th as part of the Open World Program. In 1999 the U. S. Congress established the Open World Program to increase mutual understanding between Russia and the United States, and to support Russia's efforts to strengthen its democratic reforms. Open World delegates come from all walks of life and may be from countries that were of the former Soviet Union.

Our Russian visitors had varied interests and backgrounds:

- Olga Kachakova is from Ulagan in Southeast Siberia. Her work includes measures to protect the historical, cultural, and natural values of the Chulyshman River and to support traditional nature management in the Altai region.
- Nikolay Karpov is from Varvarino in the Voronezh region, southwest of Moscow. He is Deputy Director for Research Affairs, Khopersk State Wilderness area, in the Voronezh region. He wants to learn new ways and methods of organizing and carrying out research projects and preserving endangered species.
- Elvira Nikolenko is from Novosibirsk on the West Siberian plain. She is an assistant ornithologist of the Siberian Ecological Center where she coordinates a program to study and protect birds of prey of South Siberia.
- Umar Semenov is from Sochi, Krasnodar Krai. He is the Deputy Director for Environmental Protection & Ecological Security, Sochi National Park, in Krasnodar Krai, as well as Executive Director of the Caucasus National Parks Association.
- Svetlana Kos is from Moscow, where she is pursuing a degree in statistics and computer science. She taught English in a Russian high school, is fluent in English, and is the translator for the group.

Their general interests included private sector collaboration in environmental protection, environmental education in schools and universities, grass roots citizen involvement in environmental

FEE INCREASES FOR 2006

By action of the Board of Trustees, membership and admissions fees have been increased effective January 1, 2006. The new fees are as follows:

Membership Prices

Individual Membership	\$25.00
Family Membership	\$40.00
Contributing	\$50.00
Supporting	\$100.00
Sponsor	\$250.00
Patron	\$500.00
Spears Society (new category)	\$1000.00

Admission for non-members

• Adult	\$6.00
• Senior	\$5.00
• Child	\$3.00
• Family	\$15.00

Would you like to see this newsletter in color?

Check Out

<http://birdsofvermont.org/events.html>

protection, ecotourism, environment and health, biodiversity and the protection of endangered species, and national parks and other federally protected land.

Our Russian visitors were quite impressed with Bob Spear and the Birds of Vermont Museum.

WINTER AND SPRING EVENTS AT THE MUSEUM

February 18	Bob's 86 th Birthday Celebration and Great Backyard Bird Count, 2-4 p.m.
February 27 – March 3	Museum open Monday – Friday, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
April 24 – 28	Museum open Monday – Friday, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
April 24, 25, 28	School Vacation Programs: Pre-registration required, limit 10, ages 8 and up Soap Carving Class; learn to carve a bird out of Ivory Soap using Popsicle stick tools. Everyone will make a cardinal to keep or to wash with. \$10 per participant. 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Making Pine Cone Suet Feeders; huge pine cones will be stuffed with several mixes of suet and seeds, to take home to your birds. No nuts will be used. \$10 per participant. 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
May 6 teer	Volunteer Lunch: Come meet our volunteers and complete our new volunteer orientation.

THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!

Our Museum has the best volunteers. Last season they worked over 950 hours, indoors and outdoors. Our most enthusiastic volunteer is Allen Mable at 200 hours. Three others have given over 100 hours of their time; Eva Dannenberg, Peter Jenkins, and Florence Paris. Two families, the Millers and the Lanphers, have each given over 50 hours.

If you are excited about helping us with indoor or outdoor projects, see our enclosed Volunteer Opportunities page for the various ways you can help the Museum. Just fill out the enclosed sheet listing the various jobs that are available, and mail it to us. People who send their forms by March 1 will receive 5 free tickets to this year's raffle.

We'll have a volunteer lunch May 6th for orientation of new people, and to update our existing volunteers. That's one week before the International Migratory Bird Day, where we can use a lot of volunteers for various jobs. Whether you volunteer a couple of hours a season, or a couple of hours a week, we would be delighted to train you, or use your expertise.

Thank you for helping the Museum.



Sharp-lobed hepatica, photograph taken by Peter Jenkins on the Birds of Vermont Museum property.

SPOTLIGHT ON CRABAPPLE TREES



Crabapples are medium-sized deciduous trees in the *Malus* family. Some are native to North America while others have been introduced. They are commonly used for landscaping. Hundreds of species and varieties exist. These varieties were derived from about 35 species. There is no real taxonomic difference between apples and crabapple and the distinction is based on the size of the fruit.

I don't know the species name for the trees in the museum's bird garden, but I do know it has pink flowers and very small apples (3/8"). Crabapples have fall fruit, yet the fruit can last (if not eaten) into the winter. On the tree outside my office there are very few uneaten fruit in mid-January. Thickets of crabapples provide excellent habitat for wildlife by providing food and shelter.

Here at the museum, it seems most of the fruit are usually eaten by persistent Ruffed Grouse (see page 6) but many other birds feed on crabapples. Other birds that eat the fruit include: Blue Jays, Tufted Titmice, Gray Catbirds, and American Robins. Evening Grosbeaks and Pine Grosbeaks also eat the buds while Eastern Towhees and Cedar Waxwings might eat the seeds in addition to other parts of the plants.

References: DeGraaf, R. M., 2002. Trees, Shrubs, and Vines for attracting birds. University Press of London, Hanover.

Sternberg, G. And J. Wilson, 1995. Landscaping with Native Trees. Chapters Publishing Ltd., Shelburne.

WISH LIST 2006

The following projects/acquisitions are needed by the Museum, and are on our 2006 Wish List. The annual budget cannot fund these items, and thus we must rely on the generosity of our friends and members. If you are interested in helping the Museum fund one of the items, please contact Director Dave Johnson.

- Financial support to keep biologist/naturalist on staff to work with children and families and to work on various research projects associated with the museum. \$5000
- Monies needed to purchase plants/shrubs to create gardens around the Museum. These gardens will become a demonstration site for visitors to learn how to landscape to attract birds. All plantings to be done by Master Gardener volunteers from the University of Vermont. \$5521
- Bob Spear would like to create a new display showing birds typically found on the Lake Champlain shoreline in the fall. The cost shown is to create the space for this new display and paint a background showing the shoreline in the fall. Bob would then carve the birds and create appropriate habitat settings for each bird. The new display would showcase approximately 30 birds. \$20,000
- The Museum would like to create an audio guide for visitors to tour the Museum. The audio guide would allow our visitors to learn about each bird on display as well as give us the ability to play the song of each bird. If we were able to have an audio tour it would certainly enrich the visitor experience. \$12,000
- Monies need to repair roofing, siding and other exterior improvements to Museum building as identified by an architect. This work must be done in 2006. \$20,000

Bob Spear fun fact!

Did you know Bob's first carving was of a non-native parakeet that flew into his barn in Massachusetts? He was eighteen years old. Look for the carving the next time you visit the Museum.

COURT SIDE SEATS OF RUFFED GROUSE

Sitting here at my desk on a quiet winter afternoon, there are times when it is hard to focus in at the computer and my eyes wander out to the crabapple trees in the Museum's garden. Right now there is a Blue Jay on the tree, eating a morsel he or she has just gotten from the feeding station. As much as I enjoy seeing the Blue Jay, the highlight was a few weeks ago when five Ruffed Grouse, *Bonasa umbellus*, were in the tree at the same time. Ruffed Grouse usually start feeding on the crabapple tree at dusk in late November, and continue to visit the tree until all the crabapples are gone. It is not unusual to see one or two as dusk approaches, but five in mid-morning was certainly a sight to see!

As Ruffed Grouse is a game species, it is a bird known by many. They have been hunted for centuries and there are entire organizations such as the Ruffed Grouse Society devoted to hunting the birds and preserving its habitat. According to one local hunter "Ruffed Grouse taste like chicken." Another one told me "there is nothing like it." In Vermont, according to Vermont's Fish and Wildlife website, the northeast kingdom is the best place to hunt Ruffed Grouse although they are found statewide.

To prepare for winter around October grouse begin growing their "snowshoes" which are comb-like, horny scales on the edge of each toe. This doubles the surface area of the toe, and enables the bird to walk on top of the snow. The appendages are lost in the spring. When you come upon a Ruffed Grouse in the winter, they often fly out of the snow surprising everyone around. Ruffed Grouse often roost together in the dense lower branches of conifers. When the snow is deep, these birds sometimes find shelter by flying into the snow and they can remain buried there all night.

In the spring, listen for the drumming of the male. When I first heard the sound I thought it was a motor starting up in a distance. The thumps are caused by the males wings as they are rapidly flapped in front of the body and against a hollow log. These thumps start off slow and speed up. Ruffed grouse can drum year around but are most often heard in the spring. If you happen upon a fallen log in brushy cover with grouse dropping and bare spaces where leaves and other debris have been blown away, you may have found a drumming log.

This past spring I was walking through the woods of my house in Huntington, with three dogs – not very peaceful — and we scared up a mother Ruffed Grouse and some chicks. The mother led the dogs away by creating a ruckus, and the chicks scattered around near my feet, peeping wildly. I moved away from the site as quickly as possible and within a few minutes caught up with the dogs. The mother bird had lured them away and was probably on her way back to them. The grouse seldom flies more than 100-200 meters at a time. It is important not to scare the same bird over and over, supposedly if they are flushed 3 or 4 times in rapid succession, an exhausted bird can be picked up by hand.

Young Ruffed Grouse hatch in the late spring and early summer, and are precocial. They eat insects and other invertebrates during the first weeks of life, but rarely afterwards. Older chicks and adults eat a wide variety of plants. In the spring they may focus on leaves and sprouts, in summer and fall fruit fills a greater portion of their diet, and in the winter their primary food is buds. Predators of grouse eggs include opossums, raccoons, skunks, weasels, squirrels, and snakes. The chicks are in danger of larger predators including some of the accipiter hawks while adults may be at risk from owls, foxes, and hawks.

Juveniles remain with the female until early fall. They may be solitary for a few months until early winter when they join loose conveys of foraging in roosting groups, and can be seen at dusk eating crabapples at The Birds of Vermont Museum!



Carving of male Ruffed Grouse by Bob Spear.

KEEPING FEET WARM

This morning was an early morning bird monitoring walk. It was about 15 F and the walk, like every month, consisted of 2 hours walking throughout the museum property. To monitor the entire *Birds of Vermont Museum/Green Mountain Important Bird Area*, monthly walks are done at the end of each month on the museum property and in the middle of each month on Audubon property, thereby monitoring the entire IBA. There was little bird activity this morning, save for a few Black-capped Chickadees, Downy Woodpeckers and Blue Jays. Unfortunately, this gave me ample time to think about my boots, my wool socks, and my rapidly cooling feet.

I could see chickadees flitting about in the trees, standing on bare branches, or hanging on the trunks of trees. With no socks, no boots, and outside 24 hours a day, how do their feet stay warm? Some birds, such as owls have feathers lining their feet, but most birds do not. These other birds have other ways of keeping their feet warm.

There are behavioral modifications that help birds stay warm. Birds can pull legs up into their feathers to reduce heat loss, or can tuck bills into their feathers to lessen heat loss while breathing. They can choose roosting places that are under cover, and some birds have been shown to huddle. Many birds increase time spent eating and some birds, such as woodpeckers, jays, chickadees and titmice have been known to cache food.

But what about their feet? What's amazing is some birds have the ability for *regional hypothermia*. In other words, parts of their body (their feet) can get cold, while their core remains at the correct temperature. The top of the leg could be 32 C, while the lower leg might be 8 C, and the feet between 0-5 C. This is why ducks can walk on ice and not damage their feet, nor do they melt the ice. The tarsi and feet contain tough tendons with a limited nerve and vascular supply. Blood flow can be reduced by up to 90% when the bird is trying to conserve heat. The structures of these blood vessels also allow for *countercurrent exchange*. These vessels are intertwined so that the heat of the blood in the arteries coming from the core of the body is transferred to the cool blood in the veins returning from the exposed extremities, thereby keeping more of the heat in the core and less energy going to heating the feet.

I imagine someday surgeons will be able to adjust people so their feet stay warm, but until then I will just have to wear more socks!

If you are interested in attending monthly monitoring walks, please contact either Vermont Audubon (434-3068) or the Museum (434-2167).



Snow Buntings can be found in Vermont in the winter.



Ruddy Turnstone

There has been a flurry of activity in the wetland diorama. In the past month Bob has finished eight carvings of shorebirds. The birds are clustered together on the sand to assist people in identifying them. It helps to see them next to each other, but it also shows why they are so hard to identify in the wild! The new carvings are of a Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Western Sandpiper, Dunlin, Baird's Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, and a Sanderling.

SAVE THESE DATES

February 18 Great Backyard Bird Count and
Bob Spear's 86th Birthday Party
2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

February 27 – March 3 Museum opens for visitation,
10:00 – 4:00 p.m.

April 24-28 School vacation programs and
museum open for visitation,
10:00 – 4:00 p.m.

For additional information, or to register,
please call 434-2167.

Thanks to Northeast Delta Dental for
supporting our newsletter.



**Visit our website to learn more great things about
the Museum, and details of all of our upcoming
programs.**

www.birdsofvermont.org

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Birds of Vermont Museum
900 Sherman Hollow Road
Huntington, Vermont 05462

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