



# Audubon Outlook

Newsletter of the Buffalo Audubon Society

JANUARY | FEBRUARY 2013

*“104 Years of Environmental Education 1909 - 2013”*

“You can’t get too much  
winter in the winter.”

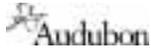
- Robert Frost



Evening Grosbeak  
*Hesperiphona vespertina*

The Buffalo Audubon Society promotes appreciation and enjoyment of the natural world through education and stewardship.

**BUFFALO AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society



**Officers & Directors 2013**

**PRESIDENT**  
David Gordon

**VICE PRESIDENT**  
Mary Canfield

**RECORDING SECRETARY**  
Marcia Nixon

**TREASURER**  
Charles Komurek

**Directors**

Janet Benjamins  
Kerri Bentkowski-Li  
Taddy Dann  
Melissa Fratello  
Richard Kingston  
Michael Petrinec  
Dorothy Rapp  
William L. Wlodarczyk  
Brenda Young

**Staff**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
Loren Smith

**NATURALISTS**  
Mark Carra  
Chris Kieber  
Bill Michalek  
Carol Welsh

**OFFICE MANAGER**  
Jackie Keller

**GIFT SHOP MANAGER**  
Ellen George

**CARETAKER**  
Lynn Feist

**FOR THE BIRDS**  
Tom Kerr  
Chuck Bartlett

Buffalo Audubon is a proud member of the Western New York Environmental Alliance. Visit [GrowWNY.org](http://GrowWNY.org) for more information!



1610 Welch Road  
North Java, NY 14113  
Ph 585.457-3228  
Fax 585.457-1378

E-mail: [info@buffaloaudubon.org](mailto:info@buffaloaudubon.org)  
[www.buffaloaudubon.org](http://www.buffaloaudubon.org)

**Our Sincere Thanks To Our Recent Donors**  
**Legacy Society Members:**

Anonymous (3) ~ Bruce Bender ~ Mary Canfield ~ Mary E. Clemesha  
Barbara Delenkitis ~ Judith Hoffman ~ Dorothy Rapp, Past President

The Legacy Society recognizes individuals who have made a bequest or other estate plan to benefit the Buffalo Audubon Society, and who have let us know of their intent. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to these individuals for the wonderful commitment they have made to the long-term success of the Buffalo Audubon Society.

If you have made such a gift and would like to be recognized in this and other listings, or if you would like information about how to make such a gift, please contact Loren Smith at (585) 457-3228 or [smith@buffaloaudubon.org](mailto:smith@buffaloaudubon.org).

**DONORS:** Thanks to all who gave after we went to press and who will be listed in the next issue.

In honor of Dutch Cole –  
Mrs. Susan Blair  
In memory of John R. Hotchkin –  
Judy Hotchkin

Anonymous (2)  
Ms. Vanda Albers  
Mr. & Mrs. Frank Austin  
Maxine Barber  
Mrs. Barbara A. Bartus  
Mr. Lance Becker  
Ms. Florence Binis  
Mr. and Ms. Richard J. Christensen  
Ms. Jaime Cocina  
Mr. Donald R. Collins  
Ms. Karolynne Cox  
Ms. Dorothy Dann  
Ms. Joan Doerr  
Ms. Eleanor E. Donnelly  
Ms. Mary C. Eichinger  
Ms. Robin Freeman  
Tricia A. Furnari and  
Deanne Pericak  
Ms. Dinah D. Gamin  
Mr. Donald R. Getty  
Ms. Ellen M. Gibson

Ms. Deborah Grant  
Mr. Irvin Hagen  
Mr. Allan Hayes  
Ms. Alice Healy  
Mr. Gerald Hodgson  
Ms. Evelyn Hoffman  
Mr. and Mrs. John S. Hughes  
Mr. Chris Hull  
Mr. and Mrs. Andre Jaccard  
Ms. Joan Johnston  
Mr. Burton C. Jones  
Mr. and Mrs. George M. Karalus  
Ms. Jane Kearns  
Ms. Cynthia Kirchmeyer  
Mr. Gary Kraciuk  
Ms. Alvina L. Lane  
Mr. William H. Loos  
Ms. Joan Doerr  
Mr. and Mrs. William Michalek  
Dr. & Mrs. Harry Newman  
Ms. Dawn Newton  
Jim and Marcia Nixon  
Ms. Shirley Noel  
Ms. Cynthia Oehler  
Ms. M. K. Phelps  
Ms. Karen A. Rader

Mr. Iain Ramage  
Donald and Joanne Roberson  
Mr. and Mrs. John Ruska  
Mr. Edward Schaefer  
Ms. Marcia Schultz  
Ms. Elizabeth S. Seaner  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Sitz  
Mr. and Mrs. Tom Sloan  
Ms. Marianne Smolinski  
Ms. Stephanie Spittal  
Harold and Jane Stock  
Mr. and Mrs. Norbert S. Storm  
Alma and Malcolm Strachan  
Ms. Becky Thompson  
Mr. David Thompson  
Mr. and Mrs. Frank J. Tichy  
Ms. Anne Tirone  
Ms. Arlene Weckel  
Mr. and Mrs. Theodore B. Weir  
Edward and Bernadette White  
Wild Birds Unlimited  
Ms. Norma S. Willard  
Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Woodard  
Mr. John Ziemer  
Mr. Douglas Zimmerman

**Cover Photo - Male Evening Grosbeak**

Male Evening Grosbeak (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) – a rare visitor to Western New York who has made numerous appearances this winter.

**Buffalo Audubon Society  
Membership Application**

**Support your local Audubon Centers and Environmental Education throughout Western NY!**

Local Membership in the Buffalo Audubon Society entitles you to:

- Receive the *Outlook*, including local activities and news.
- Receive voting rights in Buffalo Audubon plus member discounts and specials.

\$25 - Individual

\$35 - Family

\$50 - Contributing

\$100 - 100 Club

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: **BUFFALO AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
and mail with this application to: 1610 Welch Road, North Java, NY 14113  
memberships online at [buffaloaudubon.org](http://buffaloaudubon.org)



David Gordon

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

One year is freshly put to bed while the New Year has all the promise we expect at this time. We all commit to more of the better choices and less struggle as we, after all, have learned from the difficulties experienced last year. While we scheme, figure, and plan, outside it is cold and quiet. A lower sun softly lights the land and, if you listen and look carefully, you sense the rejuvenating rest that the dormant soil, animals, trees and other plants are getting at this time. Birders are out enjoying the numerous ducks and gulls taking advantage of the open water and plentiful food of the Niagara River. Horned owls will nest soon and I await the first territorial call of my local cardinal, about February 15. These are some of my signals of spring. I judge the day's temperature and humidity by the sound my boots make as they cover the snowy ground. Ah, this wonderful and perhaps most personal of seasons, winter. The extra darkness gives us much needed time for reflection.

How do I know these things? Well, concerned people that loved nature and the outdoors contributed to the Buffalo Museum of Science and to the YMCA camps whose programs planted and fertilized seeds of interest in me as a youth. These institutions

remain open and no doubt others were so given appreciation of the natural world. We at Buffalo Audubon and Beaver Meadow Nature Center can speak at length of our sprouted and realized nature minded participants also. These people number more than we know. We indeed want this connection to continue and to grow stronger. Nature-minded people will be necessary to confront the startling environmental issues that will be manifest for today's children during their adult years. We must provide nurturing experiences for them now and for others in the future. This is what we do. Provide opportunity and place for learning for our clients and provide opportunity and place for employment of good, dedicated people to carry forward this work.

I thank those who contributing to our year-end President's Appeal. This is money well spent and is your investment in a future of active, informed, and committed people who value and appreciate our natural world. I earnestly encourage those who have not taken the opportunity to contribute to do so now. You will never regret giving for this cause and we will do everything to insure that this establishment continues to be a rock in this uncertain and shifting landscape. Continue to allow us to expand, not just maintain. Help us to continue to support emerging birders and environmentalists as we did with Jim Pawlicki who, as a teenager, developed and honed his skills while a volunteer for our Iroquois Observations Program. He now works in the environmental industry and is paying us back with excellent work in defense of nature. With your help, we will continue to inspire youth to become committed to the Audubon cause of stewardship and love of nature.

In Audubon,

David A. Gordon, President



Loren Smith

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The end of 2012 was certainly an interesting time for birders! Hurricane Sandy brought many unusual birds to Western New York and other parts of the United States and Canada. In addition, this year appears to be a winter finch "superflight" or irruption, with essentially all species of finches on the move. This brought significant numbers of Pine Siskin, both White-winged and Red Crossbill and Purple Finches reported across the Eastern US. Evening Grosbeaks, our 'cover bird' have also made a large push through are region, with reports from locations far and wide. For me this was a bird to add to my life list, and I'm sure that if I was able to get out more I would be able to add several others. It is hypothesized that the drought of this past summer has led to a food shortage that in turn could bring many unusual birds to feeders across the region. Be sure to stock up on feed, squirrel-proof your feeders, and take all of the necessary steps to ensure

that your yard is bird friendly – this could bring a big payoff this winter!

These bird sightings are just another reminder of how dynamic and exciting nature can be – even without a 'storm of the century'. Winter is a great time to bird and to experience nature in Western New York, and I hope that you will participate in one of our programs or activities! Please share your stories with us and pass along your love of nature to family, friends, co-workers, neighbors or someone who might not see what you do – take a chance and point it out!

With best wishes for a happy and healthy 2013,

Loren Smith



## Great Backyard Bird Count

February 15-18, 2013

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual 4-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are. Everyone is welcome—from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Participants tally the number of individual birds of each species they see during their count period. They enter these numbers on the GBBC website. As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or from anywhere in the world. Participants may also send in photographs of the birds they see for the GBBC photo contest. A selection of images is posted in the online photo gallery.

Why count birds? Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to document and understand the complex distribution and movements of so many species in such a short time.

Scientists use the GBBC information, along with observations from other citizen-science projects, such as the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to get the “big picture” about what is happening to bird populations. The longer these data are collected, the more meaningful they become in helping scientists investigate far-reaching questions, like these:

- How will the weather influence bird populations?
- Where are winter finches and other “irruptive” species that appear in large numbers during some years but not others?
- How will the timing of birds’ migrations compare with past years?
- How are bird diseases, such as West Nile virus, affecting birds in different regions?
- What kinds of differences in bird diversity are apparent in cities versus suburban, rural, and natural areas?

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada and sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited. To participate, log onto [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc).



## Earth Dirt... Get The Dirt On Earth

By Chris Kieber

Nature doesn't work without connections. Sometimes the tangled web has unexpected connections. Take the Allegheny wood rat (*Neotoma magister*) for example. This handsome animal



is threatened or endangered in more states, including New York, than any other rodent. This may sound like good news, but the wood rat is not prone to making a home in our home. Generally, they are not even found in areas inhabited by humans and are not responsible for nuisance rat infestations. Wood rats are not even closely related to the alien and reviled Norway rat. Instead they are a cousin of the white-footed mouse and are easily distinguished from other rats by a furred tail, large eyes and ears, long whiskers, white belly and very soft fur - hardly ratty looking!

Allegheny wood rats have an agreeable disposition around people and are remarkably unafraid. Also called pack rats or trade rats, they have been known to collect snail shells, bottle caps, coins, gun cartridges, feathers and bones. Researchers have reported them stealing bait containers from their packs, removing buttons from a shirt, and even dragging a blanket away from a sleeping camper.

Allegheny wood rats historically lived in southeastern New York State and were believed to be extinct in that area by 1987. However, there has been a recent rediscovery although the population is small and unstable. Even though it seems unlikely that a rodent could go extinct, a series of ecological pressures have virtually made it so. They are not prolific breeders. Their habitat is fragmented. Their predators include great horned owls, foxes, weasels, raccoons, bobcats, skunks, large snakes and humans who persecute them for their resemblance to the problematic European rats.

But life gets even more complicated for the Allegheny wood rat. A wild wood rat mainly feeds on seeds, nuts, and fruit and is generally not considered a pest of crops. While we can enjoy imported chestnuts, blight has all but wiped out the American species which were once an important part of the wood rat's diet. Acorns, particularly from red oaks, were also desirable but the numbers have been greatly reduced by gypsy moth caterpillar defoliation. This is especially true on the high rocky ridges where wood rats abide and where the oaks are naturally stressed.

Finally, the Allegheny wood rat, like any good pack rat, collects many different objects, even animal droppings, such as raccoon. While these animals are proliferating, thanks in part to human garbage, they often carry a species of parasitic roundworms (*Baylisascaris procyonis*) that raccoons can tolerate but can be fatal to wood rats.

The Allegheny wood rat smells a rat - but it is in the form of humans, many predators, chestnut blight, gypsy moths and parasites. See the connections?

## Wish List

- |                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Clean milk jug caps     | Roof Shingles       |
| Old CD's                | Snowshoes           |
| Toilet paper tubes      | Ski Poles           |
| Pringles cans with lids | Back Packs (school) |



## Volunteers for Maple Season

Volunteers are needed to help with maple sugaring weekends in March. Call Mark Carra at 585-457-3228 for more information.

## Exploring Beaver Meadow in the Winter

Snowshoes are available to rent at the center, and you are always welcome to bring your own snowshoes or skis to explore our trails during the winter months! We are happy to help you get started if you have never used snowshoes before. It's a great way to experience nature. See the calendar for two organized snowshoe hikes.

## Allegany Nature Pilgrimage

It isn't too early to start thinking about the Allegany Nature Pilgrimage! Cabin or campsites are already available - now is the time to make your reservation to get the perfect spot for this wonderful weekend of nature! Mark your calendar for May 31, June 1 & 2 so you don't miss any of the activities. Check the website at [www.alleganynaturepilgrimage.com](http://www.alleganynaturepilgrimage.com). Call Marcia Nixon at (716) 304-1257 if you have any questions or to join the organizing committee. We'll see you at the pilgrimage!

## Save the Date - Maple Harvest Festival

March 16 & 17, 9am - 4pm at Beaver Meadow

Visit our sugar shanty, taste fresh syrup, and Jack wax, see maple sugar made the Native American way, and fuel up with our famous Pancake Breakfast! Nature walks, crafts and other activities will occur all weekend long.



## Rare Birds

Gerry Rising sends along a note that Grand Island native Elizabeth Gehrman has written an outstanding book, *Rare Birds*, about the rediscovery and rehabilitation of the Bermuda Petrel or Cahow after over 250 years when it was thought to be extinct. The book even has another local connection: Fred Hall, former Buffalo Museum of Science director plays a minor role in the rediscovery.

## School Holiday Nature Days

Monday, January 21 - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Monday, February 18 - Presidents' Day

Need a place for your kids to go while off from school for the holiday? Bring them to Beaver Meadow's Nature Day. They will have a great time learning about the wonders of the natural world. Live animals, crafts, stories, games, art and discoveries of all kinds will be part of the fun. The Program will run from 9am-4pm. The cost is \$30 per day for members / \$35 for non members. Pre-registration is required. Call Jackie at 585-457-3228 or email her at [keller@buffaloaudubon.org](mailto:keller@buffaloaudubon.org).

## Remember When... 25 and 50 years ago.

January 1963: Marie and Margaret Wendling reported on a field trip and owl prowl to part of the Ponevas property - now the arboretum and associated lands. The group observed two Great Horned Owls and a Screech Owl. Just this past November Tom Kerr ran an owl prowl that heard a Barred Owl. It is nice to see how some things stay constant over the years!

February 1988: Olga and Arthur Roche reported on a Gull and Duck trip along the Niagara River. Highlights included a white-winged scoter, Thayers gull and Long-tailed duck (formerly known as Old Squaw) among 14 species of ducks and 40 plus species total.

## Keep informed on Twitter and Facebook



Join us on Twitter and Facebook to receive periodic nature facts or program updates. You can receive interesting nature facts on your computer or cell phone or get up to date reminders of the great programs we offer. It's easy to sign up from our home page at [www.buffaloaudubon.com](http://www.buffaloaudubon.com).

## Visit The BAS Gift Shop At Beaver Meadow!

*All proceeds from our Gift Shop benefit Beaver Meadow*

Remember, your membership card entitles you to an extra 10% savings. Bring your BAS membership card in for savings on all sales. Your purchases support Nature Education.

**Bird Seed Sale March 30, 2013**

*See next month's issue...*

# Calendar of Events

All programs are by pre-registration.  
Please call 585-457-3228 to register.

Locations - (BM) Beaver Meadow Audubon Center,  
(KF) Knox Farm State Park, (IO) Iroquois National  
Wildlife Refuge.

First Saturday of every month is Volunteer Orientation  
at Beaver Meadow at 10am. (BM)

Every Wednesday, 9am-2pm, is Volunteer Day at  
Beaver Meadow. For all Audubon volunteers -even first  
timers! No need to register, but bring a lunch. (BM) Free.



## January

- 1 Tue **CENTER CLOSED FOR THE HOLIDAY!**  
Enjoy the trails as they are always open.
- 5 Sat 9am **Walk at Knox Farm State Park - "Adventure Hike."** Hike along the trails of Knox Farm State Park in search of wildlife and other discoveries. (KF) Donations.
- 12 Sat 10am-12noon **Junior Audubon Club** – Middle and high-school students are invited to join our new club in the city of Buffalo. Each month we will focus on the fundamentals of birding and the major groups of birds that are found across WNY. Call Center for more information. Free.
- 12 Sat 2pm **Family & Friends Snowshoe Walk** – Grab your family or friends and come for a guided nature walk through the preserve at Beaver Meadow on snowshoes. Our naturalist will share the history of snowshoes and then lead you on a hike. Afterwards sip on coffee or hot cocoa while relaxing in the warmth of the Center. \$25 for four people with snowshoe rental. (BM)
- 16 Wed 10am-12noon **Walk with Director** – Come walk the trails at Beaver Meadow with Director Loren Smith as your guide. (BM) Donations.

- 16 Wed 6:30pm **Audubon Board Meeting**
- 19 Sat 8 am **Winter Ecology at Joe Davis State Park** - Join BAS Naturalist Chuck Bartlett for a walk exploring the exciting ecological interactions that occur during winter. Meet in large parking lot by pond. Donation
- 19 Sat 9am **Walk at Knox Farm State Park - "A Frosty Hike."** Button up your jackets as we walk through the park on a chilly January day in search of natural happenings. (KF) Donations.
- 19 Sat 10am-3pm **Boy Scout Merit Badge Workshop** – This workshop is for any Boy Scout who wishes to earn his Photography Merit Badge. (BM) \$12 per scout
- 21 Mon 9am-4pm **School Holiday Nature Day** – Need a place for your kids to go on Martin Luther King Day? Bring them to Beaver Meadow for the day. They will have the time of their life learning about the wonders of the natural worlds. \$30 members/\$35 non members. Pre-registration required. See article on page 5.
- 26 Sat 10AM – **Gull Watch at Artpark State Park** - Join BAS Naturalist Tom Kerr for a hike along the Gorge to view the different species of Gulls that spend their winters on the Niagara River. Learn about what attracts them to the River and how they survive while they are here. Meet at Fisherman's Lot. Donation.

## February

- 2 Sat 9am **Walk at Knox Farm State Park - "Hibernation."** Learn about the seven sleepers in Western New York as we hike along the trails in search of signs of those animals that stay awake all winter. (KF) Donations.
- 2 Sat 2pm **Family & Friends Snowshoe Walk** – Grab your family or friends and come for a guided nature walk through the preserve at Beaver Meadow on snowshoes. Our naturalist will share the history of snowshoes and then lead you on a hike. Afterwards sip on coffee or hot cocoa while relaxing in the warmth of the Center. \$25 for four people with snowshoe rental. (BM)



- 9 Sat 10am-12noon **Junior Audubon Club** – Middle and high-school students are invited to join our new club in the city of Buffalo. Each month we will focus on the fundamentals of birding and the major groups of birds that are found across WNY. Call Center for more information. Free.
- 10 Sun 2-5pm **Valentine Snowshoe Hike** - Grab your sweetheart and your snowshoes and join us for a hike through the nature preserve, followed by a warm-up around the fireplace with a bowl of chili and hot cocoa. Borrow our snowshoes if you don't have your own. (BM) \$20 per couple/\$15 members. Call to reserve your spot. (BM)
- 15-18 **Great Backyard Bird Count** – An event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. See article on page 4. See how you can participate at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc)
- 16 Sat 8 am **Winter Ecology at North Tonawanda Audubon Preserve** - Join BAS Naturalist Chuck Bartlett for a walk through this preserve exploring the exciting ecological interactions that occur during winter. Meet @ Raymond St. entrance. Donations
- 16 Sat 9am **Walk at Knox Farm State Park - “Tracking Wildlife.”** Discover what animals have visited the park as we look for the marks they left behind. (KF) Donations.
- 16 Sat 10am-12:30pm **Winter Tree ID Hike** - Join John Sly, forestry expert and longtime BAS leader, as he demonstrates how to identify trees and bushes by examining bark, shape, branching and location, without relying on leaf shape. The hike will start at the Audubon Center with a display of tree twigs, followed by an outdoor hike and end back at the center for hot chocolate. Joint program with the WNY Land Conservancy. (BM) Donations.
- 18 Mon 9am-4pm **School Holiday Nature Day** – Need a place for your kids to go on Presidents' Day? Bring them to Beaver Meadow for the day. They will have the time of their life learning about the wonders of the natural worlds. \$30 members / \$35 nonmembers. Pre-registration is required. See article on page 5.
- 20 Wed 10am-12noon **Walk with Director** – Come walk the trails at Beaver Meadow with Director Loren Smith as your guide. (BM) Donation
- 20 Wed 6:30pm **Audubon Board Meeting**
- 23 Sat 10am-3pm **Boy Scout Merit Badge Workshop** – This workshop is for any Boy Scout who wishes to earn his Bird Study Merit Badge. (BM) \$12 per scout.
- 24 Sat 10AM **Waterfowl Watch at Buckhorn Island State Park.** Join BAS Naturalist Tom Kerr for a walk along the Niagara River in search of ducks, swans, geese, and maybe an eagle. Meet at Canoe Launch. Donation.

## A Look ahead to March . . .

- 2 Sat 9am **Walk at Knox Farm State Park – “Winter Birding.”** Leave that comfy chair and discover those hardy winged nymphs that stay here for the winter. (KF) Donations.
- 16-17 Sat-Sun **Maple Harvest Festival!** – Delicious pancakes are waiting for you!
- 16 Sat 9am **Walk at Knox Farm State Park – “Trees Speak.”** Listen to the trees and the nature around you as you take a peaceful walk through the park. (KF) Donations.
- 20 Wed 10am-12noon **Walk with Director** – Come walk the trails at Beaver Meadow with Director Loren Smith as your guide. (BM) Donations.
- 23 Sat 10am-3pm **Boy Scout Merit Badge Workshop** – This workshop is for any Boy Scout who wishes to earn his Environmental Science Merit Badge. (BM) \$12 per scout.
- 23 Sat – **Seed Sale Order Forms Due**
- 30 Sat 10am-12noon **Bluebird of our Happiness** – A bluebird program designed to help beginners learn about bluebirds and their special needs. Presented by BAS Naturalist Mark Carra. Pre-registration required. (BM) \$5/\$3.
- 30 Sat 10am-1pm **Seed Sale pick up day.** (BM)





# Audubon Outlook

c/o Beaver Meadow Audubon Center  
1610 Welch Road, North Java, NY 14113  
info@buffaloaudubon.org



Help us save precious resources  
- sign up to receive the Outlook  
electronically!

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Buffalo, N.Y.  
Permit #195

## BEAVER MEADOW AUDUBON CENTER

Open Year-round

- Hours -

Tuesday - Saturday 9 AM - 5 PM

Sunday 1 PM - 5 PM

Closed on Mondays and Major Holidays

Trails are always open

## Buffalo Audubon Preserves

Open Year-round

Dawn to Dusk, Open to the Public



Mark Carra

## A NATURALIST VIEW

### Gentle Owl

By Mark Carra

Don't get me wrong, an owl by nature must be aggressive to survive. However the owl described here gives the distinct impression that it is downright sweet and gentle. This beautiful and magnificent creature, which spends much of its time so far north in Canada that it has little fear of us, is the diminutive Northern Saw-Whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*).

This is the smallest owl found in Western New York – only about the size of a robin. Do not let their small size fool you, as they are one tough nut. Saw-Whets are adapted to live and breed further north than most, above the 50th parallel in northern Canada. Juveniles are marked so different from adults that many would view them as some other, perhaps rare species. Youngsters with their caramelized buff colored breast, their head seemingly dipped in a rich chocolate brown and a white frosted “X” smack in the middle of their face are more reminiscent of a delectable confectionary treat than of a

nocturnal predator. The crown, forehead and the edges of the facial disc is decoratively sprinkled with white. Adults' heads with their large golden yellow eyes are proportionately larger than seems appropriate for their body. The mature Saw-Whets' facial disk is a warm buff color, upper body parts are a rich reddish brown with white spots splashed on their wings and its breast is white with delicious

cinnamon streaked through it. All of these details give this tiny owl its reputation as a wonderfully inviting vision of loveliness.

As if their looks aren't mesmerizing enough, the sounds they produce are a source of mystery and conjecture. It has been assumed for many years that their distinctive name comes from one of their calls, as they must make a sound very much like that of a saw blade being sharpened on a “whet” stone, not so! This story was strengthened by none other than John James Audubon himself in the early 1800's when he owned an ill-fated grist mill in Henderson, Kentucky. Audubon heard a call coming from inside the mill resembling the sound of a saw blade being filed and assumed it was from a Saw-Whet. He never saw the bird, but a worker who did claimed it was a Screech Owl, the commonly used name for the Barn Owl at that time. Audubon included the description of the call in his book thereby cementing the myth surrounding this owls' name. In reality the more plausible origin of the Saw-Whet Owls name is associated with the anglicization of the French word for owl, *chouette*, pronounced (shoo-ET), so close to *saw whet*.

Recently we had the honor of bringing our Junior Audubon members out to Dave and Sandy Junkins' home to band these little gems. The night was chilly but quite pleasant, and even when the nets kept coming up empty, we were still all having a great time with the wonderfully colorful stories and bottomless well of knowledge we were treated to. The bonus came toward the end of the evening when Dave plucked a curious adult from one of the nets. What an experience and thrill to see this living breathing exquisite sprite of the forest up close and personal. I will never again question the descriptions of this animal in the natural history books, from the way it gave itself up to capture, to the seemingly friendly manor of its release with wings beating ever so rapidly, ascending into the darkness with neither sound or complaint, the gentle owl lives once more.

