

The Meadowlark

The Newsletter of Genesee Valley Audubon Society, Vol. XXXII, No. 3
January/February 2005



From the President

June Summers

New York River Otter Project, Inc.

In 1995 the New York River Otter Project (NYROP), working in partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), started to restore North American River Otters to Central and Western New York. A number of other partners participated in the project and over 100 volunteers. GVAS supported the project with donation of funds and hundreds of volunteer hours. Since the fall of the year 2000 when the last otters were released a number of people have asked me what has happened to the otters.

We have done a good job of keeping track of them, but not a very good job of letting the public know about how successful the project has been. We have obtained information on the whereabouts of the otters from three sources: snow cover roadside surveys, otter sightings, and otter mortality reports. The snow cover roadside surveys were carried out by volunteers who drove assigned routes, stopping where streams or culverts cross the road to look for otter tracks and slides down the stream bank. These surveys were carried out until last year. Otter sightings are still being accepted by the DEC by phone and through the NYROP web site, www.nyotter.org. Each person who reports seeing an ot-

ter is interviewed to verify that it was an otter, not a mink. There have been hundreds of sightings since 1995. These sightings have been recorded and the locations have been plotted on a map. The third method by which we have kept track of the otters is unfortunately otter mortality. The DEC has worked hard to educate wildlife trappers, highway departments and the general public that if they see a dead otter on the side of the road to report the location to them. Vehicular traffic is the major cause of mortality for river otters. We have learned from the above three methods that the otters are still in the areas that they were released.

If you really want to see a river otter in the wild you will need to spend a lot of time in the streams and on the banks in the release areas. The closest release sites to Rochester are Letchworth State Park, Black Creek, and the south end of Hemlock and Honeoye Lakes. Some people like GVAS members Jim and Jean Barlow of Hilton were lucky enough to see an otter on Salmon Creek in their backyard. Two other otters have been found dead in the Hilton area since 1998. These otters probably came from the otters that were released in Black Creek in the southwest area of Monroe County.

If you want to see an otter

more than once, you have to work at it like Larry Nesbit of Churchville. When otters were released in Black Creek near Churchville in the fall of 1998 Larry hit the water, too. Larry has spent over 5000 hours in his kayak and on foot tracking the river otters in Black Creek. He first located places that the otters frequented by sighting otter slides on the banks. Slides are areas on the bank of the stream that are devoid of vegetation with a narrow trough in the soil of the bank. The otters slide down the bank into the water at these locations. Larry then noticed piles of otter scat, known as toilet areas. Toilet areas are used by otters to mark their territory and communicate to other otters that this area is taken. Warning: otters are nomadic and might not be using the burrows or toilet areas the next time that you visit.

Larry took his otter survey one step farther to a research project; he started collecting, drying and analyzing the scat to see what the otters had eaten. Crayfish, pumpkin seed (*Lepomis gibbosus*), rock bass (*Ambloplites rupestris*), largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), black crappie (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*), northern pike (*Esox lucius*), and carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) were found routinely in scat, but frogs and even a few bird bones were found. Crayfish dominated the diet from April to November.

(Continued on page 3)

JANUARY

6:30 PM WED., JANUARY 26, 2005

Carmen Clark Lodge, Brighton Town Park
777 Westfall Road, Brighton

MEMBERS AND FRIENDS NIGHT

Please bring a dish to pass and slides, pictures, a carving, or a special item to share. If your last name begins with A through L, please bring a main dish. If your last name begins with M through Z, please bring a vegetable, beverage, or dessert.

Note that the meeting starts at **6:30 pm.**

FEBRUARY

7:30 PM WED., FEBRUARY 23, 2005

Brighton Town Hall, Downstairs Meeting Room
2300 Elmwood Avenue, Brighton

PURPLE MARTINS

Mr. Rick Marx, an environmental engineer with the law office of Nixon Peabody LLP in Rochester, is a purple martin enthusiast who has admired these acrobatic songsters since he was a small child. He currently manages two purple martin colonies near his home a few miles southeast of Naples, New York.



The purple martin is one of the few species that prefer to nest in man-made colonial houses or in clusters of natural or artificial gourds. Mr. Marx will provide

valuable advice about choosing the proper location for a purple martin colony nest house and successfully management it. Protecting the house from predators and best practices for controlling European Starlings and English Sparrows will also be discussed.

Purple martins are on the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology Birdhouse Network's "Most Wanted" list. The need to provide suitable housing for this species is of paramount importance for its resurgence in this geographic area. If anyone wishes to become a "purple martin landlord," or just learn more about this beautiful songbird, you won't want to miss this informative and educational PowerPoint presentation.

First Sunday Hikes in 2005

GVAS will host our First Sunday Hikes at Braddock Bay Wildlife Management Area in 2005. We will explore this beautiful area near Lake Ontario, which sometimes has extreme weather conditions. Always dress or bring clothes for the windy cool environment along Lake Ontario. We will meet in the lodge parking lot at Braddock Bay Park on East Manitou Road off the Lake Ontario State Parkway. Have a question? Call June at (585) 865-6047.

January 2	3:00 p.m.
February 6	3:00 p.m.
March 6	3:00 p.m.
April 3	3:00 p.m.
May 1	8:00 a.m.
June 5	8:00 a.m.
July 3	8:00 a.m.

Great Backyard Bird Count

Feb. 18—21, 2005

Join the 8th annual Great Backyard Bird Count! Count the birds in your backyard or in a park and send your numbers in. Check www.birdsource.org for instructions and to see the results of last year's count.

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Now that winter has gripped much of the continent, what are our birds doing? Bird populations are dynamic, they are constantly in flux. We want to take a snapshot of North American bird populations and **YOU** can help.

Everyone's contribution is important. It doesn't matter whether you identify, count, and report the 5 species coming to your backyard feeder or the 75 species you see during a day's outing to a wildlife refuge.

Your data can help scientists

answer many questions:

- How will this winter's snow and cold temperatures influence bird populations?
- Where are the WINTER finches and other irruptive species?
- Will late winter movements of many SONGBIRD and waterfowl species be as far north as they were last year?

The data that you collect will be combined with Christmas Bird Count and Project FeederWatch data to give an immense picture of our winter birds. Each year that these data are collected makes them more important and meaningful. So as we see patterns, discover new questions and insights, we'll update you. And we'll ask for your help again.

(Continued from page 1)

Fish use was highest during winter months and likely linked to the lack of availability of crayfish. Scat of mixed content, fish scales/bones and crayfish shells, were found most often during seasonal transitions, in spring and fall.

As proof of the project's success, in November of 2000 a young river otter was captured on film by a remote-sensing camera near a toilet site next to Black Creek. Mortality reports to the DEC in 2002 indicated that two young otters had been killed on roads in the Black Creek watershed. Integrated circuit chips were not found in the two young otters. All otters released by the project were implanted with integrated circuit chips under the skin so they could be identified if captured or found dead. Therefore the two young river otters were not released but probably were the offspring of released otters.

So if you want to see a river otter in Central and Western New York, get out there and start looking.

Seneca Meadows Landfill

This summer when the executive director of Seneca Meadows, Inc. asked to meet with GVAS Board members we didn't take it lightly. The Seneca Meadows Landfill is one of the largest landfills in New York State. In the past when Seneca Meadows, Inc. has applied for a permit to expand the landfill GVAS has opposed the granting of said permit. Seneca Meadows had a number of problems in the past: underground leakage of the original landfill, odor pollution, and noise. Black Brook runs between the original landfill and the cur-

rent state-of-the-art landfill. A few years ago the ownership of Seneca Meadows, Inc. changed; it is now owned by IESI and things have changed. State-of-the-art barriers have been placed around the original landfill to contain any leakage. The current permit application to expand Seneca Meadows landfill includes the realignment and enhancement of the portion of Black Brook that passes through the landfill. This will insure improved water quality for Black Brook and Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, which is down stream. Expansion of the landfill will also fill in approximately 71 acres of wetland, which Seneca Meadows, Inc. will replace with a 400-acre mitigation wetland project in the Black Brook watershed.

The Board of Directors of GVAS supports the current permit application for expansion of Seneca Meadows Landfill and commends the current management of Seneca Meadows, Inc. for taking giant steps in the right direction at the landfill. We also thank Seneca Meadows, Inc. for their long-term commitment to support GVAS and our continuing environmental work.

Backyard Bird Talk

June Summers, President of GVAS, will give a talk and slide show on identifying backyard birds on Tuesday, January 18 at 7:00 pm at Braddock Bay Park lodge. This will help you identify the birds that come to your feeder. It will also prepare you to take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count on February 18-21, 2005.

Directions: Take I-390 north until it ends at the Lake Ontario Parkway. Go west on the Park-

2004 Annual Campaign Update

By Lisa McKeown

As of Dec 1, 2004 Genesee Valley Audubon Society has received over \$500 in donations towards our annual fundraising campaign. We would like to send our sincere thanks to those who have contributed. There is still time to make a donation; you can use the envelope enclosed in the Nov/Dec Meadowlark.

Thank you to the following people for their generous donations:

Donations of \$50 - \$99

Bonnie & David Swinford
Linda & Lyle Tague

Donations of \$25 - \$49

Barbara Ames
Mary Dinnan
Jane Duerr
Frank Ichishita
David Jennison
Tom Judd
Serene Palozzi
Margaret Rogers
Pam Rosen
Robert & Susan Spahn

Donations under \$25

Charles Brewer
John Edmeston
Nina Lembo
Michael O'Reilly
Louis & Karen Root

We are grateful for your generosity!

way and exit on East Manitou Rd (the next exit after Long Pond Rd). Go right (north) on East Manitou Rd and the entrance to the park will be on your left in a few hundred feet. Note that East Manitou Rd is not connected to Manitou Rd.

Board of Directors
Genesee Valley Audubon Society, Inc.,

Officers: *President*, June Summers; *Vice President*, vacant; *Secretary*, Joni VanDelinder; *Treasurer*, William Gruenbaum.

Committee Chairpersons: *Field Trips*, vacant; *Fundraising*, vacant; *Publications*, Joanne Mitchell; *Programs*, George Zakielarz; *Publicity*, Loretta Morrell; *Conservation*, June Summers; *Membership*, Doug Smith; *Education*, vacant; *Hospitality*, vacant; *Directors-at-Large*, Carolyn Emerson and Marylynn Marino, Lisa McKeown, Ravi Sampath and Nancy Strong; *Webmaster*, Sid Gear, *Staff Biologist*, Brett Ewald.

The Meadowlark is published the 1st of September, November, January, March, and April. Articles for the Meadowlark should be submitted four weeks prior to the date of publication. Send articles to Joanne Mitchell, 169 Black Walnut Dr., Rochester, NY 14615, or at GJMitch@localnet.com.

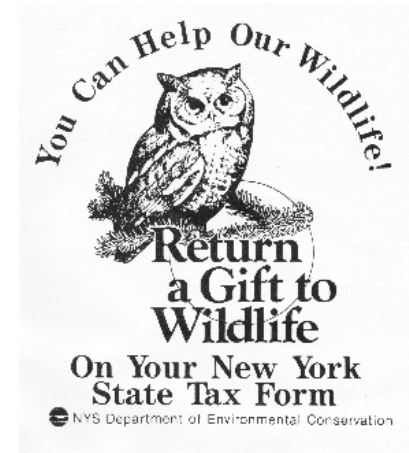
Meadowlark staff: *Editor & Layout*, Joanne Mitchell; *Business Editor*, vacant; *Printing*, Community News; *Distribution*, vacant.

What's Happening

- Have you wondered what is going on in Washington, DC? Check out www.audubon.org then click on "Latest from DC" to see what environmental issues are the buzz in Washington.
- Did you know that National Audubon Society has an office in Albany? Check out www.ny.audubon.org, then click on Conservation and choose a topic to see what issues Audubon is working on in New York State.

Return A Gift to Wildlife

Don't forget to check the Return a Gift to Wildlife box on your New York State tax return.



Keep up-to-date with our web site, www.ggw.org/gvas.

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P.O. Box 886, Adams Basin, NY 14410-0886

GVAS: A chapter of the National Audubon Society

The mission of GVAS is to promote conservation of the environment through education and to advocate for its protection, focusing on birds and other wildlife in western New York.

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