

The Meadowlark

The Newsletter of Genesee Valley Audubon Society, Vol. 33, No. 5
May/June 2006



From the President

June Summers

In my last column on invasive plants I covered a few of the plants found in this area: Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed, and Pale Swallow-Wort. These plants and the following four plants rob us of biodiversity and abundance by limiting the plant food supplies for wildlife.

Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)

This woodland plant enjoys shade, excluding other forest floor plants and thereby limiting food for forest animals. It blooms in June or early July, has a small white flower with four petals and a triangular, sharply toothed leaf, and grows one to three feet tall. It forms long thin seed pods by late July and the plant dies off and turns yellow. This plant is easily pulled up. This should be done early, before it has gone to seed.

Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)

This is a woody vine with a teardrop-shaped leaf that has small flower during summer. In September the berries are noticeable; they have a light orange cover that later pops open to reveal a bright orange berry. While this plant does supply berries for birds to eat it will exclude other plants, creating a monoculture.

Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*)

This clonal grass can grow eight

feet or taller. This tall grass has beautiful flowing seed heads at the top. It reproduces by seed as well as runners. It starts growing in ditches and in no time at all will grow up the side of the hill excluding all other plants, as it has done on Rte. 390 south of Rochester. Research has shown that the abundance of wildlife increases after the removal of Phragmites. Mowing, digging, and chemicals might be needed to remove it.

Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)

This beautiful purple flower spike that you see in mid summers in Montezuma NWR, Braddock Bay WMA and in ditches along the side of the road changes the hydrological process in wetlands. When this happens it impedes the ability of the wetland to purify water and support a diversity of other plants. It changes the timing of the release of nutrients in the wetland ecosystem, which will limit plant growth. Marsh birds such as bitterns and small herons will not nest in purple loosestrife. The disappearance of the Black Tern from Montezuma NWR is believed to be tied to the explosion of Purple Loosestrife on the refuge.

Pale Swallow-wort, Japanese Knotweed, Garlic Mustard, Common Reed, and Purple Loosestrife are the invasive plants that I see most often

around the Rochester area. I urge you to become familiar with these plants and when possible eliminate them from your property. It will be a lot of work and will take a lot of trial and error. We will try to keep you informed as we learn along the way. Please consider helping us eliminate some of these plants from public land.

Dragonfly Workshop

On July 8, 2006, 9:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), in the A-frame in Avon, a workshop on dragonfly (odonates) identification will be held. This event is not for the casual dragonfly watcher or naturalist, it is for the dragonfly enthusiast and devoted naturalist who will be willing to add to the body of scientific data collected on dragonflies of New York State. The workshop will be taught by Paul Novak, Zoologist with the NY Natural Heritage Program, NYSDEC. This workshop is sponsored by the NYSDEC and Genesee Valley Audubon Society. To sign up please contact June Summers, GVAS, (585) 865-6047 or email at summers@frontiernet.net, put Odonate Workshop in the subject line. Bring your lunch and something to drink, and be prepared to go outside and use microscopes.

Black Creek Park Wetland Project Volunteers Needed

We will be helping the County Parks Department to plant a wetland expansion project in May or June. The dates for training and planting have not been set yet. We are not going to plant the entire project area, just enough to become familiar with the plants and the area. We are hoping that you will be inspired to keep coming back to see how the plants are growing and to help remove other invasive plants. If you are interested in helping with this project call June Summers at (585) 865-6047 or email me at summers@frontiernet.net; put Black Creek Park in the subject line.

Needed: New Board Members

To help us spread the word about protecting the environment through action at home. We need people to man booths and tables at events such as International Migratory Bird Day Festival, The "Our Fragile World" event at the Seneca Park Zoo, the ADK Outdoor Expo in June, Coastal Clean-Up and Public Lands Day. We need people to contact Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops to offer to mentor them through their bird study badges or help coordinate the volunteers for the wetland planting in Black Creek Park. We have lots of possibilities. Let us know if you're interested; contact June (585) 865-6047 or sum-

First Sunday Hikes

GVAS will host our First Sunday Hikes at the South end of Irondequoit Bay. We will explore Bay Park East, Bay Park West, and county-owned wetlands to the south of the bay. Always dress or bring clothes and boots for the windy cool environment along Irondequoit Bay. We will meet in the back corner of the parking lot of Froggy's Restaurant, 1129 Empire Blvd. We will caravan or car pool from there. Have a question; call June at (585) 865-6047.

Please note the time change.

May 7	8:00 a.m.
June 4	8:00 a.m.
July 2	8:00 a.m.
August 6	8:00 a.m.
September 3	3:00 p.m.
October 1	3:00 p.m.
November 5	3:00 p.m.
December 3	3:00 p.m.

GVAS thanks you!

Genesee Valley Audubon Society would like to thank the following people for their generous donations during our 2005 Annual Campaign. This past year we raised over \$1,000.00 from the gracious donations sent in by our members. Thank you—every dollar counts.

Eberhard & Audrey Thieme
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Genesee Valley Audubon would like to send a special thank you to the firm of **Nixon, Peabody, LLP** for a wonderful donation of \$2,500.00

Mark your calendar: International Coastal CleanUp Sept. 16, 9:00 a.m. – Noon

We could use your help at Braddock Bay Marina. Call June for more information, (585) 865-6047.

Falcon Watch

Spring is in the air and so are the falcons at Kodak Tower. For the ninth straight year the Peregrine Falcons that inhabit the nest box on top of Kodak Tower on State St are back and already starting on this season's clutch of eggs. We all look forward to another exciting year watching Mariah, Kaver and their young falcons. Look for further information during the month of May on the Falcon Watch, which should happen in June again this year.

Check our web site,
www.gvaudubon.org.

You Can't Catch the Bird Flu (Avian Influenza) from Wild Birds

By June Summers

There are three major groups of influenza, or flu – A, B, and C, all caused by viruses. Influenza C viruses rarely cause illness in humans. Influenza B viruses occur only in people and are usually the cause of the annual flu. Influenza A viruses are found in a variety of animals, including birds, pigs, whales, horses, and seals.

Each major group of viruses has many different subtypes classified by certain proteins on the surface of the virus; the first protein is hemagglutinin (H) and the second neuraminidase (N). There are 16 H influenza A (A) subtypes and 9 known NA subtypes. The avian flu A of current concern is H5N1. Many type and subtype A viruses circulate among birds worldwide, particularly water bird, ducks and shorebirds. It is carried in their intestines and shed as saliva, nasal secretions and feces. Birds become infected by coming in contact with contaminated body secretions from infected birds. Most wild birds that are host to the H5N1 virus don't get sick, but they can carry the virus.

Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans. Most cases of avian influenza infections in humans have resulted from direct or close contact with infected poultry (e.g., domestic chickens, ducks, and turkeys) or from surfaces contaminated with secretions and excretions of infected birds. Most of the people who have contracted the avian flu have been in close contact with domestic fowl, either allowing the fowl into their homes or cleaning poultry pens. Recent research has shown that humans contract the virus by inhaling it deep into their lungs.

Scientists and health officials are concerned about the Influenza A viruses that might gain the ability to

spread easily from one person to another. To be able to be transmitted from human to human first the virus must mutate, which happens by one of two pathways. One is through random mutation, a process that occurs frequently in viruses. The second is through the exchange of genetic material with another flu virus in a human or a pig that has contracted both viruses. Health officials around the world are trying to keep this from happening by killing flocks of infected domestic bird to minimize the chances that a pig or human in close contact with the infected fowl will serve as a host for two flu viruses. If an Influenza A virus mutates into a form that can pass easily from person to person, a flu pandemic could occur.

The highly pathogenic H5N1 virus is an Influenza A virus subtype that occurs mainly in birds, is highly contagious among birds, and is deadly to many species, especially to waterfowl (ducks, geese, and swans) and gallinaceous birds (chickens and their relatives). H5N1 virus does not usually infect people, but a few cases of human-to-human spread have occurred which have not continued beyond a small cluster of individuals.

When this article was written, March 27, 2006, H5N1 virus had not been detected in North or South America; most cases have been in Asia. It will, however, reach North America some time this year in all probability. Spring migration is already underway, and many birds that summer in Alaska winter in the Eastern hemisphere. To reach Alaska they migrate along Australia to Asia north past Russia across the Bering Sea to Alaska. Other birds from North and South America are headed to Alaska to their breeding ground. Western hemisphere birds could also

come in contact with infected birds on the eastern side of northern North America as well. The US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Geological Survey, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and public health agencies are working together to test thousands of waterfowl and shorebirds for the virus in Alaska, and field sampling is being integrated with surveillance programs throughout the United States and Canada.

The H5N1 virus could also show up in North America through the illegal import of commercial birds, pet birds, bird parts, or bird products such as feathers or manure-based fertilizer. There is a ban on the importation of any birds or bird products from any country reporting an outbreak of H5N1 in its bird populations. Smuggled birds often have spent time in crowded Asian bird markets, where they are likely to be near infected domestic fowl.

The World Health Organization, Food and Agricultural Organizations of the United Nations, and World Organization for Animal Health all emphasize that culling wild bird populations is highly unlikely to stop the spread of the disease, and would divert resources away from more important disease control measures. The point of killing infected domestic flocks is to prevent the spread of the virus to other flocks, and to decrease opportunities for the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus to be transmitted to a pig or human infected with another flu virus, to lessen the chance of the gene exchange that might create a form of the virus that passes easily among people.

People who feed birds in their yard are not at high risk of contracting avian flu from wild birds. Birds do transmit diseases among themselves, and therefore people who

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GVAS: A chapter of the National Audubon Society

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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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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.

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feed birds should clean their feeders and birdbaths as recommended by Audubon and the USGS National Wildlife Health Center. Bird feeders should be cleaned with a weak bleach solution and water. Any large die-offs of birds should be reported to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Region 8, (585) 226-2466.

Things that You Can Do to Insure Your Health

- Don't handle dead or sick wildlife.
- When handling wild fowl for cooking use rubber gloves.
- Cooking poultry kills the H5N1 virus – cook fowl until all parts of the bird are 160 degrees F.

If the pathogenic form of H5N1 shows up in North America:

- Measures to protect domestic flocks will have been taken, such as isolating them from contact with wild birds.
- Don't panic. Don't change your daily activities. The current form will not cause a flu pandemic.

Web Resources

Audubon Science Department Statement and Links

<http://www.audubon.org/bird/avianflu/avianflu.htm>

Centers for Disease Control Bird Flu Page

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/>