



New York Birders

Newsletter of the
New York State Ornithological Society, Inc.

For the Birders and Birds of the Empire State Since 1948

Vol. 51 No. 3 (213) Fall 2022

A Look Back at the New York State Ornithological Conference September 30–October 02, 2022 Lake Ontario Event & Conference Center, Oswego, N.Y. Hosted by Onondaga Audubon

After two years of preparation, the weekend for the New York State Ornithological Association conference finally arrived. The planning committee had been hard at work, all the time hoping that Covid-related developments would not ruin our plans. Planning committee members included Maryanne Adams, Alison Kocek, Kayla Fisk, Pat Parkhurst, Robert Kuehnel, Michelle Stantial, and Jason Lusier. In addition to the planning committee, other board members who stepped up and volunteered their time during the conference weekend were Dori Joiner (Onondaga Audubon President), Joan Ragland, Diane Emord, Liz Del-Conte, Anna Stunkel, and David Fitch. Liz Williams also helped out.

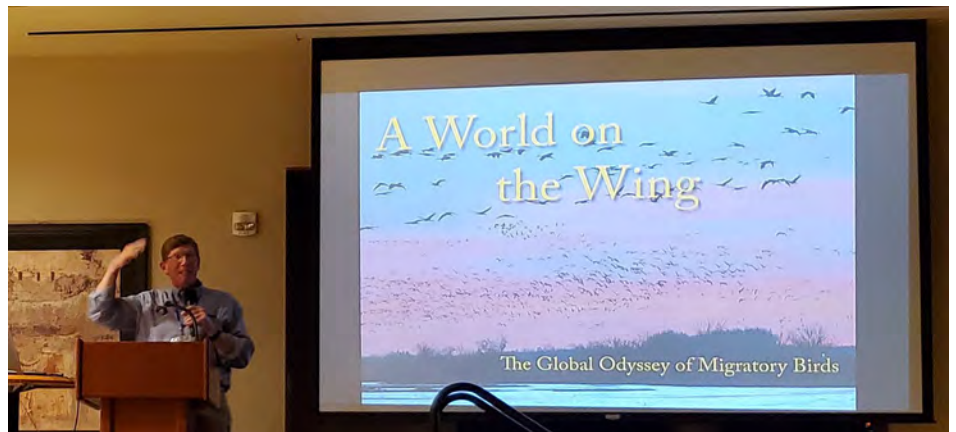
The weather cooperated for the weekend, and it did not rain on our parade. Guests began registering on Friday afternoon. A few had attended a small gathering at Derby Hill Bird Observatory to remember long-time Audubon

member Sherri Leigh Smith (formerly known as Gerry Smith), who had been the first hawk counter there and had taken a strong leadership role in the chapter for many years.

Folks from the Oswego County Tourism Board joined our welcome and registration team, and shared information about places to visit in the historic port city of Oswego. Conference attendees had time to settle in, explore the area, check out the vendors, and inspect raffle items. The cash bar opened at 5 PM and

Continued on Page 4

Author Scott Weidensaul gave the keynote presentation on Saturday evening.



people mingled and had a chance to get acquainted with keynote speakers, Scott Weidensaul and Bill Evans. The weather was pleasant enough for the doors to the second story deck to remain open so that guests could sit outside and enjoy the view of the Oswego River and Lake Ontario. Dinner was an informal affair with pizza and vegetable crudites.

We would like to thank our vendors that helped make the conference a success by providing birdy wares for attendees to enjoy. Dancing Vulture Designs (linktr.ee/dancingvulturedesigns) had needle-felted soft bird sculptures to sell; Sue Adair (www.suedeleareadair.com/) brought her original bird art and prints; World of Birds with Kayla Fisk (www.kaylafisk.com) also had bird art- originals, prints and bird jewelry; Gato Diablo Specialty Coffee Roasters (www.gatodiablo.coffee) sold Bird Friendly coffee; Rivers End Bookstore (www.riversendbookstore.com) a local Oswego bookstore had many birdy books and puzzles available as well as many copies of Scott Weidensaul's books for signings; Zeiss optics (<https://www.zeiss.com/>) also graced us with a variety of optics for birders to try out. We also had two educational vendors: Wild Ones Habitat Gardening in CNY Chapter (<https://www.hgcny.org/>) shared information on native plants for birds and harmful invasive species and the New York Breeding Bird Atlas III (<https://ebird.org/atlasny/>) shared information and stickers on our ongoing NY BBA.

Andy Mason, NYSOA Vice-president and Dori Joiner, Onondaga Audubon President, welcomed everyone. Dori introduced Bill Evans, Friday night's speaker, who gave a fascinating talk about nocturnal bird migration in New York State. He presented an overview of his decades-long research using spectrographs of flight calls to identify which species of birds were calling out during night flights. Bill also explained the conditions that sometimes resulted in the phenomena of fallouts of birds during their seasonal journeys. After the program, many of us went outside to listen for migrating birds and to peer at the blips and squiggles on a computer screen that had been



Curious birders gather around Bill Evans's computer to see visualizations of night calls of migrating birds.

connected to a microphone. There wasn't a great deal of bird movement that evening, but we saw enough to get the idea and to whet our appetites to try again on Saturday night.

Saturday morning, after a very early breakfast, birders went out on several field trips, most of which were near the Lake Ontario shoreline. Joe Brin led the delegates and David Fitch led the non-delegates on a field trip to Fair Haven Beach State Park and to West Barrier Bar Park. A Lapland Longspur was observed at West Barrier Bar to the delight of both groups. Liz DelConte took over the outing to Sterling Nature Center when the center's director had to cancel at the last minute due to illness. The lucky conference goers who went on the trip to SUNY Oswego's Rice Creek Field Station led by Dan Baldassarre were accompanied by Scott Weidensaul, who had been a friend of Dan's late father and eminent biologist, Guy Baldassarre. Scott remarked on how much Dan reminded him of Guy. Dan also brought trip attendees into the Field Station to observe the ongoing research there. Onondaga Audubon board member and past hawk counter Anna Stunkel led a trip to Onondaga Audubon's Derby Hill Bird Observatory, gave a history of the site and found a small flock of Rusty Blackbirds to enjoy. Local birder Matt Brown led a group to Deer Creek Wildlife Management Area where attendees got stunning views of unique Lake Ontario coastal dune habitat as well as 45 bird species.

NYSOA's Annual Board Meeting commenced at 10:30 AM. Details about the meeting can be accessed here: <https://nybirds.org/docs2022/>.

After the meeting, attendees enjoyed lunch on their own and had time to look over the forty-four raffle items and the vendors' wares until it was time for the paper sessions, which commenced at 1:30 PM. The paper sessions covered a variety of topics. Julie Hart (NY Natural Heritage Program) spoke about the importance of the NY Breeding Bird Atlas III: What's hatching in NY? Ms. Hart discussed how the atlas is organized; what results have been accumulat-

ed statewide so far; and what birders of all abilities can do to participate in this community science project. The next three presenters all hailed from SUNY Oswego. Sonia Hernandez discussed avian malaria in urban and rural Northern Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) and its effects on plumage color and body condition. Brooke Goodman explained how multiple carotenoid-based signals are enhanced despite poor body condition in urban male and female Northern Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*). Daniel Baldassarre presented his findings that urban Northern Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) have shorter flight initiation distances and are less neophobic (fearful of new things) than rural birds. After these presentations, the room took a coffee break and then the next three speakers, all from the SUNY-ESF, had the floor. Molly Jacobson described the response of wild pollinator assemblages to management of restored wetlands in central New York. Natia Javakhishvili elaborated about how autonomous recording technology could be used to study occupancy and reproductive success of the Broad-winged Hawk. And finally, Onondaga Audubon's Vice President, Alison Kocek, described the efforts that have been taken to maintain a newly colonized Piping Plover population on Lake Ontario, New York. The last speaker of the afternoon was also an Onondaga Audubon board member, Jason Luscier (Le Moyne College), who elaborated on CatTracker, a free smartphone app for reporting sightings of free-roaming domestic cats anywhere in the world. Jason uses community-based data to model domestic cat distributions in Syracuse, NY. With increased use, data gathered from CatTracker can be used by conservationists and cat advocates alike to amass detection data and develop solutions to the conservation challenges created by free-roaming domestic cats. Many thanks to each of these excellent speakers who did an amazing job updating us on the exciting research they are performing.

After these informative presentations, conference-goers were ready to relax and prepare for dinner and the evening entertainment. The cash bar opened. Last minute decisions were made about where to place raffle tickets before the drawings. There was time to review vendors' wares for a final time, to chat with



The Lillian C. Stoner Award is presented to Julien Amsellem, Iliana Dafoe, and Nina Vigil by Jerry Thurn.

Scott Weidensaul, and to get books signed.

The night's festivities began with dinner and welcomes from OA President Dori Joiner, and NYSOA Vice President Andy Mason. Jason Luscier kept the audience engaged as he announced the raffle winners for the first half of the items on display. Diane Emord drew a ticket from the bag associated with each item and volunteers formed a relay with ticket bags that were brought to the winners so they could retrieve their prizes.

Next came the portion of the program where Certificates of Appreciation were awarded. Jerry Thurn did the honors here. The Lillian C. Stoner Awards went to Julien Amsellem (a high school senior from Hastings-on-Hudson, NY), Iliana Dafoe (a high school sophomore from Warners, NY), and Nina Vigil (a high school sophomore from Katonah, NY). The President's Awards went to Gary Chapin, in appreciation for his many years of dedication in compiling meticulous records as secretary of NYSARC, and to Andy Mason, treasurer of NYSOA for ten years, and who successfully navigated all of the New York State requirements to have NYSOA registered as a not-for-profit organization with the NYS Office of the Attorney General. Andy continues to support NYSOA's fiduciary responsibility with regard to the New York Breeding Bird Atlas II. Andy is NYSOA Conservation Chair and advocates for the birds and birders of New York State.

Last, Andy Mason presented the Kingbird Statue to Shirley Shaw in recognition of her term as president of NYSOA.

Shai Mitra and Alison Kocek then took over to pay tribute to Sherri Leigh Smith (formerly known as Gerry Smith), who passed away on September 13. Their tributes were poignant and meaningful, especially to those whose lives had been touched by this unforgettable avian advocate.

The somber mood soon lifted when, once again, Jason Luscier took to the stage to announce the remaining raffle winners. The tension in the room was almost palpable as the time to draw the ticket for the last raffle item—the coveted pair of Zeiss binoculars—drew near. Imagine his surprise and delight when NYSOA's vice president, Andy Mason, heard his name being called!

Finally, it was time for Scott Weidensaul's keynote speech, *A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds*. As one might expect, Scott expounded on the worldwide decline of bird populations and highlighted the role of humans in this unfortunate occurrence. Yet, Scott was able to leave his audience with a feeling of optimism, because, mixed in with the bad, there was also a lot of good. Scott showed how humans who cared about righting wrongs were able to turn things around.

After Scott's riveting speech, there was another opportunity for visiting and book signing. Some of the birders who had been fascinated by Bill Evans's ability to interpret night flight calls on a computer screen returned to the edge of the Oswego River and enjoyed a significantly larger night flight than had been observed on the previous evening. Migrating Gray-cheeked Thrushes turned out to be real crowd pleasers.

Sunday morning offered choices of sleeping in or eating an early breakfast and participating on a field trip. Matt Brown, Alison Kocek, and

Kennedy Sullivan led a few hardy souls on a long trek to Sandy Island Beach State Park, walking against a stiff, chilly wind. The trip leader was local birding expert, Matt Brown. Alison Kocek, vice president of Onondaga Audubon and SUNY-ESF postdoc, has spent many hours studying Piping Plover at this site, and Kennedy Sullivan of New York State Parks presented her perspective about working with the birds at this site. They had an epic trip despite the winds, with 60 species observed including hundreds of migrating warblers, a light raptor flight, and flyovers of a Snow Goose and two Sandhill Cranes. Irene Mazzocchi, recently retired NYSDEC Biologist in the area and local birding expert, led a trip to Black Pond WMA and El Dorado Beach Preserve, where attendees got to see beautiful eastern Lake Ontario dune habitats and back marshes as well as dozens of bird species. A trip to Oneida Shores County Park on the southwestern edge of Oneida Lake in Cicero was led by local birding expert, Dennis Anderson. Attendees enjoyed 46 species, including good views of Gray-cheeked Thrush and several late-migrating warbler species. Maryanne Adams, Onondaga Audubon Conservation Chair, led a trip to West Barrier Bar Park and Fair Haven Beach State Park. Attendees had been hoping that the Lapland Longspur spotted on a field trip to West Barrier Bar on the previous day might still be around, but it was not. Nevertheless, there were a fair number of waterfowl on the pond and attendees observed a total of 37 species on the trip. Many thanks to each of the field trip leaders from both days of the conference who expertly led attendees to observe over 120 species of birds and created many lasting memories.

The Board of Onondaga Audubon was proud to host this conference and hopes that everyone who attended had a great time, learned a lot, and renewed their sense of wonder about the miracle of bird migration. As individuals who share deep concerns for the future of the birds that live in our world, we can only “do what we can and hope for the best.” As Sherri Leigh Smith often said, “Birds rise above it all.”

Field trips are a highlight for many at the Annual Meeting.

