

The Woodcock

Volume 4



Fall 2019

Antioch Bird Club

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***Cover page photo is by Greg & Company, Springbok**

Editor's Note - A Call to Action

In September of this year, the New York Times published a bombshell article based on a paper from ornithologists across North America called *Decline of the North American Avifauna*. Within this report was the realization that 1 in 4 birds, some 3 billion individuals, have been lost since 1970. The losses stretched across various families, from sparrows and warblers to blackbirds and finches — all common visitors to backyards here in New England. This kind of revelation can feel crushing, especially for something we see everyday that is slowly fading from existence. Birds are being taken out from multiple threats: pesticides, loss of habitat, window strikes...

So what do we do?

Something.

Anything.

Because if we do nothing, they will fade so gradually that we become numb to the loss. And that would be a true tragedy.

As the author of a similar environmental bombshell publication said:

“Conservation is a cause that has no end. There is no point at which we will say our work is finished.” - Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*

In light of this sobering news, the Antioch Bird Club has decided to focus on promoting everyday conservation practices like 3 Billion Birds' 7 Simple Actions to help birds and by highlighting the beauty and diversity of birds through our events. That's why we've done something a little different with this edition of the Woodcock. In this edition, we've compiled the usual reports on our events, news, eBird hotspot, and Birds of the Month. Additionally, we've solicited entries from other Antioch students that have worked closely with birds in academic/professional capacities or have a passion for our avifauna. We've even included information on Audubon conservation initiatives and resources for how to get involved. Consider this edition of the Woodcock a celebration of the birds we have and hope that in the future, even more of those feathered friends will fill our skies.



[#bringbirdsback](#)

ABC News



We have two new student employees working with Antioch Bird Club this semester alongside the coordinators Kim Snyder and Steven Lamonde! Sophie Dorow and Ally Gelinas are dedicated to helping facilitate club events, scheduling, feeder maintenance, meeting preparation and education/outreach programs.

Many club trips are more like group outings and we always have so much fun as well as discovering new bird species and exchanging some great stories along the way.

We have accumulated new resources in the 'bird corner' of the library which includes a new donated book with great hand drawn visuals and a handmade measuring tool for the people who are curious about what kind of bird their wingspan most resembles. So, step right up and try it out!



Ornithology professor and Club advisor Mike Akresh tests out his wingspan



Club coordinators Kim and Steven with a winter-ready Motus tower unit!



Event Recaps

COASTAL TRIP

On Saturday, October 5th, members of the Antioch Bird Club and students in Antioch's Ornithology class spent the day at Plum Island in Massachusetts. The trip was led by Sean Riley,



the Belle Island Marsh Reservation Supervisor and Mike Akresh, an Antioch Professor. The day was brisk but bright and yielded many staples of the coast as well as winter-plumage shorebirds. As the group gathered in the early morning at Parker River NWR, curiosity and excitement were keeping us awake as it was a chilly morning, we began searching by a dock for saltmarsh sparrows but instead found double-crested cormorants, greater yellowlegs, and great egrets flying above. Our next stop was Sandy Point State Reservation where we found shallow wading pools and birds sitting just above the incoming waves. The majority of the shorebirds found that day, came from this spot including

semipalmated plover, Bonaparte's Gull, Sanderling, Dunlin, Black-Bellied Plover and the American Golden Plover. We then headed over to Lot 6 where we witnessed a bird drama: a Peregrine Falcon had an aerial dance with a shorebird and ended up with lunch and a gull vying for a bite. This area also presented Common Eiders, White-winged Scoters, and Northern Gannets. The last highlighted spot was the Hellcat Dike where we saw many waterfowl including Green-wing Teal, a Northern Harrier and 3 species of shorebirds: Long-billed Dowitcher, a Whimbrel eating woolly bear caterpillars, and Greater Yellowlegs. After an amazing day, the club celebrated reaching a total of 77 species (breaking our goal of 75) by consuming large quantities of very tasty Brick Oven Pizza.

RIVER RUN FARM BIRD WALK

Many thanks to Rebecca Todd for hosting Antioch Bird Club for a guided bird walk on her beautiful property in October! Twelve participants enjoyed a diverse smattering of migrating and resident species, including a large skein of Canada Geese flying overhead to challenging-to-ID sparrows, three woodpecker species, and a calling Hermit Thrush. Not only did the group enjoy the bird life, we were also treated to a delicious spread of fruit, warm beverages, and homemade food after the walk. This event will certainly be remembered as an ABC favorite!

MEET THE MOUNTAIN DAY

For this October event (hosted by MERE and other local groups), we set up a make your own trail mix station about 20 minutes up the main mountain trail! Every ingredient in the trail mix represented a resource birds need at some point during migration. There were swedish fish (meat proteins), chocolate chips (insect proteins), rice krispie cereal (nuts and seeds) and dried fruit mix (fruits and vegetables). While hikers created their own mix, Ally and Sophie educated them on 7 ways they can help birds and gave visitors with an info card to take with them.



GAME NIGHT

Towards the end of October, we hosted a board game night on campus. Bird-themed games were played with some tricky questions, and food was enjoyed.

BIRDS ON THE FARM: WORKSHOP & GUIDED BIRD WALK

This first-time event for ABC was a big success! We partnered with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service office in Walpole, NH and the Cheshire County Conservation District to organize a workshop on creating bird-friendly habitat in and around farmland. This event attracted over 25 participants from New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts, all of whom enjoyed the educational walk of Walpole Valley Farm and Alyson's Orchard, both situated in Walpole, NH. Despite the frosty cold, we observed five species of sparrows (it was the height of sparrow migration season), a mixed-species flock of American Robins and Cedar Waxwings, and a late-migrating Eastern Phoebe! After the walk, many treated themselves to fresh apples, cider donuts, and pies from the Alyson's Orchard store. We look forward to doing this event again next year!



CEMETERY PROWL

For the past three years, ABC has held guided bird walks at the Greenlawn and Woodland Cemeteries in downtown Keene. We search for creepers, thrashers, owls, and other spooky birds lurk through the swamp reeds or perch on gravestones. This year, we were delightfully chilled by haunting Wood Duck whistles, enchanted by the mystical song of a Winter Wren, and warned of a nearby witches' kettle by a Carolina Wren's message - *teaKettle teaKettle teaKettle!* We also found, to our surprise, a headstone with the name "Woodcock" inscribed on it - an especially spooky sight since our club (and the name of this newsletter) is *the Woodcock!*

PROJECT OWLNET

This birding trip to coastal Maine in early November was an amazing experience. There were many birds spotted throughout



the trip including Snow Goose, Common Loon, Bald Eagle, American Kestrel, Savannah sparrow, Surf Scoter, Hooded Merganser, Saw-whet Owl and many more! Some other critters we saw on our journey include porcupines, harbor seals, and mummichog fish. The terrain and scenery of the coastline and blueberry fields had us in awe. We enjoyed spending a night with Project OwlNet, helping the station manager Devin record data on migrating Saw-whets.

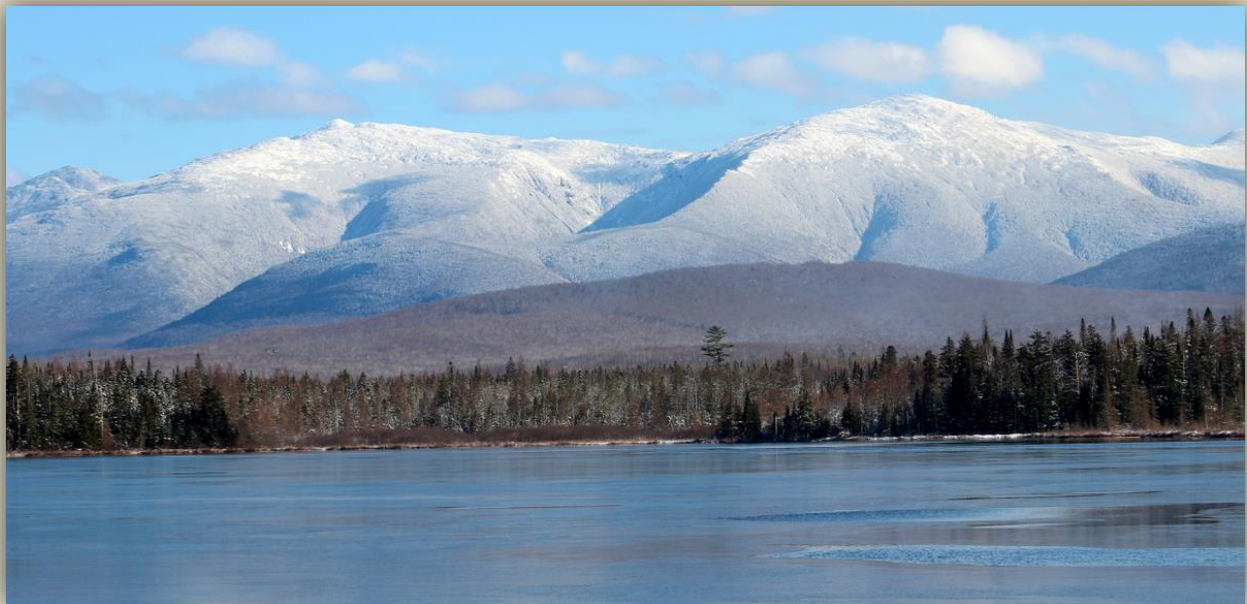


MOTUS WINTERIZING

As winter began, the club coordinators Steven and Kim took an overnight trip up to Dixville Notch in northern New Hampshire to assist with the winterizing of a Motus tower unit run by NH Audubon. They wrapped and stored the wires for winter weather and covered up the solar panel to prevent charge build-up. Kim took pictures of the entire process to provide a guideline for future winterizations of similar units across the state. They were hosted by Carol Foss of NH Audubon, who provided lively discussion of tropical birds and a cozy cabin to spend the night in! After winterizing the Motus tower, a mandatory stop was made at Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge to look for the rare and elusive Black-backed Woodpecker. None were detected, but Kim and Steven enjoyed watching a romp of otters create breathing holes a frozen pond and a Ruddy Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, and Pied-billed Grebe swim in the little open water remaining.

BAGELS AND BIRDS

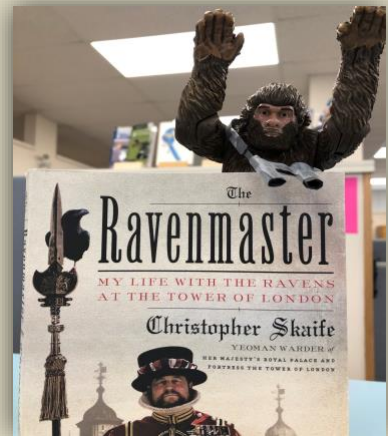
A big thanks goes out to The Works Cafe on main street in Keene for donating some very tasty bagels (and cream cheese) to go with our relaxed morning of bird feeder watching in early November. We set up in the library to look at the birds visiting our feeders and had a few live feeds of feeders viewing from Ontario, a west Texas hummingbird feeder and Panama fruit feeder. At the Panama feeder, we witnessed visits from Green Honeycreepers, Blue-gray Tanagers, Clay-colored Thrush, Thick-billed Euphonia, Spot-crowned Barbet, and Dusky-faced Tanager. We also managed to spot many typical feeder birds at our own feeders like the Dark-eyed Junco, Mourning Dove, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, and House Finch. A group of PhD students who were conducting a study on grey squirrel foraging/caching behavior at the same feeders stopped by, and we couldn't help but get involved.



LIBRARY SCAVENGER HUNT

The birds for this November hunt were strategically placed around the inside of the library. Most were hidden in plain sight matching color backgrounds to the walls and bookshelves. It was really tricky, but we had very attentive participants! We had some excellent guesses by our fellow birders and would like to congratulate our 4 winners! They walked away with prizes such as Duck ID guides, plush birds, and books about bird intelligence.

A big thanks to the Library
for partnering with us for
this event!



HOT SPOT UPDATE

Throughout the semester, Antioch University has submitted numerous checklists to ebird and the results are quite amazing. Some 139,545 individual birds have been accounted for during the 2019 semester through Antioch University Bird Records. 84 species of birds were recorded to eBird on Antioch University property Aug-November 2019 like this Swainson's Thrush! Way to go and keep up the great citizen science data collecting!



NOVEMBER BIRD OF THE MONTH

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

A sleek, round-headed woodpecker, about the same size as a Hairy Woodpecker but without the blocky outlines and is three quarters the size of a Northern Flicker. They are about 9.2 in long with a 13.0-16.5 in wingspan weighing 2.0 – 3.2 oz. Often appears pale overall, even the boldly black-and-white stripped back, with flashing red cap and nape (females lack the red crown). Look for white patches near the wingtips as this bird flies. These birds often stick to main branches and trunks of trees, where they hitch in classic woodpecker fashion, leaning away from the trunk and onto their stiff tail feathers as they search for food hiding in bark crevices.

When nesting, males choose the site and begin to excavate, then try to attract a female by calling and tapping softly on the wood around or in the cavity. When a female accepts, she taps along with the male, then helps put the finishing touches on the nest cavity.

The Red-bellied Woodpecker's most common call is a shrill, rolling *kwirr* or *churr* given by both sexes. You might also hear a gruff, coughing *cha cha cha* sounding through the woods, usually, a contact call between mates, or a throaty growl exchanged when birds are close together. Drumming (hammering against a loud or resonant object) is the woodpecker equivalent of singing. A Red-bellied Woodpecker can stick out its tongue nearly 2 inches past the end of its beak. The tip is barbed, and the bird's spit is sticky, making it easier to snatch prey from deep crevices. – Retrieved from All About Birds.com



DECEMBER BIRD OF THE MONTH

Pine Siskin (*Spinus pinus*)

Pine Siskins are very small songbirds with sharp, pointed bills and short, notched tails. Their uniquely shaped bill is slenderer than that of most finches. In-flight, look for their forked tails and pointed wingtips. They are slightly smaller than an American Goldfinch. Pine siskin's are brown and very streaky birds with subtle yellow edgings on wings and tails. Flashes of yellow can erupt as they take flight, flutter at branch tips, or display during mating. Pine Siskins often visit feeders in winter (particularly for thistle or nyjer seed) or cling to branch tips of pines and other conifers, sometimes hanging upside down to pick at seeds below them. They are gregarious, foraging in tight flocks and twittering incessantly to each other, even during their undulating flight.

Males string together husky, whispering trills, slurs, and short ascending notes into songs lasting 3–13 seconds. Songs are generally more nasal or wheezy than those of other finches. Song phrases are sometimes punctuated by "watch-winding" or "churry". Their most recognizable call is a "watch-winding" note, a harsh, upsweeping *zreeeeeeet* lasting most of a second, tossed in amidst shorter calls. Pine Siskins can temporarily store seeds totaling as much as 10% of their body mass in a part of their esophagus called the crop. The energy in that amount of food could get them through 5–6 nighttime hours of subzero temperatures. – Retrieved from All About Birds.com



AUDUBON'S CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIONS

Written by Allyson Gelinas Bird Club Work Study Student



Named after John James Audubon (often referred to as “Audubon”) the National Audubon Society is a science-based bird conservation organization whose mission is to “protect birds and the places they need

today and tomorrow”. Throughout the entire organization, they have established 23 state programs, 41 Audubon nature centers, and approximately 500 local chapters. Some states, like Massachusetts, even have climate designated centers like Arcadia in Easthampton and Northampton, Wellfleet Bay in South Wellfleet, and Broadmoor in Natick. These centers have “Life in a changing climate” programs targeted at middle and high school students and host Youth Climate Summits with local partners. On a larger-scale, Audubon signed onto a collaborative agreement with Birdlife International in 2010 where they collaborated in developing the Climate Action Plan for the Americas and pledged to help reduce at least 80% of 1990 emissions levels by 2050. By stating directly what Audubon is pledging to do, it shows that they are taking action just as much as they are encouraging others to do so.

Continuing the climate awareness effort, in 2014 Audubon published Audubon’s *Birds and Climate Change Report* which reviewed some major conservation and adaptation efforts. Such topics include water security, wetland buffers, revenue streams, low-carbon buildings, innovative transportation, wildlife corridors, carbon farming, and coastal resilience. One project that came out of this is *Climate Watch*, which has trained coordinators set up in areas to help train interested participants on citizen science actions like monitoring birds and documenting how they respond to climate change. Standard protocols, survey manuals, datasheets, maps, and a video training clip are available to acclimate volunteers to the research. Recently, Audubon also partnered with the *#bringbackbirds* movement in response to a study that was published in the journal *Science*. This study revealed that 2.9 billion birds have disappeared since 1970 across multiple ecosystems. These efforts have branched out and reached many communities, motivating their *Climate Initiative*, which addresses climate change and provides sustainable and targeted actions across its network, which then radiates out into the public through communication efforts, campaigns, and education.

THE MRBC

This year ABC held its first annual birding competition to raise money for student scholarships! The following piece appeared on AUNE homepage after the event.

First Annual Monadnock Region Birding Cup Soars

On Saturday, September 14th, the Antioch Bird Club hosted its first competition for bird watchers in the Monadnock Region of New Hampshire. Sponsored by various regional businesses, including the Monadnock Food Co-op, Achille Agway, Toadstool Bookstores, Bird Watcher's Supply and Gift, Jake's Market and Deli, and Moosewood Ecological LLC, this competition brought awareness to local fall bird species and raised funds for future Antioch student bird conservation research.

In total, 7 teams competed over 12 hours to tally 85 species. The winning team, the *RAVENgers*, saw 46 of these tallied species, all on Antioch's New England campus. The 25 participants, many of them Antioch University students, competed for glory in the cup or for recognition in competition categories. Winners were picked for the Fledglings category (less than 5 years birding experience), the Townie category (most species seen in a single town), and the Carbon Footprint challenge (fossil fuel free competition). While Antioch students had a

strong presence, they were far from the only contenders. A family team,

Year of the Pink-footed Goose, travelled all the way from Scituate, MA to compete for their Big Year effort and composed a great [blog post](#) about their experience during the event. They placed 2nd in the competition with 44 species reported during their 12-hour journey across the Monadnock region! A team also competed from the Harris Center for Conservation Education and the Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory, tallying migrating hawks and songbirds from atop Pack Monadnock.

Warbler species made a strong appearance with 16 species recorded across the teams. Rarities included a Nashville Warbler, several Northern Parulas, a few Magnolia Warblers, and a Tennessee Warbler. Additional species of note were an Eastern Screech Owl, a Great Egret, a Solitary Sandpiper, a Bald Eagle, and the MRBC mascot, the Golden-crowned Kinglet even made an appearance!

The Antioch Bird Club is thrilled at the success of this event and is looking forward to hosting the cup again in the Fall of 2020. Please visit the [MRBC website](#) for up-to-date information on the competition!



STUDENT SHOWCASES

Raptors: A Life-long Love

By Eric Campisi - a 1st year Conservation Biology MS student.

My love for raptors first fledged upon reading *My Side of the Mountain* at eight years old and has been soaring ever since. Like a songbird being overtaken, the human heart passes into the raptorial shadow and does not reemerge unchanged. I especially love peregrines. They flush admiration into the human heart with the same devastating beauty as a flock of pigeons into the air.

My love for raptors first drew me to falconry. There is nothing like having a raptor on your glove, and it is a long-standing dream of mine to work with them in this capacity — specifically falconry-based bird abatement as an ecologically sustainable substitute for agricultural pesticides and other unsustainable, dangerous forms of “pest” control. The ecological soundness of this vocation manifests further in the relationship between falconer and bird, which is not one rooted in dominance but rather in respect and mutual trust. I find this reciprocity to be a healthy exception to the general rule of the relationship between human and non-human animals, which is exploitative, repressive, destructive, and ontologically impoverishing. Falconry also provides the opportunity to become immersed in the ancient interplay between predator and prey, by which

humans evolved and to which they have become estranged, and in so doing, provides the restorative of wildness to the insulated and domesticated human spirit.

A passion for birds also led me to work with them at the Center for Wild Bird Rehabilitation at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science. As much as I admire the hearts and tenacity of rehabilitators, especially those at VINS, I've since realized that I am not interested in rehabilitating raptors so much as I am in a world in which their rehabilitation is unnecessary. That kind of world is the only true and lasting form of rehabilitation that can be accomplished, and it is toward that kind of world that we must direct all of our efforts. Going forward, I hope to find a niche for myself in the field of raptor ecology and to give the best of myself to safeguard wildlife against the pressures of avarice, exploitation, and an unacceptable ignorance and indifference toward their suffering and disappearance.



Oscar the Barred Owllet

By Jennie Healy a 1st year Conservation Biology MS student

My days started out like most; I would get up, feed my animals, and get ready for the day. Once everything settled down, I would bring a covered crate out from my back room into my kitchen and open it up. Immediately, this loud huffing and clicking would start. After a few moments and some protesting, an angry, one-foot tall fluff ball would tumble out. Then the begging for a thawed mouse would start.

It's not often someone is lucky enough to spend a few months raising a barred owllet*. Wildlife rehabilitation can be an extremely rewarding experience treating patients to the point release — but not all experiences result in a positive outcome. The majority are heart-wrenching and leave you asking *why am I doing this?* or *why does this continue to happen?* Thankfully, this experience resulted in a positive outcome. This barred owllet was brought into the center I was working at after being hit by a car. We lovingly named him Oscar — after his grouchy disposition. Oscar had a fractured humerus in his right wing, which would usually result in an automatic euthanasia. Rare exceptions to this protocol can only be made under the perfect conditions and with proper permission.

Oscar was young enough that his skeletal and muscular structures were still developing. The veterinarian pinned the

bone and splinted the wing so the joint could fuse and lock in place to support the fractured section. This meant Oscar could never be released and would have a future as an educational ambassador bird.

Oscar was also young enough to imprint on his primary caregiver. This meant he needed to be exposed to handling, movement, all sorts of noises, and just general everyday activities. He also needed daily treatments, bi-weekly bandage changes, and frequent veterinary check-ups. Oscar dreaded his veterinary appointments. We rewarded him with his favorite activity, watching a superhero movie on the back of our couch. His personal favorite was *Iron Man*. Once Oscar's bandage changes were done and his wing healed, he no longer needed intensive care. Oscar was able to move to his permanent home for continued training. I am happy to report that Oscar is now an education bird with a local zoo and is a wonderful ambassador for his species

*Jennie is a certified wildlife rehabilitator and a member of the CWRA, NWRA, and IWRC.



Chasing nighthawks

By Kim Snyder a 1st year Conservation Biology MS student

As the sun set, I set out on my bike down Winchester Street. I was on survey, preparing for a long two hours of watching the night sky. Every summer, common nighthawks return north to nest in the northeast. These aerial insectivores can consume thousands of insects in a single night and are sometimes seen winging their way across open expanses of sky just before sunset. In recent years, all aerial insectivores, but especially the nighthawk, have experienced a precipitous decline, the cause of which is yet unknown. Project Nighthawk, run through the Harris Center, aims to track nesting success of our resident nighthawks and contribute citizen science data to the conservation effort.

I skidded to a halt at the designated location on Keene State campus. Keene has been lucky enough to have at least one nesting pair of nighthawks consistently each year but their success has been limited. One had been heard here several nights previous, possibly courting a female on a nearby gravel roof. My job was to document if he returned and watch for the nearly invisible female, if one was present.

As the last of the sunlight faded away, I heard the call: *peent*. In the dim light, I could see the small, pointed shape darting back and forth overhead. He circled the rooftop in

jerking turns that were hard to trace in the dark. After several minutes of calling, the shape dove suddenly, rocketing downward. Ten feet from the ground, he boomed: snapping his wings open and sending his unnerving sound (a cross between a truck speeding past and a laser rifle firing) echoing between the buildings. Then just as suddenly as he had appeared, he vanished.

I waited in the silence, watching the rooftop in case the silent female chose to slip away. For all I knew, that would be the only time I saw the male that night. But to my surprise, he returned not long after he left, approaching from the opposite direction that I had heard him leave from. His display began again, once again using the buildings to amplify his boom. Then he departed again.

He returned exactly four minutes after departing, displayed for four, and then flew off again. This continued for some time, captivating me with its regularity. Perhaps he was patrolling his territory, seeking out females to court and I was just witness to one of many displays he gave. Or perhaps his lady was already crouched on the gravel roof, staying perfectly still and silent and the displays were only to announce his presence to her.

I returned home, leaving the male to his diligent displays.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Christmas Bird Count



The Christmas Bird Count is the world's oldest and largest biological survey and citizen science endeavor, with thousands of participants worldwide. Before 1900, Americans would celebrate the holiday season by going out and shooting as many birds as possible. In 1900, this all changed when the Christmas Bird Count was established. Rather than shooting birds, a counting system was established, and it has turned into the premier long-term dataset for tracking winter bird populations across North America. Since its inception, over 2,300 standardized counts "circles" have been established. Our very own Keene count is one of the oldest, dating all the original 25 count circles created in 1900!

This year the **Keene Christmas Bird Count** will be on **Sunday, December 15th**.

ABC will also participate in the **Brattleboro, Vermont Christmas Bird Count**, which is held on **Saturday, December 14th**.

For more information or to sign up for this fun day of birding, please contact Steven Lamonde (slamonde@antioch.edu).

Coastal Field Trip: Cape Ann and Plum Island

This trip was originally slated for mid-November but was postponed due to severe winds. Our new date for this trip is **Wednesday, December 18th**. Join us for an all-day scenic tour of Cape Ann, a quintessential coastal Massachusetts area with a rich maritime history, and Plum Island, a nationally recognized birding destination. Highlight birds from this trip will include Snowy Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, Snow Bunting, scoters, Harlequin Duck, Red-throated Loon, and much more. We'll even keep our fingers crossed for Short-eared Owls, Atlantic Puffin, and Purple Sandpiper!

Contact Steven Lamonde (slamonde@antioch.edu) for more information.

2020 GLOBAL BIG YEAR

That's right, ABC is doing another Big Year! We had so much fun organizing our 2018 Global Big Year to document as many birds as possible around the world, that we set up a new group eBird account (Antioch University Bird Records) to continue this effort. This is the eBird account we will use to track the 2020 Global Big Year and all future Big Years! Stay tuned for an official announcement later this month. Starting January 1st, we will be collecting all bird observations by students, staff, faculty, and alumni from all 5 Antioch University campuses. In 2018, we tallied almost 400,000 individual birds across 1,349 species in 18 countries! Can we beat these records in 2020??



Read the 2018 Big Year Report at
[https://www.antioch.edu/new-
england/resources/students/student-](https://www.antioch.edu/new-england/resources/students/student-)

See you in 2020!
IN CLOSING

A NEW SILENT SPRING

By Audrey Boraski a 2nd year Conservation Biology MS student

The world was once
screaming, and all humans
could hear

Drowned out by loud sounds
disguising the chickadees
cheer

The warblers in the woods
and wrens in the weeds,
everything was so clear

The world has become quiet
and few humans can hear

The world was then talking,
and most humans could hear

Even the crows audible
squawk has become less and
less near

Notably the noisiest of the
songs like the Veery's
sweet *veer*

The world is now silent and no
humans can hear

The world was also chatting
and less humans could hear

What once was a constant
chorus around our blue
sphere.