



# Woodlands *for* Wildlife

Volume 23 December 2009

A newsletter of Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.

## The Birds of Winter

by Steve Haggendach, Class of 2006

When one's thoughts go to the birds (literally) winter may not be the first season that comes to mind. While many bird species have journeyed south for a few months, where their food sources are more abundant, there is plenty of activity to be enjoyed during the cold, snowy months, both visible and unseen by our investigative eyes.

Peering out the window at the bird feeders nearby we get an idea of the types of species that winter in our area. Gone are the warblers, flycatchers, and forest thrushes that filled the summer woods with song and fed upon flying insects and small organisms that live in the leaf litter.

The species that brave the northwoods winter are those that by and large are seed eaters or glean an insect meal from the crevices of tree bark. Data from the winter of 2008-2009 Project FeederWatch, a citizen-science program of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, indicate the five most frequently reported bird species at feeders were, in order of percentage of feeders visited: blue jay, black-capped chickadee, hairy woodpecker, downy woodpecker, and American goldfinch.

These are familiar year-round residents of our area. We may also get a glimpse of some bird species that spend the spring and summer breeding season in the boreal forest and taiga regions well to our north.

The movement of species to areas that

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## New Current Use Categories Permit Enrolling Additional Land Areas

by John Evans, Class of 2002

"Use Value is the single most important program in Vermont to conserve forest land."

This statement introduced a review of legislative changes in the Use Value Appraisal (UVA) program at the Vermont Coverts annual meeting in September by Steven Sinclair, director of forests, Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

"Land managed for timber is still the bread and butter of Use Value," Sinclair said, and the underlying principle of Use Value Appraisal for forest land is to manage for the sustainable production of high-quality forest products.

What has changed is the addition of new categories which permit enrolling forest land with other goals in mind, such as managing for a particular wildlife species or to protect an ecologically significant feature.

Four new UVA categories were created by the legislative changes in 2008. These include:

**Land managed for timber but not using existing USDA-Forest Service silviculture guidelines.** In the past, managing land according to Forest Service guidelines was the foundation for a Use Value management plan. This new category permits using guidelines with other objectives, such as protecting significant wildlife habitat and special places and sensitive sites. Examples include deer wintering area and mast stands, unique geologic sites, waterfalls and historic foundations.

**Land not necessarily managed for timber but requiring some type of protective management.** This category permits creating Ecologically Significant Treatment Areas (ESTAs) that require some type of management, such as controlling exotic invasive plants or restoring degraded conditions.

ESTAs cannot exceed 20 percent of productive (site I, II or III) lands and fall under the following six types: Natural communities of statewide significance; rare, threatened and endangered species, riparian areas, vernal pools, forested wetlands and old forests.

In riparian areas, which often are well suited for active forest management, an ESTA is permitted if there are characteristics making the land ecologically inappropriate for timber harvesting.

A similar situation may exist in forested wetlands where logging may create soil rutting that alters hydrology, changing flood flows or altering microhabitats that change species composition and diversity.

Old forests are defined as biologically mature forest areas that have escaped stand-replacing disturbance for more than 100 years and show minimal evidence of disturbance caused by human activity. In general, they will be characterized by native species in multiple ages and complex structure.

**Lands not managed actively for timber but requiring some type of protective treatment.** Country Foresters can use

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New Current Use Categories  
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discretion in allowing exclusion from timber management to protect areas of less than one acre containing features such as vernal pools, cultural/historic sites or denning sites for animals.

**Lands not managed for timber, which only needs to be mapped and substantiated to be included under Use Value.** These areas are defined as site IV lands on non-productive soil not capable of producing 20 cubic feet of wood per acre per year.

To place land in any of the new UVA categories the site must appear on an approved map, include a detailed description of site characteristics being protected, and follow a management strategy that covers a ten-year-period and describes the status and condition of the resources.

Landowners are responsible for implementing silviculture methods and treatments in the plan and the plan must be consistent with the guidelines for various tree species established by the USDA-Forest Service for areas managed exclusively for timber production.

**2008 OVERVIEW OF USE VALUE**

15,047 land parcels enrolled

Agricultural land: 524,887 acres, 58.9 percent of eligible land.

Forest land: 1,594,418 acres, 40.4 percent of eligible land.

**2010 LEGISLATIVE CHANGES**

The Vermont legislature will be considering options to reduce the future cost of Use Value during budget discussions. A current target is to either reduce the annual cost of the program by \$1.6 million or increase revenues by this amount.

As information becomes available we will share it by e-mail or posting on the Vermont Coverts website.

# Preparing for Winter: Animals, birds and insects adapt to snow and cold

*by Lisa Sausville, Executive Director*

As December approaches we humans are cutting those last cords of wood, pulling the sweaters out of storage, and making hot soup. It's time to prepare for winter. Animals, birds and insects in your forest are making their own adaptations to snow and cold.

Winter is a tough time in the animal kingdom. It is more difficult for animals to get around and meet basic needs for food, water and cover. Animals have adapted to these changes in a variety of ways, with behavioral changes or physical changes allowing them to survive cold winter months.

The most recognizable adaptation is migration to find adequate food supplies. Some critters go long distances, like the neo-tropical migrant birds, bats and monarch butterflies. Others have shorter migrations such as geese and ducks, many of which winter on the Chesapeake Bay. Still others migrate here to Vermont for the winter. The Champlain Valley is a great place in winter to see rough-legged hawks which breed in the arctic.

Even our deer population undergoes a migration of sorts. In New England, deer head to winter yards. Deer yards are made up of coniferous trees, generally pine and hemlock in the southern part of our state and white cedar and spruce up in the north country. These areas provide a thermal shelter protecting deer from deep snow and wind.

White-tailed deer also go through physical adaptations, including storing fat, growing thicker fur and behavioral changes such as altering their food sources. During the winter months deer will feed on bark and lichens.

Deer yards in Vermont only occur on 6 to 8 percent of the landscape. These coniferous stands also provide win-

ter habitat to other wildlife, including fox, fisher, coyote, crows, and raven. Mapped deer yards and management recommendations for these areas can be obtained from the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Some animals adapt to the cold by entering a period of dormancy or torpidity. There are many forms of dormancy depending on the critter in question. In general an animal that enters a state of torpidity reduces respiration, heart rate and body temperature.

***Hibernation takes various forms***

The most dramatic form is hibernation. True hibernators significantly reduce metabolic rates and are not easily awakened from their "slumber." Woodchucks and bats are examples of true hibernators. Woodchucks lower their heart rate from about 100 to 4 or 5 beats per minute. Their body temperature drops from 104 to 38 degrees Fahrenheit.

True hibernators can wake up every few weeks to nibble or relieve themselves. However, unexpected arousal of a true hibernator can be costly in terms of their fat reserves and may reduce their chances of surviving until spring.

Bears, skunks and raccoons however, are not true hibernators. These animals do enter a state of dormancy and their metabolic rate slows but does not drop as significantly as true hibernators. During this time these animals are easily aroused and may wake to feed between winter storms.

Other animals that enter a period of dormancy are reptiles and amphibians. These cold blooded creatures need to become dormant because their body temperature is controlled by the external environment. Reptiles and amphibians dig down under leaf litter and into the mud to wait out the cold. Snakes

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## Birds

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they don't typically inhabit is called an irruption and is often a much anticipated event for birdwatchers. Among the more commonly seen irruptive species at our feeders are the common redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*), pine siskin (*Carduelis pinus*) and occasionally pine grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*).

Away from the bird feeders, in the forest and even in developed areas, there are a host of other bird happenings that we may not observe. In addition to the redpolls and pine siskins that make a southern migration to Vermont we are sometimes graced with the presence of other northern species.

### *Snowy and great gray owls*

One of the greatest treats may be a snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) or great gray owl (*Strix nebulosa*) which can make an appearance when their food supply up north is low. Getting a look at one of these large birds of prey is something you will not soon forget!

But perhaps one of the most amazing aspects of wintering birds is found with the diminutive golden-crowned kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*). This year-round resident of coniferous forests is able to survive in winter temperatures that fall as low as -40 degrees (F or C, take your pick).

Naturalist and University of Vermont

professor Bernd Heinrich, provided the first documentation of why this species is able to persist in such cold temperatures. Heinrich discovered that golden-crowned kinglets, which travel in mixed flocks during the day as they forage for food, huddle together with others of their species on open tree branches at night, a behavior which had not previously been observed.

This behavior gives the kinglet, despite its very small body size, the advantage it needs to survive on extremely cold winter nights.



As you sit sipping a hot cocoa while enjoying the birds at your feeder this winter, take a moment to consider all of the other happenings going on in the bird world. It might make that cocoa taste a whole lot better!

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## Fund Raising Update:

As of this writing our annual fund drive has raised \$10,136 toward our goal. We are excited about the prospect of a matching gift.

Once we reach \$20,000 a generous donor will match any gift dollar for dollar, up to \$4,000. So if we are able to reach our goal of \$24,000, the match will bring the total up to \$28,000.

Every bit helps us get there. Last year our annual drive raised \$21,035, netting an additional \$1,035 in matching

funds.

Wouldn't it be great to reach the full match! If you have already contributed, Thank You!

Your gift will help us to reach more landowners and make more program options available in the future.

To be counted toward the match, gifts need to be received by February 28th. Gifts can be made online at [vtcoverts.org](http://vtcoverts.org) by credit card or paypal by clicking the Support VT Coverts button.

## Preparing for Winter

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head into burrows and holes.

Insects are also around but you won't see them until spring. They will over winter in a variety of stages, as adults, larvae, nymphs or pupae. Insects that winter as adults find holes in the ground, under bark or inside rotting logs. A few can even produce a chemical inside their blood called glycerol that will prevent them from freezing.

There are many animals that are active all winter but are seldom seen as they live in the subnivean layer (under the snow.) Small mammals, such as voles and shrews, tunnel under the snow, where temperatures can range from 20 to 30 degrees, to find food. Weasels will also use tunnels in search of a meal. Even ruffed grouse dive into the snow to make cozy roosts for the night.

Weasels and hares will don a white coat for protection from predators in the snow. The fur and feathers of mammals and birds act as insulators against the cold. Watch a bird fluff up on a cold day to trap air between its feathers to keep warm. Fox will wrap their fluffy tails across their faces in order to stay warm while sleeping.

The consistency and depth of the snow can also affect the survival of wildlife. Snow, as you know, can be shallow or deep, fluffy or packed.

After an early rain an ice layer or crust can form on the top. Depending on conditions; some wildlife will be favored while others are not. For example, when a hard crust forms on the top layer it makes for easy travel for the predators.

However it is difficult for deer to paw through to find food or to move, as they tend to break through and slip. This type of snow also makes it difficult for the grouse to burrow into the snow or get out if they were underneath when

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Woodlands  
for Wildlife

Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.  
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Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.

Executive Director: Lisa Sausville  
Lisa@vtcoverts.org 802-388-3880

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**Calendar of Upcoming Events**

**HOLD THIS DATE:**

**Vermont Coverts will celebrate its 25th Anniversary on September 25, 2010**

**Horse Logging and Low-Impact Skidder Clinic**

January 9, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Northwoods Stewardship Center. Fee is \$10. Demonstrations will include one-horse and team skidding and use of a small tracked skidder designed for low-impact logging. To register and for information contact jayson@northwoodscenter.org

**From Tree to Board — Lessons of a Landowner/Sawyer**

January 16, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at site in Derby, VT. Fee is \$10. Pre-registration is required. Contact jayson@northwoodscenter.org. See how a standing pine tree is converted into boards and learn simple methods for measuring the volume of standing trees, logs and finished boards.

**Winter Birding by Snowshoe**

January 30, 7 a.m. Northwoods Stewardship Center. Fee is \$5. Explore the Northwoods property to observe bird species that stay year-round.

**Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)**

February 12 through Monday, February 15. "Count for Fun, Count for the Future." For more information, visit the ornithology web page at [www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu).

**Apple Tree Release and Pruning**

February 27, 9 a.m. to 12 noon, Pittsford, VT. Join Rutland County forester Eric Hansen and cooperator John Haverstock to learn strategies and participate in hands on training to release and prune apple trees. Pre-register by e-mail to [lisa@vtcoverts.org](mailto:lisa@vtcoverts.org) or call 802-388-3880.

**Preparing for Winter**

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the crust layer changed. A lack of snow will affect the survival of those animals living in the subnivean layer.

As the snow begins to fly and you sit

snug by your fire, give a thought to those critters outside. The ultimate key to their survival is habitat.