



Vermont Coverts Woodlands for Wildlife

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

Volume 62 Summer 2023

NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Rich Chalmers, *Class of 2005 Spring*



It's a busy time in the woods. We are in the middle of bird monitoring and invasive plant pulling, and that means a lot of interactions with wildlife. It's amazing what you see when you move and sit quietly.

We seem to be bumping into more bears. On one occasion near the house, it was not the usual "excuse me, I'll just go on my way" that characterizes our interactions. Could it be they are hungrier from a poor mast crop? Or that, more and more, people represent a source of food, whether compost, trash, or bird seed?

In typical fashion, they are leaving our honeybee hives alone, despite how attractive they must be. This is clear confirmation that when we do our part, in this case an electric fence free of wet grass, that we can co-exist without problems. Front Porch Forum is filled with stories of people learning (hopefully) that bird feeders, even only during the day, create a lot of conflict with bears.

In another wildlife encounter, the other day, Ann was digging up a small but rapidly growing patch of narrow-leaved bittercress and a doe chased a coyote past her within 50 yards. They were busy and did not notice her, but on the way back, the doe, this time alone, took a careful look at Ann and our leashed dog. No problems there.

Two pieces of smart-phone-based technology have made this quiet time in the woods considerably more fruitful. The first is Merlin which, for dedicated birders like Ann, can remarkably enhance the higher levels of bird appreciation and monitoring. For a less skilled birder such as myself, it's like your own personal translation service. Gradually, I am beginning to recognize the breadth of what's out there and make stronger connections between bird and habitat type.

Seek, and similar ID apps, do much the same for non-bird species and plants. Those fern allies you have been struggling to identify? The name and, by extension, the chance you will remember it and understand its role and place in the woods, are right at your fingertips.

Meanwhile there has been a large number of Coverts sponsored forest and wildlife programs available, both online and in person. I recently attended Allen and Kathleen Yale's old growth characteristics walk and a tour of Sabina Ernst's pollinator garden – both were excellent examples of applying concepts in the real world. And the Coverts Book Club is reading Eager by Ben Goldfarb, a fascinating look at an amazing creature and its role in habitat enhancement.

The importance of these opportunities to learn cannot be overemphasized, as each piece coming together strengthens our understanding of the whole and our connection with our surroundings.

Spend some time in the woods in quiet observation and attend some of the great workshops coming up. There are lots of rewarding surprises awaiting us.

Rich Chalmers
President

Larger Cooperator Signs

We've heard from a few Cooperators that they would like a larger sign. We are taking orders for 18 by 24 inch signs made of white, durable plastic (a slightly thicker gauge than the 9 by 12 inch signs); the artwork will be the same as the smaller signs. The cost is \$25. We need to have at least 10 orders. To place an order, email Laura at laura@vtcoverts.org or call the office by August 1.

We do not have these signs in-hand yet; we are purchasing them based on your orders, so don't miss this chance! As these signs are larger, they will not be mailed to you. We will coordinate delivery to you at a later date.

We also have 9 by 12 inch signs available. Your first sign is free and additional signs are \$5 each.

FEATURED SPECIES

BROAD-WINGED HAWK

Laura Farrell, Outreach Specialist, 2022 fall

Walking up a steep forested mountain road in the Northeast Kingdom, a friend and I were astonished to see a hawk flying within the forest canopy, about 20 feet up. Seeing such a large bird that wasn't an owl gliding along in a densely treed area was a bit puzzling. What was it doing in the forest? How could something with such a large wingspan maneuver through the trees?

Though this appeared quite large for a forest bird, Broad-winged Hawks (*Buteo platypterus*) are a relatively small and stocky buteo hawk, with an average wingspan of 34 inches.



Photo by Cooperator Pieter Van Loon, 2001 Spring

Buteos are defined as hawks with broad wings and rounded tails. Their wide wings let them glide effortlessly. The pointed wingtips of Broad-winged Hawks enable tighter turns to maneuver through close spaces.

The one we observed was likely looking for something to eat – they hunt mainly within forests or along the edges while breeding in the northeast. Broad-wingeds usually eat small reptiles and amphibians, but also consume large insects, small birds or mammals such as mice, most often swooping down on prey from forest perches.

Seen from below, mature Broad-winged Hawks have uniformly pale wings with a dark trailing border, and covert feathers (those along the leading edge of the underwing) are generally light - white or streaked. The rounded tail is usually spread wide (it's a Buteo!) and is broadly banded on both sides, with one wider white band. If you happen to see one from above, you'll see uniformly dark upper plumage on the body.

A less common darker morph is known only to breed in western North America. It has dark underwing covert feathers, a lighter mid-wing, with a darker trailing edge. As in the lighter phase the tail is distinctly banded black

and white.

Broad-winged Hawks favor large undisturbed tracts of mature deciduous or mixed hardwood and boreal forests throughout the eastern half of the US and southern Canada, from April through mid-September. You may hear their thin piercing high pitched whistle when out in the forest. If you are lucky, you may even see one over the summer.

Nesting pairs often return to their previous nesting sites and settle in with the same mate year after year. Sometimes they reuse an old nest, sometimes they retrofit one of another species. Usually pairs spend two to four weeks building a nest in the lower third of the tree canopy.

Nests are constructed of dead twigs lined with a wide variety of things, but often include conifer sprigs around the rim, with fresh sprigs added for almost a month after their 1-5 eggs hatch in mid-June. While in the nest, eggs and chicks are vulnerable to predation by porcupines, raccoons, American Crows, Great Horned Owls and black bears.

The chicks are fed small mammals, nestling birds, invertebrates, and toads for five to six weeks before fledging. By seven weeks surviving chicks are out catching their own food, but stay close by their parents for another month or two.

Pairs socialize only with their mate through the reproductive season and defend their nesting site from Northern Harriers and other Buteo hawk species. Though Broad-winged Hawk individuals are not seen as often as other hawk species during the summer, this species is actually fairly common. Over half the migrating hawks that pass through Vermont in the fall are Broad-winged!

Leading up to migration they usually flock together in larger numbers (up to 100 or more birds) for the journey. Research suggests that Broad-winged Hawks accumulate body fat before migrating. They weigh between 7 ounces and 1 lb 3 oz when departing, and fast during migration.

Most Broad-winged Hawks migrate to Central or South America for the winter along land-based routes. In fact, the easiest way to see one is to visit a mountain along a migratory flyway in the fall. Mt Philo in the Champlain Valley, and Putney Mountain in southern Vermont are well known raptor migration viewing spots – where it is not unheard of to see thousands of Broad-winged Hawks!

Migration generally peaks mid-September but it depends on the weather. Juveniles may lag behind migrating adults, sometimes waiting until November or December to start heading south for the winter in smaller numbers.

Mass movements are triggered by a cold front with wind from the north or northwest. The raptors then wait until a sunny day following the cold front, with winds from the northwest, to travel. They take advantage of warm air rising in thermals towards the middle of the day. If you are lucky you might see over a 100 of them conserving energy

Annual Meeting
Saturday, September 9th from 10:00am to 2:30pm
Kehoe Conservation Camp, Castleton, Vermont

Join us as we gather to connect, share and learn. This year we are lining up a great program to look at forest and wildlife health. Meet the newest class of Cooperators and visit with other alumni. Fee: \$25, lunch is included. We hope you can join us!

Annual Meeting Registration

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Number Attending: _____ Amount Enclosed @ \$25/person): _____

Cooperators, if you are unable to attend the annual meeting, please fill out and return your proxy. Proxies can be e-mailed or mailed (must be received by September 6). Send via e-mail to lisa@vtcoverts.org or mail to PO Box 328, Vergennes, VT 05491.

PROXY

I, _____, a member of Vermont Coverts, hereby constitute Donna Foster or Rich Chalmers as my lawful proxy to attend and vote on my behalf at the Annual Meeting of Vermont Coverts held on Saturday, September 10, 2023 or at any adjournment thereof.

Given this _____ day of _____, 2023 Signature: _____
 (day) (month)

FEATURED SPECIES
BROAD-WINGED HAWK

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rising on a thermal, or ketteling, and then riding the air current off to the next thermal.

Biologists from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology found that four radio-tagged Broad-winged Hawks averaged 69 miles a day, and migrated an average of 4,350 miles to northern South America. Over the winter, Broad-winged Hawks perch and watch for prey in partially cleared tropical forest areas, or along forest edges – though a few overwinter in Florida, Louisiana, Texas and California.

Their return in the spring is more dispersed over time, but Broad-winged Hawks are usually nesting by early May. So, right now is the time to watch and listen for them in your woods. If you miss them, you still have an excellent chance of seeing multiple Broad-winged Hawks, all at once, during migration this fall!



Photo by Cooperator Tig Tillinghast, 2006 Spring



Vermont Coverts Woodlands for Wildlife

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Welcome Spring 2023 Cooperators!



Front Row: Nick Gemmil Houghton (Chittenden), Terry Marron (Chittenden), Kathy Damon (Orange), Cheryl Mitchell (Addison), Dana Casperson (Caledonia), Alyssa Conn (Orleans), Donald Hale (Caledonia), Mark Raishart (Addison), Olivia Carlson (Rutland)

Back Row: Cyrus Parker (Washington), Sam Perron (Orleans), Randy Gates (Orleans), Devon Pensinger (Orleans), Eve Fisher (Orleans), Ethan Mitchell (Addison), Stephen Devoto (Orange), Lander Burr (Windsor)



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