FIRST IN FLIGHT

We humans are fascinated with flight. Leonardo the genius may have dreamed and drew helicopters, but most third graders even in this space age still look at umbrellas and the garage roof with interest. The Wright brothers so felt flight that they risked scorn from their Dayton neighbors and financial ruin. For privacy and other important reasons they took their rig 677 miles away to Kitty Hawk. The Outer Banks would have reduced only some scoffing if the venture failed, but they still went. Since December 14, 1903 we, as a nation, flew.

A quick look at the origins of flight in birds is no less fascinating. Archaeopteryx (early bird) appeared in the Jurassic Period (213-144 million years ago). These individuals were about the size of modern day Ravens and had feathers. Even in the Triassic Period (248-213 million years ago) there is fossil evidence of winged lizards. These would have been the first vertebrates who were heavier than air and had anatomical structures resembling wings. At this early point, though, we probably want to think more glide than fly. Venturous humans might call it parasailing.

I have always thought alligators, crocks, elephants, etc. leave the door ajar to a Jurassic Park-like scenario. To this end in early spring I like to walk around the forest close to the Lillibridge Road parking lot. Any visitor to the Outdoor Living Museum here can easily peer into one of the vernal pools to look for frog or salamander egg sacs. Later in the summer I sometimes wander along Griffins Way uncovering salamanders. I especially enjoy the chubby Spotted salamander. To me it is like looking into the ghost eyes of Tyrannosaurus Rex.

It wasn’t until recently though that a friend pointed out that birds emerged before the dinosaurs. Prototype wings emerged when reptiles began to overtake amphibians in the warm soup of Earth. Birds with feathers, anatomical clavicles and wish bones appeared not with modern humans who came on the scene 150,000 to 60,000 years ago, but millions of years ago! Archeologists have found amber with the bird feathers that would have floated down from the early trees above.

There are a couple of theories about how avian flight evolved. One suggests it happened from the ground up; the second hypothesis from the trees tops down. The ground up theory suggests running on two legs and jumping into the air. The goal pressing this action would be gaining better access to food or escaping immediate danger. Slowly the jumps became longer as the wing structures grew stronger. The other theory again suggests bi-pedal action where individuals climbed into forested trees where the habitat provided better food and protection and glided down.

As early as 286-248 million years ago in the Permian Period there is evidence of really small, pre-dinosaur lizards that glided from tree tops not on wings but on enormously
From the Director

Barbara Kingsolver is one of my favorite authors. I like her fiction well enough, but I love her nonfiction writing about the natural world. With my book club, I recently re-read an essay collection she published in 2003. This is an excerpt from the essay entitled “Knowing Our Place.”

“Oh, how can I say this: People need wild places. Whether or not we think we do, we do. We need to be able to taste grace and know once again that we desire it. We need to experience a landscape that is timeless, whose agenda moves at the pace of speciation and glaciers. To be surrounded by a singing, mating, howling commotion of other species, all of which love their lives as much as we do ours, and none of which could possibly care less about our economic status or our running day calendar. Wildness puts us in our place. It reminds us that all our plans are small and somewhat absurd. It reminds us why, in those cases in which our plans might influence many future generations, we ought to choose carefully. Looking out on a clean plank of planet earth, we can get shaken right down to the bone by the bronze-eyed possibility of lives that are not our own.”

Pfeiffer Nature Center provides wildness. Wildness that is easily accessible. Wildness that can engulf you with its silence, and its sounds, just a few hundred feet from your car door. Wildness that can take you on hikes with steep climbs through creeks or scrambling over boulders as big as houses. We’re happy that we can continue to offer our hiking trails as free access: although we love (and rely on) your donations, no membership fees, day passes, or parking permits are required to immerse yourself in our preserves.

In our Outdoor Living Museum on Lillibridge Road you’ll be privy to the sights and sounds of an old-growth forest, to seeing the outcome of little human intervention for more than half a century. The deep, rich forest soil has built up for much longer than that, and with the tall, almost unbroken canopy our woods invite in forest-loving wildlife galore. The birds, mammals, amphibians, and plants who call our preserve home year-round depend on each other for food, shelter, and mates to keep their species healthy. On a quiet winter visit you’re likely to see and hear chickadees, tufted titmice, and nuthatches. A red-tailed hawk will likely be flying over the meadow in search of voles or mice that scamper out of their holes. With some snow cover, you’ll surely see tracks of deer, squirrel, and perhaps fox, rabbit, and more.

The forested areas of our Eshelman preserve provide similar sights and sounds. With more than 2½ times the acreage and more varied ecosystems, this property offers a wide range of opportunities in wildness. Winter birds in our transition areas are likely to include cardinals, juncos and overwintering sparrows, and if you’re lucky, cedar waxwings. Near the creeks and ponds you might find Canada geese and an occasional seagull. More exciting, beaver is always nearby and we’ve had more than one report of river otter! In our pastures you’re likely to see flocks of turkey, families of deer, and occasionally bear or coyote.

I love our wildness. I love it when it’s calm and quiet, and when I get a rush of adrenaline when I’m startled by the sudden movement of a large mammal. I love it in the winter when the snow sparkles create a myriad of rainbows and in the summer when the breeze barely moves the aspen leaves. While there’s much to enjoy in a city backyard or park, the joys of wildness can’t be recreated there.

Join us in our programs and on our trails, or simply explore our wildness on your own.

Peg Cherre

Pfeiffer Nature Center Mission

- To preserve the integrity of the old-growth forest
- To provide an area for scientific research
- To promote community-based nature study programs for grade school, high school, college and adult students
- To further natural resource stewardship
First in Flight (cont from p. 1)

long ribs. The idea of this type of skin flap this early is not unique. Pelycosaurs or sail-backed reptiles were from around this same time. These reptiles had a single upright structure on their back which acted like a thermal panel. On cool mornings it could be turned to face the sun. Consequently they would warm quicker and move sooner than other reptiles, thus increasing the food supply by taking advantage of immobility due to the cold in its prey.

I have a video from this past summer of my cat doing cat stuff. When I look at him what I don’t see is a docile being. What I do quite often see is a Saber Toothed Tiger who would have appeared in our neighborhood about 10,000 years ago when the Wisconsin glacier was just receding. On this day my little tiger was stalking in the backyard and momentarily paused crouching on his belly under the clothesline. A slight breeze gently wisped a piece of string dangling from the line across his back and head. His tail switched with annoyance. By the third pass of the little string, he blew a gasket. Leaping straight in the air he tried to remove string, line, and house to which it was attached. The battle lasted about thirty seconds until he exhaustedly flopped on the ground…. He is twelve. I remember thinking that I was glad cats don’t fly and very glad he didn’t fly as a kitten.

With DNA testing and increased archeological finds, the ground up theory has proven to be much less plausible as means to the evolution of flight. A key factor is that gliding down from trees is much more efficient and takes much less energy than leaping up.

The early birds of Jurassic didn’t just glide. Although Archaeopteryx did not soar it did live in the trees. The food supply provided within a particular ecosystem does predict survival for any particular species. The advantages of tree dwelling were the same then as today. The habitat in the treetops would have been cooler, provided hiding places, locations for nests and sleep. The feathers would also have provided insulation as they increased in plumage. Through the eras and epochs eventually gliding yielded to flapping and ultimately to soaring.

There is so much more to the story of birds and flight in birds. On the upcoming Nature Center program calendar for 2014 there are at least six activities devoted to birds and birding. (Find a complete list of 2014 programs on our website: www.pfeiffernaturecenter.org.) Some of this year’s programs are geared to kids such as Naturalist 101. In May we will again be collaborating with the Cattaraugus County Bird Club to bring fun adventure for all ages. In addition there are also a number of citizen science programs through the Cornell Lab of Ornithology such as Project Feeder Watcher, Great Backyard Bird Count and Nest Watch. (See page 4 for more info.) These are available online anytime. Learning about birds is fun and hopefully the tidbits shared have increased a thirst for more knowledge. I know now look at flocks with a whole new appreciation- Before dinosaurs; who knew?!

If you would like to comment or have an expertise in a particular area of the natural world to share please do not hesitate to contact the Nature Center office or feel free to drop me an email at colleenkent@verizon.net. I look forward to seeing you at Nature Center programs this year.

Did I mention that later in the Eocene Epoch, roughly 50 million ago, some birds were as big as an elephant and not nearly as friendly?

Colleen Kent is not only a massage therapist, horse enthusiast, and certified addictions professional, but also is a past staff member of the Nature Center having worked in the capacity of Naturalist and is currently President of the Board of Directors.

Did you know…

- Want to explore the winter wonderland on your own? Rent a pair of snowshoes from the Nature Center for a day or a weekend.
- Our beautiful timber frame pavilion, built from regionally harvested larch, is available for rent. It’s a great place to hold your family picnic, class reunion, birthday party, small wedding, or other gathering. Get rental costs and policies on our website pfeiffernaturecenter.org/nature-blog/programs-events/rentals-services/ or phone us for more details.
- We’ve made it easy to explore the natural world and support Pfeiffer Nature Center. With a few online clicks you can now register for programs, become a member, or help the Nature Center grow with your donation.
- Our Kay Pfeiffer Gerkin Endowment Fund is now invested through the Cattaraugus Region Community Foundation (CRCF). It’s easier than ever to help this fund grow! Contact us or the CRCF for details on how to make a donation or include us in your estate planning.
Counting living things, especially those that move quickly, can be a challenge. Birds - the only easy to count of the bird-watching spectrum are the people who participate in a variety of citizen science. (see next page for more info) bird counts.

We recently completed the 114th year of the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Over 63,000 people watched birds in designated areas around the world, called circles, between December 14 and January 5. Organized by the National Audubon Society, the CBC has produced volumes of information, over the past century. Once collected by volunteers, scientists analyze the data for trends, commonalities, and oddities. The long-term health of bird populations, changes in migratory patterns or timing, and other data is used by conservationists, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency, to name just a few. Because of the CBC we now know that there are 20 common birds, including the Ruffed Grouse and the Northern Bobwhite, that have lost at least half their population in just the last 40 years. There are many rarer species that are in serious danger. Why? Habitat loss or fragmentation is a big reason, along with environmental threats. Learn more about the CBC online at www.birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count.

Missed the CBC? Never fear, there are other opportunities to get involved!

Cornell University Lab of Ornithology partners with Bird Studies Canada to organize Project FeederWatch, now in its 27th year. One of the beauties of FeederWatch is that you don’t even need to leave your house to participate! All you need is a bird feeder, bird-friendly plants, water, or other bird-friendly habitat in your yard and a kit of information from Cornell. FeederWatch runs from November through early April, so you can still get involved this year. There is a small annual fee, which covers the cost of materials, staff support, data analysis, and reporting. FeederWatch is designed to provide weekly information about birds, so you’ll be asked to be consistent about when you’ll watch the birds that come to your feeder, and to report it on a regular basis. This helps track the movement of birds around the United States and Canada. There’s even a contest here: FeederWatch is teaming up with Bob’s Red Mill Natural Foods for a BirdSpotter photo contest. You might win a trip to Oregon! Get more info and sign up at www.feederwatch.org.

If you’re not able to commit to an ongoing project, the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) may be just the thing for you. It’s an annual snapshot of birds that takes place over four days, this year from Feb 14-17. You simply count the number of birds you see at your site and send the information in via the internet. You can also enter a photo contest here, too, if you’d like. The GBBC is a joint project of the three groups mentioned above: Cornell University, Audubon Society, and Bird Studies Canada. They combine the results of the GBBC with the CBC and FeederWatch to provide the most comprehensive view of the movement of birds. They can interpret the impact of weather conditions on migration, differences between birds in urban & rural settings, suburbia and wild lands, and more.

You could have knocked me over with a feather (pun intended) when I read about the largest flocks reported in the 2013 GBBC. Are you ready? At the Mark Youngdahl Urban Conservation Area in St. Joseph, MO, observers estimated there were 5 million Red-winged Blackbirds and a flock of 1.5 million American Robins.
Many Thanks Our Wonderful Volunteers

Robert Strassburg helped Joe Schueckler build some new wooden sandwich board signs for us to use in event promotion, while Joe Leo helped save the changeable one we use in front of the office.

Our wreath sale is successful only because of great volunteers who buy, sell, and decorate wreaths. This year our bow makers, decorators, and other helpers included Joanne Allen, Amanda Andreotta, Janet Ast, Dick & Roberta Baker, Beth Bergreen, Barbara Borer, Betsy Brairton, Tiffany Brairton, Wendy Brand, Betty D’Arcy, Pam Dominsky, Jackie Dougherty, Kathy Elser, Alice Frost, Bridget McAfee, Jen Eaton Miller, Sue Ford, Tony & Carol Gallo, Darlene Goetzman, Joni Greene, Sheila Gugino, Charlene Granger, Judy Johnson, Marilyn Hale, Cecily Higgins, Stephanie Hill, Connie Howard, Kathy Howard, Colleen Kent, Lynn Knowles, Sarah Lyons, Shelly Marks, Cheryl Norton, Judy Patton, Evelyn Penman, Paige Powley, Betsy Price, Tonya Reisman, Melissa Sahm, Vicki Schmidt, Joe & Theresa Schueckler, Laura Shields, Punkie Sinesiou, Marcia Storch, Sherry Volk, Etta Walker, Pat Wickenheiser, Ryan Wilcox, Jane Wolcott, & Cso Woodworth.

Want to spend some time with great folks? Call us and volunteer!

Bird Counts (cont. from page 4)

The next largest flock was at the Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, also in Missouri, where observers reported between 700,000 and 1.1 million Snow Geese. That’s a lot of birds!! Learn more & get involved at www.birdsource.org/gbbc.

As they say in commercials, “But wait, that’s not all!” The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) uses citizen science to help them determine the status of our wild turkeys. Anyone who watches wildlife knows that a hard winter with continued deep snow and below freezing conditions is really hard on turkeys, especially young birds. The DEC’s Winter Wild Turkey Flock Survey, conducted January through March, helps the Department to assess the health of the birds prior to the start of the spring breeding season. They likely use this information to help them make decisions about permits for spring hunting season. They conduct another survey in August, the Summer Wild Turkey Sighting Survey, asking about hens and poults.

Want even more? The DEC also conducts two surveys about Ruffed Grouse – one on hunting and one on drumming. They’re probably particularly interested in this bird because they’re the Christmas Bird Count has reported that they one of the 20 common species that has lost at least half of its population in the last 40 years. Learn more at http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/1155.html

There are lots of other opportunities for citizen scientists to get involved in wildlife monitoring: choose the animal(s) that resonate with you - everything from toads to fireflies. Or choose plants, snow depth, noise levels, even dog poo. The possibilities are almost endless. The point is: Get Involved!

*If you’re not familiar with the term, ‘citizen science’ generally refers to research collaboration between scientists and volunteers. There are hundreds of well-recognized citizen science projects. You’ll be amazed when you start your internet search on this term.

Season’s Stirrings

January
- White footed mice move indoors after a snowstorm.
- Dead deer are an important part of the winter diet of fishers, bobcats, and coyotes. *(Ed. note: We’ve also seen chickadees taking advantage of any existing fat on a deer carcass.)*

February
- Skunks enter their breeding season early in the month.
- Begin cleaning out your birdhouses for the upcoming migration & nesting season. *(Ed. note: Join our program on Feb. 22; & build a house to take home with you!)*

March
- Cooper’s hawks are returning to their nesting areas. Watch for early bluebirds and song sparrows.
- Spotted salamanders lay their eggs in spherical masses in vernal pools.
- American kestrels are looking for favorite nest holes: cavities excavated by common flickers.

Information from Virginia Barlow’s A Look at the Seasons’ Main Events from Northern Woodlands
Thank You To Our Financial Supporters

New & Renewing Members
October 16—December 31, 2013

Bill & Kay Anderson
Don & Lucy Benson
Scott & Sarah Bray
Barbara Chew
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In Memory Of
Lee Merrick by Elizabeth Frair
Carroll Mills by Kathleen Grandusky

We are grateful for your generosity and support! Kind acts and thoughtful gifts such as these assist us in fulfilling our Mission. If we have inadvertently omitted your gift from these lists, please bring it to our attention and we will happily correct our oversight.

Create a Lasting Tribute

You can honor your family and friends in ways that will have lasting impacts on Pfeiffer Nature Center and therefore the local community. Gifts can be either memorials or tributes to the accomplishments of someone still with us, and all gifts will be acknowledged in this newsletter.

Gifts to the Kay Pfeiffer Gerkin Endowment Fund are maintained and managed separately from our operating funds. The principle in this fund is retained exclusively for investments and income generation, with only interest and dividends available to support our ongoing activities. You can now make donations to this Fund directly through the Cattaraugus Region Community Foundation. Check with your financial or legal advisor to name Pfeiffer Nature Center in your estate planning.

Gifts may be made specifically to our sugar bush expansion project. We will plant sugar maples on our Eshelman property annually. While donors will not be able to identify “their” tree, they will have the benefit of knowing that their gifts provided a source of ongoing income. Maple seedlings are $35 each.

Gifts of any size may be made to the Nature Center to honor or memorialize relatives, friends, or pets. With no minimum donation, this option provides giving opportunities for all.

We hope you’ll make a gift soon!

John James Audubon & The Birds of America

By Peg Cherre

I sometimes get an idea stuck in my head, lodged in there solidly so that there isn’t room for alternative thoughts on that topic. Such was the case with my thinking about John James Audubon (1785-1851). In my mind, Audubon is a man who opened lots of doors to knowledge about birds with his art and studies.

While that’s true, Audubon was also a naturalist and a writer. These other aspects of his personality augmented his meticulous artistry and made his work both accessible to a wide audience and a valuable resource for identifying and learning about birds. I learned a great deal about Audubon and his work during a recent NPR (National Public Radio) program when Tom Ashbrook’s guests were Roberta Olson (curator of drawings at the New York Historical Society and author of Audubon’s Aviary: the Original Watercolors for The Birds of America) and William Souder (author of Under a Wild Sky: John James Audubon and the Making of The Birds of America). (Download a recording of the full hour at http://onpoint.wbur.org/2013/03/19/john- james-audubon-and-the-birds-of-america.)

I already knew that in keeping with
Yes, I’d Like to Become a Member of Pfeiffer Nature Center

Membership Levels and Benefits

All members receive a subscription to The Ovenbird, our quarterly newsletter, delivered to your home.

- Student/senior $10 1 $5 off program admission coupon
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May we contact you about volunteering? _____ Yes _____ No, thank you.
Send your completed form to: Pfeiffer Nature Center, PO Box 802 Portville, NY 14770

Audubon (continued from p. 6)

practices of the time, Audubon killed his specimens. I hadn’t thought about why his artistic renderings were so lifelike, about the time he spent wiring birds to the ceiling or branches so that they were in more natural poses. About how much time he must have spent watching them in their habitats so he’d know what those poses were. About what it took to keep his specimens flexible enough so that he could pose them. About the implications of the fact that he created almost all of his drawings life-sized.

If you’re doing any traveling this year, consider making stops at the following galleries to see Audubon’s full-sized works.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Audubon’s Birds, Audubon’s Words exhibit, up through May 11, 2014, pairs life-sized prints with Audubon’s words, providing information and insights into the man as he went about his work, including his methods, obsessions, and the challenges of creating his The Birds of America.

North Carolina Museum of Art has an ongoing exhibit John James Audubon’s “The Birds of America”. The State of North Carolina has owned one of the few remaining copies of the four-volume complete work for more than 150 years, and is now displaying it in its entirety in a special gallery. The Birds of America consists of 435 hand-colored prints, each about 40” high, and each produced using a combination of watercolor, engraving, pen and ink, and other artistic techniques to render each feather of each bird.

To learn more about birds, see them in the wild, and improve the bird habitat in your yard, come to our birdhouse workshop (February 22), intro to birds program (April 5), and bird walks (May 10 & 24).
Pfeiffer Nature Center is here for you. Hike our trails, come to our programs, marvel at our ancient trees and huge boulders, enjoy all that we have to offer!

DON'T MISS OUT! If you receive *The Ovenbird* but aren’t also receiving our e-News, you're missing a lot! E-News is sent out 2-4 times per month with the latest information about upcoming programs, events, nature happenings, & opportunities, including details on how you can join in the fun. Four easy ways you can start getting e-News:

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