

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
December 14, 2008

Christmas Bird Count
By Mark Baldwin
for the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



Today Christmas Bird Count participants will be carefully recording birds they see and hear in the Jamestown area. A bird they hope to include in their tally is the white-winged crossbill, pictured here as it appears in the Peterson Field Guide. White-winged crossbills, which feed in flocks on the seeds of hemlock and spruce trees, are currently appearing in this part of North America in unprecedented numbers. Image courtesy of the Roger Tory Peterson Institute.

Today is a special day in the Chautauqua Watershed. It's Jamestown's annual Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by the Jamestown Audubon Society and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute Ornithological Club. If you're reading this on Sunday morning, some volunteers have already been out for hours in the cold quiet darkness to observe and count owls by listening for their calls. As daylight approaches, hardy souls are turning their attention to the first visual bird sightings. For the rest of the day they'll travel by foot and by car, covering territory inside a 15-mile wide circle centered in Jamestown and

extending south to the NY-PA border, east to Kennedy, north to Gerry, and west halfway up the southern basin of Chautauqua Lake. At the end of the day they'll gather together for a potluck supper at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute to warm up, enjoy each other's company and recap the day's events.

From today through January 5, 2009, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas will take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists will head out on an annual mission. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house in the middle of winter. Last year, the 108th Christmas Bird Count, over 2,000 counts were completed; nearly 58,000,000 birds were counted, adding another huge data set to the longest-running citizen science program in the world.

Each of the citizen scientists who brave snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count make an enormous contribution to conservation. Audubon and other

organizations use the data collected to assess the health of bird populations - and to help guide conservation action.

From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition – and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

Last year's Jamestown CBC was held December 16, 2007, a windy day that started with rain turning to sleet then snow. Not a pleasant day to be outside all day. Still, 39 volunteers counted a total of 63 species. The count included seven eastern bluebirds and 22 American robins; 12 Carolina wrens and four common redpolls; three great horned owls and 4,220 American crows. A fine contribution to a great scientific enterprise, a unique snapshot of bird life in this corner of the world, and a message that the decisions we make not only determine our own fate here but the fate of the wildlife we share it with. Thanks to all who take part in the Christmas Bird Count.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a private, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Its urgent focus is to conserve the endangered natural shore lands of Chautauqua Lake, which provide fish and wildlife habitat and pollution filtering functions essential to a healthy lake. Only four miles (10%) of the lake's shoreline remains in a natural, undeveloped condition. The Conservancy is funded primarily through membership donations. Its 2008 annual membership campaign is currently underway. It is presently raising funds to conserve the Chautauqua Lake's most important remaining natural shoreline habitats, undertake programs to address the root causes of the conditions that fuel lake plant growth, and manage its preserves. It is the only local organization conserving lands in perpetuity for these purposes. Please contact the Conservancy at 664-2166 to join for 2008!