



GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



An approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing

10 March 2017

Lessons from the Jr. Audubon Clubs - What could we learn?

From the very start of the anti-feather-trade bird-protection movement of the late 1800s, there was an interest in winning over the sympathies of children. Beyond the general appeal by our bird-protection foremothers to a caring youthful public, there were two important institutional trends that arose.

The first organized attempt began with the "Nature Study Movement" launched by Anna Botsford Comstock (1854-1930) and other educators in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a call to study nature, not simply books. The movement was particularly popular in the Northeast, West, and Midwest. Moreover, the grave economic downturn of 1893 gave the Nature Study Movement further grounding and purpose, since one message was to appreciate the beauties and simplicities of rural life and to avoid the temptations of corrupting city living.

The next big step began in 1910. In a formal effort to reach children in schools in the fall of that year, T. Gilbert Pearson (1873-1943), head of the National Association of Audubon Societies, announced a program of "Junior Audubon Classes" in the semi-official magazine of the Audubon movement, *Bird-Lore*. The effort was unveiled in the September-October issue of the magazine (cover shown on the right). This program, with its ups and downs, remained on the scene for about half a century.



Each child would pay a nominal annual fee (originally a dime) to become a Junior Audubon member. A minimum of 10 students per class was required. In return, the student would receive a set of colored pictures, leaflets, and a "button" with a bird on it, a Northern Mockingbird, Blue Jay, or other songbird.

The classroom teacher got a free subscription to *Bird-Lore* for teaching at least one lesson a month about birds. Perhaps most importantly, the study of birds was also correlated with reading, composition, history, geography, and even arithmetic. By the end of the school year in June of 1916, the campaign had organized 27,873 classes with a total Junior Audubon membership of 559,840 children. In the state of Ohio alone, the astounding effort reached almost 8,000 classrooms.

The distributed materials cost the Audubon Association about twice what the schoolchildren actually paid, so that by 1917, the Association was annually spending \$25,000 more than the

effort collected. (In 2017 dollars that would be almost \$475,000 per year.) Despite this high expense, the Audubon leadership regarded the campaign as a valuable investment for the future. There were also deep-pocket supporters, both known and anonymous, such as Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage (1828-1918) and William P. Wharton (1880-1976), who kept the program alive.



Students from Kingston, Pennsylvania, at their Jr. Audubon Society class in 1916

The numbers of students engaged in the Junior Audubon efforts ebbed and flowed. It clearly dipped during WWI. And during the early years of the Depression, the numbers sagged again, but they picked up by the late 1930s so that between 1935 and 1939, over 600,000 children signed up. Some of this clearly had to do with the role played by a young Roger Tory Peterson (1908-1996) in leading that effort at Audubon. Through the late 1930s, over 60 related leaflets were prepared, with over 3 million copies printed. Nine teacher guides appeared with a printing of 87,500 copies. (To appreciate the numbers, the population of the U.S. in 1939 was only about 131 million, or 40% of the U.S. population today.) By early 1942, the project could boast that more than 9,000,000 students had passed through the Junior Audubon clubs since their start in 1910.

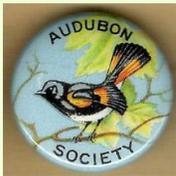
After WWII, there were many alternate venues of entertainment to engage youngsters, not the least of which was TV, but the Jr. Audubon Clubs continued here and there. Unfortunately, school districts across the country resisted the practice of teachers' collecting money from the young students for membership dues and bird charts. The Jr. Audubon efforts faded.

Some local Audubon clubs picked up the slack in supporting youth-oriented bird study. While a variation of this model reemerged in the 1980s with "Audubon Adventures," never would the numbers of youthful participants be as high as they were in the 1920s and parts of the 1930s.

So, this raises some interesting questions. Why is it that so many young-student outdoor efforts today seem so weak compared to this past experience? Why does it seem that these current efforts are either very broad and general, with vague environmental lessons linked to birds, or are the exact opposite, highly intense, almost elite-oriented lessons of field-study and skill building directed to those few youth already with an interest - sometimes a deep interest - in birds? Over all, why are things so different - and even difficult - today?

There are probably three very good reasons why:

- 1 Back then, at the turn of the previous century, there was a rural majority in the country.
- 2 By the early 1900s, teachers had already been mobilized through the bird-protection movement of the 1890s.
- 3 Teachers then had much more flexibility and freedom to teach.



When our bird protection foremothers sought to imbue schoolchildren with a concern for birds, starting at the end of the 19th century, they were dealing with a country that was overwhelmingly rural (over 60% rural in 1900). Today we have a country, overwhelmingly urban and near-urban (over 84%). The cultural implications are enormous, with a century of corresponding changes.

By the start of the 20th century, the highly feminized cadre of instructors had already been previously recruited (and virtually prepared) through the bird-protection movement. The effort to stop the feather trade and market-hunting had already seen our foremothers aim to inspire schoolchildren with a concern and deep appreciation for birds. The next educational step was logical, if not almost inevitable. We do not have that equivalent "source" today, we have no small army of prepared instructors, despite the great acceptance of environmentalism, going back to the late 1960s and 1970s.

And, finally, today our teachers at all levels are facing tasks - for 56 million enrolled school-age children (K-12) - that are far different than in the past. They face children increasingly removed from the outdoor experience, children who have other - mostly indoor - distractions, and they face circumstances where the classroom scene itself is consumed with "teaching to the test." The last problem was characterized by the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. NCLB is now being replaced with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) with at least some new provisions that can support student learning on the environment, conservation, and even field studies.

Still, and on the positive side, today we are equipped with many more tools for communications, a more informed biological base, a better understanding of the trans-national and inter-American aspects of our birds, and an awareness of how birds are linked to other key features in our environment. We also have a century's worth of bird-conservation experience upon which we can build.

What we lack today to build a bird-literate society is crucial. Missing essentials include at least four elements: a small army of educators, a dense network of cooperators, an agreement over priorities, and adequate funding to make it all happen.

~by Paul J. Baicich



A shorter version of this article by PJB appeared in *BEN Bulletin* #81 of the Bird Education Network, published on 5 January 2016.

Hog Island Opportunity

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Scholarships and CEU credits available



Derrick Jackson is a *Boston Globe* journalist and co-author (with Steve Kress) of *Project Puffin: The Improbable Quest to Bring a Beloved Seabird Back to Egg Rock*. Jackson has put up proceeds from the sale of the book to create a "diversity scholarship" for individuals from historically under-served and under-represented communities to attend any of acclaimed Hog Island's camp sessions this summer. Hog Island, of course, is the famous Audubon camp at Muscongus Bay, Maine, where bird education camps have been held going back to the 1930s.

The Derrick Z. Jackson Diversity Scholarships are being offered to support birders and educators with an emphasis on African American and Latino individuals. These six-day ornithology and educators' workshops are being offered this summer. The \$900 scholarships will go toward the regular \$1,095 session fees (price includes program, lodging, boat travel, all meals)

To apply, send an e-mail letter of interest and two professional references to Hog Island Camp Director Pete Salmansohn at psalmansohn@audubon.org. Awards will be given on a rolling basis, so early application is strongly suggested. For details, photos, and videos about the camp, visit the camp [website](#).



Nebraska Anniversary, Stamp, Cranes, and Avitourism

A new "forever" stamp from the U.S. Postal Service appeared last week. It celebrates the 150th anniversary of Nebraska statehood, which occurred on 1 March 1867. It is meaningful that the image chosen to recognize that event is a photograph taken on the banks of the

Platte River as Sandhill Cranes fly low overhead at sunset.

At the onset of spring, half a million of the cranes - about 80% of the world's population - return to the braided river during their northward migration, a true natural North American spectacle. After spending each day feeding in nearby fields, the cranes will fly toward the shallow river, seeking sandbars to provide nighttime roosts safe from riverbank predators.

Michael Forsberg, a photographer based in Lincoln, Nebraska, took the photograph about 17 springs ago. The spring migration was nearly over that year when the lighting,

the cranes, and other features came together to "get it right" along the Platte. "I wanted to capture the feeling that you were there watching, hunkered down along the bank," he said.

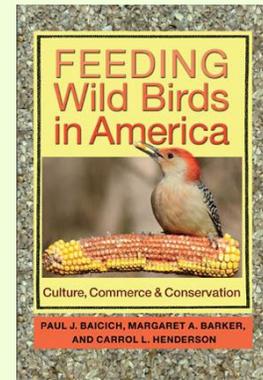
Fortuitously, this anniversary stamp is also appearing at the time of year that nature-based tourists visit Nebraska, specifically when the Sandhill Cranes pass through the Platte River region. The cranes will start to arrive in late February and persist through early April on their way to breeding grounds in Canada, Alaska, and even Siberia.

Check your Post Office for this new stamp, or you can order it [online](#). And for details on seeing Sandhill Cranes in Nebraska, you can start at the [Nebraska Flyway website](#) for migration information, crane-viewing locations, birding etiquette, and connections to the regions convention and visitor bureaus

History of Backyard Bird Feeding

The authors of *Feeding Wild Birds in America: Culture, Commerce & Conservation* (Paul Baicich, Margaret Barker, and Carrol Henderson) continue to line up talks, interviews, and book-signings with bird and garden clubs, nature centers, festivals, parks and refuges, and stores for 2017. The presentations cover a wide range of bird-feeding history topics, linked with practical lessons for today. Also note the following:

- If you want to order a supply of the books for your own store, nature center, or organization, contact [David Neel](#) at Texas A&M University Press: 979-458-3988
- For talks, book signings, festivals, interviews, etc. please contact [Margaret Barker](#).
- To order an individual copy of the book, use this [order-form](#).



Words to Consider:

"The philosophy that I have worked under most of my life is that the serious study of natural history is an activity which has far-reaching effects in every aspect of a person's life. It ultimately makes people protective of the environment in a very committed way. It is my opinion that the study of natural history should be the primary avenue for creating environmentalists..."

~ Roger Tory Peterson (1908-1996)

GBP Bulletin Archives

Great Birding Projects is a vehicle to promote a creative approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing. GBP functions as a bridge to an innovative engagement between people and birds. You can access all previous issues of the *GBP* bulletin on the GBP website [here](#).

