

Banding together for birds in Charlotte

Frances Foster

CONTRIBUTOR

I am not a particularly early riser, nor do I consider myself to be a “birder.” Yet, I was thrilled to take part in a bird-banding project that took place early one Saturday morning on Curt and Lynn Alpeter’s land in East Charlotte. Curt invited a few Charlotte Land Trust board members and friends to join him and Mark LaBarr, a wildlife biologist who works for Audubon Vermont, to participate in this really exciting event.

The land trust holds a perpetual conservation easement on 42 acres of Curt’s land, which means that the land can never be developed. Curt, who is the board chair of Audubon Vermont, manages this land for bird and wildlife habitat. A federally funded program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service that helps fund wildlife management has helped Curt pay for extensive invasive-species removal work and the improvement of natural habitats. This invasive removal has allowed

native shrubs and trees, such as dogwood, maple, oak, hickory, apple and cherry, to grow up and provide a more diverse habitat for birds and other wildlife.

Mark LaBarr has been guiding Curt on habitat management and has monitored the area for the past five years to assess the impact of that work. Priority birds, such as golden-winged warblers as well as the blue-winged warbler, have increased in population as have overall bird numbers of many other songbirds, such as orioles, bluebirds, indigo buntings and scarlet tanagers.

On our early morning adventure onto Curt’s land, Mark had set up a series of mist nets on the property. These look like long badminton nets with pockets in the netting designed to catch unsuspecting birds when they fly into the net. Our group was very excited to see a variety of songbirds that were briefly captured. The nets caught a beautiful bluebird, which Mark banded, and a variety of warblers, which was our goal for that day. Mark was excited when we caught a rare golden winged warbler in the net (see photo). He



Mark LaBarr, wildlife biologist and board chair of Audubon Vermont, holding a rare golden-winged warbler. Reportedly, this bird is no longer found in New England but is sometimes found in the Champlain Valley of Vermont. PHOTO: ROBERT COLEBURN

explained to us that this particular bird is no longer living in any other New England states and seems to particularly like the Champlain Valley of Vermont.

What does banding mean? Mark weighs the bird on a small scale, measures its wing span, records its sex and then affixes a tiny metal band loosely around the bird’s leg. All the information about the bird, as well as the number on the band, is recorded and later logged into a national database. Banding serves as a way to document birds, to understand life expectancies and where they winter, and to help track population health. We caught one bird that already had a band on it. The number was recorded—we later learned that this same bird had been banded last year on Curt’s land!

For almost 30 years the Charlotte Land Trust has worked to protect the most special lands in Charlotte. Our mission is to conserve exceptional agricultural lands, natural areas, scenic views and vistas, and land that provides recreational access. We were pleased to be invited to partner recently with Audubon Vermont in its mission to protect birds, wildlife and their habitat through engaging people of all ages in education, conservation, stewardship and action.

Our Saturday outing perfectly represented why the conservation of important wildlife habitat is important and demonstrated how the careful management of these types of properties can really enhance the habitat.

ARK

Dr. Bill Kellner . Dr. Gary Solow . Dr. Paul Urband