

A Generous and Expert Birder

George Clark's quiet, soft-spoken demeanor belies a remarkable energy and enthusiasm, not only for birds and their habits, but for communicating their wonders to others. Although his contributions as a professional ornithologist are well known, many Norwich residents may not be fully aware how much George has contributed to our town. It's no understatement to assert that few have done more to promote conservation in Norwich over the past decade than George Clark. And, his reach extends well beyond feathered creatures—George is an active member of the Conservation Commission, the Trails Committee, and the Warner Meadows Association. He's as likely to be out lopping branches or pulling invasive weeds on an overgrown trail, or poring over conservation maps at a meeting, as he is to be leading a group of rapt kids or adults on a bird walk.

George defines the notion of volunteerism in that he gives abundantly of his time and energy for worthwhile causes, yet seeks nothing tangible in return. A lifelong teacher with extraordinary patience and curiosity, George is in his element when it comes to introducing people to birds and the natural world. He has so far led at least one community birding excursion in every month of 2010! He's also pretty darn good at identifying birds, always with at least one ear and eye, if not both, tuned to the avian world. Ask him a question, simple or complex, about anything ornithological, and you'll get a reasoned, succinct answer. He'll be the first to tell you that he doesn't have all the answers—if he doesn't know something (a rarity), he won't hide the fact.

The Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) has taken full advantage of George's expertise and dedication since we set up shop in Norwich 3 years ago, and well before that during our tenure at VINS. George did yeoman's work for our 5-year Vermont Breeding Bird Atlas project (www.vtecostudies.org/vbba)—he served as volunteer coordinator for northern Windsor County, organized scores of amateur birders to beat the bushes for nesting birds, logged 450 hours in the field himself, *and* even wrote 22 of the 209 species accounts for the Atlas book that VCE plans to publish in 2011. No one has volunteered more time, blood, sweat and tears for bird conservation in Vermont than George Clark.

More recently, George has teamed up with other Norwich birders to spearhead the Norwich 2010 Birding Quest, a year-long effort to identify as many species as possible within our town lines. Part friendly competition, part careful documentation of our town's avifauna, and part educational outreach to engage citizens in exploring Norwich, the Quest combines many of George's passions. It provides an 'excuse' (not that he needs one) to get out birding every day; it yields a comprehensive record of Norwich's avian diversity; and it is a vehicle to offer monthly birding walks for the public. Not surprisingly, George's list now stands at 130 species, eclipsing all other birders, a testament both to his tireless field birding and superb identification skills. The Norwich master list recently surpassed our original target of 150 species, and we're now aiming for 175 before year's end. If anyone can get us there, George will!

Norwich residents owe a huge debt of thanks to this unassuming, but energetic and community-minded man.

—Chris Rimmer, Vermont Center for Ecostudies