

2014 Volunteer of the Year Award

As presented by Rebecca Suomala at the New Hampshire Audubon Annual Meeting, September 20, 2014.

The Volunteer of the Year Award has been presented since 1997 and was created to honor those who through their dedication and hard work have made an outstanding contribution to the success of New Hampshire Audubon and its work. The 2014 award is shared by two long-time, deeply committed volunteers from Concord, Jane Kolas and Stephanie Parkinson.

Jane and Stephanie are the key volunteers for Project Nighthawk and have been instrumental in its success. The project began as an effort to place gravel nest patches on rooftops and expanded to involve finding and monitoring nests and recording behavior. Both Jane and Stephanie have worked on the Project since its inception in 2007, providing invaluable assistance both in the office and in the field, watching nighthawks, building gravel patches and helping to plan each season's priorities.

Jane is the Project Nighthawk Assistant and comes into the McLane Center once a week throughout the year. She has helped install nest patches, gathering and carrying buckets of gravel, hauling it up onto roofs, and monitoring patches. She initiated and supervised the installation of patches at St. Paul's School. She also helps with coordinated watches and has done many nest watches on her own, including observations at 4:00 am – a mark of true dedication!

She produces the annual summary for Project Nighthawk, maintains the mailing list, and tallies annual volunteer hours. She has also drafted grants, produced posters for each nest patch site, compiled the nest patch data, and created other informational material – including the display on the table. In addition to numerous observations in the Concord area, she has also done nighthawk observations in areas such as Franklin and Hanover when local volunteers were not available to follow-up. Jane is working to draft a research paper about the nest patch experiment. Her efforts allow us to conduct this project with minimal funding and the project could not function without her.

Stephanie is the most experienced nighthawk nest watcher on the Project. She has spent countless hours recording behavior at nests and has been dubbed “Master Nest-finder” for her ability to locate nests of these secretive birds. Since 2007 she has spent many evenings watching at each nest. Keep in mind that we watch from 8-9:30 at night and that pretty much excludes any other evening activity with more “normal” friends! In 2007 when the first nest was found, Stephanie monitored the chick for 14 nights in a row. The next year she monitored the nest for 52 nights. In 2009 there were two nesting attempts and Stephanie was there for both – watching the first attempt for 36 nights until the nest was flooded, and then for another 17 nights, helping to locate and monitor the second nest.



Jane Kolas (left) and Stephanie Parkinson, co-recipients of the 2014 Volunteer of the Year Award.

Photo by Terri Donsker.

The workers at the plant where the nest was located got to know her so well that one of them called her at 1:00 am during the late night shift to report activity at the nest! In 2010, the nesting nighthawks moved to a gravel pit that required a hike in to check. Stephanie not only found the nest, but watched it for 30 nights. Nothing like hanging out on a Friday evening in a gravel pit with the many mosquitoes! She has even climbed trees to try to detect a nest!

Stephanie coordinated the schedule of nest watch volunteers and computerized all the nest observations. She secured permission from her employer, Sulloway and Hollis to place nest patches on the building's rooftops and helped carry many buckets of gravel for 14 of the patches in Concord. Stephanie is also the president of NH Audubon's Capital Chapter and a Backyard Winter Bird Survey volunteer who has willingly invited the press into her home on Survey day.

Watching nighthawks involves sacrificing evening or early morning activities and risking sleep deprivation. Both Jane and Stephanie work full time. Constant watching during the intense period of June and July often precludes any other recreational activity. They have become expert nighthawk watchers and made significant contributions to Project Nighthawk and the study of nighthawks in the state. Both have been excellent ambassadors for the Project and helped foster relationships with the businesses where we have patches. They are dedicated not only to Project Nighthawk but also to all that NH Audubon represents. Their ongoing dedication and investment in the project and the organization are above and beyond the call of duty.

NH Audubon is grateful for their contributions, and thrilled to name Jane Kolias and Stephanie Parkinson as NH Audubon's 2014 Volunteers of the Year.

