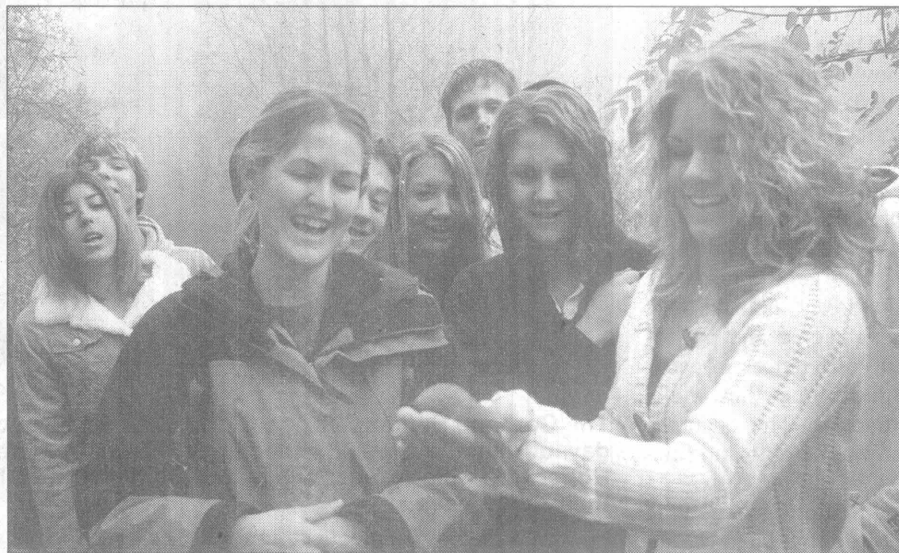


# CHS students learn lesson on fowl behavior



## Ornithologists from Cornell catch, track birds at school

By IDA M. PEASE  
Staff Reporter

A soda bottle birdfeeder filled with black-oil sunflower seeds roused chickadees and tufted titmice Friday morning for breakfast at a feeding station on a trail off the parking lot of Cortland High School.

The cold crisp foggy morning also brought some visitors to the trail. Michelle Rogne, an employee of Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology, and Jesse Ellis, a Cornell student studying for his doctorate in ornithology, wanted to catch 30 birds, band them and then release them.

Students in high school teacher Ron Reed's Regents biology classes, which include ninth- and 10th-graders, observed the banding process. Reed said Ellis is one of four Cornell students he is working with through the Cornell Science Inquiry Partnership.

"They come out here and they think of it as a classroom," Reed said of his students' experiences outside. He said his classes have completed a tile project in which tiles were set out on the trail and students studied the diversity of insects that made their home under them.

Reed said in this project students would come out to observe the individual birds to see how they compete with other chickadees and other birds — who's fighting with whom. "They have a pecking order," said Reed. Ellis said the students would also study the feeding habits of the birds.

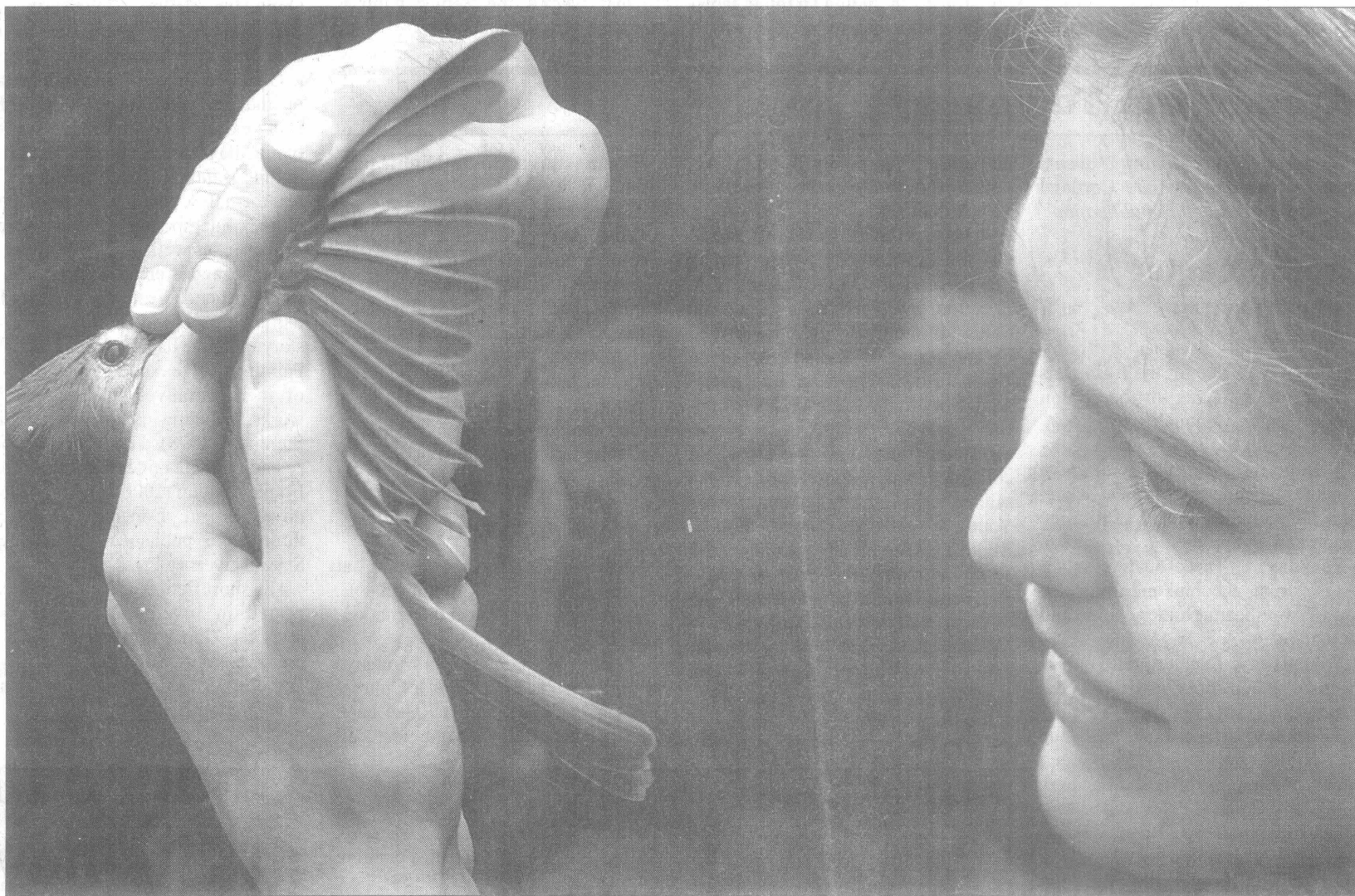
Reed said the feeders were put up about two weeks ago. He said he followed a design for a chickadee feeder he found on the Internet.

In about an hour, Rogne and Ellis had caught one titmouse and seven chickadees and were planning to set up another net at a second location near a pond after a lull at the first location.

Even before a fine black net had been set up completely, one titmouse landed in it. Complaining vociferously, he twisted around trying to get out, only to tangle his feathers and feet even more in the webbing. Most of the chickadees twisted around in the net, but once caught were quiet. One netted chickadee lay on its back as if it were lounging in a hammock.

Ellis said working with the small birds and untangling them was a difficult chore. He said he is used to working with bigger birds, in particular a type of jay in Costa Rica that typically weighs 200 grams (about 7 ounces). That compares to the titmouse that weighed around 22 grams (three-quarters of an ounce) and even smaller chickadees (almost half the weight of the titmouse).

Once untangled, the bird is placed into a cloth bag that is loosely tied with a cloth tie. Rogne carried the bag over her neck, like a necklace, to



Photos by Bob Ellis/staff photographer

Michelle Rogne of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology examines the wings of a titmouse for mites along a trail at Cortland High School Friday morning. Students in Ron Reed's biology class observed as Rogne and Cornell doctoral student Jesse Ellis caught and banded birds which the lab will track. TOP: Ninth-grader Taylor Foster releases a chickadee as Rogne looks on. Rogne banded and collected data on the bird prior to releasing it back to the wild. BELOW: Students observe as Rogne and Ellis write down information about the bird.

### Area birding spots

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology recommends the following locations as the best local spots for birding

#### Malloryville Nature Conservancy Preserve

**Location:** Dryden, between Ithaca and Cortland.

**Appeal:** A little bit of northern forest within a 20-minute drive of Cortland

**Habitat:** Hemlocks and a small bog

**When To Go:** Year-round, though the trails are a little tough in winter without snowshoes or skis.

**Birds to Look For:** Northern waterthrush, black-throated green warbler, ruffed grouse are among the breeders. Winter wren and common redpoll have also been spotted.

#### Mundy Wildflower Garden

**Location:** Ithaca

**Appeal:** Great spot for a quiet walk through tall deciduous woods along a babbling creek, as well as a good fall migrant trap for species below.

**When To Go:** Fall

**Birds to Look For:** Swainson's thrush, lots of warblers and several sparrows

a spot farther away where she set in down in the bushes along the trail.

Students immediately noticed the bag wiggling.

"That is so sad," said Ashley McNulty, a 10th-grader in Reed's first class of the day, when a chickadee flew into the net.

Ninth-grader Taylor Foster eagerly volunteered to release the titmouse. "I just really wanted to hold one," she said of the birds. Students crowded around Rogne and Ellis as they not only banded the birds using two bands per leg, but also weighed,

measured, identified if the bird was hatched this year, and checked for any fat and mites on the bird. Rogne explained that two bands per leg are used so that more color combinations can be made. Birds were outfitted in colors of aluminum, pink, orange, blue, green, red, black and white.

A feather from each bird was also taken. Rogne said the sex of titmice and chickadees cannot be determined until after a DNA analysis of the feather. Once banding is completed, Reed will receive a list of every bird banded.

