

THE NEWSLETTER OF NEW YORK CITY AUDUBON

SUMMER 2015 / VOLUME XXXVI NO. 2



THE URBAN AUDUBON



**Counting Birds in
New York City**

North Brother Island

**Jamaica Bay
Shorebird Festival**

**NYC AUDUBON
MISSION & VISION**

Mission: NYC Audubon is a grassroots community that works for the protection of wild birds and habitat in the five boroughs, improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers.

Vision: NYC Audubon envisions a day when birds and people in the five boroughs enjoy a healthy, livable habitat.

THE URBAN AUDUBON

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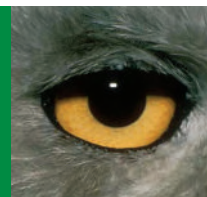
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Kathryn Heintz



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Kathryn Heintz



©Christopher Palladino



“Vito” and “Linda” have landed. After more than 200 years, a pair of bald eagles has nested within the five boroughs. Staten Island birder Seth Wollney reported the nest to us this past April—and within hours of our releasing the story, the media had jumped on it. The return of this signature raptor to New York City underscores the best of the conservation movement, as many of us grew up fearing there would be no bald eagles for our children to see.

Following sharp population declines in the 19th and 20th centuries, bald eagles recovered

enough following the 1972 ban on DDT to be removed from the list of threatened and endangered species in 2007. But they are still at risk. In January, a bill was introduced to Congress seeking to “update” the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 in order to support what is termed the “All-of-the-Above Energy Approach.” As introduced, the CLEAN Energy Producers Act of 2015 (H.R.493) substantively weakens the existing restraints and restrictions on accidental or incidental killing of bald and golden eagles and migratory birds. It is important that this proposed legislation be defeated or at least amended to ensure the conservation and protection of eagles along with all of our nation’s birds. NYC Audubon and many of our partners in bird conservation are tracking this bill’s progress, and I encourage you to join us.

The media attention garnered by the eagles’ nesting location offers us a context for sharing our work on other species of conservation concern. Though not as iconic as our national symbol, no less important are the oystercatchers, red knots, common terns, snowy egrets, and millions of migrating land birds that use New York City’s urban habitat. This issue of *The Urban Audubon* shares highlights of that ongoing work. Be inspired. Join us for a seasonal walk, birding trip, or community volunteer event this summer. I look forward to seeing you out in the field!

CONSERVATION PROGRAM UPDATE AND ANNUAL MEETING

By Susan Elbin, PhD, and Conservation Staff

Wednesday, June 10, 6pm

The Arsenal, Central Park, Fifth Avenue at 64th Street, Third-Floor Gallery

NYC Audubon conducts scientific monitoring in all five boroughs to understand how birds are using our urban environment and how this environment affects them, via Project Safe Flight, our Jamaica Bay program, and our Harbor Herons project. Join us as Susan Elbin and research staffers Darren Klein, Debra Kriensky, and Tod Winston provide updates on what this research has taught us in the past year. Our board election will precede the meeting. Snacks and refreshments will be provided.

All lectures are free and open to the public. NYC Audubon’s lecture series has been made possible by the support of Claude and Lucienne Bloch.

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Yellow-Crowned Night-Heron ©François Portmann

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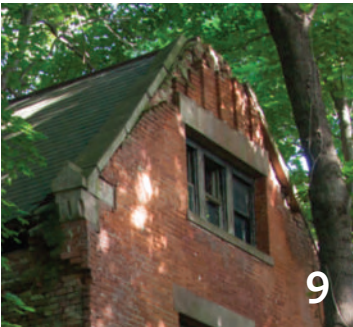
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CONSERVATION NOTES

Summer is an exciting and busy time for the conservation staff here at NYC Audubon. With thanks to continued funding from the Leon Levy Foundation, Patagonia, and the Williams Companies, Inc., and continued support from our NYC Audubon members and volunteers, we will be adding some new initiatives in line with our two main programs, Project Safe Flight and Waterbirds of the New York Harbor.

PROJECT SAFE FLIGHT: BIRD COLLISION MONITORING

This spring, we continued monitoring at some high-risk collision sites such as Bryant Park and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and we started monitoring at some new ones, such as the Freedom Tower. We also expanded into Queens this spring, monitoring a collection of three neighboring buildings in Long Island City that has reportedly been the site of many collisions in the past. Our monitoring at Columbia University is continuing as well, and

we hope to get more students engaged in our efforts in the coming year. Results from this spring will be available on our website later this summer. Program and Advocacy Manager Darren Klein was instrumental in getting our newly launched D-Bird website (www.d-bird.org) up and running. The site has been an effective way for us to learn about collisions occurring outside our regular monitoring routes. Over 50 dead or injured birds had already been reported to us this year by the time spring migration was starting to gear up. These data, in conjunction with our Project Safe Flight monitoring data, are helping us understand more about bird collisions in New York City. Our glass-testing project with the American Bird Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Society, Fordham University, NJ Audubon, and Ennead Architects has also been up and running. Under the skilled hands of Field Technician Anikó Totha, migratory birds are teaching us about the properties of glass: what birds can and cannot see.

PROJECT SAFE FLIGHT: STOPOVER HABITAT

The Urban Oasis, our native plant garden in McGolrick Park, survived the harsh winter (for the most part), and plants have started to bloom. Long-time Field Technician Ann Seligman is leading the effort this year as our "Garden Guardian." We did a second round of planting earlier in May to fill in what didn't make it, as well as some maintenance to make sure our plants thrive this spring and summer. Many of the plants may look like little twigs now, but with some "TLC," these plants will continue to establish themselves and grow. In 2014, we conducted several pre-planting biodiversity surveys, and found 11 species of birds in the park: American crow, blue jay, common grackle, European starling, fish crow, hermit thrush, house sparrow, mourning dove, northern cardinal, rock pigeon, and white-throated sparrow. We also observed arthropods such as butterflies, moths, millipedes, and a variety of bees. In the garden's second year, we will continue these surveys in order to monitor

VOLUNTEER!



Work in NYC Audubon's friendly office or in the field and make a difference for the City's wildlife. There are many ways to help. **If interested in any of the projects listed below, contact us at volunteer@nycaudubon.org or 212-691-7483 x304.**

OFFICE PROJECTS

Help with mailings, filing, and general office work. Computer skills and birding knowledge are helpful but not required.

THE URBAN AUDUBON

Join the newsletter committee and contribute your writing skills to four seasonal issues. Meetings are bi-monthly in the early evening.

PROJECT SAFE FLIGHT

During spring and fall, migrant birds confront many hazards as they pass through New York City. Volunteers are needed to monitor buildings weekly for bird collisions, rescue injured birds, and record any casualties. Orientations will be held Monday, August 17 and Thursday, August 20, 6-7pm.

BIRD TRANSPORTERS

We often receive calls from concerned individuals who have found injured birds but are unable to transport them to a rehabilitator. We need caring volunteers to transport these birds to licensed wildlife rehabilitators in the area. A training session will be held Tuesday, September 8, 6-7pm at the Wild Bird Fund.

TRIBUTE IN LIGHT MONITORING

**Friday, September 11, begins at 8pm
With the Municipal Art Society**

Each year a tireless group of volunteers monitors the Tribute in Light to ensure that migrating birds do not become entrapped in the light beams. A training session will be held Wednesday, September 2, 6-7pm.

INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEAN-UP

**Saturday, September 19, 10am-1pm
With American Littoral Society and National Park Service**

Join us at North Channel Bridge to take part in a multi-state effort to improve coastline habitat.

The North Channel Bridge area, used by species like the American oystercatcher, is also a stone's throw away from the Harbor Heron Islands, the newly restored Elders Point Marsh, and the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. Help us clear the beach and raise awareness of the importance of coastal areas to birdlife. Equipment, refreshments, and bus transportation from Manhattan are provided (bus limited to 40).



American Kestrel Box on the Javits Center Green Roof

how the assemblage of animals changes as the garden matures.

The Jacob K. Javits Convention Center has funded us for the second year of biodiversity monitoring on their green roof. We are happy to be partnering with Dr. Alan Clark of Fordham University again on this project. Fordham doctoral student Dustin Partridge and Research Assistant Kaitlyn Parkins are leading the team, setting up surveys for bats, birds, and bugs. Undergraduate student Robert Ciardullo will join us for a second summer, sorting and identifying terrestrial and arboreal arthropods. We were surprised last year to discover six nesting pairs of herring gulls on the green roof. Earlier this spring, two American kestrel nest boxes were installed. Time will tell if American kestrels, which used the roof last year as a hunting ground, will move in.

WATERBIRDS OF THE NEW YORK HARBOR

We are in the middle of both our annual Harbor Herons Nesting Survey, led by

Communications Manager/Research Assistant Tod Winston, recording colony size and species composition in our local rookeries, and our foraging surveys, coordinated by Foraging Survey Project Coordinator Joe O'Sullivan, studying wader feeding behavior throughout the Harbor estuary. In addition to our regular monitoring, one lucky great egret will be wearing a backpack transmitter, courtesy of a project in partnership with Lenoir-Rhyne University Center for Graduate Studies Co-Director Dr. John Brzorad, the U.S. Forest Service, the Generation Schools Network, and NYU's Wallerstein Collaborative. Our egret will be mapping its own movements throughout the year via text messaging to the movebank.org website. The project includes egrets from two other urban centers: Philadelphia and Baltimore.

Horseshoe crabs, the eggs of which serve as an important food resource for migrating shorebirds, continue spawning in impressive numbers on the beaches of Jamaica Bay. Our annual horseshoe crab monitoring, done

in conjunction with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, is in its seventh year. We are looking forward to seeing if horseshoe crabs return to Plumb Beach West, the restored end of the beach, in the strong numbers that we observed last year. American oystercatchers returned to our area in March, and we have been on the shores of the Rockaways and Breezy Point surveying nests and helping resource managers protect them from disturbance. Field Technician Emilio Tobón continues to band adult and young birds, giving us a deeper understanding of how these shorebirds are using our beaches year after year. We have been partnering with Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences on this project for four years. Hein Sihm, an undergraduate student from Columbia University, has joined our team this year and will be working on an additional piece of this research: monitoring the interactions between nesting American oystercatchers and piping plovers, and measuring the advantages and disadvantages for each species of nesting in close proximity.

Stay tuned for updates in the next issue of *The Urban Audubon*.

REMEMBER NYC AUDUBON

New York City is forever changing, and with time the need to protect our urban wildlife and habitat becomes more and more critical. A bequest is a generous and straightforward way to safeguard birds and their habitat in the City's five boroughs. It can be expressed "I bequeath [a sum of money or a percentage of my estate] to New York City Audubon Society, Inc. a not-for-profit organization with offices at 71 West 23rd Street, Suite 1523, New York, NY 10010, for its general purposes." To learn more, please give Director of Development Kellye Rosenheim a call at 646-502-9611.

COUNTING BIRDS IN NEW YORK CITY

There are many reasons to count, survey, and monitor bird populations. Principal goals of monitoring include documenting the presence or absence of a species, determining population trends over time, and evaluating habitat quality or restoration success. Through monitoring, we can begin to understand “connectivity” between nesting, migratory stopover, and wintering grounds: where our breeding birds go during the fall and winter, how many return, and how many of them return to the same place. Do individuals of species of greatest conservation need (SGCNs) return year after year? Do they come back every year to the same general area, the same islands, or even the exact same nest site? In other words, how high is their “nest site fidelity”? Furthermore, what are the trends in population size and species composition? Important elements of a successful monitoring project designed to answer these questions include the consistent use of standard protocols, repeated annual surveys, and data-driven interpretation of results. NYC Audubon’s longest-term monitoring project is our survey of SGCNs—long-legged wading birds (a.k.a. Harbor Herons—as well as co-occurring waterbirds nesting in colonies in the New York Harbor. This project began when wading birds first reappeared on islands in the Arthur Kill in the 1980s, and monitoring has followed the Harbor population on an annual basis since that time. By monitoring every year, our team has documented not only the presence and species composition of breeding colonies, but also how the colonies have shifted between islands, and how the size of the Harbor population has changed (reaching peak numbers in 1993, but maintaining a stable size since 1988). The size and location of our colonies reflect the resources available to the birds while they are raising their young.

Focused monitoring is needed to understand why the Harbor Heron colonies are not at peak 1993 levels. If young birds are successfully fledging and returning to breed, then the colonies should be growing in size. If birds are unsuccessful in nesting, they will not return and the colonies will decline. To assess nest success and nest site fidelity (how likely it is for individuals to return and to successfully breed), we need to monitor more than the number of nesting pairs over time. For some species (e.g., the double-crested cormorant), we have monitored nest success by following the fate of several nesting pairs from nest building to chick fledging. We observed that the City’s cormorants often lose eggs in the early stages of nesting, but lay replacement eggs to complete their usual clutch size of four eggs. The number of nesting pairs is growing, but remains lower than the peak number in 1993. Cormorants are now nesting on eight islands, compared to three islands in the mid 1980s. We have banded nearly 1,500 young cormorants, some of which have returned to nest in their natal colonies (high fidelity) after reaching sexual maturity at age three. New York Harbor hosts an important cormorant colony.

Healthy and accessible foraging grounds are as critical to



A Banded Snowy Egret on Hoffman Island

breeding success as are nest sites. We partner with NJ Audubon to monitor foraging activity (location, flock composition, foraging success) of colonial waterbirds and have found that more birds use the New Jersey wetlands than the New York City wetlands.

Events on the breeding grounds, however, may not be the main driver of waterbird population size. What are the conservation issues on the wintering ground or along the migration route? This is where connectivity comes into play: Where do the waterbirds of the New York Harbor spend their winters? Do they use regular migration routes? These questions bring a different focus to our monitoring: We need to be able to identify where “our” birds are going. Re-sightings of some of our banded cormorants have been reported to us, and we’ve learned that the birds winter south along the eastern seaboard, both coasts of Florida, and into Alabama. It seems our cormorants do not have strong connectivity between wintering and breeding sites. But we do know that most of them remain coastal rather than using inland water. (Although one bird was seen last year in Wisconsin!)

Monitoring of the Harbor’s great egrets shows us how young

birds disperse from their natal colonies. We have been able to document local and migratory movements, post-fledging. Fledgling great egrets banded in June on Elders Marsh in Jamaica Bay have been seen in August in northwest New Jersey, the New Jersey Meadowlands, southeastern Pennsylvania, and as far as Quebec. When there is low post-breeding site fidelity like this, conservation efforts need to be large-scale, to protect all the possible areas the birds may be using. We have banded only 206 egrets since our study began in 2009, so monitoring needs to be more intensive in wintering and stopover areas if we are to see any of our banded birds. In 2014 we received reports that an egret tagged in 2012 had returned to New

York Harbor (Liberty State Park, New Jersey) during the breeding season—an indication of breeding area fidelity. We have also had reports of a banded snowy egret returning to the shores of the East River (near its natal colony on South Brother Island).

In the coming year, NYC Audubon will be conducting nesting surveys of long-legged wading birds, monitoring songbird response to habitat enhancement, monitoring reproductive productivity of beach-nesting shorebirds, and documenting the presence of migratory shorebirds. In other words, we will be counting birds: figuring out what birds are here in New York City and how well they are doing.

10TH ANNUAL JAMAICA BAY SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL AT JAMAICA BAY WILDLIFE REFUGE

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 7:30AM-5PM

During the past 40 years, over 40 species of shorebirds (including rare and accidental vagrants) have been recorded at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge's East and West Ponds from mid-July through October, with the greatest diversity and abundance usually occurring in August. We invite you to attend our tenth annual celebration at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge on Saturday, August 29.

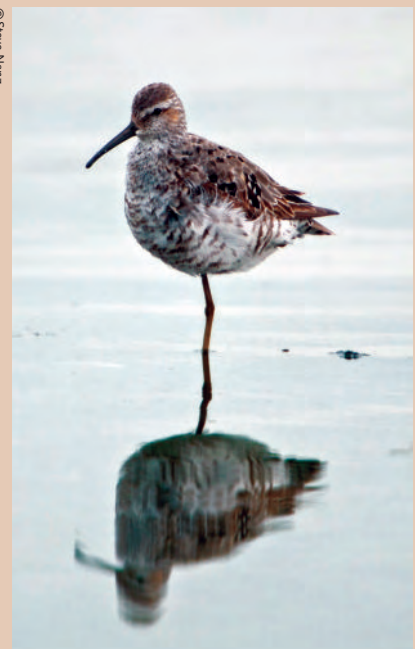
Free bus transportation from Manhattan to Jamaica Bay is available for NYC Audubon members at the Student/Senior level and up. Meet at 71 West 23rd Street at 6:30am. To reserve a seat, contact the office at 212-691-7483 x306.

For more information, contact NYC Audubon at 212-691-7483 x306, the American Littoral Society at 718-474-0896, or Don Riepe at donriepe@gmail.com.

The Shorebird Festival is a NYC Audubon partnership program with the American Littoral Society and Gateway National Recreation Area.

- 7:30am** Meet at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center for registration and continental breakfast (coffee, donuts, juice, etc.)
- 8am** Hike to the East Pond to view shorebirds during the high tide (Kevin Karlson, Lloyd Spitalnik, Tom Burke, et al.)
- 10:30am** Welcome from the National Park Service (Gateway Superintendent Jennifer Nersesian)
- 10:40am** Overview of Jamaica Bay conservation issues and wildlife (Don Riepe)
- 11:15am** NYC Audubon shorebird research (Susan Elbin, Debra Kriensky)
- 11:45am** Shorebird photography (Lloyd Spitalnik)
- 12:20pm** Lunch (bring lunch or drive to a deli located in nearby Broad Channel)
- 1:15pm** Hikes to East and West Ponds (all leaders)
- 3:30pm** Birding by Impression (Kevin Karlson)
- 4:30-5pm** Discussion and wrap-up

© Steve Nanz



Stilt Sandpiper

TRICOLORED HERON (*EGRETTA TRICOLOR*)

Tod Winston

A low, marshy island in Jamaica Bay, Elders Point East, has in recent years been home to a surprising diversity of nesting waterbirds. This 49-acre island, recently restored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, hosts breeding double-crested cormorants, which nest in the island's small grove of mulberry trees, as well as a thriving population of great egrets, snowy egrets, black-crowned night-herons, and glossy ibis, all nesting just a few feet from the ground, literally stacked atop one another, in an area of marsh elder ("high-tide bush"). Last year as the NYC Audubon Harbor Herons nesting survey team counted a cluster of snowy and great egret parents jealously guarding their eggs and young, two darker birds stood out—and as we focused in on them, we were thrilled to discover the telltale snowy white belly that quickly distinguishes the tricolored heron from its slightly smaller and more monotone cousin, the little blue heron.

As its name suggests, the tricolored heron is known for its striking coloring: The adult's slate-blue upperparts and bill are offset by its white belly, underwing coverts, and head plumes—and by its gold-buff throat and scapular plumes. Formerly known as the Louisiana heron, this very slender, long-billed heron actually breeds along both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of South America, throughout the Caribbean, and north to Baja California in the West. On the east coast, though the bird has been known to nest as far

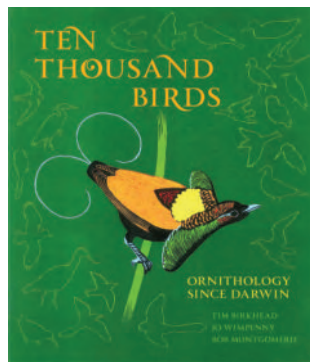


north as Maine, the south shore of Long Island seems to be its current northern breeding limit. In New York City, over the past 20 years the tricolored heron has consistently nested in very small numbers in Jamaica Bay; Canarsie Pol, which has in recent years been abandoned by waders, was a long-time favorite, before nesting

...continued on page 16

BOOK REVIEW

Mary Jane Kaplan



*Ten Thousand Birds:
Ornithology since Darwin*
by Tim Birkhead,
Jo Wimpenny,
and Bob Montgomerie
Princeton University Press,
2014

Ten Thousand Birds: Ornithology since Darwin belongs in the category of history of science, but that doesn't begin to describe it. The book's beautiful design and physical heft make it suitable for the coffee table, as does its wealth of historical photos. But its 400-some pages of text require the reader to pay attention: Although written in informal style, the book doesn't water down the scientific material for the non-expert. However, those interested in how we came to know as much as we do about birds—and how much is left to be discovered—will find a wealth of information, and the mini-biographies of just about every ornithologist you've ever heard of (and some you haven't) will fascinate many for whom the science itself is not of great interest.

By including tales of popular hypotheses that turned out to be wrong—often standing in the way of real advances for years—the

book gives a realistic sense of the bumpy road of scientific progress. In reverse situations, influential scientists have blocked for decades the acceptance of new ideas they doubted. This was the case with Darwin's theory of sexual selection, to which the authors devote an entire chapter. When experimental techniques were finally developed that showed the importance of female selection, "the serious study of mate choice for plumage coloration had begun, 140 years after Darwin had suggested such experiments."

Ten Thousand Birds is about the study of birds, not their conservation, but in the afterword the authors address the issue with a compelling hypothesis of their own: At the current rate of extinction, historians writing a survey of ornithology a century from now will have to choose a new name, since fewer than 9,000 species will remain.

NORTH BROTHER ISLAND

Suzanne Charlé

Everyone, it seems, is interested in North Brother Island, a.k.a. New York's "Forgotten Island." Situated just north of the East River's Hell Gate—and once home to the quarantine hospital that housed Typhoid Mary—the island is an Audubon "Important Bird Area," one of 17 islands in New York Harbor that NYC Audubon monitors for nesting long-legged wading birds. The Forest, Horticulture, & Natural Resources Group of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation (NYC Parks) is working to improve and restore the island's natural habitat. Two New York City Council members, however, want to open it to the public: NYC Parks Committee Chair Mark Levine wants to have

a pier built there, while Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx imagines a "Disneyland" in the East River!

NYC Audubon has been studying North Brother as part of the Harbor Herons Nesting Survey project since 1986. In 2003, 238 wader pairs were recorded nesting on the island. "That was the heyday," says NYC Audubon Director of Conservation and Science Susan Elbin, PhD. "Then, for reasons we haven't completely figured out, the colony shifted to nearby South Brother." Numbers dropped precipitously over just a few years: In 2007 only 13 black-crowned night-heron pairs nested on North Brother; gull nests were observed there up to 2009. Since then, no nests have been sighted,

although Elbin has seen waders "hanging out, using it for loafing. It's a nice island."

The nesting survey team, led by NYC Audubon's Tod Winston, is monitoring for nesting pairs again this spring—and also looking for predators. If no nests are found, NYC Parks will be able to proceed with the restoration in June. If nests are observed, the restoration team will have to wait until the last chicks fledge before they can start. "So much invasive seed blew in over the years," says Jennifer Greenfeld, deputy chief of the Forest, Horticulture, & Natural Resources Group. Tall non-native Norway maples, dense bittersweet, and porcelainberry vines gradually altered the herons' habitat. The NYC Parks team has removed invasive species, cleared paths, and covered treacherous manholes. (The ruined buildings of the quarantine hospital complex continue to decay.) Now they're focusing on restoring the habitat with native plants: hackberry trees and thicket-forming shrubs like sumac, blueberry, and wild blackberries.

As for public access, the City Council members' plans have little chance, according to Greenfeld. "It's already pretty well protected. If there were any moves to develop it, we would advocate that it be declared a "Forever Wild Preserve." To discourage eager "urban explorers," Elbin had the island's GPS coordinates removed from the database of coordinates used for the popular online scavenger hunt game, "Geocaching," which sends its players in search of items in little-known places. NYC Parks is thinking about planting the perimeter with thorny shrubs. "There's already a lot of poison ivy," says Kristen King, director of forest restoration for NYC Parks. "Birds love it." (Those interested in seeing the island can pick up Christopher Payne's handsome book, *North Brother Island: The Last Unknown Place in New York City*. For a quick look, go to Payne's website: www.chrispaynephoto.com/north-brother-island.)



Kristen King Takes Measurements in Preparation for Restoration Work on North Brother Island

EVENTS AND ADVENTURES

- NYC Audubon Events
- Partnership Events

● JAMAICA BAY SUNSET CRUISE

Saturday, May 30, 3-6pm

Guides: Don Riepe, Mickey Cohen
With American Littoral Society

Meet at Pier 4 in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. Enjoy a narrated cruise aboard the "Golden Sunshine." Visit the 13,000-acre Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge to see nesting peregrine falcons, osprey, egrets, shorebirds, and waterfowl. Includes refreshments. Contact Don Riepe at 718-474-0896 or donriepe@gmail.com for more information and to register. Limited to 140. \$55

● SPRING MIGRATION ON RANDALL'S ISLAND

Sunday, May 31, 9am-2pm

Guides: Gabriel Willow, Randall's Island Park Alliance Staff

With Randall's Island Park Alliance, Inc.

Meet on the northwest corner of 102nd Street and the FDR Drive. We'll walk across the foot bridge over the East River to Randall's Island, an under-explored location with newly restored freshwater wetlands and salt marsh. We'll look for spring migrants (both waterbirds and land birds) as we explore the results of recent restoration efforts. Limited to 20. \$40 (28)

MEMBERS-ONLY

June Member Walk in Inwood Hill Park

Tuesday, June 2, 7:30-9am

Meet Kellye Rosenheim at Inwood Hill Park's entrance at 218th Street to look for late-spring migrants and nesting birds in Inwood's mature urban forest. Call 212-691-7483 x306 to register. Free for Contributing NYC Audubon members at the Student/Senior level and up



Snowy Egrets

● CAMERA CLUB

Wednesday, June 3, 6:30-8:30pm

Instructors: David Speiser, Lloyd Spitalnik

Meet at the National Audubon office, 225 Varick Street. Whether you're a beginner or more advanced photographer, our friendly photography club is the place to discuss diverse photography-related topics, hone your skills, and learn about the great photography opportunities available in the New York City area. Professional bird and nature photographers David Speiser and Lloyd Spitalnik will share their expertise and help you improve your work. Registration required. No limit. \$14.50 (\$10) per meeting

● VAN CORTLANDT BIRD WALKS, THE BRONX

Saturdays, June 6–August 29,

8-9:30am

Guides: NYC Audubon, Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy
With the Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy

Meet at Van Cortlandt Nature Center. The history of birding and Van Cortlandt Park are inseparable.

Influential birders such as Roger Tory Peterson and Allan D. Cruickshank got their starts on Van Cortlandt's ecologically diverse grounds. These walks celebrate the tradition set forth by these great ornithologists. Participants will look for various species of residents and migrants and discuss a wide range of avian topics. For more information, call 212-691-7483. No registration necessary. No limit. Free

● BIKING AND BIRDING: JAMAICA BAY

Saturday, June 6, 9am-3pm

Guide: Gabriel Willow

Meet at Grand Army Plaza.

Bike your way through Brooklyn neighborhoods and along scenic greenways to Jamaica Bay to look for migrant shorebirds, as well as breeding egrets, oystercatchers, and more. This is a 16-mile trip; return by subway from Broad Channel. Bring binoculars, water, lunch, and your bicycle. Limited to 15. \$40 (28)

● SPRING HIKE IN THE GREENBELT, STATEN ISLAND

Sunday, June 7, 9:30am-3pm

Guide: Gabriel Willow

With NYC Parks and the Greenbelt Conservancy

Meet at the Manhattan terminal of the S.I. Ferry and begin your tour on water. Explore the 3,000-acre Staten Island Greenbelt and visit High Rock Park, Walker Pond, and the Pouch Camp property: 143 acres of unspoiled woods and wetlands. Look for late-spring migrants and nesting birds, and learn about the Greenbelt's ecology. Trip involves 3.5 miles of hiking. Includes refreshments at the Greenbelt Nature Center and transportation on S.I. Limited to 20. \$43 (30)

● SUNSET ECOCRUISES TO THE HARBOR HERON ISLANDS

Sundays, June 7–August 16

7-9pm (Brother Islands; Hoffman

and Swinburne Islands)

6-9pm (Jamaica Bay)

Guide: Gabriel Willow

With New York Water Taxi

Meet at South Street Seaport Pier 16 to visit the fascinating Brother islands, the large egret and cormorant colonies on Hoffman and Swinburne islands, or the great expanses of Jamaica Bay. Whichever your destination, you'll experience the wonders of New York Harbor at sunset and see some of the 3,000 herons, egrets, and ibis nesting here. To choose a cruise and register, contact New York Water Taxi at 212-742-1969 or www.nywatertaxi.com/tours/audubon. Limited to 90. Price varies by destination

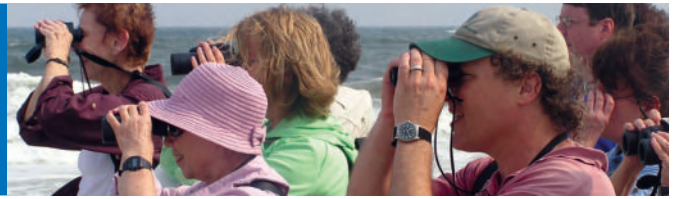
● THE PARAKEETS OF GREENWOOD CEMETERY, BROOKLYN

Saturday, June 13, 10am-1pm

Guide: Gabriel Willow

With Green-Wood Cemetery

Meet at the cemetery entrance at 5th Avenue and 25th Street, Park Slope, Brooklyn. Green-Wood Cemetery is rich in both history and wildlife. It is



also the highest point in Brooklyn, affording marvelous views. We will explore its environs in search of spring migrants and its most unexpected avian residents: the huge flocks of brilliant green monk parakeets that nest there. Native to South America, these charming immigrants are surprisingly hardy and flourish even in our harsh winters. Limited to 15. \$46 (32)

● **BREEDING BIRDS OF THE HUDSON HIGHLANDS, NY**
Saturday, June 20, 8am-5pm
Guide: Gabriel Willow

Join Gabriel Willow in exploring some of the most exciting and beautiful birding locations in the Hudson Valley: Doodletown Road, Constitution Marsh, and Indian Brook Farm. We'll look for uncommon breeding warbler specialties at Doodletown, such as cerulean, hooded, blue-winged, golden-winged, and worm-eating. We will then head to the Constitution Marsh Audubon Sanctuary, home to breeding wood ducks, bald eagles, least bitterns, and marsh wrens. After a picnic lunch by the banks of Indian Brook, we will explore the extensive grasslands and highbush blueberry stands of Indian Brook Farm in search of breeding field and savannah sparrows, bobolinks, and indigo buntings. Transport by passenger van included. Bring lunch. Limited to 12. \$129 (90)

● **A MEMORIAL TO JEAN BOURQUE: NATURE OF FLOYD BENNETT FIELD, BROOKLYN**
Saturday, June 20, 8:30am-Noon
Presented by the Brooklyn Bird Club
Guides: Steve Nanz, Jerry Layton, Peter Dorosh, Marielle Anzelone
With the Brooklyn Bird Club and National Park Service

Meet at the Floyd Bennett Field south entrance parking lot. Join us to remember our friend Jean Bourque, who passed away in

2014. A longtime advocate for wildlife conservation in New York City and wife of past NYC Audubon President Ron Bourque, Jean was particularly instrumental in the protection of grasslands at Floyd Bennett Field. This walk in her memory will focus on plants, insects, birds and overall nature, in the setting she nurtured and loved. Visit www.nycaudubon.org/jeanbourque for registration details and directions. No limit. Free

MEMBERS-ONLY
Van Trip to A Memorial to Jean Bourque: Nature of Floyd Bennett Field
Saturday, June 20, 7:45am-1pm
 Come with NYC Audubon to celebrate the memory of conservationist Jean Bourque. Limited to 12. To register, call Kellye Rosenheim at 212-691-7483 x306. Free for Contributing NYC Audubon members at the Student/Senior level and up

● **PROSPECT PARK BIRD WALK**
Saturdays, July 11 and August 22;
8-10:30am
Guide: Gabriel Willow

Meet under the arch in Grand Army Plaza. Join Gabriel Willow for a leisurely walk to get to know the summer bird residents of

“Brooklyn’s back yard,” beautiful Prospect Park. Although summer birding in the City can be a bit slow, Prospect Park has a wide variety of habitats that attract a number of breeding bird species. We will explore the park’s meadows, forests, and waterways in search of nesting waterfowl, green herons, barn swallows, yellow warblers, Baltimore orioles, and more. Limited to 15. \$33 (23) per walk

● **BIRDING GEMS OF STATEN ISLAND: FRESHKILLS PARK**
Saturday, July 11, 10am-5pm
Guide: Cliff Hagen

Meet at the Manhattan terminal of the S.I. Ferry for a special opportunity to visit Freshkills Park, currently in transition from what was once the world’s largest landfill into an expansive park. Currently closed to the general public, the park is home to rolling grasslands, tidal marshes, woodlands, and a freshwater pond system, which host an array of breeding birds, butterflies, mammals, frogs, and turtles. Sparrows, osprey, yellow warblers, and blue grosbeaks nest alongside wrens, orioles, and shorebirds. Wading birds feed on the mudflats while hawks and vultures soar above. On calm, sunny days, one can expect to find nearly two dozen species of butterflies here. Transport by passenger van on S.I. included. Limited to 12. \$57 (40)

● **SUMMER BIRDING AT WAVE HILL, THE BRONX**
Sundays, July 12, August 9, and September 13; 9:30-11:30am
Guide: Gabriel Willow
With Wave Hill

Meet at the Perkins Visitor Center. Naturalist Gabriel Willow contributes his extensive knowledge of bird species and their behaviors on these captivating walks. Wave Hill’s garden setting overlooking the Hudson River flyway provides the perfect habitat for resident and migrating birds. Advance registration is recommended, either online at www.wavehill.org, at the Perkins Visitor Center, or by calling 718-549-3200 x251. (Walks run rain or shine; in case of severe weather call the number above for updates.) Ages 10 and up welcome with an adult. NYC Audubon members enjoy two-for-one admission. See www.wavehill.org for more information

● **TWILIGHT BAT WALKS IN CENTRAL PARK**
Tuesdays, July 14–August 11, 7:45-9:15pm
Guide: Paul Keim

Meet at 103rd Street and Central Park West. Explore the mysteries of Central Park at twilight as we seek these fascinating and misunderstood flying mammals—and learn about their great importance to our environment. We’ll see local bat species in flight as they hunt and dive for insects, and hear them with an echolocator. Other nocturnal creatures like crickets and katydids may be seen as well. Bring bug spray and a flashlight. Limited to 16. All children must be accompanied by an adult; recommended for ages 5 and up. \$32 (22) for adults, \$20 (14) for children under 12

continued on page 12

©David Speiser



Baltimore Oriole

EVENTS AND ADVENTURES (CONTINUED)

© François Portmann



Wilson's Phalarope

● CITY OF WATER DAY ECOCRUISE

Saturday, July 18, Time TBA
Guide: Gabriel Willow
With Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance

Meet at Pier 83, at West 42nd Street and 12th Avenue. As part of City of Water Day, a celebration of the waterways and harbors of New York City, NYC Audubon will once again offer a special ecocruise past Hoffman and Swinburne islands, exploring the natural history of the area. Visit www.nycaudubon.org to learn more about City of Water Day and ecocruise details. Registration required. Limited to 150. Free

● **"IT'S YOUR TERN" FESTIVAL**
Sunday, July 19, Noon-4pm (Rain date Sunday, July 26)
With Governors Island Alliance, National Park Service, New York Harbor School, Earth Matter
 See page 17 for details.

● **CROTON POINT PARK, NY**
Saturday, July 25, 8:20am-3pm
Guide: Gabriel Willow
 Meet at Grand Central Station and travel in comfort aboard Metro-North to visit Croton Point Park, overlooking the Hudson

River about one hour north of the City. This 500-acre park is a wonderful mix of forest, wetlands, and grasslands that are home to hard-to-find breeding birds such as indigo buntings, grasshopper sparrows, bobolinks, and eastern meadowlarks. Great horned owls, willow flycatchers, and orchard orioles breed in nearby woodlands. Bring lunch for a picnic in one of the riverside pavilions. Limited to 20. Round-trip Metro North fare (\$19.50) not included in trip price. \$53 (37)

● SHOREBIRD IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP

Thursday, July 30, 6:30-8:30pm (class)
Sunday, August 2, 9am-12pm (trip)
Guide: Joe Giunta, Happy Warblers LLC

Shorebirds are one of the most challenging groups of birds to identify, yet beautiful and fascinating once they can be distinguished. Learn to identify plovers and sandpipers (including "peeps") by learning behavior, field marks, and calls—then take a field trip to the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge to practice your new skills. Limited to 12. \$65 (45)

● BIRDING GEMS OF STATEN ISLAND: MOUNT LORETTO AND CONFERENCE HOUSE PARK

Saturday, August 8, 10am-6pm
Guide: Cliff Hagen

The south shore of Staten Island is a great place to search for southbound birds and butterflies. The grasslands, freshwater wetlands, and coastal habitats of Mount Loretto host a variety of birds, while its fields of colorful blooms attract a fantastic collection of butterflies. Farther south, Conference House Park, Staten Island's "mini-Cape May," is a jumping-off spot for migrants—and its hackberry trees host butterflies such as hackberry emperors and American snouts. Transport by passenger van included. Limited to 12. \$103 (72)

● SHOREBIRD WALK IN JAMAICA BAY

Saturday, August 15, 9:30am-2pm
Guide: Gabriel Willow
 Meet at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. We'll search the mudflats and ponds for breeding herons and egrets, Forster's and common terns, clapper rails, and American oystercatchers, as well as migratory plovers and sandpipers that will already be headed south. Limited to 15. \$40 (28)

● 10TH ANNUAL SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL AT JAMAICA BAY

Saturday, August 29, 7:30am-5pm
With Gateway National Recreation Area and American Littoral Society
 See page 7 for details

● MORNING FALL MIGRATION WALKS IN CENTRAL PARK

Wednesdays, September 9–October 21, 7:30-10:30am
Guide: Joe Giunta, Happy Warblers LLC

Meet at Central Park West and 72nd Street. Birders of all levels can enjoy this fun and educational series of seven walks, observing the diverse and ever-changing waves of

migrants that stop over Central Park during fall migration. Limited to 15. \$158 (110)

● FALL WARBLERS

Thursday, September 10, 6:30-8:30pm (class); Sunday, September 13, 8-11am (trip)

Instructor: Joe Giunta, Happy Warblers LLC

Identifying "confusing fall warblers" can be tricky, even for the experts. Come study some of the most puzzling species that stop through our area during fall migration with expert Joe Giunta, and then enjoy a second session in the "classroom" of Central Park. Limited to 12. \$65 (45)

● EVENING FALL MIGRATION WALKS IN CENTRAL PARK

Monday Series: September 14–October 12; 5-6:30pm
Tuesday Series: September 15–October 13; 5-6:30pm
Wednesday Series: September 16–October 14; 5-6:30pm
Guide: Gabriel Willow

Meet at Central Park West and 72nd Street. Witness the spectacle of autumn migration as songbirds follow the Atlantic Flyway to their tropical wintering grounds. Look for tanagers, warblers, and other neotropical migrants in the wilds of Central Park. Choose from our Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday evening series. Limited to 15. \$125 (87)

● HOOK MOUNTAIN HAWK WATCH, NY

Sunday, September 20, 9am-4pm
Guide: Joe Giunta, Happy Warblers LLC

Part of the Palisades Interstate Park system, Hook Mountain has commanding views of nearby mountains ridges and the Hudson River—and is a prime location to spot many species of migrating raptors, including broad-winged and red-shouldered hawks, bald eagles, accipiters, and falcons. Note: this

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL TRIPS

trip requires a 35-minute hike up and down the mountainside. Bring lunch to enjoy atop the mountain as you watch the hawks fly overhead. Transport by passenger van included. Limited to 12. \$99 (69)

● EARLY MEMBER REGISTRATION FOR UPCOMING EVENTS

More fall and early winter events will be posted at www.nycadubon.org and available for registration for Contributing NYC Audubon members starting on Monday, August 10. (Registration will open to all on Monday, August 24.)

● TO REGISTER FOR ALL NYC AUDUBON EVENTS and for more information, visit www.nycadubon.org or call Darren Klein at 212-691-7483 x304 unless otherwise specified.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- Classes meet at 71 West 23rd Street, Suite 1523.
- Contributing Members (Student/Senior level and up) receive a 30% discount on most local trips and classes (on discounted events, the discounted price appears in parentheses after the nonmember price). See membership form on page 19.
- For all coach and van trips, the meeting location is in front of 71 West 23rd Street in Manhattan unless otherwise specified.
- We depart promptly at the stated start time.
- For all overnight trips, membership in NYC Audubon at the Student/Senior level and up is required. See membership form on page 19.

MONTAUK SPRING WEEKEND, LONG ISLAND Friday, June 5–Sunday, June 7 Guides: Don Riepe, Mickey Cohen, Mike Bottini

With American Littoral Society
Spend an extended weekend at the luxurious Manor House. Hike the “Walking Dunes,” Lighthouse Beach, Montauk Bluffs, and Shadmoor State Park. Includes two nights’ lodging (double occupancy), five meals, guided hikes, evening programs, and a star watch. View the full itinerary and purchase tickets at springmontaukweekend.eventbrite.com. Contact Don Riepe at 718-474-0896 or donriepe@gmail.com for more information and to register. \$395 (\$120 single supplement)

CAPE ANN WHALE WATCH, MA

Thursday, August 13–
Sunday, August 16
Guides: Don Riepe, Mickey Cohen
With American Littoral Society
A fun-filled, nature-focused weekend in beautiful Cape Ann, Massachusetts. We hope to see pelagic species such as sooty and greater shearwater, Wilson’s storm petrel, and common eider—not to mention minke and humpback whales, basking sharks, and family pods of dolphins. Includes three nights’ stay in historic Gloucester, a whale watch boat trip, an evening Essex River cruise, easy canoeing on Ipswich River, and birding at Parker River Wildlife Refuge, plus a lobster dinner. Contact Don Riepe at 718-474-0896 or donriepe@gmail.com for more information and to register. Limited to 40. \$395 (\$180 single supplement)

CAPE MAY FALL MIGRATION, NJ Saturday, September 26, 9am– Sunday, September 27, 7pm Guide: Joe Giunta

Cape May, NJ, is one of the best birding venues in the United States, especially during fall migration. Visit the Cape May hawk watch on two days, once late in the day and then again in the early morning to get a good variety of hawks. Also visit birding hotspots such as Higbee Beach, Jake’s Landing, Cape May Meadows, and Nummy’s Island. Transport by passenger van included. Limited to 10. \$335 (\$50 single supplement)

CAPE MAY FALL MIGRATION, NJ Saturday, October 3, 9am– Sunday, October 4, 7pm Guide: Gabriel Willow

Cape May, NJ, is the East’s capital of birding, and is particularly bird-rich in the fall. On good fall migration days, the area’s forests and marshes are swarming with warblers, vireos, and thrushes, and of course the hawk watch is legendary. We’ll visit Cape May Point, Higbee Beach, Cape May

Meadows, and more in search of songbirds, raptors, wading birds, ducks, and terns. Transport by passenger van included. Limited to 10. \$335 (\$50 single supplement)

CHINCOTEAGUE REFUGE/ ASSATEAGUE ISLAND: BIRDS AND PONIES

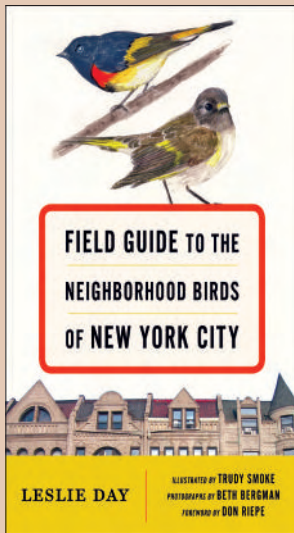
Thursday, November 19, 9am–
Sunday, November 22, 6pm
Guide: Don Riepe

With American Littoral Society
A great natural history weekend on the Virginia coast. See wild ponies, snow geese, bald eagles, migrating hawks, waterfowl, and shorebirds. Includes three nights’ lodging at the luxurious Refuge Inn (heated pool, jacuzzi, sauna, exercise room, and observation deck), breakfast, a Safari bus tour of the back dunes area, guided hikes, evening programs, and an “all you can eat” oyster and seafood dinner. Contact Don Riepe at 718-474-0896 or donriepe@gmail.com for more information and to register. \$395 (\$180 single supplement)

©Ellen Michaels



Black Skimmers



In her *Field Guide to the Neighborhood Birds of New York City*, Leslie Day provides a visually arresting and engrossing introduction to our city's most common birds. Each species profile includes notes on behavior and ecology not found in typical field guides, as well as very specific and well researched details about each bird's New York City's population. Sections covering local birding spots as well as birding and conservation organizations will serve to connect readers to the rich birdlife and habitats of the City's five boroughs.

Baltimore Oriole: *Icterus galbula*

Where and when to find Spring, summer, and fall in open wooded areas of city parks and yards throughout the five boroughs.

What's in a name? *Icterus*: jaundice (ancient Greeks believed that yellow birds cured jaundice); *galbula*: small, yellow bird; Baltimore: during the colonial era, the Baron of Baltimore's colors were orange and black.

Description The male is a brilliant orange with a black head and wings with white wing bars. Females and juveniles have a yellow face, chest, and belly, with an olive head and dark wings with two white wing bars.

Size 6.7–7.5 inches long; wingspan: 9.1–11.8 inches.

Behavior Migrate to New York City in the spring where they nest in city parks. In autumn, they return to their Central American and South American winter feeding grounds.

Nest and eggs The nest is a pouch almost 6 inches deep, and 3 to 4 inches wide at the bottom where the eggs sit, woven from plant fibers, hair, and colorful string. It hangs suspended from the tip of a branch. The females weave the nest. The inside is lined with fine grasses, feathers, and animal hair. The female incubates three to six pale, gray eggs with dark blotches. The male feeds her and the hatchlings.

Voice Males have a rich, flutelike, complex song: *chewdi-chewdi-chew-chew-che* sung from treetops to attract their mate or defend their territory during spring nesting. Each male has a unique, slightly different variation of this song. It is loud, almost tenor-like. Usually, males are so high in the tree that you hear them but have to strain your neck to see them.

Ecological role Omnivores; feed on insects, fruit, berries, and seeds; they forage in trees and shrubs for caterpillars, including tent and gypsy moth caterpillars, beetles, ants, aphids, grasshoppers, and wood borers. Its diet also includes wild cherries, serviceberries, blackberries, and grapes. It collects nectar from flowers.



Male Baltimore oriole feeding on cotoneaster buds.



Female Baltimore oriole in the cotoneaster.

BLACKBIRDS AND ORIOLES: BALTIMORE ORIOLE • 341

*Field Guide to the
Neighborhood
Birds of New York City*
by Leslie Day
Illustrated by
Trudy Smoke
Photographs by
Beth Bergman
Foreword by
Don Riepe
Johns Hopkins
University Press,
2015

FAVORITE BIRD WEBSITES

Jennifer Rauch

When not out watching real birds in the field, many of us in the local birding (and bird-loving) community have favorite websites we turn to for the next best thing. Besides www.nycaudubon.org, sites such as www.nybirds.org, www.littoralsociety.org, www.brooklynbirdclub.org, or www.statenislandmuseum.org offer local birding information and events. To find detailed information, photos, and song samples of all North American bird species, visit www.audubon.org and www.allaboutbirds.org, or, for a fee, www.hbw.com. A good reference for all things birding is www.aba.org. Many of you already know about www.ebird.org, an important online tool to gather information about bird populations across the globe—as well as www.d-bird.org, a new component of our own Project Safe Flight. Another useful site during migration is www.birdcast.info, which provides real-time migration forecasts. The number of websites available today is astounding—so we don't attempt to provide a comprehensive list here—but we've gathered a flock of other favorite online resources below to help you get closer to the birds of New York City and beyond.

BLOGS

Author Marie Winn and other Central Park birders share their latest sightings on her blog, www.mariewinnnaturenews.blogspot.com, while www.citybirder.blogspot.com offers a lot of helpful news, maps, apps, trips and links, and www.birdingdude.blogspot.com specializes in shorebirds and waterfowl. At www.urbanhawks.blogs.com the focus is on, naturally, raptor-centric tales and photo essays, while www.10000birds.com focuses on birds both local and further afield.

EMAIL LISTS AND BIRD ALERTS

Those of you who bird frequently in the City may be accustomed to the sight of birders checking their phones and racing off, binoculars held high. More than likely, they've read one of the popular emailed reports of local bird sightings. Popular email lists and alerts (google them to find out more) include [ebirdsnyc](http://www.ebirdsnyc.com), [nysbirds-l](http://www.nysbirds-l.com), and [eBird](http://www.ebird.com) rare bird alert, as well as www.birdingonthe.net and www.narba.org.

AUDIO AND VIDEO

Have you ever heard a Bird Note? Each of these brief, engaging podcasts explores songs and stories of a single species; download them free at www.birdnote.org. You can listen to bird sounds from around the world at www.xeno-canto.org, as well as upload recordings and join discussions. Or, when singing birds elude you in nature, enjoy close-up video with clear audio at Lang Elliott's channel, www.youtube.com/user/themusicofnature (www.youtube.com is home to many other bird videos as well). Finally, the "nest-cam" focused on NYU's pair of red-tailed hawks become an Internet sensation several years ago. That cam has been dismantled to avoid disturbing the birds, but our Queens red-tail pair, "Mama and Papa," are viewable on Jeff Kollbrunner's website

at www.jknaturegallery.com/rth_nestcam.html. Many other web-cams are available for viewing at www.ustream.tv/explore/animals.

FOR THE KIDS

A great resource for connecting kids aged 10-19 with field trips, creative projects, and a community of peers who share their passion is www.nysyoungbirders.org. At www.birdsleuth.org, parents, educators, and homeschoolers can download science kits, activities and other resources for grades K-12. (We hope children from 8 to 12 will visit our NYC Audubon KIDS membership page at www.nycaudubon.org/kids-membership.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Many talented artists have online galleries with beautiful images of birds in Central Park, Jamaica Bay, Tompkins Park, and other New York City locations. Some standouts are www.lilibirds.com, www.lloydspitalnikphotos.com, www.stevenanz.com, www.fotoportmann.com/birds, www.laurameyers.com, and www.ellenmichaelsphotos.com. (Please ask the photographer's permission before making use of any photos.) Many photos can also be found at www.flickr.com/groups/nycaudubon.

You can of course visit www.nycaudubon.org to find out about top birding spots in every borough, learn about upcoming events, get involved as a volunteer or armchair activist, renew your membership, shop for unique bird merchandise in our online store, and more.

TRICOLORED HERON

(continued from page 8)

activity shifted to the smaller Subway Island and Elders Point East. Local birders report that the species has been harder to find of late at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, though it has continued to nest in the Bay—and the species is thought to be in decline in the United States due to its need for limited and threatened coastal nesting habitat.

If you happen upon the tricolored heron, keep a watch for its active, darting feeding style, as well as its spectacular breeding display during the spring and summer: A single bird elicited "oohs" and "aahs" from a birding crowd at the West Pond several springs ago, when it raised its white head plumes in a surprising circular crown of feathers (see inset photo, page 8). It's a sight we hope will continue to be enjoyed by New York City birders long into the future, as we work to preserve the fragile coastal environment this species needs to survive.

BIG JOHN'S POND, JAMAICA BAY WILDLIFE REFUGE

Don Riepe

One of the best birding spots at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge is the lesser known “Big John’s Pond,” located along the refuge’s East Pond trail. It all began when Bob Cook, a biologist working at the refuge, devised a plan to introduce native herptiles (reptiles and amphibians) to several parts of Gateway National Recreation Area from 1985 to 1988. To enhance the habitat needed for these animals, he wanted to create a shallow, freshwater pond. Named after the big man who operated the bulldozer, the half-acre Big John’s Pond took only an hour or two to build, simply by digging out a section of *Phragmites*, an invasive reed that had become a monoculture at the site. The pond then slowly filled up with rainwater and groundwater. As an interpreter and field biologist working for Gateway, I designed a walkway and blind to allow visitors to view introduced painted turtles, snapping turtles, spring peepers, gray tree frogs, and other species of herptiles. The pond also became a magnet for a variety of birds including herons, egrets, ibis, shorebirds, and

waterfowl—especially species such as wood duck, black-crowned and yellow-crowned night-herons, green-winged teal, and solitary sandpiper, which prefer feeding or roosting in or around the small, protected freshwater pond bordered by birch trees.

A few years after the pond’s creation, a nest box for barn owls was placed at the northeast corner of the pond. The next spring it was occupied, and has been almost every year since. Serious birders will wait patiently at the blind for the resident barn owl to look out of the nest box opening, to check it off as a life or year bird. Noted bird photographers Lloyd Spitalnik, Art Morris, Johann Schumacher, David Speiser, François Portmann, and others have taken award-winning photos from the blind at the pond’s edge, and many birders have enjoyed the close-up views of birds afforded them at the site. In early spring, it’s a treat to hear the spring peepers chorusing, followed by the trilling of gray tree frogs a little later in the season. Currently, the pond is the only open freshwater habitat at



Black-Crowned Night-Heron and Yellow-Crowned Night-Heron

the refuge, and it is hoped that the National Park Service will create several more much-needed freshwater ponds along the eastern and western upland areas. As much of this area is dominated by *Phragmites*, it would be a simple operation to dig out a few potholes. All you need is a bulldozer!

“IT’S YOUR TERN” FESTIVAL



Common Tern with Chicks

**Sunday, July 19, Noon-4pm
(Rain Date Sunday, July 26)
With Governors Island Alliance,
National Park Service,
New York Harbor School, Earth Matter NY**

COME CELEBRATE GOVERNORS ISLAND’S TREASURES:

Common terns and oysters! Common terns, listed as a threatened species in New York State, have recently colonized several decommissioned piers on Governors Island’s waterfront. The colony has expanded over the last few years, and benefited last year from the introduction of oyster-shells as a nesting material. Free activities at this year’s festival will include birdwalks and talks, displays, and hands-on activities for the whole family including creating oyster-shell jewelry. NYC Audubon naturalist Gabriel Willow will lead boat tours to provide a view of the tern colony from Buttermilk Channel. Learn more at www.nycaudubon.org/tern-festival. Free

BIRDER'S REPORT FROM THE FIELD: VAGRANT BIRDS IN THE NEW YORK CITY AREA

Dr. Claude Bloch

I have been chasing vagrant birds in the New York City region for over 30 years. Looking for birds that have strayed out of their normal range is both challenging and rewarding. Those of us who live near Central Park are spoiled by its varieties of both resident and migrating birds, but the possibility of finding a stray is always welcomed. When a vagrant shows up these days, it becomes known quickly, thanks to the Internet and, more recently, to texting. Sometimes I have been lucky to find my target bird easily, but just as often, the extra effort has not been rewarded.

Two southwestern kingbird species have recently shown up in New York City: Couch's in Manhattan's West Village and Cassin's at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn. Unusual nearby sightings in the last few years have included a European mew gull in Brooklyn, a southwestern Grace's warbler on Long Island, and a Latin American fork-tailed flycatcher in Connecticut. Also seen were two species from the Far North, an ivory gull in Massachusetts and a northern wheatear in Connecticut—as well as a European wood sandpiper in Rhode Island and a southern Swainson's warbler in Queens. Visitors from the American West have included a rufous hummingbird on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, a western tanager in Central Park, and a calliope hummingbird in the Bronx. The eastern end of Long Island has recently been visited by a flurry of northern and western goose species, including pink-footed, greater white-fronted, cackling, Ross's, and barnacle geese. A whiskered tern from Europe that I saw in Cape May was the latest addition to my American Birding Association life list. And just as this issue was going to press, a chuck-will's-widow, which occasionally strays our way from more southern breeding grounds, spent several days at Bryant Park in midtown Manhattan.



Cassin's Kingbird Seen this Past Winter in Brooklyn's Floyd Bennett Field

News & Notes

NESTING BALD EAGLES RETURN TO NEW YORK CITY

Following an unusual winter during which bald eagles were spotted in all five boroughs of the City and on Hudson River ice floes off of Inwood Hill Park in Manhattan, a pair of eagles was confirmed as nesting in mid-April, just as this issue went to print. After building a “practice nest” at the site in 2014, the birds returned this spring to an undisclosed New York State Department of Environmental Conservation property on Staten Island's South Shore. This is the first nesting attempt by bald eagles in New York City for over 200 years, marking a milestone in the improving health of the New York Harbor ecosystem, and in the continuing recovery of the bald eagle from near extinction. Check www.nycaudubon.org for updates.

LIGHTS OUT NEW YORK PRACTICES TO BE ADOPTED BY CITY AND STATE

The new OneNYC plan announced by Mayor Bill de Blasio's office this past April includes good news for nocturnal migrants, complementing NYC Audubon's Lights Out New York program. The plan asserts that the City will work to pass a version of the Lights Out Bill (Intro. 578/2014), recently introduced by the City Council to require vacant offices and retail spaces to shut off their lights at night.

Governor Cuomo's office also announced a new Lights Out New York initiative this April, which will bring migrant-friendly practices promoted by NYC Audubon's Lights Out program to all state-owned properties across New York State. As a result of efforts by Audubon New York in Albany, state-owned and managed buildings will turn off non-essential outdoor lighting from 11pm to dawn during peak spring and fall migration. The Governor also launched www.iloveny.com/birding, which will provide visitors with information on birding and how to participate in the new Lights Out initiative.



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SAVE THE DATE



THE FALL ROOST

Tuesday, October 13, 2015, at Guastavino's
Protecting Birds in New York City for over 30 Years

For more information, please contact Kellye Rosenheim
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