The 30 years since NYC Audubon was founded have been less than ideal for wild birds in the five boroughs. Given the catastrophic habitat loss, human overcrowding, trend toward structures faced with fatally reflective and transparent glass, and a host of other threats, some wonder whether bird conservation here is a lost cause. Might it be the better part of valor to simply declare New York City an exclusively human habitat and to concentrate conservation efforts elsewhere—say, on some rain forest or prairie grassland? On bleak days, I have harbored such thoughts myself.

But this line of thinking makes no sense. With its 53,000 acres of open space and parkland and 578 miles of waterfront, our city provides thousands of wild birds representing more than 300 species with migratory stopover habitat, breeding territory, or wintering grounds. New York City is as deserving of conservation as any environment in the Americas.

An exhaustive review of the status of the city’s birds is far beyond the scope of this article, but the following snapshots illustrate the threats they face. Bird data are drawn from The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State, edited by Kevin J. McGowan and Kimberly Corwin, Cornell University Press, 2008. “First Atlas” refers to data gathered in 1980-1985; “Second Atlas” refers to data gathered in 2000-2005. The Atlases divide the state into many thousands of geographic “blocks” and state the species present in each block over a set period of time. The number of blocks that a species occupies generally correlates with the species’ population. Data from other sources cited in The Second Atlas are also used in this article.

SUCCESSES IN THE CITY

From waterbirds to raptors, several declining species have stabilized, while others have taken the Big Apple by storm. Great egrets have made considerable gains over the past 30 years or so, with a statewide increase of 59 percent in confirmed breeding areas between the two Atlases. The bulk of the breeding pairs were found in the New York Harbor-Long Island region, with the 296 pairs observed in 1985 almost tripling by 2001. After that, the number of breeding pairs fell precipitously on certain islands until 2004, but the harbor’s overall population now seems to be stable. The great egret’s geographically isolated declines seem to be related to human activity—from dogs and sound pollution to sewage overflows into the harbor after heavy rains. Meanwhile, snowy egret populations are declining nationwide, but the species maintains a stronghold in and around the city (see profile on page 9). Similarly, little blue herons are considered to be at high risk within North America overall, but are growing in the New York
T

his year, NYC Audubon celebrates thirty years of protecting New York’s environment on behalf of both people and birds. On June 11, 1980, NYC Audubon members elected the first board of directors and selected the house finch as the first official bird of the organization (in 2003, the American kestrel was elected the symbol). Since that day, NYC Audubon has worked tirelessly to protect natural areas, to advocate on behalf of sound environmental policies, and to educate New Yorkers about their environment. Throughout this issue you will find articles about our successes over the last three decades along with upcoming challenges. I hope you will join us in meeting these challenges.

From NYC Audubon’s very beginnings, it has been clear that this organization is unique among the Audubon family. As the late Geoffrey Cobb Ryan, a founding board member, put it in the November 1980 Urban Audubon, “Most Audubon chapters only have to concentrate on one or two conservation issues at any given time, while we in New York City have literally dozens of serious concerns demanding our attention every day.”

Some of those concerns have changed over the last 30 years, but the sheer multitude of conservation issues affecting New York City remains staggering—from parks management to wetland protection, protecting our watershed from gas drilling, water quality in the harbor, bird-safe buildings, and now climate change. If anything, the number of problems we face has grown in the last three decades, as conservationists have come to understand the importance of urban ecology and maintaining healthy habitats even in highly developed areas.

As the articles in this issue make clear, there have been some success stories along the way. Thanks to NYC Audubon’s members, staff, and volunteers, over 5,000 acres of New York’s precious remaining natural areas have been protected, a dozen bird-friendly buildings have been constructed or renovated, and half a million New Yorkers of all ages have learned to love and value nature in the city. But much work remains to be done. I hope this issue will inspire your continuing support of NYC Audubon’s efforts to make New York City a livable habitat for birds and people alike. Without your help, it won’t be possible.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Nominating Committee Chairperson David Speiser with Marcia Fowle, Diana Green, Lynne Hertzog, and Peter Shen present the following:

Candidates to continue for a second two-year term as officers: Pamela Manice, Vice President, and Peter Joost, Recording Secretary. Candidate to move from the Board of Directors to serve a two-year term as Vice-President: Lynne Hertzog.

Candidates to continue for a second two-year term on the Board of Directors: Diana Greene and David Speiser. Candidate to move from Vice President position to serve a two-year term on the Board of Directors: Richard T. Andrias.

New candidates to serve two-year terms on the Board of Directors: Andrew Farnsworth, Ph.D., Ornithologist with the Conservation Science Program of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Catherine Schragis Heller, writer, activist, and former docent with the Wildlife Conservation Society; Ari Kavour, outdoorsman, head of CMO desk at Morgan Stanley; and John S. Shemilt, retired, life-long birder starting in Toronto, Canada, formerly trader on the London Futures Exchange.

Jared Keyes, Managing Director at Brown Brothers Harriman & Company in New York City and member of the Advisory Board of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, was appointed to the Board of Directors in March to fill the space left by the resignation of Brenda Torres-Barreto.

CORRECTION

In the article “Gardening for Birds with Native Plants” by Mareille Anzelone in the March/April issue, the olive species being planted at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge was mistakenly identified as Russian olive (Olea europaea), the correct species is autumn olive (Olea europaea umbellata).-Eds.
Work to protect and restore the natural environment in New York City—one of the most built environments in the world—is a constant battle. Over the last 30 years, NYC Audubon initiatives have helped protect over 53,000 acres of natural areas in the city.

“There has been a steady loss of natural environment,” says David Burg, past president of NYC Audubon and current president of Wild-Metro, an organization dedicated to protecting nature and people in metropolitan areas. “There’s a history of destruction.”

Even some of the most cherished parks have not been immune to habitat destruction. The battle to preserve Central Park as a haven for birds has been a long one, generating significant controversy. “It has been quite a balancing act,” says NYC Audubon’s Director of Conservation Susan Elbin, noting that managing for multiple uses presents challenges. Here, as in other parks, NYC Audubon works to ensure that the ecosystem’s health is the main focus of habitat restoration.

Jamaica Bay, one of the most important wetland complexes in New York State, provides food and shelter for at least 320 bird species and 91 species of fish. It is designated an Important Bird Area of Global Significance by Audubon and Bird Life International, acknowledging its importance to bird populations worldwide.

Because of the bay’s importance, NYC Audubon and The Trust for Public Land published Buffer the Bay and Buffer the Bay Revisited, which provide recommendations for prioritizing and protecting habitat and for developing a watershed plan. One of the successes to come out of the plan is Four Sparrow Marsh Preserve in Brooklyn. As part of buffering the bay, NYC Audubon and other groups worked to remove large pieces of heavy debris, marine floatables, old boats, and plastic, so that marsh grasses could grow back. Because of its relative isolation from residential areas, Four Sparrow Marsh Preserve has remained in a fairly natural condition, attracting many nesting birds, including four native sparrow species.

Under various initiatives, environmentally important private islands throughout New York Harbor have been bought and transferred to the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. The most recent—South Brother Island—is, according to Glenn Phillips, “one of the most productive heron colonies in the New York Harbor complex.” The seven-acre island was purchased with federal funds through a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration program with the help of Congressman José Serrano of the South Bronx. The Parks Department now oversees care for the island. As part of the Harbor Herons Project, NYC Audubon continues monitoring the island’s bird populations and is looking at foraging behavior of great egrets as an indicator of habitat quality in the South Bronx.

NYC Audubon was a strong opponent of the Westway Project of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which sought to build a highway over the river on the West Side. We have been strongly supportive of efforts to create new parks along the shoreline, especially Hudson River Park and Governors Island. “While a one-acre park like Stuyvesant Cove at 23rd and the East River doesn’t attract endangered species, it does provide more habitat for butterflies, common birds such as the catbird, and migrants passing through the city,” says Don Riepe, board member and Jamaica Bay Guardian.

The most critical recent battles for natural areas are focused in Staten Island, the city’s least populous but fastest-developing borough. An Islanded Nature, a masterful conservation plan written by Peter P. Blanchard III and Paul Kerlinger for NYC Audubon and the Trust for Public Land, presents a plan for the western shore of Staten Island as well as Fresh Kills, where the landfill site has been covered, closed, and turned into a park. As of 2010, 714 acres are protected, including the wildlife refuges of Shooters Island, Prall’s Island, and Isle of Meadows. Still, other critical sites, including Arlington Cove Marsh and Gulfport Marsh remain unprotected and in need of restoration. Another current threat is the potential loss of the 143-acre Pouch Boy Scout Camp, which is slated to be sold for development.

Of course, there are also severe challenges ahead, as water levels rise, the city’s population grows, and pressure for development increases. “There are big issues in landscape protection,” notes Burg. “Not enough has been done in the way of preservation, consequently we are losing forest species, tree sparrows and blue birds, and grassland birds, like the bobolink and meadowlark. One of the most dramatic changes is the loss of the oak savannah in the outer boroughs, so the red-headed woodpecker is no longer breeding here.”
Perhaps the most famous of Gotham’s avian residents, star-crossed lovers Pale Male and Lola achieved international renown in 2004. Their welcome presence here represents a larger positive trend: a steady increase in red-tailed hawk populations nationwide over the past decades, and surprising adaptability to our dangerous urban landscape.

A year-round resident of open areas of North and Central America, red-tailed hawks have likely increased since European settlement as clearing of primeval forest expanded their potential territory. Today, the hawk seems comfortable in rural, suburban, and even urban settings. In New York State, the number of breeding atlas blocks increased 6 percent between 1980 and 2005, while during the same period New York City witnessed a red-tail population boom. Between 1980 and 1985, red-tails were found breeding in only one block in each of Staten Island and the Bronx; by 2005, these intrepid pioneers had colonized multiple blocks in all five boroughs. In recent years, red-tails have nested in sites as unlikely as the RFK Bridge and flushing Meadows’ Unisphere sculpture.

Despite this success story, urban red-tails are vulnerable to hazards including collisions with cars and ingestion of poisoned or diseased prey. NYC Audubon has been at the forefront of efforts to protect these big-city predators through its Eyas Watch program, which monitors nesting hawks, and through its work to limit the use of poisons. City residents and birders can also do their part by not disturbing nesting hawks or their young.

In eastern North America, summer cannot be far off when we first hear the chimney swifts, and crane our necks to spot the small, cigar-shaped birds, bursting across the sky with high-pitched twittering. A species that has benefited from human civilization and industry, chimney swifts once nested in hollow trees and caves, but saw their numbers grow substantially by adapting to chimneys and buildings as nest sites.

This unintended but successful result has been affected in recent years. Upon returning from Amazon basin wintering grounds, chimney swifts often find their traditional brick chimney homes torn down or replaced with modern (and inospitably narrow) capped models. Other factors that may contribute to the swift’s decline include destruction of wintering ground habitat and falling insect prey populations.

In New York State, the number of breeding atlas blocks in which swifts were found fell 16 percent between 1980 and 2005. In New York City, both Manhattan and Queens had lost breeding populations, though the swift was listed as a possible breeder in NYC Audubon’s 2008 Central Park Breeding Bird Census. There is hope, however, for NYC swifts: In 2009, NYC Audubon and Audubon New York collaborated with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation to erect three artificial nesting “chimneys” in Staten Island’s Clay Pit Ponds State Park, Brooklyn’s East River State Park, and the Bronx’s Roberto Clemente State Park. In 2010, towers will be constructed in Queens’ Grange Park and in Manhattan’s River Bank State Park. NYC Audubon will monitor the swifts’ progress.

As summer twilight falls upon the eastern forest and we are treated to a closing chorus of bird-song, the rich timbre of one voice is sufficient to create a mood of sleepy tranquility, tinged with magic: the wood thrush. Something otherworldly yet intimate in its musing, mezzo tones speaks of things unknown, echoing from deep in the dark woods. Sadly, in the past 30 years the thrill of the thrush’s song has become more scarce, as populations of this emblematic neotropical migrant have fallen across its range.

Upon returning from its Central American wintering grounds to eastern North America, the wood thrush seeks out woodlands with a well-developed understory and moist soil from which to glean its diet of invertebrates and shrub fruit. This habitat has made the “American nightingale” particularly vulnerable to forest fragmentation; in smaller tracts the thrush is more vulnerable to parasitism by the brown-headed cowbird, and to nest predation.

In New York State, breeding atlas data indicate a 3.24 percent annual decline in wood thrush populations since 1980. In New York City, a sharp drop occurred on Staten Island, where the bird was found in five blocks in the early 1980s but none between 2000 and 2005. Conversely, in the Bronx’s Van Cortlandt Park, 20 likely breeding territories were counted in 2006.
While conservation of the species depends on large-scale preservation of both breeding and wintering habitat, local projects such as NYC Audubon’s restoration of Van Cortlandt Park’s forest understory with native, fruit-bearing shrubs are an important step to ensure that the wood thrush’s song will continue to enchant future generations. TW

**SALTMARSH SPARROW**
*Ammodramus caudacutus*

Restricted to coastal salt and brackish marshes, this secretive little sparrow is not easy to find as it skulks around in the spartina grass at the edge of the marsh. It is becoming less common in New York City, as rising sea levels increase inundation periods on marshes and cause higher moon tide flooding, threatening nesting habitat and even existing nests. Marsh die-back, possibly due to factors such as nitrogen loading from treatment plants, has been shrinking salt marshes by 40 acres per year in Jamaica Bay—one of the sparrow’s prime nesting areas in the city.

According to the mayor’s PlaNYC, the city’s human population is expected to grow by another one million people by 2025, raising concerns about continued shoreline development and hardening of marsh edge areas. This, coupled with pesticide spraying, stray cats, spread of invasive species, and other human-induced events, will put pressure on remaining sparrow populations.

Currently, the saltmarsh sparrow is on both the Audubon and Partners in Flight Watch Lists as a species of regional concern. In New York City, it can still be heard singing in springtime around the West Pond trail and Big Egg Marsh at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, and at Dubos Point, Spring Creek Marsh, Four Sparrow Marsh, and Marine Park. The *Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State* lists them as breeding on Staten Island as well.

However, the future of this bird as a breeding species in New York City is in jeopardy unless development adjacent to nesting areas is strictly controlled and marsh habitats at known breeding sites are protected. DR

**AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER**
*Haematopus palliatus*

Once you’ve seen an American oystercatcher, you won’t forget it. This chicken-sized shorebird easily stands out: its coal-black head, brown back and snow-white belly, and long, heavy red bill. American oystercatchers do in fact dine on oysters, as well as mussels and clams, turning their long bills into perfect three-in-one tools. As they wade through shellfish beds, they shovel through the wet sand to dig up their prey. When they locate a bivalve with open valves, they insert their “knife,” making quick stabs to sever the two valves and gobble up the juicy delicacy. If the valves aren’t open, oystercatchers hammer away at the valves’ connecting point until they break through the shell.

In the 1800s, hunting and egg collecting nearly wiped out the oystercatcher population. In the 1970s, they were still rare in this area, and the first nesting pair appearing in Jamaica Bay in 1980. Now there are fifty or more pairs. You’ll also find (and hear) these striking, highly vocal birds in the Rockaways, the south shore of Long Island and the Jersey shore. In September, oystercatchers migrate in flocks of up to 300 to the southeastern Atlantic coast, returning in March to breed. CPR

**RED KNOT**
*Calidris canutus*

The red knot, a shorebird the size of a robin and the weight of an apple, may look like just another sandpiper wading in the surf. But this sandpiper has been places. By the time you see him in Jamaica Bay or elsewhere along the Atlantic coast, he has flown thousands of miles—en route from Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America to the Arctic. At 10,000 miles, it’s one of the longest avian migrations.

But the story gets better, as it highlights one of nature’s most remarkable inter-connections: the red knot, the horseshoe crab, and man.

While wintering in South America, the red knots fatten up on mussels for the long journey ahead. Their spring departure date is synchronized with another event that takes place thousands of miles north. The flock flies day and night up the coast with a rest stop in Brazil, then it begins the longest leg—4,000 miles—to a critical predetermined stopover on the eastern seaboard: Delaware Bay. That’s where thousands of horseshoe crabs are spawning. And the red knots, thin and tired, have come specifically to feed on horseshoe crab eggs, to fatten up once again for the journey to their Arctic breeding grounds.

But there’s a glitch in this magnificent plan. Throughout the 1990s, Delaware Bay... continued on page nine
**NYC Audubon Events**

**Partnership Events**

**STERLING FOREST WARBLERS, NY**
Sunday, May 2, 9:30am-5:30pm
Guides: Don Riepe, Andrew Baksh
Enjoy a leisurely three-mile hike through the woods and around the lake during peak spring bird migration. Look for rare warblers (including golden-winged, cerulean, hooded, prairie, and blue-winged) as well as spring wildflowers and salamanders. Visit the rustic visitor center. Bring lunch, water, and binoculars. Limited to 40. $65

**BIRDING TOURS OF BRYANT PARK, MANHATTAN**
Mondays, May 3-17, 8-9am
Guides: Gabriel Willow
With Bryant Park Corporation
Meet at the Birding Tour sign at the 42nd Street & 6th Ave entrance to the park. Discover the varieties of birds that call Bryant Park home. No limit. Free

**PROSPECT PARK SPRING MIGRATION WALK, BROOKLYN**
Wednesdays, May 5 and June 2, 5:30-7pm
Guides: Gabriel Willow
With Prospect Park Alliance
Meet at Grand Army Plaza at the north end of Prospect Park. Experience the spectacle and wonder of spring migration in beautiful Prospect Park, Brooklyn. Site of Brooklyn’s only lake and its last stand of native forest, this park is home to hundreds of species of migratory waterfowl, raptors, and songbirds (nearly 250 species have been seen here). Limited to 25. Free

**SPRING WARBLERS**
Thursday, May 6, 6:30-8:30pm (class); Sunday, May 9, 8-11am (trip)
Instructor: Joe Giunta, Happy Warblers LLC
Learn to identify the 30-plus species of warblers that migrate through our area each spring, using field marks and other techniques. Limited to 15. $45

**CAMERA CLUB: MIGRANTS OF CENTRAL PARK, MANHATTAN**
Saturday, May 8, 7:30-10:30am
Instructor: David Speiser
Meet at the Belvedere Castle (near 79th Street). Learn how to photograph fast-moving birds in one of the country’s migration hot spots. Exposure, composition, and camera techniques will be explored. Limited to 8. $70

**VAN CORTLANDT PARK BIRD WALKS, THE BRONX**
Saturdays, May 8-26, 9-10:30am
Guides: Urban Park Rangers, Andrew Baksh (June 5)
With the Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy, Fieldston School, and NYC Department of Parks & Recreation, Urban Park Rangers
Meet at Van Cortlandt Nature Center. The history of birding and Van Cortlandt Park are inseparable. These walks celebrate the tradition set forth by influential birders such as Roger Tory Peterson and Allan D. Cruickshank, who got their start on Van Cortlandt’s ecologically diverse grounds. No registration necessary. For more information call 718-548-0912. No limit. Free

**NATURE IN THE GARDEN: WAVE HILL WALKS, THE BRONX**
Sundays May 9, and 23, 9:30-11:30am
Guides: Gabriel Willow
With Wave Hill
Meet at the Perkins Visitor Center. Explore Wave Hill’s woodlands and gardens to discover the world of insects, flowers, trees, and birds. Ideal for ages 5 and up with adult companions. We’ll walk rain or shine, so dress for the weather! (Severe weather cancels; call 718-549-3200 x245 by 8am the day of the walk for weather-related updates.) Register online at www.wavehill.org/calendar/. Limited to 20. Free for Wave Hill and NYC Audubon members (with two-for-one admission to the grounds); $5 non-members

**MAY MEMBER WALK: CENTRAL PARK, MANHATTAN**
Thursday, May 13, 8-9:30am
Guides: Michael McCarthy
Meet at Central Park West and 72nd Street. Join Michael McCarthy, author of Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo, for this special walk in the height of spring migration. McCarthy will be speaking at our May lecture the evening prior (see page 12). Limited to 20. Free for NYC Audubon members at the Student/Senior level and up

**RED KNOTS AND HORSESHOE CRABS AT JAMAICA BAY, QUEENS**
Saturday, May 15, 9am-1pm
Guides: Don Riepe, Andrew Baksh
With Gateway National Recreation Area
Meet at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. Take an easy two-mile hike around the West Pond and the shoreline of the bay. View shorebirds, spring migrants, and the horseshoe crab mating ritual during peak spring shorebird migration. To register, contact Don Riepe at 718-318-9344 or dripe@nycrr.com. Limited to 25. Free

**Horseshoe Crabs**
Meet at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. Take an easy two-mile hike around the West Pond and the shoreline of the bay. View shorebirds, spring migrants, and the horseshoe crab mating ritual during peak spring shorebird migration. To register, contact Don Riepe at 718-318-9344 or dripe@nycrr.com. Limited to 25. Free

**JAMAICA BAY SUNSET CRUISE, QUEENS**
Saturday, May 29, 5-8pm
Guides: Don Riepe, Mickey Cohen
With American Littoral Society
Meet at Pier 2 in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. Enjoy a three-hour cruise aboard the 100-foot boat “Golden Sunshine.” Visit backwater marshes near JFK Airport, and learn about the history, ecology and wildlife of the bay. See nesting peregrine falcons, ospreys, egrets, shorebirds, and waterfowl. Includes refreshments. To register, contact Don Riepe at 718-318-9344 or dripe@nycrr.com. Limited to 140. $45

**ROCKY COASTS,PUFFINS, AND LOBSTER BOATS: BIRDING ON THE COAST OF MAINE**
Saturday, May 29-Saturday, June 5, 2010
Guides: Gabriel Willow
Join Maine native Gabriel Willow in exploring the Maine coast, home to Atlantic puffins, murre, shorebirds, warblers, and other migratory songbirds. Stay in Camden and on the remote Monhegan Island, a birder’s paradise where seeing 25-30 warbler species in a day is
not uncommon. Includes double-occupancy lodging, most meals, and van transportation in Maine (airfare not included). Limited to 12. $1,500 ($350 single room supplement)

- RED KNOTS AND HORSESHOE CRABS AT JAMAICA BAY, QUEENS Sunday, May 30, 10am
  Guides: Don Riepe, Andrew Baksh
  With Gateway National Recreation Area
  See May 15 description. To register, contact Don Riepe at 718-318-9344 or driepe@nyc.rr.com. Limited to 25. Free

- TWILIGHT BAT WALKS IN CENTRAL PARK, MANHATTAN Tuesdays, June 1-29, 7:45-9:15pm
  Guide: Paul Keim
  Meet at 103rd Street and Central Park West. Explore Central Park at twilight, looking for bats and other nocturnal creatures. Watch these animals in flight as they hunt for insects using echolocation. Bring bug spray and a flashlight. Limited to 16. $20.

- THE BREEDING BIRDS OF DOODLETOWN ROAD, ROCKLAND COUNTY, NY
  Wednesday, June 2, 6:30-8:30pm (class)
  Friday, June 4, 9am-4pm (trip)
  Instructor: Joe Giunta, Happy Warblers LLC
  A variety of birds, including species at risk, breed at Doodletown Road in Bear Mountain State Park. Learn to identify them. Limited to 9. $80

- EXPLORE THE BRONX RIVER BY ROWBOAT
  Saturday, June 5, 10:30am-12:30pm
  Guide: Rocking the Boat
  With Rocking the Boat
  Meet at Hunts Point Riverside Park (Lafayette Avenue & Edgewater Road) in the Bronx. Explore the Bronx River aboard a hand-built wooden boat led by experienced rowers. The Bronx River harbors an abundance of wildlife, including herons, egrets, osprey, and kingfishers. Visit restoration sites, learn about the Bronx River’s unique eco-systems, and discuss its history.

Limited to 20. $35 for adults, $25 for ages 18 and under

- SUNSET ECO-CRUISES TO HARBOR HERON ISLANDS Sundays, June 6-August 29, 7-8:30pm
  Guide: Gabriel Willow
  With New York Water Taxi
  Meet at South Street Seaport’s Pier 17. Experience the wonders of New York’s famous harbor at sunset and see some of the three thousand herons nesting on islands around the harbor. To register, contact New York Water Taxi at 212-742-1969 or www.nywatertaxi.com. Limited to 100. $25 for adults, $10 for children under 12

- JAMAICA BAY SUNSET CRUISE Saturday, June 19, 5-8pm
  Guides: Don Riepe, Mickey Cohen
  With American Littoral Society
  See May 29 description. To register, contact Don Riepe at 718-318-9344 or driepe@nyc.rr.com. Limited to 140. $45

- JUNE MEMBER EVENT: PROSPECT PARK IN THE DARK Friday, June 25, 6-8:30pm
  Speaker: Marie Winn
  Guides: NYC Audubon naturalists
  With Prospect Park Audubon Center
  Meet at Prospect Park Audubon Center. Marie Winn, author of Central Park in the Dark and Red Tails in Love, will join NYC Audubon and Prospect Park Alliance members for an enchanting evening celebrating diurnal and nocturnal wildlife. A short talk focused on how animals use parks as habitat is followed by naturalist-led walks through the ecologically diverse grounds of Prospect Park. The evening ends with a search for the resident bat population. Limited to 60. Free for NYC Audubon members at the Student/ Senior level and up

- MONTAUK SPRING WEEKEND Friday, June 11-Sunday, June 13
  Guides: Don Riepe, Mickey Cohen
  With American Littoral Society
  Spend an extended weekend at the eastern tip of Long Island during peak spring orchid and heather bloom. This trip includes double-occupancy accommodations at the luxurious Manor House, most meals, guided hikes, evening walks around the East and West Ponds as well as presentations by Don Riepe, Lloyd Spitalnik, and Kevin Karlson. For information and reservations call American Littoral Society at 718-318-9344. Limited to 75. Suggested donation $10

- TO REGISTER FOR ALL NYC AUDUBON EVENTS and for more information, visit www.nycaudubon.org or call 212-691-7483 unless otherwise specified.

IMPORTANT information for all local trips and classes:
- Classes meet at 71 West 23rd St. room 1523.
- Members at the Student/ Senior level and up receive a 10% discount on most local trips and classes. See membership form on page 11.
- For all bus and van trips, the meeting location is in front of 71 West 23rd St. in Manhattan unless otherwise specified.
- We depart promptly at the stated start time.

IMPORTANT information for all national/international trips:
- Membership in NYC Audubon at the Student/Senior level and up is required. See membership form on page 11.

www.nycaudubon.org
This May, Join a Special Birdathon Trip!

The Birdathon is a great way to celebrate the arrival of spring migration and to get friends and family involved in one of America’s fastest-growing pastimes: bird watching! It is also a fundraising drive, and an important source of support for NYC Audubon’s conservation, research, and education programs. Now more than ever, we need your help—and what better way to raise money than by getting out there and enjoying your favorite activity?

That’s why this May, NYC Audubon is offering a series of special Birdathon trips. Instead of paying a set trip fee, participants are asked to gather pledges from friends and family to sponsor their day of birding. Your sponsors can make a flat donation or pledge an amount per species seen. It’s easier than you might think to meet your goal!

- $1,000 Overnight Birdathon
- $500 Full-day Birdathon
- $250 half-day Birdathon
- $25 Beginning Birdathon

For every friend who pledges $0.25 per species seen...

To find out more, get tips on gathering pledges, or to register for a trip, please visit www.nycaudubon.org/Birdathon or contact Melissa Husby at mhusby@nycaudubon.org or 212-691-7483;

Overnight Hudson Valley Birdathon
Friday, May 7-Saturday, May 8
Meet at 71 W. 23rd Street. Join us on a special overnight Birdathon to Doodletown road and other Important Bird Areas in the lower Hudson Valley. Depart the city after work and arrive in time for an evening owl expedition. Spend Saturday searching for warblers and other songbirds, along with interesting waterfowl and raptors, including bald eagle. Expect to see between 80-100 species. Includes accommodations and van transportation. Limited to 8. Requested Pledge $1,000

Beginning Birdathon in Central Park
Saturday, May 8, 8:30-10:30am
Meet at the Central Park Boathouse. Can’t tell a pigeon from a peregrine? No problem! This two-hour walk is geared toward beginners. Expect to see 25-30 species. Limited to 20. Requested Pledge $25

Full-day Birdathon in Manhattan: Battery to Inwood Park
Saturday, May 8, 8am-5pm
Meet at 71 W. 23rd Street. There is more to Manhattan birding than Central Park! Explore the many pockets of excellent birding this densely-populated island has to offer. Expect to see 80-100 species. Includes van transportation. Limited to 8. Requested Pledge $500

Beginning Birdathon in Prospect Park
Sunday, May 9, 8:30-10:30am
Meet at the Prospect Park Audubon Center. Come get a taste of what Brooklyn birding has to offer in this two-hour walk geared toward beginners. Expect to see 25-30 species. Limited to 20. Requested Pledge $25

Full-day Birdathon in Jamaica Bay
Sunday, May 15, 8am-5pm
Meet at 71 W. 23rd Street. One of the best places to see birds in the Bronx, Van Cortlandt Park is home to over 30 nesting species. It’s also a great spot to observe migratory songbirds. Expect to see 50-80 species. Includes van transportation. Limited to 8. Requested Pledge $250

Full-day Birdathon in Staten Island
Saturday, May 15, 7am-4pm
Guides: Harry Maas, Steve Nanz
Meet at 71 W. 23rd Street. Explore the many parks and recreation areas along the Staten Island Greenbelt, which offer some of the best birding in the city. Expect to see 80-100 species. Includes van transportation. Limited to 8. Requested Pledge $500

Full-day Birdathon in Jamaica Bay
Sunday, May 15, 7am-4pm
Meet at 71 W. 23rd Street. Join us on a special spring expedition to one of the best birding sites in the city! We will see shorebirds, waders, waterfowl and dozens of migratory songbirds. Expect to see 50-80 species. Includes van transportation. Limited to 8. Requested Pledge $250

Beginning Birdathon in Van Cortlandt Park
Saturday, May 15, 8am-11pm
Meet at 71 W. 23rd Street. One of the best places to see birds in the Bronx, Van Cortlandt Park is home to over 30 nesting species. It’s also a great spot to observe migratory songbirds. Expect to see 50-80 species. Includes van transportation. Limited to 8. Requested Pledge $250

Beginning Birdathon in Jamaica Bay
Sunday, May 15, 8am-11pm
Meet at 71 W. 23rd Street. Expect to see 50-80 species. Includes van transportation. Limited to 8. Requested Pledge $250
fishermen began catching horseshoe crabs for bait, greatly decimating the population. Consequently, the red knot population has declined drastically. In fact, some scientists predict the red knot could become extinct. NYC Audubon has worked to clear Jamaica Bay’s beachfront so that a small but stable population of horseshoe crabs can safely lay its eggs. There you’ll spot feeding red knots as they migrate through in mid-May—but in nowhere near the historic numbers. CPR

SNOWY EGRET

_Egretta thula_

“The snowy egret is a success story,” says Glenn Phillips, executive director of NYC Audubon. “The population has not recovered, not to historic levels but to sustainable levels, and is doing well here in New York City.”

A bird of the estuary, the snowy egret had been hunted almost to extinction by the turn of the twentieth century; an ounce of its plumes—prized by milliners in New York and elsewhere—fetched twice the price of an ounce of gold. Passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 put a stop to the slaughter, and egret and heron populations recovered. By 1960, snowy egrets were nesting as far north as New Hampshire. However, there were no colonies in New York City due to water pollution and destruction of habitat and foraging grounds.

Eventually populations did rebound, in part thanks to the Clean Water Act of 1972. In 1986, NYC Audubon started monitoring heron and egret breeding colonies on islands in New York Harbor. Currently snowy egrets nest on six islands, and the 2009 population has increased 35 percent over the 2008 population.

Over the past three decades, the city and federal government have acquired island nesting sites. As recently as 2007, New York City Parks & Recreation bought privately owned South Brother Island in the East River, where snowy egrets are thriving.

“In many other places, the snowy egret population is declining,” notes Phillips, “but here, there is recovery and no one is quite sure why. It may be because snowy egrets feed on small fish that are recovering in New York Harbor. There are, however, disappointments. On Isle of Meadows, Prall’s Island, and Shooters Island, the colonies of snowy egrets and other waders have collapsed. This is particularly disturbing as the Arthur Kill/Kill van Kull complex was the core of New York Harbor’s breeding wader community from the 1970s to the late 1990s. NYC Audubon and other groups are searching for answers and remedies.

Phillips stresses that we need to figure out what has made the successful colonies thrive. “We know we have a lot of birds nesting, so the next step is to measure productivity. We need to determine how well individual birds are doing.”

| StarrTrips |
| MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, AND SATURDAY MORNINGS IN CENTRAL PARK SATURDAY, MAY 1- WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2 |
| Mondays and Wednesdays: Meet at 7:30am sharp at 81st and Central Park West (SE corner). |
| Tuesdays: Meet at 9am sharp at 103rd and CPW (parkside). |
| Saturdays: Meet at 7:30am sharp at 103rd and CPW (parkside). |
| Join guide Starr Saphir on spring bird walks through Central Park. All StarrTrips are non-smoking. Cost: $8 per person ($4 for full-time students). No registration necessary! For further information, call Starr at 917-306-3808. |

NYC Audubon has a wide range of volunteer opportunities. No experience is required; we will provide all necessary training for field work. If you have questions or would like to volunteer, please visit www.nycaudubon.org/volunteer or call 212-691-7483.

OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

Make a difference for the city’s wildlife working in our busy and friendly office! As migration approaches, office volunteers become even more important in keeping up with answering inquiries about wild birds and our organization.

SUNSET ECO-CRUISE VOLUNTEERS

Orientation: Tuesday, May 18, 6-7pm

Sunset Eco-Cruises are one of NYC Audubon’s flagship programs, taking hundreds of people onto the water to learn about the environmental and cultural wonders of our waterways. Learn more about this series and the ways you can help.

No in-depth knowledge of birds is necessary.

PROJECT SAFE FLIGHT

Thousands of songbirds migrate through our city from southern wintering grounds back to northern nesting grounds. We need caring and compassionate individuals to rescue stunned and injured birds that have collided with glass buildings during spring and fall migration.

JAMAICA BAY MONITORING

NYC Audubon is engaged in an ongoing project to restore horseshoe crab spawning beaches at Jamaica Bay, to monitor the effects on both horseshoe crabs and the shorebirds that depend on crab eggs to fuel their migratory journey. We need volunteers from April through September to survey beaches for crabs and birds, and to help with beach cleanup and restoration activities.

TOGETHERGREEN VOLUNTEER DAY

CLOVE LAKES PARK, STATEN ISLAND

SATURDAY, MAY 22, 10AM – 2PM

Please see details on page 1.
Harbor area. Much of these three species’ success in New York City may be attributed to NYC Audubon’s Harbor Herons program, which has successfully advocated for increased habitat protection.

Wild turkey in Manhattan? Yep—and not the kind you find in a liquor store. Nearly extirpated at the turn of the twentieth century, the wild turkey population has increased dramatically thanks to a series of reintroductions. Breeding pairs more than doubled between the First and Second Atlases. Now turkeys breed again in the Bronx and Staten Island. Some famously found their way into Manhattan’s Riverside and Battery Parks.

Diurnal raptors provide additional reasons for hope. Ospreys continue to breed in good numbers in the City and Long Island, and their upstate populations expanded over the past 30 years. Peregrine falcons are becoming a more frequent sight over or near the City’s rivers. In 1999, the federal government removed peregrines from its Endangered Species List. New York still classifies peregrines as endangered, but will likely soon downgrade them to threatened. Bald eagles also have been doing well in New York State, though without breeding pairs in the City. The state’s red-tailed hawk population has remained healthy and relatively secure (see profile on page 4). Only NYC Audubon’s emblem, the American kestrel, may be beginning to decline; further research to identify the underlying problem and a concerted effort to maintain suitable habitat will help.

DEFEATS AND TROUBLING PUZZLES

Habitat loss is the single greatest factor for most declining bird populations across New York State. It has driven down populations of blue-winged teal across the state. The American bittern also faces significant loss as well as habitat degradation due to invasive plant species like purple loosestrife and common reed. Though American bittern declines since 1985 seem to be slight, the bird is a state-designated species of special concern, and appears no longer to breed within New York City. Similarly, breeding least bitterns disappeared in Jamaica Bay between the two Atlases, and are listed as threatened.

Upland sandpipers are in trouble, too, due to loss of the varied vegetation they need to court, nest, and raise young. Some still breed in Staten Island, but statewide, the blocks in which they breed declined by 65 percent between the two Atlases. Long Island’s piping plovers have benefited from assiduous conservation efforts—breeding pairs there doubled between 1986 and 2005—but are under constant pressure as they compete for beach space with humans. These and other ground-nesting birds also face predation by mammals introduced or supported (directly or indirectly) by humans. From feral cats and dogs off-leash to scavengers like raccoons, opossums, and rats, these mammals prey heavily on eggs and chicks.

Some population declines have no such clear-cut causes. Loss of shrub lands is probably contributing to the decline of brown thrashers, which have been decreasing throughout North America since 1966; the blocks occupied by breeding pairs in New York State fell 45 percent between the First and Second Atlas. But other birds that nest in the same habitat have not declined so greatly. Just as strangely, plentiful habitat remains for red-headed woodpeckers, which have been declining across their range since the 1800s. Both of these cases underscore the need to understand more deeply the earth’s ecosystems and the species that live in them.

The last 30 years have been mixed for the state’s warblers. For example, the number of blocks occupied by breeding pairs declined for four species (the golden-winged warbler, Nashville warbler, Blackburnian warbler, and prairie warbler) but increased for eight (the blue-winged warbler, Tennessee warbler, northern parula, chestnut-sided warbler, magnolia warbler, yellow-rumped warbler, black-throated green warbler, and pine warbler). Most warblers do not nest in New York City; our importance primarily lies in providing suitable
stopover habitat to fuel up and rest during their long spring and fall migrations. But migrating warblers are quite vulnerable to injury or fatality by striking windows; yellow-rumps are one of the species most recorded in North American window-strike studies, according to Dan Klem, a leading authority on bird collisions. At least we can do something about window strikes, but the troubling case of Canada warblers brings up another concern over which New Yorkers have less control: Their numbers have been declining since the 1960s, but much faster than those of other species that inhabit the forest understory, so it may be that these birds face problems in their South American wintering grounds.

ENDURING CHALLENGES AND HOPEFUL SOLUTIONS
The short profiles above drive home the point that, while many wild bird species are currently relatively stable, their populations are under mounting pressure from a litany of man-made and man-augmented perils. NYC Audubon’s strategic plan identifies dozens of such challenges to wild birds: human disturbance at breeding, nesting, or foraging sites; habitat fragmentation through development; human-supported predators like pets and scavengers; ever-present environmental pollutants, including rodenticides; the lack of adequate buffer zones between airports and wetlands; hazardous glass buildings that form barriers to migration; and of course, global climate change.

This list is daunting, isn’t it? But its very length and breadth reveals a great source of hope: Dedicated researchers are gaining a more sophisticated understanding of the threats to wild bird populations, so that they can determine and implement workable solutions. To cite just a few examples:
- Perhaps as many as 80,000 wild birds are killed annually in New York City alone due to collisions with windows. NYC Audubon’s Project Safe Flight is working with building owners and managers, architects, and glass manufacturers to come up with long-term solutions to this issue.
- The Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds is another example. Under this program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New York City Parks & Recreation, Audubon New York, and NYC Audubon work together to restore, conserve, and protect valuable bird habitat within New York City.
- Since NYC Audubon’s founding, it has been a leading voice for habitat conservation in the City. Most recently, we are working with the City to preserve Staten Island’s Arlington Marsh, a vital wetland habitat, and transfer it to New York City Parks & Recreation.
- In conjunction with the American Bird Conservancy’s “Cats Indoors” campaign, NYC Audubon has been educating New Yorkers about the many dangers that unrestricted outdoor access presents to pets and wild birds alike.

The challenges faced by New York City’s birds over the past 30 years have been significant, and every indicator shows that ecological pressures will only grow. The good news is that NYC Audubon’s efforts in the past 30 years have clearly proven that conservation can and does work—when approached with knowledge, perseverance, tact, and passion. New York City’s birds will continue to endure, even thrive, so long as the people who care about them are ready, willing, and able to make a difference.
SAY GOODBYE TO THE CUCKOO
By Michael McCarthy
Wednesday, May 12, 6pm
The Arsenal, Central Park
64th Street at 5th Avenue
For millennia, migrant birds such as the nightingale, the turtle dove, the swallow, and the cuckoo have annually flown out of Africa to bring the spring to Europe, and in so doing, become a key part of Western culture. Now many of these birds are crashing in numbers, in what threatens to be not just a wildlife tragedy, but a cultural one. Please note that Michael McCarthy will be leading a member walk the following morning in Central Park (see listing on page 6). Free

ANNUAL MEETING & LECTURE: RAPTOR REHABILITATION IN NYC
By Bobby Horvath
Wednesday, June 9, 6pm
The Arsenal, Central Park
64th Street at 5th Avenue
Join us for an up-close-and-personal presentation with birds of prey, including hawks, falcons, and owls. These animal ambassadors offer bird-lovers a unique opportunity to connect with nature and our environment. Hear about specific cases of red-tails and kestrels rehabilitated in New York City.