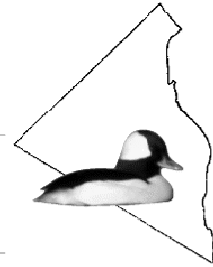


The Observer



The Rockland Audubon Society Quarterly Newsletter. Since 1947. Volume 61, Number 2
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Special Interest Articles

Conservation Corner:

Tom Fuller weighs in on the paper vs. plastic debate, *page 3*

Insert: Details about the annual potluck dinner and Big Bird Day, *page 7*

Winter's visitors:

Eugene Brown greets an *Anas penelope*, *page 10*

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Early May: When Warblers Flood Rockland

Late April through early May marks a highlight of the birding year in Rockland County. It is during this period that a flood of small, colorful birds begin arriving from points south. The crown jewels of these "Neotropical Migrants" are undoubtedly the warblers, or more correctly the American Wood Warblers. These tiny hyperactive jewels are often unnoticed by the general public. But with a bit of effort, these vibrant splotches of color can reward the observer with unparalleled natural beauty.

Approximately 36 different warbler species can be found in Rockland County with about 20 to 25 species observable on a single day during peak migration.

Among the first species to arrive are Palm Warbler, Pine Warbler, and Louisiana Waterthrush. These species have among the shortest migrations from their overwintering grounds in the southern United States.

Begin looking for these species in mid-April. Yellow-rumped Warbler may be also found at

this time; it is the only warbler species that is regularly found in Rockland throughout the winter.

Over the next several weeks, these migrants are joined by warblers that overwinter in the Caribbean and South America, including: Northern Parula, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Hooded Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Yellow Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler,
Continued on page 11...

Eastern Bluebird's Beautiful, but Delicate, Dance

The Eastern Bluebird is performing an ever-so-precious waltz here in New York State.

Seventy years ago, Eastern Bluebirds, the official New York State bird, were among the most common songbirds in America.

But from the early 1900s, astute birders had become aware of the threats to the Bluebird from the non-native house sparrows, introduced in 1850, and the starlings introduced in 1890. There was

even a House Sparrow trap for sale by 1921 for \$6.00. There were small scale and individual attempts to help the Bluebirds from this time through the 1970's, according to Sandy Morrissey, vice president of the board of Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society and coordinator of its Eastern Bluebird Project.

Due to the shortage of natural cavities for nesting, competition from House

Sparrows, European Starlings, and eventually pesticides, the population plummeted by 90 percent.

The good news, however, is that the Eastern Bluebird populations in the New York area are on the rise and have been for some time now.
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Our Mission

Rockland Audubon Society's mission is to promote environmental conservation and foster an appreciation of birds and nature through education programs and activities.



The Observer is the newsletter of the Rockland Audubon Society, Inc. P.O. Box 404 New City, NY 10956

Editor: Tom Sullivan

Send articles, trip reports, poetry, drawings, photos and comments to sullivantp@gmail.com Submission deadline: July 15.

Is there something you'd like to read about in *The Observer*? Please, just let me know!

Membership

To join send a \$20 check (\$15 for senior citizens) payable to National Audubon Society to Veronika Krause, 8 Spruce Street, Orangeburg, NY 10962. Allow 4 to 8 weeks for delivery of Audubon Magazine and *The Observer*.

President's Message

May is a very important month in the RAS calendar...

May 2nd is our annual members-only potluck supper and business meeting. After we share our favorite culinary creations and lively conversation, we will elect the 2008-2009 Board of Directors from the slate put forward by the Nominations Committee at the April meeting. Please remember that the May meeting starts at 6:30 p.m. instead of our usual 8 p.m. so we have ample time to enjoy the potluck supper, exercise our voting privileges, and travel vicariously to Taiwan with long-time RAS member Carol Weiss. The enclosed flyer includes sign-up information. All members and their guests are invited to attend.

May 16th - 17th is "Big Bird Day", our ONLY fundraiser of the 2007-2008 RAS year! Teams will be scouring all their favorite haunts in Rockland County in a friendly competition to find the highest number of bird species in a 24-hour period. It is fun and for a very worthy cause - your Chapter's survival! The dues share we receive annually from National Audubon Society covers only a small fraction of our operating expenses. Printing and mailing this newsletter is our largest, followed by administrative expenses, such as rent for the auditorium at Rockland Country Day School where we hold our monthly public meetings, liability insurance,

telephone, and speaker fees. Your Board of Directors works very hard to control Chapter expenses, but you know from paying your own bills each month that costs keep rising. Your Chapter needs your financial support, which is tax deductible!

The enclosed flyer includes a Big Bird Day pledge form, so please contribute generously! Each donation will be acknowledged with a letter that can be used as a receipt when filing your 2008 income taxes. Thank you for taking an active role in the support and governance of your Chapter.

Good birding!

Della Wells, April '08

Board of Directors:

President: Della Wells*
Vice President: Open*
Secretary: Karen D'Alessandri*
Treasurer: Glenys Foster Roberts*
* Denotes a member of the Board of Directors

Committees:

Conservation: Stephanie Garber*, Tom Fuller, Elyse Fuller*
Education: Lorrie Pallant*, Carol Weiss
Field Trips: Ruth Carlson*, Alan Wells
Membership: Veronika Krause*
Fundraising: Glenys Foster Roberts*
Newsletter: Tom Sullivan
Publicity: Jessie Trabant*
Webmaster: Alan Wells

Conservation Corner: Paper or plastic? No, thanks

3

This simple question has caused many to wonder which is the more responsible choice. Whereas each has certain advantages over the other, they both cause serious harm to the environment. After considering the lifecycles of these materials, you might just choose to reuse.

Production

Some 14 million trees are logged to produce the 10 billion paper bags Americans use each year. The milling process requires toxic chemicals and tremendous amounts of water. Compared to making plastics, paper bags require four times the energy and create 70% more air pollutants.

Plastic bags are made from polyethylene, a by-product of petroleum refining. About 12 million barrels of oil are needed to produce the 100 billion plastic bags we use annually.

Recyclable?

Unfortunately, only 10-15 percent of paper bags are recycled. Paper recycling takes lots of energy, water, and chemicals. Since paper bags require virgin pulp, most are recycled into corrugated cardboard.

Although many grocery stores now have bins to collect used plastic bags, only 1-3 percent is ever recycled into items such as composite decking. It is simply not cost-effective. Sadly, a growing trend has been to ship them overseas where they are cheaply incinerated.

Biodegradable?

While paper biodegrades, 95 percent of garbage is buried too deep for sunlight and air to break it down. Plastic does not biodegrade. After hundreds of years, it breaks down into toxic bits that accumulate as they enter aquatic food chains.

Give Them a Second Chance

A lot goes into making bags, so be sure to get the most out of them. Reuse them for myriad purposes. Line wastebaskets or litter boxes. Cover textbooks. Crumple for packing. Bundle curbside recycling. Pick up after your dog. Whether you ultimately recycle or toss them, ensure they don't end up as litter.

A Whale of a Litter Problem

Litter from plastic bags is a pollution crisis of global proportions. They sully our roadways and natural landscapes, clog storm drains, and eventually find their way to our oceans. Hundreds of thousands of whales, dolphins, seals, turtles, and birds die each year when they become entangled in or ingest plastic bags. Mistaking bags for prey items such as jellyfish or squid, their intestines become blocked and the animals slowly starve. One poor pelican died after swallowing 17 plastic bags, and a single, insignificant shopping bag caused the agonizing death of a mighty beaked whale.

BYO ... Bag

Paper or plastic? Neither. The sensible choice is to carry your own. Those tote bags you have around the house will make a good start. Other options range from \$1-polypropylene bags to organic or recycled canvas bags for around \$10. A small initial investment will prove worthwhile.

Revisiting last issue's Junk mail topic

Thank you for your responses to last issue's article "Stamping out Junk Mail." I gladly pass on two very useful suggestions from our readers. CatalogChoice.org is a free service that makes it easy to decline unwanted catalogs. Select from their extensive list of merchants and Catalog Choice will contact them for you.

For a small fee, GreenDimes.org can reduce your junk mail up to 90 percent by removing you from dozens of marketing lists. They can reduce mail addressed to 'Current Resident' and 'Occupant,' and they even plant trees on your behalf.

— Tom Fuller is on the RAS conservation committee. He can be reached at otterswift@hotmail.com.

If it's raining, call the field trip leader at least one hour before the meeting time to see if the trip is a go. Also, call the trip leader for directions to the field trip site, or if you will be on the trip but not at the meeting place.

May 3 (Sat) *Stony Point Battlefield State Park*

Meet Della and Alan Wells at 8 a.m. at the main parking lot at the end of Battalion Rd, accessed from Park Rd. off Route 9W in Stony Point. Stroll through this historic site on the Hudson River as we search the woodlands for spring neotropical migrants. Over about 10:30 a.m. 845-942-5751

May 4 (Sun) *First Sunday Walk at Piermont Pier*

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. at the parking lot by the baseball field near the entrance to Piermont Pier. Over by 10 a.m. 845-358-3659

May 16 (Fri evening) to May 17 (Sat evening) *BIG BIRD DAY fundraiser* - See RAS Observer insert.

May 18 (Sun) *Trees & Flowers in Monsey Glen Park*

Meet Matt Beckerle & Ruth Carlson at 10 a.m. at the entrance parking lot on Saddle River Road off Route 59 in Monsey. Views of sandstone overhangs and stone carved steps. Some uphill walking. Over by noon. 845-735-5411 or 845-268-6703

May 24 (Sat) *Bashakill Wildlife Management Area*

Meet Carol Weiss at 6 a.m. at the former Park & Ride on Route 303 at Route 59 for carpooling. All-day trip to a diverse wetland-woodland habitat that supports an impressive variety of birds and other wildlife. May be wet under foot. Bring sunscreen, insect repellent, snack and drink. 845-358-3659

June 1 (Sun) *First Sunday Walk at Piermont Pier*

Meet Ruth Carlson at 8 a.m. at the parking lot by the baseball field near the entrance to Piermont Pier. 845-268-6703

June 7 (Sat) *Galeville Airport during Nesting Season*

Meet Della and Alan Wells at 7 a.m. at the former Park & Ride on Route 303 at Route 59 for carpooling. This abandoned airport, now administered as the Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge, is a hotspot for grassland birds. 845-942-5751

June 8 (Sun) *Doodletown for Beginners*

Meet Della and Alan Wells at 8 a.m. at the pull-off on Route 9W just north of the Iona Island causeway, south of Bear Mountain. Practice bird ID and binocular use. Some uphill walking. 845-942-5751

June 22 (Sun) *Butterflies, Birds, & Dragonflies at NJ Meadowlands*

Meet John Lampkin at 9 a.m. at the former Park & Ride on Route 303 at Route 59 for carpooling. Look for butterflies, breeding birds, and dragonflies. 845-354-9567

July 6 (Sun) *First Sunday Walk at Piermont Pier*

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. at the parking lot by the baseball field near the entrance to Piermont Pier. 845-358-3659

July 13 (Sun) *Dragonflies for Beginners*

Meet Della and Alan Wells at 9 a.m. at the Kakiat County Park parking lot on Route 202 opposite Viola Elementary School in Suffern. Learn to identify common dragonflies of Rockland County. Plan to spend about 1.5 hours at Kakiat, then drive to Sandy Brook Park where we will spend another 1.5 hours. (Summit Park Rd. at Sandy Brook Dr. in New Hempstead, next to Vacation Camp for the Blind) Binoculars with close focus highly desirable. Bring cameras to capture these photogenic subjects. 845-942-5751

August 3 (Sun) *First Sunday Walk at Piermont Pier*

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. at the parking lot by the baseball field near the entrance to Piermont Pier. 845-358-3659

August 24 (Sun) *Birds and Cameras at Jamaica Bay*

Meet Alan and Della Wells at 7:30 a.m. at the former Park & Ride on Route 303 at Route 59 for carpooling to this birding hot spot. Alan's group will concentrate on photographing shorebirds and Della's group will not. Full day trip. 845-942-5751

Whereas in the 15-year period ending in 1979, the population decreased by an average of 6 percent a year, in the subsequent 25-year period ending in 2006, the population for Eastern Bluebirds has increased by an average of 3.1 percent each year in NY State, according to John Rogers, a co-founder of the New York State Bluebird Society, who has maintained a trail of hundreds of these same bluebird boxes for decades, and has fledged over 11,000 Eastern Bluebirds.



Eastern bluebird hatchlings. *Photo Credit: Sandy Morrissey*

"It's truly a conservation success story brought about entirely by amateurs!" Rogers exclaims. "The banning of some of the pesticides that were widely used in the 1950's and 1960's has been a factor, too. But it's those nest boxes that made the difference."

Indeed, both Rogers and Morrissey are living proof. During the past decade, Morrissey has led the charge to install and maintain some 180 Bluebird boxes around central and lower Westchester County, and done so with noteworthy results: in 2006 the area had a record high of 19 nesting pairs.

Suggesting that her own experience is reflective of the national movement, Morrissey explains that, "what brought the Bluebird back was hundreds, maybe thousands, of people hearing about the plight

of the Bluebird and putting up Bluebird boxes and 'trails' across the country. People couldn't do much about habitat loss (losing farmland -- reverting back to forests or being developed for housing or commercial use), but they could help to give the Bluebirds nesting cavities by providing the boxes."

That's not to say we're in the clear yet; past success and a current thriving population are no guarantees for the future. The species, like many others, is walking a tightrope with human intervention as its balancing pole and safety net.

When asked what would happen if the efforts ceased, Morrissey answers, "I would guess that the population would decline again. The House Sparrow population is supposed to be in a decline, but there are still plenty of them around. Plus the Starlings are still going strong. I would guess that these two species would continue to commandeer most of the natural nesting cavities."

Eastern Bluebirds, in fact, face more threats as well. Rogers points out "fire ants are extending their ranges to the north. Fire ants cause problems for many avian species, including Bluebirds." What's more, "Tree Swallows are now advancing their average start time for nestings in the spring, and this can have serious negative effects," Rogers explains.

More of these campaigns are still needed to ensure the Bluebird's safety, which is continually threatened by overdevelopment and the decrease of open spaces.

We've not, in fact, seen anyone doing what Morrissey does on our side of the Hudson. So we are recruiting all interested to join in this mission. To learn more about Eastern Bluebirds, come hear John Rogers' "All about Bluebirds, and More" on June 6. See Programs on the back cover for details. — *Tom Sullivan is editor of The Observer. Reach him at sullivantp@gmail.com.*

Housing Assistance, Human-Style

True bluebirders don't just put up a house and hope for the best.

"The houses have to be monitored so that House Sparrows don't use them, multiply even more, and make the problem worse," explains Sandy Morrissey, vice president of the board of Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society and coordinator of its Eastern Bluebird project.

She ought to know. So, too, should John Rogers, co-founder of the New York State Bluebird Society. "For any nest box made with relatively smooth lumber, it is important to have a 'ladder' beneath the entrance hole to enable Tree Swallows to exit," Rogers points out. "Otherwise, they will perish from being trapped."

Horizontal grooves can be sawed, or a small strip of plastic gutter guard can be stapled. Rogers will gladly mail a few pieces free of charge. Just send a SASE to: John Rogers, 9641 Bauer Rd. Brewerton, NY 13029.

January, and February were good months for Rockland's birders. It's great to report so many birds — and in so many different voices. The descriptions of behaviors are particularly inspiring, as there is always more to learn about even the most common bird species. Thanks to all who submitted sightings for the winter season. Please send in your spring observations to cweiss1124@optonline.net or 845-358-3659.

Jan. 1: The Eurasian Wigeon, first spotted on Nov. 6, 2007, continued at Rockland Lake until the first days of February.

Jan. 15: A male Bluebird at Rockland Lake - north end. Gene Brown.

Jan. 21: Last weekend I observed three Bald Eagles soaring over Lake DeForest. I saw the two immatures first and recognized them to be bigger and more mottled than the usual turkey vulture. They also had longer, straighter wings so I confirmed that they must be immature Bald Eagles. Then I saw another one soaring and saw its clean brown plumage and white head and tail. This was the awe-inspiring mature Bald Eagle - the symbol of America. This was a pretty nice sighting! Kevin Quill

Throughout Jan. and Feb., Jean and Glenn Nelson observed Bald Eagles, sometimes a single and sometimes a pair, at Congers Lake and at Lake DeForest.

Jan. 30: A Red-shouldered Hawk actively hunting from a perch in a dead tree near the Pomona Post Office. Jim Previdi. A Catbird at Nyack Beach SP; had probably been there all winter but I missed it on the Christmas Count. Gene Brown

Feb. 7: Peregrine Falcon cruising along the Hook Mt. cliffs, humming a soft, wailing tune. Gene Brown

Feb. 8: A single Black Vulture soaring with seven Turkey Vultures, Hook Mountain. Gene Brown

Feb. 10: Two Horned Grebes near the end of the Pier. Drew Ciganek and Veronika Krause

Feb. 13: As the snow shifted to rain late in the evening, a Great Horned Owl sounded off three times. Probably in my neighbor's big Norway spruce. Gene Brown

Feb. 15: Ten Redhead Ducks in a small pool of water on mostly-frozen Rockland Lake. Eight males; two females. Carol Weiss

Feb. 17: I was counting the feeder birds for the Great Backyard Bird Count, looked up from my tally sheet and said "Where did everyone go?" My question was answered when I noticed what I thought was a Sharp-shinned Hawk on a branch. It swooped down to my deck and then onto the railing after missing its target. I then had a very close-up view and realized how big and intensely colored it was - orange eyes flashing and almost black head, russet barred chest and long striped tail. A beautiful Cooper's Hawk was the grand finale to my bird count! Beverly Simone

Feb. 19: Kennedy Dells County Park: A Barred Owl landing on a bare branch made my day. And then, four male Bluebirds flew over a hedgerow between two fields. Carol Weiss

Feb. 23: Large numbers of Ring-necked Ducks have wintered at the lake. On my walk today, I counted nearly 50! Carol Weiss

Feb. 24: In the afternoon and evening there were five Hooded Mergansers in the stretch of the Pascack Brook that is outside my apartment door in Spring Valley. Two males displaying to females. Females vocalizing. One male separate from the group of four. Beautiful birds. This is the first time I had such a good look at them. Linda Pistolesi

Feb. 25: A cute little Yellow-rumped Warbler foraged in a mulberry tree, far out on the Pier. Gene Brown.

A bunch of us were discussing the TV show, “Heroes” the other day, and this question was raised: If you could have one super power, what would you choose?

Responses ranged from the predictable “Invisibility” and “Mind Reading” to the more specific “Putting my Mother-In-Law in Suspended Animation” and “Mentally Sticking Voodoo Pins in My Boss.” For me, it was a no-brainer. To quote that great rock and roll philosopher, Steve Miller, I want to, “Fly like an Eagle!”

For as long as I can remember, the sight of a raptor in the sky has caused me to stop whatever I’m doing and just watch. There’s something about the stillness and the way they ride the drafts. The word “soar” was invented to describe their flight. While driving, I have to fight the urge to pull over and indulge my fascination. How I envy each hawk, owl, vulture and falcon.

There was a PBS special recently where they attached a “Critter Cam” to a Red-tailed Hawk to watch as he climbed, coasted, then

plummeted at jet-plane speed, pulling up at the last second, grabbing a tasty mouse in his talons. It’s as close as we’ll come, I think, to experiencing what they see and do. All this was supposed to aid aviation engineers in designing better wings, but it just made me hungrier to ride the breeze.

I can’t quite put my finger on what the attraction is. I think it’s the gracefulness; it gives me hope. After all, even an ornery old buzzard is a thing of beauty in flight.

Sounds like a perfect super power for Me!
— Peggy Bruner



Book review: *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw*, by Bruce Barcott

How does one raise a voice against an environmental disaster?

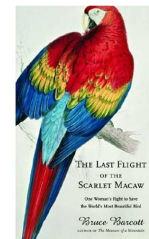
This is the story of one woman, Sharon Matola, the “zoo lady” of Belize, who tried to save the habitat of the endangered species, Scarlet Macaw.

The core of the book is the fight she struck against the Belize bureaucracy and foreign multinationals to build a dam that

would flood the nesting habitat of the Macaw and other unique species (tapirs, jaguars, etc.) and affect ecotourism sites downriver in exchange for some electricity for the citizens of Belize. The book primarily covers the graft, politics, both local and international, and lies, that go with such a large government project in a third world country.

It is a well-written account that explains the history, ecology, and economy of dams and rivers worldwide and the legal intrigues that accompany environmental, government projects from initiation to completion anywhere. Oh yes, and how one person can try to make a difference to our planet.

—Lorrie Pallant, a RAS board member, serves on the education committee.



I'd be lying if I didn't admit to questioning my sanity as I drove cross-county to join teammates for my second Christmas Bird Count. It was a cold, grey morning, three days before Christmas. My one consolation is that the *truly* dedicated had hit the road even earlier. I was assigned to a shorter-day group with others whose health limitations make a full day too taxing.

The Section 5/Central Clarkstown count has been led by Ruth Carlson for the past five years. A lifelong resident, Ruth is intimately familiar with her territory, its avian residents and visitors, and their various hang-outs. Unable to participate this year, she has conscientiously prepared Susan to lead. Pert, perky and well organized, Susan keeps us on track, while Veronika, our most knowledgeable birder, deftly transports us. Unfortunately, a fractured foot effectively confines Veronika to the car. Karen, an enthusiastic, self-described "newbie," and I complete the team.

Notably, none of us is on home territory, nor expert in waterfowl or raptor identification. We start a little uncertainly, but the challenge of new exploration excites us and we proceed, making full use of field guides and county map. At the causeway across Lake DeForest, the new dynamic is immediately apparent. Whereas previously, Ruth said, "These are mergansers. Let's count," this year we have,

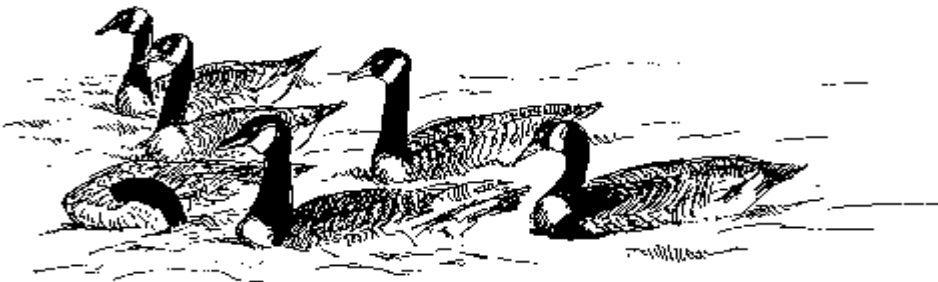
- Geese overhead
- Fourteen
- Sure those are geese? They're kinda short
- Black-tipped wings? Check the neck line
- Think they're ducks? They're awfully big
- Where're the books?

Thus we ID our Mergansers, and surely will remember them. The rafts of thousands seen in previous years are missing, as is much open water. We place an SOS to Ruth for her scope, as the few ducks present were well out of range. Not many are mergansers; ruddy ducks surprise us.

The day continues in the same vein: expected birds missing; surprises present. At one suburban site we search where a Kingfisher invariably patrols its stream. Instead, a large bird of prey is spotted in the distance: Red-tailed Hawk versus immature eagle. We *want* an eagle. It *almost* goes down as an eagle. But one skeptical member insists on scope, books, and 10 more minutes of frigid air. The bird finally moves: a RTH. Next stop we tromp through snowy wood to an inlet known for Wood Ducks and are greeted by a Kingfisher! Wood Ducks are spotted later by Karen's sharp eyes on a stream where "nothing is ever found." Another exciting find is the Red Fox ambling through brush behind Clarkstown North H.S. Perhaps he's responsible for the paucity of birds there. By 2PM we stop for Ruth and head to Blauvelt Diner to tally our count (33 species, 528 individuals) and warm up both inside and out.

Most of us rejoin the full group for the Countdown Pot Luck. The atmosphere is friendly; Della and Alan are gracious hosts. Carol entertains with quizzes and prizes, and RAS folks prove themselves respectable cooks. After eating, the count is tallied species by species as each group in turn calls out the number of individuals sighted. I fear this could get boring, but no. It's fascinating to learn what others saw, and satisfying to realize that similar scenes play out across our continent linking us to a larger effort.

On the drive home I don't bother to revisit the sanity question. I'm exhausted, but know I'll recover and look forward to returning. — *Patricia Murray*



Rockland Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY 61st CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - December 22, 2007

Years Seen	Common Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	TOTAL
44	Canada Goose	274	97	45	96	73	40	62	387	724	1,798
67	Mute Swan	2							69		71
28	Wood Duck					12					12
31	Gadwall								181		181
1	Eurasian Wigeon								1		1
21	American Wigeon								6		6
61	American Black Duck	17	5			1		7	5	9	44
60	Mallard	306	166	88	2	36	4	69	192	148	1,011
27	Northern Shoveler					35			1		36
55	Canvasback	70								75	145
15	Redhead								4		4
32	Ring-necked Duck								35		35
50	Bufflehead	3							28	5	36
52	Common Goldeneye									1	1
31	Hooded Merganser	15							65	1	81
60	Common Merganser	42				25		176	73	109	425
54	Ruddy Duck	28				14			12	243	297
15	Wild Turkey		11	9	12			23	11		66
33	Pied-billed Grebe									1	1
26	Double-crested Cormorant	1							1		2
15	Great Cormorant	2									2
36	Great Blue Heron	2						32	1		35
6	Black Vulture	38	14							2	54
21	Turkey Vulture	5	33		3	8	1		3	6	59
30	Bald Eagle	4						21	1	3	29
31	Northern Harrier									4	4
35	Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	1					4	1	4	11
26	Cooper's Hawk	2						2		5	9
55	Red-tailed Hawk	7	10	2	6	3	5	13	3	10	59
51	American Kestrel								1		1
11	Peregrine Falcon	1									1
54	American Coot								106		106
12	Wilson's Snipe									1	1
59	Ring-billed Gull	267	28			43	392	72	221	1,607	2,630
61	Herring Gull	33						4	5	18	60
3	Glaucous Gull	1									1
61	Great Black-backed Gull	6						4	2	6	25
31	Rock Pigeon	93	30		6	30	216	50		60	485
60	Mourning Dove	22	80	40	17	17	41	115	48	28	408
45	Eastern Screech-Owl	5							1	1	7
32	Great Horned Owl	2				1				2	5
13	Barred Owl		2		1						3
4	Short-eared Owl	1									1
58	Belted Kingfisher	6	4			1		3		1	15
37	Red-bellied Woodpecker	3	13	3	19	6	1	16	5	15	81
29	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker		1							1	2

Years Seen	Common Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	TOTAL
61	Downy Woodpecker	17	15	1	25	10	5	16	12	26	127
61	Hairy Woodpecker		6			1		3		5	15
59	Northern Flicker	8	9	1		1		4	2	6	31
51	Pileated Woodpecker		2		1				1		4
61	Blue Jay	22	58	35	53	29	14	68	32	60	371
61	American Crow	26	48	25	52	43	22	47	43	47	353
34	Fish Crow	8									8
10	Common Raven							1	2		3
10	Horned Lark	40									40
61	Black-capped Chickadee	20	48	5	33	16	4	43	23	48	240
61	Tufted Titmouse	8	38	3	46	20	2	31	23	33	204
40	Red-breasted Nuthatch	1									1
61	White-breasted Nuthatch	8	19	2	14	8	4	13	5	10	83
59	Brown Creeper									1	1
52	Carolina Wren	7	4		1	3	1	7	2	8	33
56	Winter Wren	1	2						4	1	8
55	Golden-crowned Kinglet							2	2		4
44	Ruby-crowned Kinglet							1			1
24	Eastern Bluebird	1	2		1						4
40	Hermit Thrush		2					2		1	5
60	American Robin		120	13	1	22	1	42	5	110	314
50	Gray Catbird									2	2
56	Northern Mockingbird	10	11		1	5	4	8	6	14	59
61	European Starling	260	250			38	196	99	98	668	1,609
6	American Pipit	3									3
52	Cedar Waxwing		20		1			10		12	43
47	Yellow-rumped Warbler		1			2		2			5
61	American Tree Sparrow	2	2	10				12		31	57
54	Field Sparrow		2								2
26	Savannah Sparrow									2	2
52	Fox Sparrow									3	3
61	Song Sparrow	20	25	15	3	1	1	16	17	56	154
55	Swamp Sparrow		3								3
61	White-throated Sparrow	79	50	22	18	6	57	93	12	93	430
61	Dark-eyed Junco	83	70	33	64	17	28	106	37	81	519
9	Snow Bunting	1									1
61	Northern Cardinal	9	20	9	12	8	5	26	15	38	142
61	Red-winged Blackbird	3								2,683	2,686
52	Common Grackle									3	3
54	Purple Finch		2								2
46	House Finch	2	25		5	6	20	15	5	4	82
7	Common Redpoll		1								1
32	Pine Siskin									3	3
61	American Goldfinch	10	12	7	2	11	4	15	5	35	101
61	House Sparrow	43	75	10	3	32	121	148	36	45	513
TOTAL Individuals:		1,951	1,437	378	499	583	1,193	1,507	1,854	7,223	16,625
TOTAL Number of Species:		91									

Three (3) additional species seen during Count Week (three days before/after Count Day): Brant, Great Egret, Red-shouldered Hawk

Note: "Years Seen" column includes all 61 counts, from 1947 through 2007

DISTRICTS: 1) Haverstraw-Stony Point; 2) Ramapo; 3) S. Ramapo; 4) N. and W. Clarkstown; 5) Central Clarkstown; 6) S. Clarkstown; 7) W. Orangetown; 8) E. Clarkstown; 9) E. Orangetown

Participants (32 Adults, 1 Fledgling): Dan Albantides, Barry Babcock, Eugene Brown, Drew Ciganek, Ronald Conzo, Karen D'Alessandri, Azucena Dow, Tom Dow, Bernie Doyle, Philip Faurot, Susan Freeman, Anne French, Padraic French, Larrie Goetz, Anita Gossett, Christopher Healy, Gene Herskovics, Karl Knoecklein, Bonnie Koop, Veronika Krause, Ken McNichol, Tom Micelli, Patricia Murray, Vince Plogar, Jim Previdi, Tom Rowe, Helen Russell, Ronnie Smith, Joan Totton, Jessie Traband, Carol Weiss, Alan Wells (Compiler), Della Wells

Feeder Counters (4): Ruth Carlson, William Fahan, Laurence Pringle, Nancy Slowik

Welcome new members!

Feb. '08: Paul Blatt, Frances Duarte, Anthony Franco, Rita Garner, Frances E. Korey, Lawrence Olsen, John and Louise Parnell, Linda Pistolessi, Claire Swartz, Midjy

Jan. '07: Arnold J. Aronson, Joan Bankey, Niall Conroy, Robert C. Cordock, Christine Dempsey, Mary Ellen Greenberg, E. Freifeld, Marilyn Goldzweig, Danielle Goodyear, Vicki Hefflefinger, Barbara Heinrich, Pam Hicks, Joseph Ivanick, Anna Korn, Edythe Kurz, Micki Leader, Barry Lipensky, Kay McIntyre, Barbara Pease, Kevin Quill, Madeline Quill, Linda Schulz

Dec. '07: Matthew and Sarah Andreadis, Naomi Anthony, Barbara Baninski, Charles G. Banks, III, Marcia Citron, Connie Coker, Carolyn Delisser, Henry Farmer, Pamela Furth, Nancy Higgins, Michael Kaiser, Peter Majewski, Patricia Ann Tinston, Daniel Wolff

[Editor's note: Well, winter has faded and spring is here. Neither the Snowy Owl nor the Arctic Gull found way back to Rockland, but we did get some surprise visitors, including several Pine Grosbeak, a Glaucous Gull, a Short-eared Owl, and a Eurasian Wigeon, the latter of which Eugene Brown details beautifully...]

Arrival of the Eurasian Wigeon at Rockland Lake, spotted by Carol Weiss on November 6, 2007, marked one of the very few appearances of this species in Rockland County. The complete entry for this rarity in Bob Deed's "Birds of Rockland County and the Hudson Highlands," 1976, reads: "An accidental visitant, with a single record on March 11, 1938, on the Hudson River off Dunderberg (William Carr)." Carr was director of the Bear Mountain Trailside Museum at the time.

The Eurasian Wigeon, *Anas Penelope*, breeds from Iceland eastward. It is considered a rare but regular winter visitant to coastal North America from Newfoundland to Florida and Texas, and rare to very rare inland (*Bull's* "Birds of New York State," 1998.) There is a theory that this bird may have a nesting hideout somewhere in northern Canada.

There appears to be a northward spring movement over the Central Plains and a southward movement down the Atlantic coast in fall. But banding evidence indicates birds of this species have drifted from Iceland and the western fringe of Europe. The male Eurasian wigeon is extraordinarily beautiful in a subtle, not gaudy, way. Roger Peterson succinctly calls the crown "buff" and his predecessor, ornithologist Frank Chapman, used the adjective "creamy buff." Peterson, always the artist, adheres to Chapman's old-fashioned, (but still descriptive) adjective in describing the breast as "vinaceous" – as if dipped in pink-purple wine. At close range in good light, the vermiculations, fine undulated lines along the flanks, display intricately artistic patterns. The head has been variously and inadequately described as red-brown, rufous-brown, bay and simply reddish. When we are fortunate enough to observe this drake on the water together with redhead males, both species display a "rufous" head, but the hues are not the same. Bright sunshine, time of day, and the angle of view create spectacular effects.

As we browse through Audubon's "Birds of America," we find no Eurasian Wigeon, although

he does include a pair of American Wigeons, also known as Baldpates. Audubon sailed up the Atlantic coast to Labrador, June through August, 1833, when the bird might have been observed by the sharp-eyed naturalist if it had, indeed, been present. He would have recognized it, probably having seen it in Scotland or England. He also often received bird skins from interested friends in far places. But if he did obtain a sample of the Old-World form, he chose not to include it in "Birds."



Strangely, James DeKay, in his 1844 "Birds of New York State," notes that "Audubon is inclined to the opinion that there is no difference between the American and the European and Asiatic Wigeons." DeKay quotes Audubon: "...not having traced them through all their gradations I cannot positively assert their identity." Perhaps this explains why Audubon did not portray two separate species.

A number of these splendid waterfowl were observed in the New York City and lower Hudson Valley area in the mid-1990's. On March 7, 1994, a fine drake turned up at the Rockland Lake Fishing Station where other ducks and coots were feeding. I had remembered certain "wild" ducks in London's St. James's Park, getting handouts from the public.

That earlier, half-tame visitor to our lake, seeing the local birds gathering for a free lunch, had joined the party.

— Eugene Brown is a former editor of *The Observer*.

Early May: When Warblers Flood Rockland (*continued from page 1*)

Golden-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Cerulean Warbler. By mid May, Backpoll Warbler, Canada Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, and Mourning Warbler mark the end of the migration.

Some of these warblers simply migrate through our area on their way to nesting areas further north, but many breed in Rockland. Among the most common nesters are: Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Louisiana Waterthrush, Chestnut-sided Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Prairie Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler and Cerulean Warbler.

Whereas the spring migration is flamboyant, the fall migration is an exercise in subtlety. Gone are the vibrant breeding plumages, often replaced by the subdued browns and yellows tones of the fading leaves. Identification of these birds can sometimes challenge even the most experienced enthusiasts. The fall migration is more protracted than that of spring. Species such as Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow Warbler, and Cerulean Warbler begin moving southward as early as mid-July. By late August to early September we see the greatest numbers and diversity passing through our area. By late September Palm Warblers and Yellow-rumped Warblers indicate the end of the migration.

Chestnut-sided warbler, Harriman State Park. *Photo Credit: Alan W. Wells*



Although many warbler populations are relatively stable, several of Rockland's most colorful species are in serious decline. The Cerulean Warbler, still relatively easy to find in Doodletown, has declined countrywide at an average rate of 3.7 percent per year over the last 30 years – 68 percent over the period, thanks in large part to the clearing and fragmentation of mature deciduous forests along streams for housing developments and agriculture. The Golden-winged Warbler, too, has dipped noticeably in Rockland County over the past several decades. A major reason for its disappearance has been the loss of wetlands and early successional woods. As woodlands mature, the habitat is favored by the Blue-winged Warbler which out-competes the Golden-winged or hybridizes with it. Golden-winged Warblers are

also subject to cowbird parasitism, a problem exacerbated by habitat fragmentation.

If you want to see warblers at their best, head out in early May to Doodletown or take a drive to Central Park in New York City, Garrett Mountain in West Paterson, NJ or the Celery Farm in Allendale, NJ. While warblers can be found in a wide variety of habitats, your best bet is to search the tree tops for signs of movement, especially around the newly emerging buds where the birds feed on small insects. Warblers are highly active and you will often need to piece together several clues from partial views, behavior, and song to make an accurate identification. By being patient and persistent, you will be rewarded with an unobstructed view of these avian jewels that makes all the effort worthwhile!

For further reading: Stokes and Stokes 2004 "Field Guide to Warblers"; Dunn and Garrett 1997 "A Field Guide to Warblers of North America"; Curson, Quinn and Beadle 1994 "Warblers of the Americas: An Identification Guide."

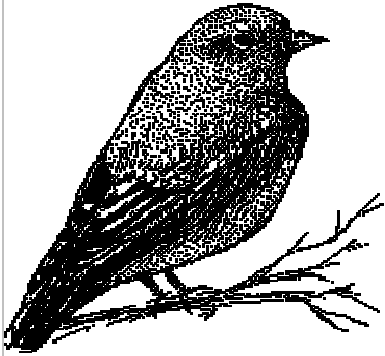
—Alan Wells is Webmaster of Rockland Audubon Society.

We've started the all new Rockland Audubon Society blog!

For updates and postings beginning with a review of New York Historical Society's recent "Audubon's Aviary: Portraits of Endangered Species," which also foreshadows, with as much detail as NYHS was willing to share, the forthcoming and final installment in the series, visit our new blog at: <http://rocklandaudubon.blogspot.com>.

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Upcoming Rockland Audubon Society Programs

RAS meets at Rockland Country Day School, 34 Kings Hwy, Congers, NY, at 8 p.m.

May 2: The Many Colors of Taiwan

The mountains and forests of Taiwan create a constantly changing backdrop of blue and green. Rivers cut deep, windy gorges of gray and brown. The sea shows shades of blue and turquoise. Flowers bloom in pinks and

purples. Hotels and temples are often predominantly red, laced with many hues. Join Carol as she recounts her trip to the island of Taiwan and the Hong Kong marshes.

June 6: All About Bluebirds and More
Nationally-recognized bluebird expert John Rogers will deliver his highly-acclaimed program, which looks

at the life history of the Eastern bluebird, nest box management, other birds that creep into bluebird boxes. While the focus is primarily on bluebirds, John also shares his great passion for the natural world.

Rogers is a recipient of the John and Nora Lane Award for Bluebird Conservation from the North American Bluebird Society. He has kept an extensive trail of bluebird boxes and fledged more than 11,000 bluebirds.