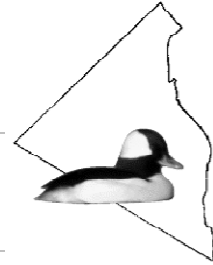


The Observer

The Rockland Audubon Society Quarterly Newsletter. Since 1947. Volume 61, Number 1
February – April 2008
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Special Interest Articles

Conservation Corner: Tom Fuller takes on junk mail, page 3

Tales from an old shed: George W. Doerre's unique nest, page 4

Kid's Corner: Nature's most beautiful gift, page 7

Snowy Owl and Arctic Gull: Will They Return?

The winter of 2007 brought two extraordinary avian visitors to Piermont Pier.

The first, a Snowy Owl, arrived on January 7 and was seen fairly regularly through April 8. While Snowy Owls have been found during many winters throughout New York, especially along the coast, they are very rare in Rockland, occurring on average about once every 5 to 10 years.

But the second visitor, an adult Ivory Gull that

arrived in February, was even more amazing. This gull, a vagrant from the Arctic, was first positively identified on February 25th (but it may have been present as early as the 23rd). It stayed only a short while, leaving late in the day on the 26th. This was the first record of this species in Rockland. There are only about 14 recorded instances of this species from New York, including an immature individual (and possibly one adult) seen in Newburgh in January, 1981.

Both birds became instant celebrities!

They were featured in local papers, even appeared on the Channel 12 news; word spread quickly over the Internet.

The excitement has long since vanished, but even now when I walk the Pier, people ask "Did you see the Snowy Owl and Ivory Gull?" This is followed by the inevitable "Do you think they'll return this year?" One can only hope, but in both cases it appears unlikely.

Here is why.

Continued on page 5...

What FAA Plans for Rockland Mean to Birding

While the FAA may not be considering the well-being of resident and migratory birds as it re-routes flights over Rockland County, local birders most certainly are interested.

In total 11 lawsuits across 5 states have been filed against the FAA to reverse the agency's Record of Decision regarding the redirecting and increasing of air traffic over Rockland.

But the FAA "is not

considering other alternatives," says Thomas Sullivan, a core member of Quiet Rockland, a Rockland County, NY citizen activist group. (Mr. Sullivan is of no relation to this reporter or the editor of *The Observer*.)

With this proposed arrival path, the majority of flights would travel at 6,000 to 8,000 feet in a several-mile-wide corridor between Suffern and Hillcrest, jetting over Wesley

Hills, Montebello, Kaser, Monsey, Chestnut Ridge and Pearl River, and raising noise levels moderately for about 11,000 residents.

Most songbirds migrate at 1,640 to 6,500 feet, but some fly as high as 21,300 feet; and some swans have been recorded over 25,000 feet, according to Wild Birds Unlimited.

It would seem, therefore, a treacherous lane of traffic if one were a bird.

Continued on page 7...

What's Inside:

New members	2
President's Message	2
Field Trips	4
Notes and Sightings	6
From Mothering Heights	7
Programs	8

Our Mission

The mission of the Rockland Audubon Society 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, ideas, trip reports, poetry, drawings and comments to sullivantp@gmail.com Submission deadline: March 1.

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 deliver of Audubon Magazine and The Observer.

President's Message

How do you like our new newsletter format? This edition of *The Observer* introduces a different layout, as well as some new feature columns. Our new editor, Tom Sullivan, and the members of the Board of Directors are eager to hear your comments and suggestions. Please e-mail Tom at sullivantp@gmail.com or Della at dmwells@optonline.net, or call 845.639.9216. We also welcome your

submissions to the newsletter! Your Board is again considering making *The Observer* available in electronic format from our website, www.rocklandaudubon.org. Doing so saves resources (trees and money), and allows us to include color photographs! I am pleased to announce that our Chapter was awarded \$1000 from the

Audubon New York grant program to purchase a portable display board, which will help us provide a more professional showcase for our Chapter activities at various public events. Our thanks to Al Caccese and Sean Mahar, Audubon New York, and the Audubon Council of New York State. Good birding!
Della Wells

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Welcome New Members!

Sept. '07: Edna Andreassi, Linda Arroyo, Renee Becker, Elizabeth Belisle, Marianne Callanan, Jennifer Clark, Erun Clas, W. Deutsch, Jayne Fox, Sr. Mary Ann Garisto, Chris Grim, Clifford Hendrickson, Rachel Hirschfeld, Abhay Jhaver, John Oello, Valerie Popov, Charlotte Revesz, Joan Sanders, Virginia Smith, Joseph Suarez, Ramesh Ubriani, Edward White.

Oct. '07: Jerome Buckely, Ronald Conzo, John Dailey, Tracey Deleso, Phyllis Ehrenman, Johanna Fleming, Donna James, Jacqueline Kelter, John Lipscomb, Richard Mahoney, Caroline Mullen, Juanita Sibley.

Nov. '07: Rajesh Balchandran, Joanne Bentley, John Blanco, Andrea Braunstein, Maryann Brownsell, Joyce Cardile-Easter, Laura Clines-Caruso, Shirley Dulach, Elisabeth Franceschelli, Rose Gonnella, Frank Grandel, Ronald Johnson, Norman Kimball, Harriet Lewis, Mary Lou Kiley, Rose Marie Raccioppi, Emily Nissen, John Page, Gail Pardo, Bob Stien, Barbara Stolzenberg, Sofia Toth.

Conservation Corner: Stamping Out Junk Mail

Welcome to Conservation Corner! In this space, we will provide a forum for conservation matters: articles concerning local and global environmental issues, tips, profiles and projects of chapter and community members, as well as ways to get involved. It will be your contributions, however, that make Conservation Corner a success.

Do you know a useful organic remedy for weeds? Are you involved in a project or issue in need of support? Do you know a great place to buy local produce? Or, are you wondering how to make your backyard into a haven for wildlife? Stumped by the eternal debate over paper or plastic? Frustrated by what's happening to your favorite birding spots? Now there's an opportunity to share your experiences, to ask these questions, and to take part in the united voice of conservation. In this, the inaugural column, we'll start with junk mail.

Remember when checking the mail was fun? The prospect of getting a letter, card or anything with my name on it meant such delightful anticipation each time the postman came. Now that most of my correspondences and bills are taken care of over the phone or electronically, checking mail has become a frustration. That's because I'm fighting an endless battle with junk mail.



Credit card offers, coupons, catalogs, non-profit solicitations...it never seems to end. The Consumer Research Institute, in fact, estimates we spend eight months of our lives processing junk mail.

Junk mail, however, is more than just an aggravation. Every year, Americans receive some four million tons of junk mail produced from 100 million trees. This strips our forests, burdens our landfills, and consumes excessive energy in production and disposal. According to the EPA, only 36% gets recycled; the rest ends up in landfills.

Fortunately, there are ways to combat this nuisance. Most companies receive your information through two main sources: the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) and the credit bureaus. To remove your information from the DMA Mail Preference Service list, online and mail-in forms can be found at www.dmachoice.org/MPS. Unfortunately, they now charge \$1 for this service. To remove your information from the credit bureau lists, call 1-888-5-OPTOUT (1-888-567-8688).

But that is the easy part. Companies that don't get information from these lists have to be contacted directly. And the companies with which you're doing business can still share your information and slam you with junk. It seems every online, credit card, and catalog purchase we make results in unsolicited junk mail. A bath store purchase made ages ago has meant weekly coupons ever since. Our former realtor keeps in touch by sending home magazines we neither asked for nor read. Send someone a ham for Christmas? Well, you can look forward to that catalog showing up in your mailbox. Sign up for a discount card at the grocery store? And on and on.

There are ways to limit this, too, but they're not nearly as convenient. Banks, credit card companies and other large businesses often provide opt-out choices. Buried in the small type of their privacy policies are options to limit how they contact you and share your information. If you've recycled the privacy policies sent in the mail, they are also available online. Though tedious, taking this measure has proven effective.

With smaller companies, such as catalog merchants, calling their customer service numbers should eventually cease mailings. This can be expedited by saving the address codes found on the mailings. Be sure to ask that they not sell, rent, or share your information with anyone.

Discontinuing those bulky coupon bundles can be somewhat trickier. Since it is not easily found, I am providing the phone number for the Rockland County distribution office of the Tri-State Media Pennysaver: 845-627-3600. Calling with the code from the accompanying postcard should cease delivery. Val-Pak Savings Coupons can be discontinued through www.coxtarget.com/maillsuppression/s/DisplayMailSuppressionForm.

Additionally, there are proactive measures you can take. When making online purchases or non-profit donations, use the comments field to write, "Do not sell, rent, or share my information with anyone." Be on the lookout for check boxes with contact preferences and scan privacy policies. Avoid filling out surveys, warranty cards, and applications. Pay in cash and support smaller, local businesses that don't follow these practices.

After taking all these measures, I receive a quarter of the junk mail I once did. But sadly, it still accounts for most of my mail. There is hope. There has been increasing congressional support for a "Do Not Junk" registry. New York is among 14 states actively pursuing this legislation. Much like the Do Not Call List, the Do Not Junk registry would prevent marketers from sending unsolicited mail to those on the list. You can contact the New York state legislators in support of bills A2520 and S1403 at www.newdream.org/junkmail/state.php.

I would love to know if these steps have been able to help with your junk mail problems.

– Reach Tom Fuller at otterswift@hotmail.com.

Where to Begin Eliminating Junk Mail:

Privacy Rights Clearinghouse: www.privacyrights.org

New American Dream: www.newdream.org/junkmail

Native Forest Network: www.nativeforest.org.

Upcoming RAS Field Trips

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.

Jan 27 (Sun) Pelham Bay Park.
Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. at the former Park & Ride on Route 303 at Route 59 for carpooling. Search for owls & waterfowl in this wild(er) corner of the Bronx. Dress warmly; bring snack & hot drink. Return by early afternoon. 845-358-3659.

Feb 2 (Sat) Winter Birding in Orange County.
Meet Jim Previdi at 2 p.m. at the former Park & Ride lot on Route 303 at Route 59 for carpooling. See raptors and field birds. Northern harriers and short-eared owls are usually sighted just before sunset. Should return by 6:30 p.m. 845-942-8448.

Feb 3 (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. Over by 10am. 845-268-6703.

Feb 24 (Sun) Rockland Lake State Park.
Meet Ruth Carlson at 8am at the flagpole in the North Pool parking lot. Looking for late wintering ducks. Great for beginners. Over by 11:30 a.m. 845-268-6703.

Mar 2 (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.

Mar 29 (Sat) Woodcocks at Kakiat Park.
Meet Della and Alan Wells at 7 p.m. at the Kakiat parking lot on Route 202 opposite Viola Elementary School in Suffern. Bring a flashlight. 845-942-5751.

Apr 6 (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. Over by 10am. 845-268-6703.

Apr 11 (Fri) Amphibians at Tallman Mountain State Park.
Meet Ken McNichol and Carol Weiss at 7 p.m. at the south entrance parking lot on Route 9W (not the main entrance) to look for frogs and salamanders. Bring a flashlight and wear boots. 845-359-9255.

Apr 13 (Sun) The Celery Farm, Allendale, NJ.

Meet Alan and Della Wells at 9 a.m. at the former Park & Ride on Route 303 and Route 59 for carpooling. Great for beginners. May be wet under foot. Look for waterfowl and very early spring migrants. Over by Noon. 845-942-5751.

Apr 19 (Sat) A spring stroll at Mt. Ivy Swamp.
Meet Veronika Krause at 10 a.m. at Pomona Middle School parking lot on Pomona Rd. Look for Marsh Marigolds and chipping sparrows along the railroad embankment. Over by noon. 845-359-9294.

Apr 20 (Sun) Buttermilk Falls Park for Wildflowers, Migrants.
Meet Carol Weiss at the parking lot off South Greenbush Road, West Nyack at 9 a.m. Some uphill walking as well as a cascading water fall. Over by Noon.

Apr 26 (Sat) Doodletown for Early Migration.
Meet Carol Weiss at 7 a.m. at the pull-off on Route 9W just north of the Iona Island causeway, south of Bear Mountain. First warblers of spring! Some uphill walking. Bring snack. Over by noon. 845-358-3659.

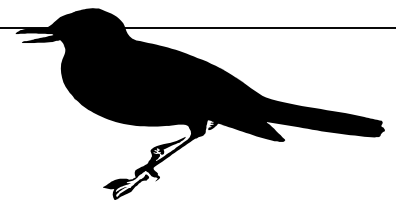
A Rather Unique Nest

The heading "Encounter" on a piece by Bill Banks brought back memories of several of my own wildlife encounters on my 30 acres on the Unadilla River in Chenango County.

In an old shed I have a rather unique nest – comprised of at least five different nests stacked one on the other. The bottom one is easily recognized as a robin's creation. On this rests a barn swallow nest being held together by a type of mud/clay, another looser robin's nest, then another barn swallow's and so on, with the top being a robin's nest. Since this was at almost eye level I decided to observe the eggs being hatched and the chicks as they grew. Meanwhile, outside the shed I have seven or eight bird houses, most of them filled with a tree swallow family, and one housing a bluebird pair!

The robin chicks were quite grown when I entered the shed one day. My arrival caught them off guard and they jumped out to the ground. I tried to pick them up and place them back in the nest but off they went right out the shed doorway. Into the hay field they scrambled, the hay now being about two feet tall. The parent robins saw the danger and gave out what I know as a distress call, same as redwings do. It is a clicking sound and recognized by other species. All my attention was focused on the chicks in the tall grasses when I became aware of a swooshing sound just above my head. I looked up and could not believe what I saw: Directly above was a squadron of avian dive bombers and my head was the target. Every tree swallow available had come to the rescue of the young robins in response to the parent robin's distress "clicks". What a wonderful sight. I had never seen such interaction between two unlike species before so I sat down on the grass, covered my head, and laughed. The tree swallows called off any further attacks.

I store the nest, now over 10 inches high, in my barn during the winter and put it back in the shed each spring ... for robins! — George W. Doerre



During the breeding season, the Snowy Owl can be found throughout the Arctic tundra regions of Alaska and Canada. During winter months some (particularly young males) disperse southward, sometimes overwintering as far south as Texas. These southward movements appear to be tied to population cycles of their favorite prey—lemmings and other small rodents. During years of low rodent populations, the owls tend to move south in what is called an irruptive migration.



Snowy Owl at Piermont Pier, January 28, 2007. Photo Credit: Alan W. Wells

Each winter from 1964 to 1989, Sammy Chevalier monitored Snowy Owl occurrences at Kennedy Airport, NY. Over this period 61 Snowy Owls were observed. Of these, he managed to band 42. During the entire 25-year study, only a single banded bird was ever recaptured. That owl was originally tagged in November 1972 and recaptured about a half mile from this location in December 1974. Other studies of banded Snowy Owls indicate that, more typically, these owls wander great distances from one year to the next; sometimes up to 1200

miles between years. Recent studies on irruptive migrations indicate that unlike regular migrants (for breeding), irruptive species tend to have very poor site fidelity. With large year-to-year fluctuations in prey abundance, a site that provided adequate prey one year may not yield sufficient food the next. A flexible migration pattern allows the species to respond to this uncertainty by seeking out new food sources each year. Because of this behavior pattern it is unlikely that the same owl will go back to the site it used the previous winter.

The return of the Ivory Gull is even more unlikely than that of the Snowy Owl. These gulls are found only in the high Arctic and are dependent on pack ice where they feed mainly on the leftovers from polar bear kills. Ivory Gulls are extremely rare worldwide. A 2005 census in Canada found only 500-700 individuals and indicated that their numbers are falling precipitously. The Canadian Wildlife Survey concluded that Ivory Gull populations are adversely affected in large part by habitat loss resulting from global climate change and that their population numbers are declining even faster than those of the polar bear. One might speculate that as habitat is lost, these birds may be randomly wandering farther from their normal haunts in search of suitable areas. In any event, it seems that the appearance of an Ivory Gull in Piermont was a highly improbable event, one that is unlikely to be repeated soon, if ever again.

— Alan Wells is Webmaster of Rockland Audubon Society, at www.rocklandaudubon.org.

Find A Banded Bird?

Three ways to report it:

Online: www.reportband.gov

Call Toll-Free: 1-800-327-BAND

Write: Bird breeding Laboratory

12100 Beech Forest Road

Laurel, MD 20708

Ask Audubon Is it possible that bird feeders made in China have lead paint?

A 2006 study from the University of Cincinnati determined that India, China and Malaysia produce consumer paints with dangerously high lead levels; these paints are used in a variety of products intended for export. Lead paint affects birds, other wildlife. [The study] confirmed that even low-levels of lead affected growth, locomotion, balance, food begging, feeding, thermoregulation, depth perception, and individual recognition in birds. Young birds affected by lead may not recognize their siblings or parents due to impaired cognitive ability and tend to wander from their nests. Higher levels of lead can lead to death. From National Audubon Society Newswire.

Here are just some of the many notable sightings in Rockland County this fall. There were many more reports, especially of owls and shorebirds, not included. The final report from the Hook Mountain Hawk Watch can be viewed at www.battaly.com/hook/HM2007.

Sep 7: Three white-eyed vireos created a fuss in Blauvelt State Park. Carol Weiss.

Sep 18: Rockland Lake: Near the Nature Center, a scarlet tanager ate a caterpillar! Carol Weiss.

Sep 20: A red-breasted nuthatch at the Bear Mountain Hawk Watch.

Sep 21: Kakiat County Park: Twenty or more chickadees and titmice mobbed a barred owl that was roosting in a large pine tree. Carol Weiss.

Oct 1: Tallman Mt. SP: A pair of great horned owls were dueting. Carol Weiss, Ken McNichol.

Oct 2: Rockland Lake SP: The southward migration is in earnest. On the ground were savannah sparrow, white-crowned sparrow, white-throated sparrow, and dark-eyed junco. In the air, two common loons. On the water, gadwall and American wigeon. Carol Weiss.

Oct 2: A large, uniformly dark raptor circling over Matterhorn Nursery led Jim Previdi to conclude he was watching a golden eagle. Good show!

Oct 13: The big black birch in my front yard was a popular breakfast stop this morning... 3 yellow-rumped warblers (or are they myrtle warblers?) were busy grabbing up seeds, as were a couple of kinglets. Beverly Simon.

Oct 28-29: A single snow bunting created a diversion for the Hook Mountain hawk watchers. Hugh Martin and others.

Nov 4 First Sunday Field Trip: Three snow buntings at the end of Piermont Pier 7:45 a.m. Very skittish about people and dogs, they moved around the edge of the lot. Pat Murray

Nov 6: A very bright Eurasian wigeon, accompanied by a female, appeared on Rockland Lake. Carol Weiss, Gene Brown, and Ed Treacy saw it the first day and many others since then.

Nov 10: Near PIP Exit 10 Ed Treacy observed an albino red-tailed hawk, quite possibly the same individual that Steve Sachs had photographed atop Hook Mountain. Later Ed found a flock of a dozen or more snow buntings at Memorial Park in Nyack.

Nov 16: Two evening grosbeaks visited the Wells' backyard feeders in Tomkins Cove, early morning, but only Alan saw them. The next day, Carol Weiss watched a female purple finch there but did not see the grosbeaks. The Wells had several visits by a black bear in October.

Nov 17: Vince Plogar noted two red-shouldered hawks above Castle Heights Ave. in Upper Nyack.

Nov 22, Thanksgiving Day: Drew Ciganek found a common loon floating on Rockland Lake.

Kid's Corner: I think the most beautiful thing in nature is birds. They come in all different shapes, sizes, and colors. They live in many regions of the world, each place depending on the habitat needed for them to survive. One of the reasons I think this is because I really have an interest in animals and have my whole life. My grandparents have given me a chance to be exposed to the beauty of these winged creatures. From the tiny, fast hummingbird to the sleek, graceful egret, birds have amazing shapes. Size is also a varying trait, from the small chickadee, to the immense ostrich. Finally, patterns alter from bird to bird. While the parrot has many dazzling colors, the blackbird has no pattern at all. A bird's habitat and food can affect the way a bird looks. For example, a toucan is brightly colored, while its surroundings are too. Or, a flamingo is pink because of all the shellfish it eats. Arctic birds are white because the area around them is covered in snow. From the parakeet to the penguin, a bird's beauty is affected by where it lives. Now that I have been exposed to birds, I can realize how beautiful they are. — Jeremy Pallant, Age 11

Those of you old enough to remember Mermaid Epic films will appreciate this.

For those too young to recall the Esther Williams classics, think “synchronized swim” before it dared to call itself an Olympic sport. Miss Williams was unquestionably the queen of the Chlorine Prom with her bevy of tight-fitting-one-piece-swimsuit-clad beauties executing perfectly coordinated aquatic maneuvers, shot from above and below the surface in the latest Technicolor scrumptiousness. The plots were unimportant, perhaps non-existent. Like many Fred Astaire

movies, the whole point was to provide a setting for the “dance” rather than tell a great story.

I mention all this because the other day I saw something that reminded me of such diversions. I found myself laughing out loud and thinking, “Oh yeah...my next column!”

I was driving past Antrim Lake lamenting the departure of the lovely Blue Heron that had perched there every evening this summer and fall. Since he left, lake life was returning to normal, including reoccupation by pesky Canada Geese. What caught my attention was this: They were there, heads down

in the water, fine-feathered tushes in the air, and forming a circle.

I imagined some avian producer filming a bird’s eye version of those old films. What made it even funnier was the lone seagull, floating nearby. Surely, the great Cecil B. *DeGull*, once again directing an effort of *bird-lical* proportions. I could just picture fans *flocking* to the theater, *turning* out in droves, tickets *flying* out of the box office, scalpers *hawking* extras, and a sold-out crowd watching “*I Egret My Mistakes*”.

A sickness, I know, but I tickle myself. And I couldn’t wait to share!

— *Peggy Bruner*



FAA Flight Plans, con’t from page 1

Indeed, bird strikes with aircrafts are hardly rare: over 56,000 such collisions in the U.S. were reported to the FAA from 1990-2004. But since reporting of them is merely encouraged rather than mandatory, it is estimated that this number encompasses a mere 20% of the strikes that likely occurred, according to Bird Strike Committee USA. The good news is that strikes most often take place during aircraft takeoff and landing. Consequently, less than

10% occur over 2000 feet, according to The Internet Center for Wildlife Disease Management. So there is a proverbial silver lining for local birders, after all. Since the planes will not be flying under 2000 feet in our county, it looks as though birdlife will not be significantly affected.

"It is impossible to say for certain, but based on the information we have, we do not expect there to be a noticeable change in the species which birders see in the county," says Jillian M.

Liner, Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon New York.

Steve Kelly, Manager, Airspace Redesign, Eastern Terminal Services stated, "it is important to note that this overflight will occur only when Newark is on the south operation," which occurs about 60 percent of the time.

This tri-state airspace redesign is no doubt an incredibly expensive project, to save just 3 minutes on delays at Newark. Perhaps we should all just slow down and go birding!
— *Patricia M. Sullivan*

"It is impossible to say for certain, but based on the information we have, we do not expect there to be a noticeable change in the species which birders see in the county." Jillian M. Liner, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon New York.

Upcoming Rockland Audubon Society Programs

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

Feb 1: Constitution Marsh: Jewel on the Hudson

Eric Lind will discuss Constitution Marsh Audubon Center, an important river habitat where one can still sense the natural side of the Hudson River. The program features photos that glimpse the unseen wildlife and recent activities. Lind is the center's Director.

March 7: Grassland Bird Conservation

Michael Morgan, coordinator of the Grassland Bird Program, will be speaking about the status of grassland bird conservation in NY, reviewing the incredible declines in grassland bird populations over the past century and their causes, with some grassland bird identification thrown in for good measure!

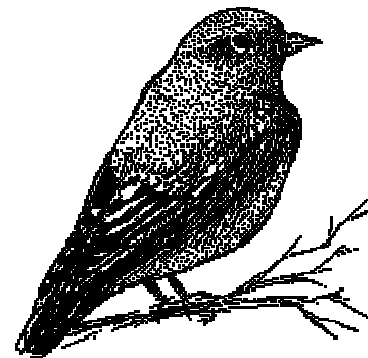
April 4: Discover California's Living Gold!

From the Bay Region's rugged coastline to the parched Colorado Desert, we'll focus on the avian fauna and touch on a diversity of plants and animals. Come learn California's secret wildlife spots from the natives! Alan and Della Wells, both originally from California, now reside in Tomkins Cove, NY.

April's meeting will be held in Rockland Country Day's music room.

ROCKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY
P.O BOX 404
NEW CITY, NY 10956-0404
(845) 639-9216
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