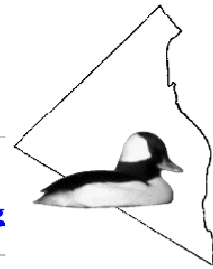


The Observer

The Rockland Audubon Society Quarterly Newsletter. Since 1947. Volume 61, Number 3
September- early November 2008

www.rocklandaudubon.org



Special Interest Articles

Birdathon 2008:
Elyse Fuller shares her field notes from this year's Big Bird Day.

Notes & Sightings:
An exciting quarter it was, Carol Weiss reports, with a new species added to Rockland's bird list, other surprises, and Warblers galore.

What's Inside:

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Historical First: Bald Eagles Breed in Rockland!

It's funny how one can witness a truly significant event without really grasping its importance at the time. So it was on October 6, 2007. Della and I were leading a morning birding walk at the Stony Point Battlefield State Historic Site in the northern part of Rockland County. As we walked up the hill, our attention was drawn to a mature Bald Eagle flying just above the tree tops. It appeared to be carrying a long stick. The occurrence of a mature Bald Eagle at this time of year was unusual in itself as they typically do not appear in the Lower Hudson River Valley until about late April. However, we had occasionally seen one or two around Stony Point over the past year, so we weren't too surprised. We thought the stick carrying odd but quickly dismissed the possibility of nest building. After all, wasn't it the wrong time of year for nesting? Besides, Bald Eagles do not nest in Rockland County. Later, we learned we were wrong on both counts.

We were actually seeing the initial stages of what was likely the first documented nesting of a Bald Eagle in Rockland County in recorded history.

In late December, we received a phone call from the Battlefield Site Manager, Julia Warger. Her staff had found a large nest in a Red Oak tree near the Lighthouse that was being attended by a pair of eagles and growing larger by the day. It appeared as if the pair intended to nest.

Until recently, the Bald Eagle was listed as an Endangered Species by both the Federal and State governments. Hunting, habitat loss, heavy metals and widespread use of DDT in the 1950's and 1960's, led to the near extirpation of the species through most of North America. When a re-introduction program began in 1976, only a single pair remained in New York state. By 1989, ten breeding pairs were established and by 2005, 92 breeding pairs produced 112 fledglings. **Con't on page 5...**

Is Your Grocery List Songbird-friendly?

Migratory songbirds are disappearing at an alarming rate. Perhaps, we may be contributing to their demise by the imported fruits and vegetables found on our tables in winter. This imported produce is grown with types and amounts of pesticides that would be illegal in the United States. North American songbirds continue to be victims of pesticide use decades after Rachel Carson raised our awareness to the dangers of pesticides. Dickcissels and Bobolinks are among some of the grassland birds experiencing a severe and consistent decline. While once a common sight in Eastern United States, Bobolink numbers have plummeted almost 50% in the last four decades according to the North American Breeding Survey. Rice fields have taken over their wintering grounds and these birds are being poisoned by highly toxic pesticides used by the farmers.

Bobolinks were captured feeding in rice fields in Bolivia by Rosalind Renfrew, a biologist at the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, who took samples of their blood to test for pesticide exposure. The findings revealed that about half of the birds had drastically reduced levels of cholinesterase, an enzyme that affects brain and nerve cells, indicating exposure to toxic chemicals.

Latin America has increased its use of pesticides fivefold since 1980 as countries expanded their production of nontraditional crops to meet the demand for fresh produce in the winter months in North America and Europe. Monocrotophos, methamidophos and carbofuran are among some of the toxic chemicals used by farmers in the region.

Con't on page 3...

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
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Editor: Tom Sullivan

Send articles, trip reports, poetry, drawings, photos and comments to sullivantp@gmail.com
Submission deadline: October 15, 2008.

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

Guess what? Unlike the past two years, we are NOT moving!

I have just renewed the rental agreement at Rockland Country Day School for our 2008-2009 monthly meetings (September through June). Program Chair, Julia Warger, has been busy over the summer scheduling a delightful list of presentations for this year's meetings ...hope you will join us!

Many thanks to the members and friends who volunteered to monitor the Bald Eagle nest, a "first for Rockland", at Stony Point Battlefield State Historic Site.

The two eaglets, W-72 and W-73 (a.k.a. April and Jules), fledged in early July. Read more about them in the article by Alan Wells.

My thanks to the 2007-2008 Board of Directors (Ruth Carlson, Karen D'Alessandri, Glenys Foster Roberts, Elyse Fuller, Tom Fuller, Stephanie Garber, Veronika Krause, Lorrie Pallant, and Jessie Traband), *The Observer* Editors Carol Weiss (2007) and Tom Sullivan (2008), Webmaster Alan Wells, and our great trip leaders for all they do on behalf of our Chapter.

Special thanks and a fond farewell to our departing Board member, Ruth, and a hearty welcome to our three new Board members for 2008-2009, Donna Nye, Jim Previdi, and Julia Warger!

In closing, regardless of how you choose to support your Chapter, be it by contributing money to Big Bird Day and other fundraisers, renewing your Audubon membership, attending meetings and field trips, bringing refreshments, or all of the above...THANK YOU!

Good birding!
Della Wells, August 2008

Welcome New Members!

March 2008: Randy Bennett, Leon Friedrich, Noreen Garry, Scott Glatley, Judy Jurman, Patricio Lopez, David Malin, Rafael Rivera, William Rosenthal, Patricia Silberman.

April 2008: Sarah Bell, Jonathan Blair, Dorothy Diederich, Krohnengold Gerso, Harry Grant, Muriel Greeley, Roslyn Jablon, June Kaplan, Howard O'Neill, Edward Russell, Anne Santo, Susan Tackel

May 2008: Marianne Bax, Belle Bell, Elliott Chase, Kenneth G. Clements, Helena Henrique, William Hohlfeld, Gail Hovey, Daniel Lennon, Ken McNichol, William Paul Kubarych, James Wanamaker

Board of Directors:

President: Della Wells*
Vice President: Elyse Fuller*
Secretary: Karen D'Alessandri*
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* Denotes a member of the Board of Directors

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Field Trips: Jim Previdi*
Membership: Veronika Krause*
Fundraising: Elyse Fuller*, Donna Nye*
Newsletter Editor: Tom Sullivan
Publicity: Jessie Traband*
Webmaster: Alan Wells
Programs: Julia Warger*

These agricultural chemicals, rated Class 1 toxins by the World Health Organization, are highly toxic to birds and are either restricted or banned in the United States. Researchers have found in countries such as Honduras, Guatemala and Ecuador that farmers spray their crops heavily and repeatedly with a mixture of these dangerous pesticides. Not surprisingly, a single application of these highly toxic pesticides to a field can kill 7 to 25 songbirds per acre. Approximately half the birds that are captured by researchers after a spraying are found to suffer from severely depressed neurological function. When tested by the United States Food and Drug Administration, these fruits and vegetables imported from Latin America are three times likely to violate Environmental Protection Agency standards for pesticide residues as the same foods grown in the United States. Washing and peeling produce can remove some, but not all pesticide residues. Centers for Disease Control tests show that most Americans carry traces of pesticides in their blood. As consumers we can discourage this poisoning by avoiding foods that are harmful to us, the farmers and their families in Latin America and the environment.

What you can buy, or not, to help protect songbirds

The next time you're grocery shopping, consider opting for these items, a practice which will help eliminate nasty pesticides use that kills songbirds in Latin America:

- * Organic, shade-grown, fair-trade coffee
- * Organic bananas

And be sure to avoid the following nontraditional Latin America crops that cannot be organically grown:

- * Melons
- * Green beans
- * Tomatoes
- * Bell peppers
- * Strawberries

There are things we can put on our bird-friendly grocery list to help protect and save songbirds. Organic coffee is one of them. Shade-grown-coffee plantations in Latin America help regulate climate and water levels while providing much needed habitat for birds. The beans are grown under a canopy of tropical trees, which provide shade and essential nitrogen, and fertilize the soil naturally with leaf litter. The organic, fair-trade coffee produced by these traditional small coffee farmers is available in coffee shops and supermarkets and it is recommended by the Audubon Society, the American Bird Conservancy and the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center.

Organic bananas are a must for your list because the bananas that we usually eat are typically grown with one of the highest pesticide loads of any tropical crop. Even though these bananas present little risk of pesticide ingestion to the consumer, the environment is heavily contaminated where they are grown. We should also avoid any nontraditional Latin American crops like melons, green beans, tomatoes, bell peppers and strawberries as it can be difficult to find any that are organically grown. Buying produce from your local growers not only supports the local economy but also saves energy and reduces carbon emissions output during transportation.

Taking these small steps will help protect migrating songbirds on their long journey to their breeding grounds. If the poisoning of songbird habitats in their wintering grounds continues we will not only be deprived of their wonderful spring calls but also a vital part of our ecosystem will be harmed. One of the ways the decline in songbird population impacts on the balance of nature is by the increase of insect infestations of our forests, flowers and gardens. Saving songbirds today means protecting our ecosystem and the environment for the future, ultimately protecting ourselves and our children.

— *Stephanie Garber is on the RAS conservation committee.*

Sources:

- Stutchbury, Bridget 2007. "Silence of the Songbirds" Walker & Company, New York
Stutchbury, Bridget 2008. "Did Your Shopping List Kill a Songbird?" The New York Times, Sunday, March 30, 2008

If it is 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.

7 Sept. (Sun) *First Sunday Walks at Kennedy Dells Park, New City*

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. at the parking lot on North Main Street opposite Blue Jay Ct. Over by 10 a.m. 845-358-3659

13 Sept. (Sat) *Celery Farm, Allendale, NJ*

Meet Jim Previdi at 9 a.m. at the former Park and Ride on Routes 303 & 59 for carpooling. Return by noon-1 p.m. 845-942-8448

20 Sept. (Sat) *Hook Mountain Hawk Watch*

Meet Jim Previdi at 9 a.m. by the flagpole at the Executive Golf Course, Rockland Lake South. Walk to the top of Hook Mtn. to view migrating hawks. Bring hat, binoculars, water -- and food if you want to stay all day. 845-942-8448

27 Sept. (Sat) *Hudson River Valley Ramble at Stony Point Battlefield*

Led by Alan and Della Wells. Co-sponsored by RAS and Stony Point Battlefield. Meet in the Battlefield parking lot at 8 a.m. 845-942-5751

5 Oct. (Sun) *First Sunday Walks at Kennedy Dells Park, New City*

Meet Veronika Krause at 8 a.m. at the parking lot on North Main Street Opposite Blue Jay Ct. 845-359-9294

12 Oct. (Sun) *Doodletown*

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. at parking area on Route 9W about one mile south of Bear Mtn. traffic circle. Look for fall migrants. Some uphill walking, over around 1 p.m., bring snack and water. 845-358-3659

18 Oct. (Sat) *Nature Walk at Greenbrook Sanctuary*

Join naturalist Nancy Slowik for a walk around this sanctuary on the Palisades to see what's out and about. Meet at the park and ride just south of exit 5 on the Palisades Parkway at 8:30 a.m. 845-942-8448

19 Oct. (Sun) *Trees of Tallman Mountain State Park*

Meet Matt Beckerle at 10 a.m. at the south entrance parking lot on Route 9W about one mile south of the main entrance to Tallman State Park for a nature stroll with emphasis on fall tree identification. 845-735-5411 or 845-942-8448

26 Oct. (Sun) *Piermont Pier for Beginners*

Meet Alan and Della Wells at 8 a.m. at the ball field parking lot at the entrance to the Piermont Pier. Practice bird ID and Binocular use on ducks and other birds. 845-942-5751

1 Nov. (Sat) *Fall Migration at Brigantine*

All-day trip to Brigantine Unit of Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, NJ. Meet Jim Previdi at 6:30 a.m. at the former Park and Ride on Routes 303 & 59. 845-942-8448

2 Nov. (Sun) *First Sunday Walks at Kennedy Dells Park, New City*

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. at the parking lot on North Main St. opposite Blue Jay Court. Over by 10 a.m. 845-358-3659

Bald Eagles Breed in Rockland County, *con't from page 1* ⁵

In 2007, most of these pairs nested in the Lake Champlain, Mongaup River, and Upper Delaware River regions of the State. None nested in Rockland County.

In late February, volunteers from Rockland Audubon Society, the Palisades Interstate Parks League of Naturalists, and the Edgar A. Mearns Bird Club began monitoring the nest. An observation blind was constructed on a hill approximately 100 yards from the nest tree and volunteers kept watch. The vigil was rewarded on April 1, when it was noticed that the parents were feeding what appeared to be two small whitish chicks.



The two young chicks were informally dubbed "Jules" and "April". Over the weeks, the chicks grew rapidly on a steady diet of fish, notably striped bass, American eel, and alewife. By late April, the chicks had turned a dark gray, and were downright homely as they flopped awkwardly around the nest. At that time we discovered that the adult bird we took to be the male wore a gold-colored metal band.

Later we were to learn that that the gold color signified that he was hatched in Massachusetts. The spotting on this tail feathers indicated that he was young, perhaps about 5 years old.

In early May the chicks were becoming more active and their movements were becoming more coordinated. They were almost black in color but still with very downy feathers. And they were still awkward looking, not yet grown into their huge beaks and gigantic feet. Suddenly, over the next two weeks, the chicks began to look like young eagles. Down was replaced by real feathers!

There is an obvious awareness in their eyes. May 21 was the official banding day. Peter Nye, in charge of the NY Bald Eagle program for NYSDEC, climbed the oak tree and banded both chicks. Both received a silver Federal band and a blue State band; they are now officially known as W-72 and W-73. It turned out that one of the chicks is a male, the other a female. The adults circled overhead and "chittered" during the entire process, but were otherwise rather accepting of the entire banding ordeal.

Throughout June the two eaglets continued to grow while the parents spent less and less time at the nest. On June 25, volunteers began to notice that the eaglets were taking extended hops (short flights) to branches near the nest. This was usually accompanied by vigorous wing flapping.

Finally, on July 2, both young successfully fledged. When Gerhard and Tracy Patsch arrived that morning, both birds were on the ground near the blind. As the observers approached the blind, the eaglets flew to a nearby tree. Independence Day had arrived two days early. In subsequent days, watching these young eagles soar overhead has been a truly awe inspiring sight!

Thanks to the staff of the Stony Point Battlefield State Historic Park, Palisades Interstate Park Commission, and New York State Department of Environmental Protection as well as to the volunteers who donated countless hours of their time for this success!

— Alan Wells is Webmaster of the Rockland Audubon Society



Orange County Audubon Society Tree Sale

The Orange County Audubon Society and the Orange County Land Trust are having a joint tree sale as a fund raiser. The trees, all native to the northeast, come from RPM Ecosystems and are grown using a patented system that develops many feeder roots. At 3-5 feet tall, the trees come in plastic pots which are 10 inches across, and cost \$45.00 of which \$30 is tax deductible. Orders must be received by Sept 17th and pick up is in Newburgh on Oct 4th. Selections and order forms are available at Orange County Audubon's Web page:

http://www.orangecountynyaudubon.com/our_chapter.ASP

More information about the trees is available at the RPM website:

http://www.rpmecosystems.com/fundraising_catalog_eastern.php

Notes & Sightings, compiled by Carol Weiss

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Once in a while, a new species is added to the Rockland County bird list and this year, it was the Cackling Goose. Now the Cackling Goose is easily identifiable, as it closely resembles a Canada Goose. Cackling, however, is much smaller, perhaps a third of the size of a local Canada, making it slightly bigger than a mallard. It also has a much daintier bill, which changes the head proportions when comparing it with a Canada. And it has a much different voice, a cackle, which I've never heard.

On March 18, as I circled Rockland Lake, I stopped to look over a large gaggle of geese feeding on the lawn between parking lots 1 and 2. In the midst was a small goose, with a small bill, that was very distrustful of my presence. But I persisted on getting closer and closer, until I was sure it was a cackler and I could take a few pictures. The goose was located later in the week by Gene Brown and by Drew Ciganek.



Other noteworthy and interesting sightings in March included:

Mar. 4: A neighbor, Emily Feiner, sent me a picture of a Bald Eagle sitting in a tree on Broadway in Nyack.

Mar. 10: Horned Grebe at the Pier, seen by Drew Ciganek and Veronika Krause. Also, Bernard and Joyce Doyle of Palisades had a resident Red-shouldered Hawk.

During the second week of March, Gene Brown checked the Rockland Landing channel light and discovered 4 Great Cormorants, each with the white slash of feathers on the flank, the sign of a breeding adult. But we don't expect them to be breeding along the Hudson River.

Mar. 21: Dan Albantides found a Great Horned Owl nest near his New City home. There were two fluffy white

youngsters in the nest, which grew and turned brown and left the tree for a nearby field in late April.

Mar. 28: Drew Ciganek reported - and several other birders concurred - 1200 Snow Geese resting in the Hudson River alongside the marsh south of the Pier.

And for April, these notes were submitted:

Apr. 5: At ten at night, a sudden wild yelping just outside my door. I go outside where an ear-shattering scream makes my hair stand straight up. Recovering, I consult my library. Chapman's "Handbook" after describing the Great Horned Owl's usual call, says, "A much rarer call is a loud piercing scream, one of the most bloodcurdling sounds I have ever heard in the woods." John Terres in his "Encyclopedia of North American Birds" attributes these unearthly shrieks to young birds "when on wing following parents (hunger cries)." Gene Brown

Apr. 24: Gene Brown's faithful House Wren returned right on schedule.

Apr. 26: Nancy Slowik of the Greenbrook Sanctuary has located stands of long-spurred violet and also white wood sorrel on Clausland Mountain. Neither plant is listed in J. Harry Lehr's "... Flora of Rockland County." Gene Brown

The May reports included these:

May 3: At Tallman Mountain a Green Heron was in the trees by the biggest pond. Denise and Bill Oswald.

May 7: Two White-crowned Sparrows seen at Rockland Lake. One was eating dandelion fluff. And a male Bobolink, a species seldom seen here, was singing from a tree at the north end. Carol Weiss

May 11: A male Eastern Bluebird at Kakiat Park at about 11 am. Bob Burton

Continued on page 7...



Rockland Audubon Society would like to thank all of the individuals and businesses who so generously donated to the 2008 Birdathon. By mid-July, our total was \$1507.00. Your contributions are greatly appreciated, and make RAS programs, field trips, environmental projects, and *The Observer* possible!

Our two Birdathon teams counted for a 24-hour period between Friday, May 16 and Saturday, May 17. While it poured on Friday evening, leaving us with pitiful numbers, the birds were quite cooperative Saturday. Highlights included a Greater Yellowlegs prowling across the baseball field in the rain next to Piermont Pier, an American Bittern soaring over Iona Island, and one very cooperative Olive-sided

Flycatcher posing perfectly at Doodletown. Alas, Alan did not have his camera!

The teams' totals were:

Carol's Team: Carol Weiss, Veronika Krause, and Vince Plogar -- 105 species.

The Chatless 4.5: Alan Wells, Della Wells, Jim Previdi, Tom Fuller, and Elyse Fuller -- 108 species.

Contributors:

Shoeb Amin, Barry Babcock, Bergen County Camera, Joan Brooks, Gene Brown, Thomas F.X. Casey, Harriet Cornell, Sandra Diana, Glenys Foster Roberts, Tom and Elyse Fuller, Michael and Stephanie Garber, Carolyn Kent, Bonnie Koop, Bob and Karen Kotecha, Rebecca and David Kraushaar, Veronika Krause, Wm. Paul Kubarych, Valerie Malkus, Jean Mauro, Doris Metraux, Marsha Meyer,

Thomas Micelli, Esther McGrath, Ken McNichol, Donna Nye, Mary O'Donoghue, Lorrie and Stanley Pallant, Jean Pardo, Tracy and Gerhard Patsch, Jim Previdi, Roberta Ross, Beverly Simone, Ginny Testi, United Water NY, Van Houton Gardens, Irene Warshauer, Carol Weiss, John Weitmann, Alan and Della Wells.

— *Elyse Fuller is vice president of the Rockland Audubon Society, and serves on the Fundraising committee.*

Notes & Sightings, *con't from page 6*

May 11: In a spruce tree near the eagle blind at Stony Point Battlefield, a persistently singing Cape May Warbler, a bird not reported annually in Rockland County. Carol Weiss and Bonnie Koop

May 14: This morning I saw a male Common Yellowthroat foraging in my backyard. Why it's called a Yellowthroat and not a 'Masked Warbler' is beyond me! Beverly Simone

May 15: Warbler time! Rockland Lake: I listed American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow and Wilson's Warblers. Doodletown: Northern Parula, Blue-winged and Black-and-white

Warbler were easily added. Then came Chestnut-sided, Tennessee, Blackpoll, Cerulean, Canada, Magnolia, Black-throated blue, and Worm-eating Warblers. Louisiana Waterthrush, Ovenbird, and Pine Warbler almost rounded out the list, but I managed a last-minute Prairie. That's 19 warbler species in one day. Carol Weiss

May 19: Unusual for Rockland Lake: 8 Northern Waterthrush on the west side of the lake, 6 to 7 a.m. Carol Weiss

May 27: Near the end of the Pier, a striking Ruddy Turnstone, a Lesser Yellowlegs, and three Brant in the sand. Gene Brown

May 28: Golden Eagle circling above the south end of Rockland Lake. I agree: not the right time or place. Carol Weiss

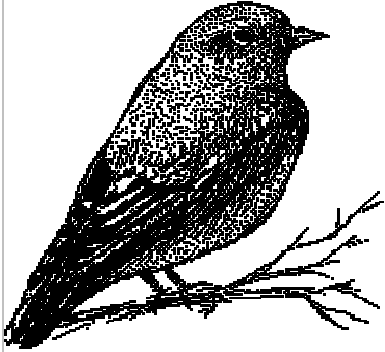
June 5: Not an unusual bird, but perhaps a new locale. Four Willow Flycatchers calling from perches in the tall grasses between the north pool and the Nature Center, Rockland Lake. Carol Weiss

June 6: Shorebirds still moving through: three Semipalmated Plovers, one Least Sandpiper, and one Spotted Sandpiper on the Pier. Carol Weiss

June 10: Great-crested Flycatcher at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory. Linda Pistolesi

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DATED MATERIAL: PLEASE DO NOT DELAY

Upcoming Rockland Audubon Society Programs

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

Sept. 5: Wildlife Lectures with Bill Robinson. Live animals include: flying hawk, owl, falcon, vulture and alligator, snapping turtle and lizards. This program is great for the whole family.

Oct. 3: Brazil and Pantanal. Stephanie and Michael Garber will take you on a visual journey to an

ecological paradise of spectacular birds and wildlife discovered on their recent trip to the Pantanal, an immense floodplain with extraordinary bio diversity and abundance of wildlife. Situated in the heart of Brazil, it's home to more than 1000 species of birds and one of the last refuges for many threatened South American mammals, as well as one of the largest concentrations of diverse flora and fauna.

Nov. 7: NY State Breeding Bird Atlas. The third NY State Breeding Bird Atlas will be available in December 2008. Learn about this important survey of the current distribution of our states birds – a document which greatly affects our decisions making in land use and conservation. This illustrated presentation by Atlas contributor Valerie Freer and Atlas co-editor Kim Corwin includes artwork produced by 9 artists commissioned specifically to create images for the Atlas.