



The Observer

Newsletter of the Rockland Audubon Society

May-August 2010

www.rocklandaudubon.org

Vol. 63, Number 2

The Suburban Garden's Vital Role in Sustaining Birds and Wildlife

By Stephanie Garber

The arrival of spring for many gardeners unleashes the urge to physically connect with nature by directly digging into the soil and planting. How rewarding it is to see the seeds that we have sown germinate and become mature plants or the small plants we've purchased from our local nursery grow and blossom!

Gardening is a favorite activity for many. Perhaps it is the challenge of designing a new flower bed in another area of our yard, creating beauty around our home, showcasing rare or unusual species or simply planting an herb or vegetable garden whose fruits will bring sustenance to our table. Our gardens not only sustain us, but also sustain all the living creatures that share this space with us. With so much habitat loss, our gardens have become a refuge for many of these species. The plants that we choose to put in our gardens play an important role in supporting these species and helping wildlife survive.

Plants are essential to all terrestrial creatures. They provide oxygen in the air we breathe and water that is filtered by their roots. Their role in the food chain is primary. They capture the sun's energy, through photosynthesis turning it into food for us. However, not all plants provide food for wildlife. Many of the native plants

that were a crucial food source have been replaced by alien plants that are toxic to native insects. These insects are important herbivores in our suburban ecosystem in terms of passing energy to other animals. Invasive alien



Baltimore Checkerspot on Swamp Milkweed, both native species of our region.

species have outcompeted and smothered native vegetation. Most insect herbivores can only eat plants with which they share an evolutionary history. Therefore, without native plants,

our native insects will struggle to survive. And the native insect populations in areas with many alien plants will be much smaller than in areas with all natives. Birds and many other animals are impacted by the decline in native plants as they depend partially or entirely on insect protein for food.

As gardeners, we can make a difference in the food available to local wildlife by using native plants. Many of the ecosystems that were a rich source of life with their native flora have been decimated by development or invaded by alien plant species. We can help to recreate vestiges of these ecosystems by introducing a variety of native plants with their beneficial insects and pollinators into our gardens. Greater plant diversity in our suburban gardens will sustain a greater diversity of our favorite birds, butterflies, and other wildlife as well as provide shelter and nest sites to rear their young.

*For a list of native plants with wildlife value and landscaping attributes by region, see reference below.

Adapted from:

*Tallamy, Douglas W. 2007. *Bringing Nature Home, How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants* " Timber Press, Portland · London

Inside This Issue: The ShopRite Eagles, Birdathon details, Annual Meeting RSVP, and more!

Rockland Audubon Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 404
New City, NY 10956
www.rocklandaudubon.org

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Membership

To join, send a \$20 check payable to National Audubon Society to:

Karen D'Alessandri
45 Camp Hill Road
Pomona, NY 10970

Allow 4 to 8 weeks for delivery of *Audubon Magazine* and *The Observer*.

Mission

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

President's Message

Spring has arrived! Our migrant friends are returning, the trees are budding, and once again, it is time for fun, food, and fellowship for RAS members!

On May 7, we will have our annual members' potluck dinner at which time we will vote on the slate of new board member nominees. Della Wells has been nominated to serve on the board, and we will take nominations from the floor. Please see the RSVP form on page 6 for details on how to sign up for the potluck. Following the dinner, Hugh Carola of Hackensack Riverkeeper will take us on a photographic journey of Newfoundland.

Our other major May event is the Birdathon, which will be on May 21

and 22 this year. To find out how to join or form a team or make a donation, please see the Birdathon information on page 5. Your donations go toward our educational programs and conservation efforts such as the RAS nest box project. (We are excited to report that bluebirds are checking out some of the boxes that RAS members helped build and install!)

We have many exciting field trips planned for the spring and summer including two new ones. On April 25, "come clean" with the RAS Cleanup Team. On May 1, explore the migrant phenomenon at Central Park. Please see page 7 for more information about all of RAS's spring and summer field

trips. We hope to see you at an RAS event!

Yours Truly,
Elyse Fuller
May 2010



Left: Boy Scout Troop 61 with the kestrel boxes they constructed for the RAS nest box project.

Welcome, New and Returning Members!

Ellis I. Barowsky, Theresa Berkowitz, Inez Brisfjord, Olga T. Burt, Ernest J. Cavallo, Carolyn Charney, Daniel Cirruzzo, Kenneth G. Clements, Michael Coughlan, Helga D'Onofrio, Jacqueline M. Fiore, Lisa A. Frank, Marsha K. Gerson, Mark A. Goldberg, Barbara Johansson, George Cavanagh, Katya Kirsten, Anita Kopf, Patricia Lopez, Rich Mallard, David Margolin, Stella Marrs, Thomas & Carol Massaro, Michelle McGregor, Anthony Miller, Irene Mosinka, Maria Passarotti, Eugene Polinski, Daniel Rosenstein, Diane Senatore, Judith Sternberg, Renata Szechter, Susan Tackel, Carol Treglia, Paul Weigle

West Nyack's Newest Birding Hotspot!

By Alan Wells

The latest entry in our series of Rockland County Birding Hotspots may come as a bit of a surprise, but where else can you sip your morning coffee, watch a squadron of Bald Eagles perform, and buy a can of split pea soup all at the same time? Our latest entry, drum roll please, is the West Nyack ShopRite on Route 59, conveniently located, for your shopping pleasure, across the street from the Palisades Center and next door to a Dunkin' Donuts!

I must admit that we are a bit late in recognizing this birding Mecca, but it is nonetheless a welcome addition to our hotspot list. Stories celebrating this eagle bonanza have already graced *The Journal News*, Channel 12, and even *RiverTown*. Better late than never, I suppose. Oh, wait, maybe not! It appears that the eagles have departed for this season. Hopefully they will return next winter. So file this article away for about nine months.

It all started (at least for me) in early January with an e-mail from a friend. The forwarded message stated cryptically that there was a pair of eagles sitting in a treetop by the creek behind the West Nyack ShopRite and to bring a camera. Since Bald Eagles overwinter widely throughout the lower Hudson River valley and can frequently be seen sitting in trees, I was less than enthusiastic. Add to that the fact that it was snowing that day and my camera needed repair, I decided to pass. They would probably be gone by the time I could get there anyway, I rationalized. A couple of days later I received a phone call from Laura Incalcaterra from *The Journal News*. She wanted to know the story behind the huge gathering of eagles at ShopRite. I admitted that I had heard several reports of a couple of eagles there, but not the six to eight she described. If true, this was likely a roosting area.

Now I had to see what this was all about. So the following morning, I swung by ShopRite on my way to work. My first

surprise was that there were already a half dozen eagle watchers present. They were armed to the teeth with a massive array of optics and photographic equipment. My second surprise was that the eagles, three juveniles and one transition phase, were still there. They were close and remarkably unperturbed by the crowd of spectators and shoppers. They calmly flew up and down the Hackensack River snagging fish for breakfast. That same morning, Laura's article hit the paper and the news was spreading faster than a stooping Peregrine Falcon!



In subsequent days, the parking lot took on a somewhat circus-like atmosphere. The number of people coming by to see the eagles was truly astounding. But even more heartening were the shoppers that stumbled upon the scene by accident. One eye-to-eye look through the scope and they were floored! A roll of toilet paper-79 cents, a can of beans-\$1.09, a close encounter with a Bald Eagle-priceless!

The discovery of a roosting aggregation of Bald Eagles in West Nyack is not too

surprising. According to the newly released "New York State Bald Eagle Report 2009", <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9381.html>, there were at least 257 eagles roosting in the lower Hudson Valley in February 2009. The number of breeding pairs is increasing exponentially with 158 breeding pairs statewide during 2009. During that same time, there were 24 pairs just within the Hudson River Valley. Recovery of the Bald Eagle within New York and the United States is an inspiring success story.

While Bald Eagles are the main attraction at ShopRite, they are by no means the only interesting denizens of the swamp. An adult Black-crowned Night Heron frequently crouches amongst the tangled branches and vines, a Belted Kingfisher noisily announces its presence as it hunts for small fish, a resident Northern Mockingbird moves in close and gives human visitors a disapproving eye, and an assortment of sparrows rustle through the dried leaves as they skulk through the undergrowth.

If you go: Park in the rear parking lot and stay behind the chain-link fence. The land behind the fence belongs to United Water. Going beyond the fence not only can earn you a ticket for trespassing, but can run you afoul of the recently amended Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. In either case, the fines can be quite substantial! When you arrive, be quiet, move slowly, and above all, don't throw hot dogs or play the cymbals (seriously, this was observed!). If you are an Audubon member, brush up on your eagle lore (see the NYSDEC website <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9383.html>), and help the general public appreciate these birds by sharing your optics and knowledge. Explain why these birds are here and why they should be treated with respect. Additionally, go into the store, buy something, and thank the ShopRite staff for their generosity in allowing access to the site!

Seeking New *Observer* Editor

If you or someone you know is interested in volunteering as editor of *The Observer*, please contact Elyse Fuller at (845) 351-2893 or elyse_fuller@yahoo.com.



Special Lecture



Join Lorrie Pallant, RAS Education Chair, at New City Library on Wednesday, June 16, 2010 at 7:00 pm for a lecture entitled "Wet Wings: Birds of the Waters in Our Area".

Dec. 2 In the early morning at Rockland Lake were six Carolina Wrens and one Winter Wren. Carol Weiss

Dec. 20 An overnight storm forced a late start for the annual Christmas Bird Count, but we Rocklanders still had a terrific day. 9000 common grackles (almost all in Piermont) were overshadowed by one Barnacle Goose, which was found in a flock of Canada Geese near the Pier and was a first record of that species for Rockland County. Drew Ciganek and Karl Knoecklein

Jan. 3 Highlights of a very cold RAS walk on the Pier were a single Snow Goose in a flock of Canada Geese and a Merlin. Some participants saw the falcon dive for a kill and all saw the Merlin on a piling, eating the bird it had captured.

After *The Journal News* reported that eagles were roosting behind the ShopRite on Rte. 59, West Nyack, there was a flurry of activity as birders flocked to the site

Jan. 10 My personal best eagle day: 20 altogether. Three were at Haverstraw Bay County Park, and four were at ShopRite in West Nyack. A great experience, fascinating. Donna Nye

Jan. 16 Hooded Mergansers in the Pascack Brook in Spring Valley outside my apartment. One male seen in the morning of Friday, January 22. A solitary goldeneye at the Pier was seen on both the 14th and 17th. Linda Pistolessi



© Maureen Henry

Jan. 16 A trip to the West Nyack ShopRite. No eagles at midday, but did anyone notice the Black-crowned Night-Heron hanging out on a fallen tree or branch at the bend in the river just north of the rear parking lot? Literally 15 or so feet from the roadway and across from the ShopRite entrance. Linda Pistolessi

Jan. 29 The Black-crowned Night-Heron has been at the Shoprite in West Nyack perched in a tree on the bank of the little river there. I



© Marcel Jaloveckas

have seen him in the exact same spot on four different days. He is directly opposite the entrance to the store, but is hard to see and photograph because of the many branches. Maureen Henry

While others were driving over to ShopRite to see the supermarket eagles, Wendy Brown called to report three Bald Eagles on ice floes between her apartment at Salisbury Point, South Nyack and the Tappan Zee Bridge.

Feb. 4 Stuck on the Westside Highway about 45 minutes ago, I was looking at the ice in Hudson when I saw a big bird soaring just south of the GWB. I thought it was a

vulture until it flew closer showing its white head and tail. Positively a Bald Eagle! Beverly Simone

Feb. 4 Northern Pintail at Letchworth Village with Mallards and Canada Geese. Alan Wells

Feb. 4 Peregrine Falcon while driving in slow traffic on Rte. 202 just east of Mt. Ivy in early afternoon. The peregrine flew about 10 feet above the tops of the cars, roughly following the line of traffic in the opposite direction. I'd spotted him

several car lengths ahead and enjoyed a great view through the windshield as he approached with purposeful yet unhurried flight—facial markings, helmet coloration all very distinct. Awesome and slightly unsettling. Pat Murray

Feb. 12 I was watching TV when I was startled by a loud, and I mean right outside my bedroom window loud, owl call. Not being that familiar with owl calls, I listened online at Cornell's website. It was a Barred Owl. Beverly Simone, West Nyack

Feb. 14 RAS members visited the Mandarin Duck that lives at the

little pond in Tappan. Here's a photo taken by Marcel Jaloveckas.

In mid-February, Drew Ciganek had a Rusty Blackbird visit his feeder in Piermont. This is early for this blackbird species, which drifts through Rockland County on migration. All Rusty Blackbird sightings should be reported.

Feb. 24 I was at Lake Tappan and saw the strangest thing. A pair of Bald Eagles were building a nest on the frozen lake. I watched the male (who was noticeably smaller) bring sticks to the female. He did this several times and then together they redistributed material around the site. I took many photos. Just unbelievable. I just hope the ice melts before she lays eggs. Who knows what will happen once this storm is over? The nest site is about 600-800 feet north of the power stanchions that the cormorants nest on, looking from Blue Hill Road. Is this one for the books? Rosemarie Widmer

Feb. 27 A neighbor's holly tree fell into our shared driveway yesterday during the nor'easter. Today I was eating lunch and reading the newspaper when I noticed activity on the fallen tree. A dozen or more robins had landed and were grabbing and swallowing the bright red berries. A lone mockingbird joined them. After 15 minutes, off they flew. Carol Weiss, Nyack

Feb. 28 Ten Eastern Bluebirds at Rockland Lake in three different spots. Carol Weiss

Thanks to the many observers who contributed sightings for this issue of *The Observer*. Please continue to send by e-mail or snail mail your observations of unusual birds or of common birds in unusual situations. Or call at 845-358-3659. Please include what, when, where, and for how long.

Be on the Lookout for This Invasive Species: *Pseudopinus cellularis*
Description and Photo by Alan Wells

Extremely hardy, growing almost anywhere, requiring no water. Growth pattern is truly astounding, sprouting at full-size, then appears not to grow any further for the rest of its lifespan. No value to wildlife (woodpeckers may bend their beaks trying to excavate nest holes.) Lumber companies have found little use for the wood, in fact, they have found little wood period! This species may well be spreading to your area soon!



Rockland Audubon Society 2010 Birdathon

May 21-22, 2010

(Friday evening through Saturday evening)

It's almost that time again, time for Rockland Audubon Society's annual Birdathon event and fundraiser! You might already know about our Birdathon, but if not, here are some details!

Birdathon participants form teams that scour Rockland County for as many bird species as they can find. Team members and sponsors make a pledge for each species that we see within the 24-hour period. After the Birdathon, we will send you a letter with the list of species and will let you know the final amount of your contribution if you make a "per species" pledge. You may also make a set pledge for any amount. The pledges will go toward RAS activities such as our educational programs, field trips, and environmental projects. Your pledge is tax-deductible, and you will receive a letter for tax purposes after the Birdathon.

If you would like to create or join a Birdathon team or have questions, please call (845) 351-2893. Also, if you create a team, we will send you pledge forms for you and your team members.

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RAS 2010 Birdathon Pledge Form

Name(s) _____

Address _____ Phone _____

My pledge for the 2010 Birdathon is: _____ \$10 _____ \$50
 _____ \$20 _____ Other
 _____ \$25 \$ _____ per Species
(Make checks payable to Rockland Audubon Society)

Please return this form to: Karen D'Alessandri, 45 Camp Hill Road, Pomona, NY 10970

You may also make a pledge by sending this information to kdalessandri@optonline.net.

Rockland Audubon Society Annual Member's Potluck Dinner

Friday, May 7, 2010, 6:30 pm

The members of Rockland Audubon Society are invited to the annual members' potluck dinner. RAS members will vote on the new Board of Directors for the upcoming year at this meeting.

Please bring your own plates and silverware. Coffee, tea, and cold drinks will be provided.

If you have questions or need directions, please call (845) 351-2893. If you would like to attend, please RSVP using the form above. Thank you, and we hope to see you there!

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RAS Members' Potluck RSVP Form

Name(s) _____ Phone _____

I will bring (please check): _____ Main Dish _____ Salad/Side Dish _____ Dessert

Please return this form to: Elyse Fuller, 40 Circle Drive, Tuxedo, NY 10987

You may also RSVP by sending this information to elyse_fuller@yahoo.com or calling (845) 351-2893.

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Program to follow at 7:30 pm:

“Newfoundland: Rugged Land, Wild Sea, Strong People”

By Hugh Carola

Rockland Country Day School (Gym)
34 Kings Highway
Congers, NY 10920

Upcoming RAS Spring and Summer 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.

25 April (Sun) *Rockland Audubon Society Keep Rockland Beautiful Cleanup*

Meet Karen D'Alessandri at 12:30pm at the intersection of Ridge Rd. (County Road 23N) and Congers Rd. in New City. Park on the side of Ridge Rd. Bring gloves, boots, insect repellent, hat, water, binoculars (in case something spectacular flies by!), or anything else that will help with the cleanup. Over by 3:30pm. 845-290-0456

1 MAY (Sat) *Birding the Ramble in Central Park, NYC*

Reservations required. Meet Stephanie Garber at 7:30am at the Central Park West and 72 Street entrance to the Park. Peter Joost of NYC Audubon will lead us past Strawberry Fields and into the Ramble, an ideal sanctuary on the Atlantic flyway to look for warblers and other spring migrants. End with a stroll through Shakespeare Garden. Over by noon. Contact Stephanie by April 26 for reservations and possible carpooling. 845-359-9543

2 MAY (Sun) *First Sunday Walk at Piermont Pier*

Meet Carol Weiss at 8am at the parking

lot by the baseball field near the entrance to Piermont Pier. Over by 10am. 845-358-3659

21 MAY (Fri evening) to 22 MAY (Sat evening)

Birdathon Fundraiser - See page 5 for details.

2 JUN (Wed) *Evening Walk at Piermont Pier*

Meet Carol Weiss at 6pm at the parking lot by the baseball field near the entrance to Piermont Pier. 845-358-3659

5 JUN (Sat) *Galeville Airport During Nesting Season*

Meet Della & Alan Wells at 7am at the Park and Ride Lot on Route 9W in Stony Point (just south of Hogan's Diner). This abandoned airport, now administered as the Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge, is a hot-spot for grassland birds. 845-942-5751

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

Meet Veronika Krause at 8am at the parking lot by the baseball field near the entrance to Piermont Pier. Over by 10am. 845-359-9294

13 JUN (Sun) *Doodletown for Beginners*

Meet Della and Alan Wells at 8am 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

20 JUN (Sun) *Dragons and Damsels of Rockland County*

Meet Alan and Della Wells at 9am at the Park and Ride Lot on Route 9W in Stony Point (just South of Hogan's Diner) for carpooling. Learn to identify common dragonflies and damselflies at Lily Pond in Harriman State Park (a short drive followed by a short hike). Bring water, snack, binoculars (preferably close focus), and camera to capture these photogenic subjects. If rain or overcast weather is forecasted, please call first to confirm. 845-942-5751

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

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

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

Meet Veronika Krause at 8am at the parking lot by the baseball field near the entrance to Piermont Pier. Over by 10am. 845-359-9294

15 AUG (Sun) *Birds and Cameras at Jamaica Bay.*

Meet Alan and Della Wells at 7:30am at the Commuter Parking Lot, Route 303 North, West Nyack, 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

Reminder: The Observer is Going Green!

Rockland Audubon will be doing its part to protect resources and habitat when *The Observer* goes paperless in late 2010.

We are compiling an e-mail distribution list to facilitate this change. In order to receive the newsletter electronically, please send your e-mail address to webmaster Alan Wells at awells@bestweb.net.

Please put [RAS News] in the subject line and your name in the body of the e-mail. If you do not have e-mail, please call (845) 639-9216 to continue receiving a paper copy.

Thank you for your cooperation in this important transition to a more sustainable Rockland Audubon Society.

Sponsor an Audubon Program

From September through June, the Rockland Audubon Society pays \$100 monthly to rent program meeting space at the Rockland Country Day School in Congers. As a way to reduce our chapter's expenses, we are asking members to consider sponsoring a monthly meeting. You may sponsor a monthly meeting or share the cost with a family member or friend. You may also designate the month you would like to sponsor.

If you wish, we will be happy to recognize your generosity at the beginning of the monthly program meeting you sponsor. Your contribution will be acknowledged by letter. Rockland Audubon Society is a non-profit, 501(c) 3 organization.

If you would like to sponsor a program meeting, please mail a check payable to the Rockland Audubon Society to: Donna L. Nye, Treasurer, 309 Front Street, Nyack, NY 10960.

Upcoming Rockland Audubon Society Programs

RAS programs are held at Rockland Country Day School, 34 Kings Hwy, Congers, NY
Doors open at 7 pm for refreshments. Program starts at 7:30.

April 9, 2010 “A Naturalist’s Journey” by Chuck Stead

Follow storyteller/naturalist Chuck Stead along his journey of social ecological awareness. Starting with a hunter’s boyhood, he has come to understand the landscape of ‘grown-up’ learning as one might track prey only to discover that they themselves are leaving tracks for others. This is an eco-autobiography that entertains as much as it educates and will leave you with a greater sense of how place-based knowledge is more earned than learned.

May 7, 2010 “Newfoundland: Rugged Land, Wild Sea, Strong People” by Hugh Carola

Annual Meeting at 6:30 followed by the program at 7:30. Using images, music and story, Hugh Carola will conduct a virtual journey to this unique and exciting land at the easternmost edge of North America. Photos of wildlife from Red squirrels to Humpback whales; birds & wildflowers of all description; and the province’s incredible landscapes feature prominently in this program. Prepare to be amazed because Newfoundland is like no place else on earth. Capt. Hugh Carola is the Program Director at Hackensack Riverkeeper where he conducts over one hundred eco-tours annually along the Hackensack River in New Jersey.

June 4, 2010 “Winter Birds of Florida” by Sam Fried

Sit back and enjoy the splendor of Florida’s winter wildlife with Sam Fried, owner of Flights of Fancy Adventures of Bloomfield, CT. Sam creates fabulous birding vacations for enthusiasts, visiting some of the best birding spots in North, Central and South America and documenting birds with his camera – over 700 species so far. This presentation will focus on the birds that make Florida their winter home as well as a few rarities sighted on his most recent trips there.
