

# The Observer

Newsletter of the Rockland Audubon Society



Vol. 64, No. 3

September-October 2011

[www.rocklandaudubon.org](http://www.rocklandaudubon.org)

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## 2011: A Banner Year for Bluebirds in Rockland

By Tom Fuller, RAS Conservation Chair

Although some have complained about the weather this season, Rockland County Eastern Bluebirds seem to like it just fine, reflected in the number of fledglings this year. In fact, the Rockland Audubon Nest Box Trail project is really taking flight.

While our first season in 2010 was a success by all counts, those numbers seem humble compared to this year's preliminary results. With the support of RAS members and community partners, the project doubled from 28 nest boxes at eight locations in the county in 2010 to 55 boxes at 16 locations this season. We were excited to have six bluebird pairs at two locations in 2010; we are thrilled with 15 breeding pairs at 10 locations this year.



Eastern Bluebird Eggs © Alan W. Wells

Perhaps the most important yardstick for the project is the number of young fledged. While our dedicated monitors are still checking in on some late second broods, we can already account for more than 50 fledglings. By season's end, that number could increase to over 75!

Likewise, Tree Swallows numbers have also soared. Last year, 10 pairs fledged 36 young. Our unofficial count so far this year shows that 18 pairs have produced more than 70 fledglings.

Although no American Kestrels have nested in our boxes so far, the number of individuals spotted in the vicinity of our five kestrel boxes makes us hopeful for future seasons.

Our other goals for 2012 and beyond include more boxes, more bluebirds, and more public outreach. Thanks to the efforts of many, the RAS Nest Box Trail is accomplishing its mission of bringing Eastern Bluebirds—New York's state bird—back to Rockland County.



Female Bluebird, Rockland Lake State Park. © Alan W. Wells

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## Birdathon (May 13-14, 2011): An Amazing 24 Hours!

By Peter Johnson, RAS Board Member

It's almost 5:50 p.m. on Friday as I pull up to the fishing station at Rockland Lake to meet my three Birdathon teammates. I can see that Vince Plogar is already at work, with his spotting scope set up at the rowboat launch. Carol Weiss and I join him to find a Green Heron sitting on the dock. We are off to a good start for my first Birdathon—a 24-hour period when we count as many birds as we can find in Rockland County.

After spotting several ducks and birds, along with a Great Blue Heron, we head to the northern end of the lake. We branch off the path whenever we feel a new bird can be found. Because of late-running construction at her house, Veronika Krause will not join us until the next morning and we miss her cheerful company.

After rounding up what we can, it's back to the parking lot. We listen for owl calls, but to our dismay we have no response. We part for the evening, but as we drive along the park road, Carol, with her roof open, spots a Common Nighthawk!

We meet the next morning in Nyack at 5:30 a.m., pile into Vince's car and arrive at Doodletown shortly after 6:00 a.m. The weather is overcast and a bit on the cool side—no help there. We walk Doodletown for several hours, adding to our count any birds that will show themselves. Veronika spots a young beaver in the reservoir, a delight for all to see. Now we head down to Iona Island, where we find that the high tide has the boardwalk underwater. We pick up a few more birds there, but no sight of the American Kestrel we had hoped for. It's now time for a well-deserved coffee break, when we plot our next move.

We drive to Harriman State Park, along Tiorati Brook Rd. We make a short stop at the ball fields, then it's on to the Elk Pen. There we find a pair of Eastern Bluebirds nesting in one of the six boxes placed in the area by our own RAS members. This scene makes all the work worthwhile, and I am uplifted.

As we leave Harriman, we swing by Kakiat Park and spot a Cooper's Hawk among a couple of other birds. We are all a wee bit tired by now, but we push on south to Piermont. Although we have tried to plan around it, the tide is running higher than usual and we don't see as much on the pier as we had hoped. A quick walk down the lower Tallman Park road concludes the Piermont part of our day.

Time is running short now. Lake DeForest is next, with a quick circumnavigation west to northeast to south. But by now there are few new birds to be seen. It's getting close to 5:00 p.m., so we head over to Nyack and to Carol's house. As we drive past Nyack Hospital we spy a Rock Pigeon on the roof—which turns out to be our last bird of the day.

But the day is far from over. Tom Dow and his grandson, Chris Healy, meet us at Carol's and we have a pizza dinner which can't be beat, until dessert—homemade apple pie, still warm from the oven, compliments of Tom's wife, Elda. What a treat!

After compiling our data, we head our separate ways home. It was a wonderful day spent birding with wonderful people. A big thank you to Vince, who did all the driving; to Carol for having us to her home; to Tom's wife for a pie that will not be quickly forgotten; and to Veronika, Chris, Tom and all involved who made the day such fun.

Give a thought to joining us next year!

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## President's Message

One of the many great things about Rockland Audubon Society is its ability to bring individuals and community groups together. How did you come to RAS? Perhaps you were a new birder and attended an RAS nature program. During the program, you excitedly told an RAS member about those "gray and orange birds" that are in your yard every morning in the spring, plucking earthworms from the ground and singing beautifully. The RAS member explained that those birds are American Robins. You have attended the programs ever since, always bringing your own nature stories and excited to hear those of others.

Did you attend RAS's "Birding by Ear" lecture offered at one of the libraries? You had been meaning to learn more about the songs of the birds in your neighborhood for years but just had not taken the time. However, the lecture inspired you to attend a field trip, where with the help of the trip leader and others, you learned the songs of the Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Song Sparrow for starters. You have been attending field trips ever since and have enjoyed the company of your fellow nature lovers.

On the other hand, you might have attended an RAS field trip and much to your surprise, discovered that others on the trip were practically your neighbors! You decided to get together on a regular basis to go on more RAS field trips and bird together.

Perhaps you were a member of the Historical Society of Rockland where RAS held its monthly programs last season. You attended an RAS program, possibly about Honeybees, Northern Saw-whet Owls, photography or a number of other topics, and decided to get more involved in RAS's many activities.

The relationship that developed between RAS and the members of the Historical Society of Rockland is a wonderful example of community groups getting together, assisting each other and enjoying each other's company. RAS is grateful to the Historical Society of Rockland for the use of its facilities during the last program season. Attendance at the RAS nature programs rose dramatically, due in part to the attendance of Historical Society members.

In fact, our program attendance grew so much that we were bursting out of the room, which isn't such a bad problem! Our program season could not have been as successful without the Historical Society, and we thank them for their support.

We hope that all of you will continue to join us for our new nature program season, and we also hope to attract even more community members at our new and larger location—Congers Community Center. Please see the program section of the newsletter for directions to our new location.

Enjoy the rest of the summer, and we hope to see you soon!

Yours Truly,  
Elyse Fuller

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## **In Memory of Jessie Traband (1937 – 2011)**

Family and friends mourn the loss of longtime RAS member and very special lady, Jessie Traband, who passed away on May 12, 2011. Jessie was an active member of RAS for many years, and served as Publicity Chair on the RAS Board of Directors from 2006 to 2009. She designed and distributed eye-catching flyers for each of our monthly meetings, and submitted our calendar of events to local newspapers and other publications.

Jessie could always be counted on to help out at the RAS table at the Earth Day and Bird Festival events at Bear Mountain. She designed name badges for the Board (making several sets because we kept misplacing them!) Jessie even brought her badge machine to Earth Day and made badges for the children who visited our table (a big hit with the kids and their parents!) She did all this with a smile, terrific sense of humor, and a denim hat adorned with a big flower.

Starting in 1997, Jessie participated in the annual RAS Christmas Bird Counts (CBC), including several counts with her beloved grandchildren, Anna, Sara, and Sam Kaufer. In 2006, she reported the first White-fronted Goose to be recorded on an RAS CBC!

Jessie was an enthusiastic participant in local African drumming circles, and also enjoyed gardening, building birdhouses, reading, and genealogy. In addition to her cherished grandchildren, Jessie is survived by her daughter, Nancy Kaufer, son-in-law David, her siblings Paul Bazzeghin, Nancy Ward, and Damon Bazzeghin, their spouses and an abundance of nieces and nephews.

The RAS Board extends heartfelt condolences to all who knew and loved Jessie. She will be greatly missed.



Della Wells and Jessie Traband, Earth Day 2007, Trailside Museums & Zoo, Bear Mtn. State Park © Alan W. Wells

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## Welcome New and Returning Members!

Connie Albertus, Charles Barone, Merle Berry, Jennifer Casscles, Marie Correia, Dianne Dominick, C. Healy & S. Dow, Carl Glogg, Jean Goldsmith, Karen Hoffer, Hugh Kiniburgh, Helen Lazer, Gordon S. Liebergall, Emma Martin, Sherry McCarthy, Fred Miller, Christine C. Mueller, Bette A. Nussbaum, Lawrence Olsen, Barbara Pease, Thomas Poidevin, Ira Rosenkrantz, Stephen Schneider, Carl Schroeder, Debra Toms, Pesach & Liz Weinstein, Kelly Weyer, Peggy Wissler

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## Notes and Sightings: March through May 2011

Compiled by Carol Weiss

What a special season this was! Was it the strange weather pattern that created ideal conditions for the birds, both local and migrating? Some species, like Eastern Bluebird and Killdeer, were on schedule despite the weather. Others, like Northern Parula and Blackpoll Warblers, seemed to be in Rockland County in unusual numbers. On May 3, I counted 20 Parulas on a walk around Rockland Lake, along with 200 Yellow-rumped as well as Nashville, Tennessee, Magnolia and other warblers. That was when I heard my first Blackpoll—the last I noted was on May 26 in my yard. Hooded and Cerulean Warblers were in early; both species were heard and seen well on Easter Sunday, April 24. And there were the Orchard Orioles: one at Stony Point Battlefield on May 1, two on Iona Island on May 2, and three at Rockland Lake, in three different spots, on May 6.

This overview includes sightings and comments from many RAS members and supporters, beginning with Frank Kemmer in March and concluding with Frank Bonanno in May. My thanks to all of you!



Female Northern Parula © Alan W. Wells

**March 2**—Spotted six bluebirds on Sunday at Kennedy Dells Park and watched them for over an hour. They were feeding in the open fields and woods where no snow had collected. Frank Kemmer

**March 2**—I saw a single female Green-winged Teal at Rockland Lake today. Carol Weiss

**March 2**—12 Bald Eagles at Convent Rd., Orangeburg, at the bridge at about noon. Also, the adult eagles were at their nest, south of Veteran's Memorial Drive. Rosemarie Widmer

**March 3**—First Rockland Killdeer for 2011, at the model airplane park across the road from Haverstraw Bay County Park. Carol Weiss

**March 4**—Two Long-eared Owls at Piermont Pier. They first appeared in February and at one point, there were four.

**March 7-9**—One Long-eared Owl at Piermont Pier. After March 9, the owls were not reported again.

**March 9**—A female White-winged Crossbill at birdbath and feeders 6:30 to 9:30 a.m.; was seen infrequently until March 11. Gene Brown dropped by to see the crossbill. Carol Weiss

**March 14**—Yesterday there was a Fox Sparrow in the shrubs alongside my driveway. Its distinct chipping call alerted me to it. Veronika Krause

**March 18**—36 species spotted during a quick walk around Rockland Lake this morning, including my "First of Season" Great Egret and Eastern Phoebe (singing near the old Ice House). Eastern Painted Turtles were out sunning! Alan Wells

**March 18**—A trip to Kakiat Park went well. We heard the bzzzzzz of the American Woodcock as we were getting out of the car at about 7:15 p.m. until we left at 8:00 p.m. and observed two. We also heard peepers and wood frogs vocalizing. The real gift was a Great Horned Owl that flew into a tree where Robin Haring and I got a great look at it. The moon was amazing, a lovely warm night! Marsha Meyer



Male American Woodcock, Kakait Park © Alan W. Wells

**May 20**—Two Barred Owls in Blauvelt State Park. Chris Healy

**March 22**—A single Peregrine Falcon at the top of the cliff above the half-mile mark on the trail north of Nyack Beach State Park. Great to see the birds in the same place year after year, and in such an inaccessible spot, too. The Common Ravens were vocalizing farther south. Carol Weiss

**March 27**—A Greater Yellowlegs swam across the Sparkill Creek. Cool! Drew Ciganek

**March 30**—A first sighting in Tallman Mountain State Park: a pair of Ring-necked Ducks in one of the woodland ponds. Ken McNichol

**April 7**—Palm Warblers at Kennedy Dells. Not sure if this is earlier than usual or just about the norm. Pat Murray

**April 9**—Piermont: A pair of Wood Ducks landed in the large black walnut tree in our neighbor's yard this morning; strange to see the ducks perched in such a large tree. They stayed about 15 minutes, then moved on. Carolyn Kent

**April 16**—I checked the boxes at Kennedy Dells for the first time; already an Eastern Bluebird is sitting on five eggs. Frank Kemmer

**April 26**—A small mixed flock of warblers came through our yard in Tuxedo. We first heard the trill (not the beee-buzz song) of a Blue-winged Warbler. It stayed for a while in the apple tree looking for insects in the unfurling leaves. He was followed by a Yellow-rumped Warbler and a pair of Wilson's Warblers. The female Wilson's stayed for a while looking for insects in the apple tree and the neighboring maples. Tom and Elyse Fuller

**April 26**—I saw a Magnolia Warbler in Garnerville today. I believe this would be an early date for Rockland County. Jim Previdi

**April 26**—The first of the season Rose-breasted Grosbeak was at our feeder today in Tomkins Cove. Also, while checking the Iona Island nest boxes, spotted what appears to be a second female American Kestrel near the kestrel box. This one may be a juvenile as it is much more streaked than the first female. Haven't seen the male for several days now. Alan Wells





Male Rose-breasted Grosbeak © Alan W. Wells

**May 8**—We had excellent looks at a Golden-winged Warbler this afternoon at the upper Tiorati ball field. It was with a female Blue-winged Warbler and singing what seemed to be a Blue-winged Warbler song. However, it had a very faint third note after the bee-buzz. You wouldn't pick up the difference unless you were watching it as it sang. We also birded Doodletown this morning where we had wonderful views of a Bay-breasted Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Canada Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, and Black-throated Blue Warbler. Elyse & Tom Fuller

**May 10**—This morning, out of an upstairs window I saw a couple of little birds flitting at the top of the elm tree. I got my binoculars, and saw a warbler, but didn't know what kind. I focused on another and it could only have been a Cerulean. Beautiful bright blue, white belly and streaks on the wings. The first one must have been a female. Beverly Simone

**May 10**—I associate May 10 with Wilson's Warbler because many years ago, on a May 10 morning at the Bashakill, there were dozens of these little warblers all around Haven Road, adjacent roads and parking areas. Today as I walked around Rockland Lake, I was delighted to see two of these black-capped warblers in trees east of the North swimming pool. They made my day. Carol Weiss

**May 10**—At 12:45 p.m. I had a VERY large group of Chimney Swifts over my yard and surroundings in Stony Point. They seemed to be in what I can only describe as a feeding frenzy, flying back and forth at all different levels. This lasted for seven minutes, when they left together in a northeasterly direction. It is puzzling that there was a very strong northerly wind, with only 37 percent humidity reported. On what could they have been feeding? Doris Metraux

**May 10**—On Friday evening (May 6) I spotted a White-crowned Sparrow as I walked towards my apartment in Spring Valley. Today on a lunch-time walk from Lamont to the State Line Lookout, I heard a tanager, Red-eyed Vireo, oriole, Ovenbird, and a few different warblers (not sure which). At the lookout was a Bald Eagle, perched off to the North. Linda Pistolesi

**May 14**—Yesterday at about 8:30 p.m., in front of the Tallman swimming pool, a rasping call came from the woods to the south. The sound quickly moved out to the margin of the marsh near the two electrical boxes. Tonight at about the same time we heard the sounds at the same place on the edge of the marsh. Chris spotted two Barn Owls in the trees at the edge. One flew north, landing in a tree north of the swimming pool; we approached and it flew again into the clump of trees in the circle at the northern end of the parking area. We didn't see it after that. Tom Dow & Chris Healy

**May 14**—While doing a bird survey for Rockland Country Club, Drew Ciganek was surprised to see Purple Martins occupying one of the cavities in a martin house near the golf course lake. In 1976 in *Birds of Rockland County, NY and the Hudson Highlands, 1844-1976*, Bob Deed reported on the decline of this species since the

late 1800s: "Certainly the bird has not nested locally within the memory of the current generation of birders, nor has it ever been in modern times more than a very rare migrant, usually single birds and with lapses of several years between sightings." Drew's find opens a new era for Rockland County birders.

**May 15-22**—Four Dunlin, two Ruddy Turnstones, three Short-billed Dowitchers, 15 Semi-palmated Plovers, several Least Sandpipers, and a Lesser Yellowlegs were found at Piermont Pier. Drew Ciganek

**May 20**—Golden-winged Warbler and eight other warbler species at the end of Ironwood Drive in Sterling Forest State Park. Carol Weiss

**May 27**—An adult Bald Eagle flew over my yard in Congers about 9:30 a.m., just above treetop level, heading west from Congers Lake towards Lake DeForest. I also had Common Nighthawks flying over my neighborhood last evening. Frank Bonanno

**May 28**—Pine Warbler seen in a pine grove at Kakiat Park. Frank Bonanno

Please send your bird notes and sightings to Carol at [cweiss1124@optonline.net](mailto:cweiss1124@optonline.net) or call her at 845-358-3659.

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## Upcoming Programs

***Nature Programs will be held in a new location this year.*** Meetings will take place in the **Community Center** building at **Congers Lake Memorial Park** (located at 6 Gilchrest Road, Congers, NY, 10920), which has much more room for activities. Programs are held on the first Friday of each month, September through June. Meet at 7:00 p.m. for refreshments and conversation, with a one-hour nature program following, beginning at 7:30 p.m. There is plenty of parking near the building, and it is handicap accessible. All RAS programs are open to the public and donations are greatly appreciated to help cover costs. If you would like to provide refreshments for any of our meetings, please call Julia Warger in advance at 845-947-4453, to coordinate efforts. Leave a message with your name, return phone number and the date you wish to provide a delicious treat (sweet or savory) for the refreshments table.

**Sep. 2, 2011**

### **Birding Delmarva: Knot to be Missed**



Red Knot © Alan W. Wells

RAS members Alan and Della Wells head south of the Mason-Dixon Line for some southern birding and to sample the flavors of the Delmarva Peninsula (that's Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia for the uninitiated). They will explore a number of prime wildlife sites along Delaware Bay and southern Maryland, finally ending up at Assateague Island National Seashore and Chincoteague National Park. Along the route, they will point out several interesting stops and eateries.

**Oct. 7, 2011**

## **Rockland Forager: Paul Tappenden**

Paul Tappenden is an environmental educator specializing in wild foods and medicinal plants. He has been studying the native plants of the northeast since 1976. His colorful slideshow presentation introduces many of the edible plants that can be found growing wild in Rockland County and he tells when and how they can be harvested and prepared.

## **Special Lecture: Birding By Ear**

Date and Time: Sep. 19, 2011 (Mon), 7:00 p.m.

Location: New City Library, 220 N. Main St., New City, NY, 845-634-4997

Lorrie Pallant will present her popular "Birding by Ear" program.

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## **Upcoming Field Trips**

Note: Please call the trip leader 24 hours ahead if you plan to join the group at the field trip site, rather than the designated meeting place!

**Please check [www.rocklandaudubon.org](http://www.rocklandaudubon.org) for updates!**

### **Sep. 4 (Sun)—First Sunday Walk in Piermont**

Meet Veronika Krause at 8 a.m. at the parking lot by the ball field at the Piermont Pier entrance. Signs in Piermont leading to the pier or Ferry Rd. will get you there. A two-hour stroll on a paved road, looking for resident birds and southbound migrants. 845-359-9294

### **Sep. 9 (Fri)—A Weekday Bird Walk at the Celery Farm**

Meet Elyse Fuller at 9 a.m. at the Celery Farm parking lot on Franklin Turnpike, Allendale, NJ. Over by 11 a.m. 845-351-2893

### **Sep. 10 (Sat)—Hudson River Ramble At Stony Point Battlefield**

Co-sponsored by RAS and Stony Point Battlefield State Historic Site. Meet Alan and Della Wells at 8 a.m. in the main parking lot at the end of Battlefield Rd.—accessed from Park Rd. off Rte. 9W in Stony Point. Take an early fall stroll through this historic site on the Hudson River. 845-942-5751; Park Phone 845-786-2521

### **Sep. 16 (Fri)—A Weekday Bird Walk at Kakiat Park**

Meet Elyse Fuller at 9 a.m. at the parking lot off Rte. 202, opposite Viola School. Look for migrating birds. Over by 11 a.m. 845-351-2893

### **Sep. 17 (Sat)—Hook Mountain Hawk Watch**

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

### **Sep. 26 (Mon)—Hook Mountain Hawk Watch**

Join Carol Weiss on her scheduled weekday watch on Hook Mountain. A good week to see different hawk species on their southward migration. Come and go according to your schedule, but those counting hawks usually have lunch about noon. If you do not know the route, call for directions. 845-358-3659

### Oct. 2 (Sun)— First Sunday Walk in Piermont

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. at the parking lot by the ball field at the Piermont Pier entrance. Check the field, marsh, water, and sky for migrating birds and local residents. 845-358-3659

### Oct. 23 (Sun)— Croton Point Park

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. at the Commuter Parking Lot, Rte. 303 North, West Nyack for carpooling; or at 8:45 a.m. at the small office parking area at Croton Point Park. Look for grassland birds on the old landfill—sparrows, hawks, and more. Over around noon.

### Oct. 30 (Sun)—Piermont Pier for Beginners

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

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## Mission of Rockland Audubon Society

An all-volunteer chapter of the National Audubon Society, Rockland Audubon Society's mission is to promote environmental conservation and foster an appreciation of birds and nature through education programs and activities.

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## Board of Directors\* and Committee Members

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## Membership

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

Della Wells, RAS Membership Chairperson  
9 Dunderberg Road  
Tomkins Cove, NY 10986-1003

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

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## The Observer

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Newsletter Submissions Welcome! Please send your contributions for *The Observer* to Caroline McDonald at carolinem38a@yahoo.com. The editor reserves the right to edit any copy for clarity, accuracy and space requirements.

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