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**65 Years in
Rockland County**

In this issue of *The Observer*:

- 2012-2013: Our 65th Season!
- Remembering the Fledgling Rockland Audubon
- Deed's Birds of Rockland County and the Hudson Highlands
- Delaware Birding Weekend Adds Nine 'Life' Birds
- Mississippi Kites at Sterling Forest
- Remembering Bob Olley
- President's Message
- Welcome New and Returning Members!
- Notes and Sightings: March-May 2012
- Upcoming Nature Programs
- Upcoming Field Trips

2012-2013: Our 65th Season!

Rockland Audubon Society became a chapter of the National Audubon Society in June 1947, making 2012-2013 our 65th season. We hope you, our members and friends, will come to a program or join us on a field trip and help us celebrate this milestone.

Remembering the Fledgling Rockland Audubon

By Eugene R. Brown, Longtime RAS Member

I keep a vivid memory of sitting on the lawn of Bill and Frances Irving on a May night, watching through telescopes the northward flying migrants passing against a full moon. The Irving's home in West Nyack was the location of Rockland Audubon Society's (RAS) first meetings back in 1947. Membership was sparse at first, but we were all active.

Frances, a founder and the first president of RAS, lost no time in getting an active program moving. We were soon creating a nature trail at the Summit Park health center and setting up, through the interest and kindness of Corliss Lamont, a beautiful nature sanctuary at what is now the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

There were local field trips with an occasional specialty such as November steak roasts at Lamont, Nyack Beach, or Tepee Hill (West Hook); or Mary Wilfred's breakfast cookouts and wildflower walks under the Hook. For several years Mary, an RAS president, led our participation in the annual festive hikers' reunion at St. John's-in-the-Wilderness in Harriman State Park.

We enjoyed, as today, an occasional weekend foray. On one of our trips to Cape May (or was it Brigantine?) we were assigned second-floor motel rooms. Naturally we planned to rise very early in the morning. Unfortunately, just as we were getting to sleep, a raucous "Happy Birthday to Harry" celebration began immediately below us, rapidly increasing in volume as liquid refreshment took effect. Finally our leader, Frank Steffens (another president), pulled on a few clothes, went down and silenced the revelers. Frank could do that.

Enthusied participation in the annual Christmas Bird Counts began immediately. My best contribution was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher probing old spider webs over my front porch.



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher © Alan W. Wells

The early newsletters were mimeographed. On one occasion our machine refused to perform, so we went down to Bill Irving's office in New Jersey. But the mimeo there was new and Bill didn't know how to work it. We tinkered and fussed until suddenly a geyser of thick black ink shot toward the ceiling and splashed down in pools on the office furnishings. But *The Observer* survives to this day.

Only two years after its founding, Rockland Audubon published the booklet, "Trails and Pleasant Walks in Rockland County" edited by Maude Brown (my mother), Robert Deed, and Marjorie Hopper, M.D. Also printed in 1949 was John Price's "The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring in Rockland County." At the same time, the Society

published Bob Deed's "Birds of Rockland County" followed in 1959 by "Birds of Rockland County and the Hudson Highlands." Bob's privately typed and monumental "Birds of Rockland County, New York, and the Hudson Highlands 1844-1976" is now kept in facsimile at many Rockland County area libraries.

Another writer was mild-mannered J. Harry Lehr, whose carefully researched "Flora of Rockland County" was published by the Torrey Botanical Club in 1957. A field excursion with Harry was a real treat.

A younger generation today perhaps does not realize that we now have a dozen or more species of birds—shifted up from the south—that were scarce at the time of RAS's founding: Black Vulture, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and others (one of Rockland's first recorded Northern Mockingbirds was discovered by an 11-year-old Junior Audubon Club member.) In 1951 Bob Deed's "Notes on the Northward Movement of Certain Species of Birds into the Lower Hudson Valley" was published by the New York Linnaean Society. This study had obvious references to the concept of global warming and climate change, although those terms had not yet been invented. The birds knew what was happening before the rest of us did.

The State Thruway and Tappan Zee Bridge were built soon after Rockland Audubon Society was established. The landscape changed abruptly. Birds of the tall grass—Eastern Meadowlarks, Bobolinks, Grasshopper Sparrows, Vesper Sparrows—declined in number or disappeared completely. Housing and commercial development chewed up the land. We can be glad that valuable portions of the Palisades Interstate Parks were already well-established and local parks were wisely created.

An incident is remembered in connection with a conference of the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, hosted by RAS and based at Bear Mountain. I was to lead a field trip featuring county birds. Many of Rockland County's birds are common throughout the state, but I knew where to find Blue-winged Warblers. We all saw one, closely, and there were many cheers! Why? Because at that time this species was just beginning to drift into our region from the west and south, and to several watchers in our group who were from northern corners of "upstate" this bird was a rarity.

RAS sponsored the fabulous Audubon Screen Tours of the National Audubon Society. These series of lectures with movies were held at Nyack and other high schools. They featured top nature photographers and were well received by all age groups. The program gradually died when nature on television took over. It was easier to slump by the TV at home than to drive through snow and ice to the school. But the advantage of these "tours" was that speakers made a point of learning about the specific environmental problems of the locality where they were to speak, and addressed these problems as part of their presentation.

In its formative years RAS had a constant friend and valued advisor in John C. Orth. John served as Park Naturalist and Director of Trailside Museums at Bear Mountain State Park. He became Assistant Director of the New York section of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission in 1954. Jack led hawk watches atop Bear Mountain and field trips elsewhere in the Hudson Highlands. He also led a series of seminars at Trailside for RAS members that amounted to a free course in basic ornithology. It was Jack who planned the Nature Center at Rockland Lake which, hopefully, will one day be restored to fulfill its original potential.

The Society's column "Woods and Fields" was published weekly in the Rockland County Journal from the late 50s into the 70s. The column's editor, Maude Brown, wrote many of the pieces, assisted by a half dozen other members. It was always a challenge to get the thing to the editor on time. A few of the headlined titles were:

- "Birdsong Promises Spring"
- "Mountainside Hides Woodland Blooms"
- "Remembering Rachel Carson's Warning"
- "The Peeper Heralds Spring"
- "From the Window of the 2:23"
- "The Beauty of Winter Snow"

A manuscript about Wood Ducks was once submitted to the editorial office, including the sentence: "The wood duck suddenly shot up and sailed off over the swamp." Readers, however, were startled and amused to read: "The woodchuck suddenly shot up and sailed off over the swamp."

Deed's Birds of Rockland County and the Hudson Highlands

By Alan Wells, RAS Webmaster

Rockland Audubon Society (RAS) is celebrating its 65th Anniversary this year and, as part of this celebration, we are highlighting some of our founding members. Outstanding among these is Robert F. Deed (Feb. 2, 1913–July 9, 2001.) Bob was one of seven original founders, served as president, and was a meticulous chronicler of the county's avian records. His seminal work, "**Birds of Rockland County, NY and the Hudson Highlands 1844-1976**," is still the standard when it comes to documenting Rockland's birds.

Bob started serious birding studies in 1927 at the age of 14. By his early twenties, he had birded with such ornithological luminaries of the Bronx County Bird Club (BCBC) as Allan Cruickshank, Roger Tory Peterson, Ludlow Griscom, John Bull, and Ernst Mayr (<http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/NAB/v045n03/p00372-p00381.pdf>).

Bob retained his passion for birds and nature throughout his life. After high school, he worked for the *Nyack Journal News*, first as a stringer in sports, feature stories and columns and then as a reporter/columnist. In 1942 he joined Young America Magazines, becoming editor and editor-in-chief by 1950. In 1952 he joined McGraw-Hill where he worked as a senior editor/copy editor until his retirement in 1978. Bob also served 17 years on the Nyack Board of Education, including several as president of the board, and was president of the Rockland County School Boards Association.



Robert F. Deed, Cape Cod, 1975 © Louise Deed

Bob's love of birds and his professional writing and organizational skills complimented the fledgling RAS perfectly. In 1949, as editor, Bob released RAS's first compilation on the birds of Rockland County: "Birds of Rockland County, New York." This small pamphlet was updated in 1959 by the RAS special publications committee chaired by Bob. In 1979, Bob authored the "Birds of Rockland County NY and the Hudson Highlands 1844-1976." His 1983 addenda to the 1979 Birds of Rockland County added 12 new species to the county list and new sightings to many of the rarer species.

Overall, "Birds of Rockland County" summarizes the occurrence of more than 300 bird species, incorporating Mr. Deed's personal observations made from the late 1920's through 1983. This document chronicles the tremendous changes that have taken place within the avian community of Rockland and the Hudson Highlands. It also includes his personal experiences such as the account of his first sighting of the then rare Mute Swan. Bob recalls that on the BCBC field trip to Piermont Marsh in 1934, it was Roger Peterson who first identified the bird as a Mute Swan, almost before the rest of the group even realized it was there.

Only a few copies of the hand-typed, mimeographed "Birds of Rockland County" were ever distributed. Recognizing the importance of this work and to expand access to it, RAS has recently reset all of the original text and has reissued the document in an e-book format. In an effort to increase the aesthetic appeal of the work, we have also included photographs of as many of the 317 species as possible. You may obtain a **FREE** copy of this 573-page document by going to http://www.rocklandaudubon.org/birds_of_rockland.htm and clicking on the download link. The document is occasionally updated as we obtain new photographs, so check back periodically for revised editions.

To date, we have photographs of 299 of the 317 species. We are always looking to fill in missing photos and to improve the quality of those we already have. If you are interested in contributing, we are especially interested in photos of the following species: Tufted Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Hungarian Partridge, King Rail, Roseate Tern, Thick-billed Murre, Black-backed Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Boreal Chickadee, Sedge Wren, Bohemian Waxwing, Swainson's Warbler, Brewster's Warbler, Mourning Warbler, European Goldfinch, Henslow's Sparrow, and Maroon-bellied Conure. If you have any of these that you would like to contribute, please contact Alan Wells at awells@bestweb.net.

Delaware Birding Weekend Adds Nine 'Life' Birds

By Tom Glover, RAS Member

It was Memorial Day weekend 2012, when eight members of Rockland Audubon Society, Zenon Bachir, John and Jane Lampkin, Alan and Della Wells (trip leaders), Tom and Elyse Fuller and I met in Dover, Del. for a weekend of intense birding.

I was introduced to birding in December 2009 by Elyse, my daughter, and her husband, Tom. My wife Emry and I reside in Punxsutawney, Pa.—yes, the very same town where every Feb. 2, Phil the Groundhog makes his weather prediction.

Tom, Elyse, and I met in Dover on Friday afternoon. Since our motel rooms were not ready, we decided to have an early dinner and do some birding. After dinner we headed for the DuPont Nature Center on the Mispillion Inlet, hoping to score one of our weekend's target birds, the Sabine's Gull. We were there for about four hours, but the Sabine's Gull was not to be found. We were not disappointed, however, as we saw other target birds. In fact, the shoreline around the Inlet was crowded with birds. There were hundreds of Red Knots feeding on Horseshoe Crab eggs. Outnumbering the Red Knots were thousands of Semipalmated Sandpipers, along with lesser numbers of Ruddy Turnstones and Dunlins. We were treated to a pair of foraging and preening Clapper Rails no more than 100 feet in front of us for well over 10 minutes. And in the marsh grass around the area, Seaside Sparrows were singing and visible. Toward dark we hoped to see another reported bird in the area, the Black Rail, but that bird proved to be a no-show that weekend.

After breakfast the following morning, we all headed for the DuPont Nature Center, again in search of the Sabine's Gull. This time we were in luck. A number of other birders already had the bird scoped out, so for the next hour or so we followed the gull as it foraged and interacted with the other shore birds.



< Sabine's Gull (wings raised displaying distinctive wing pattern) and Laughing Gulls © Alan W. Wells

One of the interesting observations on that Saturday morning were the Red Knots. Their numbers were way down compared to the previous Friday evening. Apparently, most of them had left during the night. As we left the center we stopped by a muddy marsh creek and were treated to a number of Clapper Rails. Here in western Pennsylvania, we are lucky to see any rails or Soras at all, let alone what could be termed a small flock of rails.

Our next stop was nearby Slaughter Beach. One of the most impressive sights at the beach was again, the thousands of foraging Semipalmated Sandpipers. These sandpipers were

found in large numbers at every shore location we visited over the weekend. Also impressive were the Horseshoe Crabs. The Memorial Day weekend coincided with the tail-end of the Horseshoe Crab annual breeding season along the Delaware shore. Slaughter Beach was scattered with not only live crabs, but with dead crabs. Members of our group made an attempt to rescue some of the hapless upside-down crabs stranded on the Beach.

After Slaughter Beach we made our way to Bridgeville, Del., about 30 miles south of Dover. Here, in an undeveloped grassy field across from McDonald's we were hoping to see our target bird, Dickcissel. And we were not disappointed, as we got out of our cars we were greeted with a Grasshopper Sparrow and across the street was a noisy Dickcissel. As if these two weren't enough, we also scored Eastern Meadowlark and a Bald Eagle!

After taking a midmorning break at the McDonald's, we headed for Abbott's Mill Nature Center, one of Delaware Nature Society's locations. The center was closed for the holiday, but the trails were open. As we walked a trail that meandered through a forested area, we found one of the few hawks of the weekend, a Red-shouldered Hawk. It was not until I was well away from Delaware that I began to notice hawks on the wing.

We next made our way to the town of Milford for lunch at the Georgia House. Afterwards, walking back to our cars, we noticed of all things an American Kestrel perched on a "ship" weather vane atop a church. As it turned out, we were not the only ones to take notice of the Kestrel...the bird was being dive-bombed by Chimney Swifts.



< American Kestrel Atop Steeple © John Lampkin

Our main afternoon stop was Prime Hook Wildlife Refuge, which was open and very busy with visitors. This refuge has a diverse ecology. The wetlands produced Sandhill Crane, Great Egret, Snowy Egret and Osprey. After standing in the hot sun overlooking the marsh, we decided to take one of the shaded trails. On that trail we were rewarded with Yellow-bellied flycatcher, Acadian Flycatcher, and a great view of a Prothonotary Warbler. The Acadian Flycatcher proved to be a challenge. By the time we got a good look at the bird, we were all suffering from "Warbler Neck."

As we worked our way north back toward Dover, we again checked out Slaughter Beach and the DuPont Nature Center. The Sabine's Gull was still visible from the Center's deck, and the bird was still drawing a crowd. Our last location for Saturday was Port Mahon Road just east of Dover. The road follows a rocky shoreline and produced a flyover by a Glossy Ibis. The sandy patches along the shore were crowded with Semipalmated Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstones, Dunlins, and a few Semipalmated Plovers.

Sunday morning we all headed to Bombay Hook Wildlife Refuge. We'd had a preview of what to expect at the Refuge from John and Jane, who had stopped by on Friday and discovered a Yellow-breasted Chat on the entrance road. On Friday and Saturday John had been teasing us with photos of the bird. Sure enough, right where they had seen the bird on Friday, we found it on Sunday morning. We pulled off the road and piled out to get a look at the Chat. I noticed that John and Jane delayed moving away from their car, and when they did catch up they were wearing face nets. We soon discovered why. Within a few minutes all of us were molested by swarms of Deer Flies. The little blood suckers were hell-bent on having us for breakfast. For some reason the flies had a particular taste for Zenon. As it turned out, the whole time we were at Bombay Hook we were fighting flies. While the flies did not stop us from birding, it was not unusual for our conversations to be punctuated with a "slap" as we tried to keep the flies at bay.

On the refuge's Boardwalk Trail that circled its way around a marsh, we came across Willow Flycatchers and nesting Marsh Wrens. In fact some of the Wren's nests were no more than a few feet off the boardwalk. The refuge provided me with one life bird I personally was taken with, a Black Tern that circled over Bear Swamp Pool. Also on the shore of the pool were a number of Glossy Ibis, Willets, Great and Snowy Egrets and both Yellow- and Black-crowned Night-herons. We spent the whole morning working our way through Bombay Hook.

For lunch we stopped at Boondocks near Smyrna, Del. This place was in the middle of nowhere, but it did prove to be worth the effort. They served locally caught seafood by the bucket. After working our way through crabs, shrimp, fish and fries, we started out for the afternoon's birding at Ted Harvey Conservation Area.

As we entered Ted Harvey we were greeted by a White-eyed Vireo. The Area is made up of coastal forests, grassy marshes, and a shoreline. And yes, we found large mixed flocks of Semipalmated Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstones, Dunlins, with a few Black-bellied Plovers mixed in—and we also found Horseshoe Crabs on the beach.

After two days of intense birding we returned to the motel a bit early on Sunday. For dinner that night, staying with our birding theme, we decided on a restaurant named "Where Pigs Fly." The food was great and after working our way through a roll of paper towels we reminisced about our weekend.

For me, personally, it was a great time and I saw 108 bird species on this trip. The total for the group was 123 species. Of my 108 species, nine were life birds for me: Glossy Ibis, Red Knot, Sabine's Gull, Black Tern, Yellow-breasted Chat, Grasshopper Sparrow, Seaside Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, and Dickcissel. Not only did I add nine new birds to my life list, I also had the privilege of adding five new birding friends to my list.

Mississippi Kites at Sterling Forest

By Alan Wells, RAS Webmaster

It was Saturday evening, May 26th, when Della and I received an e-mail telling of an unusual sighting at the Visitor's Center in Sterling Forest—a Mississippi Kite had been spotted that morning. Members of the Saw Mill River Audubon group had found the bird and had excellent views throughout the morning. They had even photographed the kite carrying sticks into a nearby tree. Over the next two days, additional reports on the kite, as well as the presence of a second kite, continued to surface. The two kites were often seen feeding on dragonflies, mating, and carrying nesting material in the general vicinity of the Lautenberg Visitor Center. Della and I were leading a field trip to Delaware over the long Memorial Day weekend so we could not get over to see it. It wasn't until May 29 that I was able to get there for the first of many visits.



< Female Mississippi Kite © Alan W. Wells

It is rather ironic that this pair of kites should suddenly appear in Sterling Forest. Della and I had just returned from a birding trip to Kansas where one of our primary targets was Mississippi Kite. We had traveled half way across the country to see this species and now a pair was practically in our backyard. In their native habitat, Mississippi Kites are often colonial nesters, where they frequent shelter-row trees, even in residential areas. We had seen them several times well within the city limits of Elkhart, Kan. The pair that landed in Sterling Forest consisted of a yearling female and an older male. Yearling birds may be identified by the streaked

juvenile plumage under the wings and on the tail (see photograph 1). Yearlings also lack the whitish band on the trailing edge of the wings. Adult male birds have a white to grayish-white head (see photograph 2) while the head of the female tends to be a darker shade of gray.

Historically, the sighting of any Mississippi Kite in the lower Hudson Valley was an extremely rare and exciting event. Even throughout New York State, Mississippi Kite sightings were highly unusual. Levine (1998), in Bull's Birds of New York State, indicates that the species was first reported from New York in 1979 when two were found on Staten Island feasting on the 17-year cicada outbreak. Until about 1998, there were only 22 more documented cases statewide. Most of these sightings were during the spring along the Great Lakes shoreline hawk migration route.



< Male Mississippi Kite © Alan W. Wells

In recent years, however, Mississippi Kites have been expanding their range and pushing northward. The species typically breeds in southern and eastern U.S. including southern Arizona, Kansas, Illinois, Missouri, and western Kentucky east to South Carolina. The first nesting record of Mississippi Kites in Ohio did not occur until 2007; breeding records for New Hampshire and Connecticut were established in 2008; and Rhode Island in 2010. In 2009, a pair of Mississippi Kites was discovered in Root, N.Y. This pair returned the following year and successfully nested in

2010 thus becoming the first known pair to reproduce in New York. Locally, the numbers are continuing to increase. Just the day prior to the Sterling Forest sighting, a single Mississippi Kite was seen soaring over Staten Island and on May 28, 10 kites were seen over Sandy Hook, N.J.

So what is going on? No one seems to know for sure, but several explanations for the recent expansion have been postulated. Some suggest that the planting of trees, especially shelter-belt trees in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, has increased breeding habitat. Increasing reproductive success could have pushed birds out into new areas, especially along major river valleys.

The clearing of fields for agriculture, not only in North America, but also in the Central and South American overwintering grounds, may have increased the supply of one of its primary food items, grasshoppers. Others have suggested that favorable spring weather patterns and fortuitous wanderings account for the increase.

Changing human attitudes towards raptors may have also accounted for some of the population increase. Up until the 1930's and 1940's, raptors such as hawks, eagles, and kites were extensively prosecuted by hunters under the belief that they were vermin. Some states even paid bounties on these birds. Over the years the public has begun to recognize the beneficial role that these predators play in controlling harmful insects and rodents, and laws are now in place protecting them.

Whatever the reason for the expansion, Mississippi Kite is likely to become an exciting addition to the New York avifauna. Hopefully the Sterling Forest pair will successfully reproduce and all our members will get a chance to see them.

Remembering Bob Olley

By Carol Weiss, RAS Member

Bob Olley, librarian by profession, activist by passion and birder whenever he could fit it in, passed away on July 24, 2012, at the age of 63. Bob was a Pearl River native and had been a birder since childhood. He even remembered an RAS field trip led by the legendary Dr. Marjorie Hopper.

Way back in the mid-eighties, Bob was part of a group that drove to Forestburgh in Sullivan County, to see Bald Eagles in the winter. The dirt roads through the woods surrounding the Rio Reservoir were rutted and ice-covered. One car disappeared from our caravan and we all pulled over to wait for it. After a half-hour, up the hill walked Bob. The lost car was stuck, spinning its wheels on an icy spot and he had walked up to get help pushing it. By the time we reached the car, it was in gear again. And yes, we did see a number of bald eagles.

On another winter trip to Pelham Bay Park, Bob heard me mention that there was a Lesser Black-backed Gull at Rye Beach. He and one or two others drove with me to this nearby birding spot to find and record a "lifer."

Bob's schedule did not always permit him to participate in the annual RAS Christmas Bird Count, but he joined the Rockland Lake team several times. He was always energetic and enthusiastic, smiling and supportive. He also served on the RAS Board of Directors for a short time.

Bob had two periods of employment at the Nyack Library and between those, he was executive director of TOUCH, a local AIDS support group. He later worked as a reference librarian at the New York Zoological Society, the Bronx Zoo, and led one of RAS's most memorable field trips. As the zoo opened, Bob met us at the gate and took us directly to the library. There we looked at rare books with beautifully colored illustrated plates—he had pulled out his favorites for us to peruse. A second stop was to the raptor cages, where we watched as the big birds were fed huge chunks of meat and their keeper described their personalities and idiosyncrasies. Our final stop was the butterfly tent. Bob's signature covered the extra charge for all of us for this special exhibit, where hundreds of butterflies flew freely around under the canvas. It was a unique experience!

Bob died in the Dominican Republic, a country he loved. He had a plan, to build a lodge where birders could find rest, refreshment and birds. Now *that* would have been a great RAS field trip!

President's Message

Well, I'm back—not that I've ever been very far away.

Some of you might remember I served a few terms as President of RAS around the turn of the last century. Didn't think I'd ever be back in that role, but here I am. If I sound a bit reluctant it's mainly because the past couple of people to hold this office have set the bar so high.

As president, I'm happy to report that in a world of chaos, where countries, states, cities, and corporations are in dire straits, Rockland Audubon is thriving and looking forward to a bright future. This is because many people, both board members and membership, give their time, talents, and resources. They do this not begrudgingly, but out of a love for what we do and who we do it with. Rockland Audubon is quite unique, I think, in that it is that rare organization devoid of petty politics. We like each other and we like to bring new people into our circle of friends. Most importantly, we enjoy sharing what we have come to know and love about birds and the environment that surrounds us.

September begins a new Audubon year, with opportunities to partake of our programs, field trips, and conservation projects. If you've been meaning to become more involved, why not now? My own involvement with RAS has been one of the most cherished and satisfying parts of my life. I am exceedingly proud of Rockland Audubon and I'm looking forward to another great year.

Jim Previdi

Welcome New and Returning Members!

Behira Alkana, George Booras, Dorothy S. Bromm, Joan Bullit, Peter Buchan, Louise Castelluccio, Margaret Cardamona, Morris Cohen, Penny Cruz, D'Ambrosio Family, W. Deutsch, Evan Edelbaum, Judith Sternberg & George Friedman, Joseph V. Gondek, Sheean Haley, Hammer Family, Martin Joffe, Mark Jones, Anita Kopf, Michael Kronenberg, Doris Lauder, Layne Locker, Heddy Magrill, Irene Mosinka, Anne-Marie Mot, Joan Noonan, Carl & Peggy Opalek, Theresa O'Shea, Marie Passarello, Anthony Passera, Pam Peters, J. Riley, Dianne Rosen, Kandi Rosenbaum, Milton Rosenstock, Johanna Ruiz, Denis Ryan, Elaine N. Siebenaler, Susan Tackel, Kathy Tracy, Evelyn Yonsky

Notes and Sightings: March - May 2012

Compiled by Carol Weiss

March came in like a lion, bringing back some of our favorite birds. On March 2, Peter Johnson reported six Wood Ducks, the first he'd seen for the year, at Rockland Lake. Drew Ciganek followed up with a Tree Swallow sighting in Piermont on March 3. The month was off to a good start.

March 12: I had the first Hairy Woodpecker ever in my yard—a male. Normally I have a pair of downies that show up for suet several times a day. But the hairy, who also dined on suet, was a surprise. Caroline McDonald

March 13: Stephanie Garber reported that Tom Dow had seen an Eastern Meadowlark on Piermont Pier.

March 14: A few of us went to Kakiat around 6:00pm yesterday to see the woodcocks again (first seen on the

Mar.10 field trip). We arrived well before sunset so we could walk around the park. As we approached the pine grove we heard a Barred Owl call. I did my own impression and it responded. Entering the grove I called again and the owl flew in. Everyone saw it. We also got excellent, prolonged looks at one of the woodcocks, near the grove. Jim Previdi

March 18: In my West Nyack yard around 7am, a flock of geese flew overhead. I looked up and to my surprise they were white, with black tipped wings. Snow geese! Beverly Simone

March 19: Our snow geese are very brave here in Blauvelt. This one says, "I'm not afraid of the big bad wolf..." Chris Healy



< Snow Geese and "Friends" © Chris Healy

March 20: I just saw a single male Ring-necked Duck floating in the golf course pond on the corner of Pomona and Camp Hill Roads. He's a beauty! Karen D'Alessandri

March 28: Yesterday on the Iona Island boardwalk I saw Red-winged Blackbirds and Song Sparrows. Out in the mudflats I saw several Killdeer, one drake Green-winged Teal and the bird of the day, a Virginia Rail—in the muddy area at the edge of the marsh grass. Peter Johnson

March 28: On Wednesday evening an Osprey circled over the Lamont-Dougherty marsh/pond and then flew off. I also heard a Wood Duck calling from the other side, but could not find it. About two weeks ago glimpsed a pair before they slipped behind the phragmites. Linda Pistolesi

April: Although there were fewer reports received for April, each one was stunning. Don't you wish you had been there?

April 12: Jim Previdi, Peter Johnson, Joanna Galdone and I went to Kennedy Dells park this morning and got a great look at the Barred Owl that lives in the pine grove. It landed on a branch where we were able to get a really good look for a couple of minutes. Then the owl flew into a deciduous tree where it was chased out by a Red-tailed Hawk. Quite dramatic! Caroline McDonald

April 19: At 6:00pm at Kennedy Dells Park it was Ladies' Night for 15-20 Red-winged Blackbirds atop a pollen laden oak whose leaves were beginning to unfurl, and these girls were dressed to the nines. With the low sun on them, the buffy parts around face and chest gleamed positively golden. They ate rapaciously for at least 10 minutes before moving on. Never have I witnessed a quieter flock of birds. No males were among them, though a few had been calling singly from their usual spots by the parking areas. Pat Murray

April 21: A Whip-poor-Will was heard over Piermont. Drew Ciganek

April 22: Saw one Eastern Meadowlark, one Warbling Vireo and one Gray Catbird at the Pier: All were first-of-the-year birds for me. Carol Weiss

April 22: There were six Glossy Ibis and seven Greater Yellowlegs at the Pier. The ibis were on the mudflat at the mouth of the Sparkill Creek, seen by Drew Ciganek from his boat.

April 27: RAS field trip in Harriman State Park: As nine of us emerged from the woods at the Elk Pens, we looked up to find what we thought were three Turkey Vultures flying above us. As we settled our binoculars on them, we discovered that these were two adult Bald Eagles with an immature in tow. When they were almost immediately overhead, the adults locked talons and cartwheeled toward the ground! This behavior was a first for many of us. Elyse Fuller

May: Of course May is a birdwatcher's favorite month and this year there were several unusual avian visitors. Observations and comments follow.

May 6: Blackpoll Warblers in my Congers neighborhood. This is the earliest I recall having them. Also, Great Blue Herons seem to be numerous this year. Frank Bonanno

May 11: The RAS field trip to Ironwood Drive in Sterling Forest was a success. Three Brewster's Warblers, three Golden-winged Warblers and an assortment of others were fascinating. Mention must be made, however, of a persistent, intrepid female Cerulean Warbler that repeatedly flew down to gather nesting material from dead plants near where we were standing. When do we ever see a Cerulean Warbler at knee level? Carol Weiss

May 14: This morning at Down to Earth nursery, a large dark bird appeared at medium altitude. Something about it drew my attention—I think the fact that it didn't exhibit the wobbly flight characteristic of the Turkey Vulture. I had no binoculars and was mainly seeing the bird from below, but it seemed to be showing a slight dihedral, a head larger than a Turkey Vulture but smaller than a Bald Eagle, with no trace of any white on the body or head. It made several tight circles above, reminding me of the immature Golden Eagle I had seen at work last fall. It then flew east in a steady and direct manner, following the ridge of South Mountain. I would have liked to see the gold on the nape of the neck before reporting an adult Golden Eagle, but I think that's what it was. A little research shows there were at least three spring sightings as of 1976 (Deed, "Birds of Rockland County and the Hudson Highlands"), including one on May 19, 1971. Jim Previdi

(Other Golden Eagle sightings in May were May 30, 2001 at Kakiat Park and May 28, 2008 over Rockland Lake. Carol Weiss)

May 14: Tracy and I were birding in Doodletown. The place was alive with Cerulean and Hooded Warblers. Near the entrance to the Herbert Cemetery we heard and then saw a Kentucky Warbler. Also noted were Tennessee, Worm-eating and Blue-winged Warblers. Around noon it started to rain so we headed home. It was raining heavily, but we heard another Kentucky Warbler near the west end of Stillwell Lake. Gerhard Patsch

May 17: As I walked out on the Pier this afternoon, I was delighted to see 110 Brant (I counted) in the water around the old ferry slip and barge. The evening before, I had counted between 700 and 800 in the sky over Piermont. My Rockland FOS (first of season) was on Sunday evening when 50-60 flew over Nyack Hospital. Carol Weiss

May 18: As I innocently watered my hanging begonia, I was set upon by two foul-mouthed bullies (Carolina Wrens) who seemed to think I had encroached on their turf. Here's one of them: Jim Previdi



< Carolina Wren © Jim Previdi

May 18: Birdathon night—Peter Johnson, Veronika Krause and I went into Harriman State Park hoping to find some unusual birds. At dusk we encountered—seeing and hearing—a dozen American Woodcock and after dark, a calling Whip-poor-Will. Carol Weiss

May 24: Still not many shorebirds at the Pier. Saw Short-billed Dowitcher, Spotted Sandpiper, and Ruddy Turnstone, one of each. Three birders also were there. Of more interest was a group of Turkey Vultures feeding on a skeleton on the mudflats. It was near one of the few patches of phragmites on the north side. One of the birds had an arrow through the soft part of the wing but could still fly. The vultures had been there since yesterday. I later heard from Linda Pistolessi that the vulture with the arrow had been seen at Lamont for a month and seemed to be doing okay. Carol Weiss

May 26: Add Dunlin and Whimbrel to the Piermont Pier list of shorebirds. Gene Brown

For this report, we will add some Orange County sightings for May: A Kentucky Warbler on Mine Road and Mississippi Kites at Sterling Forest were reported by several observers.

May 24: I went to Mine Road, Ft. Montgomery, to look for the Kentucky Warbler. I missed the warbler, but spent 20 minutes watching a Yellow-breasted Chat chatter away, oblivious to my presence. Carol Weiss

May 27: After standing for over an hour in the Sterling Forest Visitor Center parking lot, we finally saw the Mississippi Kite come gliding in and land on a dead tree to look around and to preen. With his beady eyes and hooked bill it looked down on us. After a while it took to the air again and circled around, then flew off. Minutes later the kite came back with nesting material and landed in a heavily leafed tree nearby. We observed the bird for an hour-and-a-half as it perched, preened and devoured a dragonfly. It was a life bird for both of us. Tracy and Gerhard Patsch

May 28: I went to see the Mississippi Kite and much to my surprise saw two, a fairly plain looking female and a spectacular male. The female was perched in a tall dead tree, preening all the time and waiting for the male to return. He seemed to bring some food, stayed with her for a while and took off time and time again, giving us a show and always coming back to the female. They sure made it a happy Memorial Day. Doris Metraux

May 28: Thank you, Carol, for the Mississippi Kite. What a spectacular bird! It's a lifer for Elyse and me. We watched it for 45 minutes yesterday evening. Tom Fuller (*Note: I did not find the kite but I did pass along the message I received. Carol Weiss*)

*Have you seen a bird in your yard for the first time? Did you get a lifer? Or did you note a species in unusual numbers or in an unusual place? Have you found a nest or watched a parent feeding its young? Were you attacked by a bird? (Don't take it personally.) Please share your comments and observations in **Notes and Sightings**. Contact Carol by phone, 845-358-3659 or e-mail cweiss1124@optonline.net*

Upcoming Nature Programs

These programs are made possible through generous donations from our members and friends! Thank you!

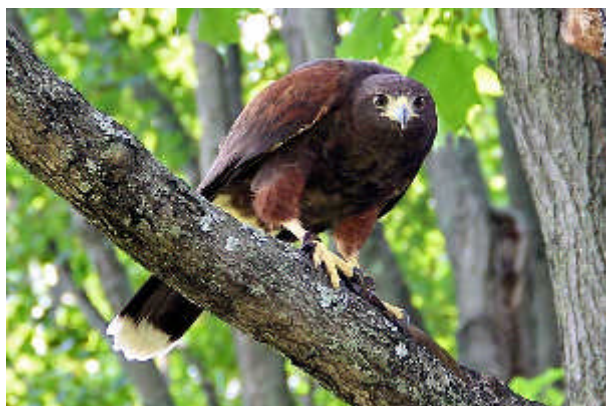
Unless otherwise noted, **Nature Programs** are held on the first Friday of each month, September through June, at the **Community Center, Congers Lake Memorial Park**, located at 6 Gilcrest Road, Congers, N.Y., 10920. Meet at 7:00pm for refreshments and conversation, with a one-hour nature program following, beginning at 7:30pm. 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 add your name to the sign-up sheet available at each meeting.

PLEASE NOTE: *The Sept. and Oct. programs will begin at 7:00pm, one half hour earlier than our usual start time to accommodate a younger audience and the travel time for the raptors and Atka. Come early for refreshments and conversation. Doors open at 6:30pm. Suggested donation for these two programs is \$5.00 for adults, \$2.00 for children ages 5-18, under age 5 free.*

SEPT. 7, 2012

Talons! A Birds of Prey Experience

**** Refreshments 6:30pm; Program 7:00-8:30pm ****



< Harris' Hawk © Lorrie Schumacher

Speaker: Lorrie Schumacher

Lorrie Schumacher, Master Class Falconer, returns with her hawks, falcons, owls and other birds of prey for an evening of exciting up close and personal raptor encounters. Learn about these magnificent birds, their important role in the global environment and our personal responsibility to maintain a balance world where these creatures can soar free. This is an excellent program for children and young adults.

OCT. 5, 2012

Wolves of North America

**** Refreshments 6:30pm; Program 7:00-8:30pm ****



< Atka Howling. Photo from www.nywolf.org

Speaker: Maggie Howell, Wolf Conservation Center

We welcome the return of another old friend, Atka, an Arctic gray wolf who is the traveling ambassador for the Wolf Conservation Center in South Salem, N.Y. To be in his presence is thrilling. Maggie Howell, Managing Director for WCC, brings Atka to explain how wolves fit into a healthy, balanced ecosystem. Atka is a vivid and eloquent advocate for the wisdom and urgency of establishing wolf populations in our country's remaining wild areas. This program is also wonderful for children and young adults to connect with the wild side!

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 for updates!

Audubon in the Parks is an initiative with Audubon New York and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation to advance bird conservation in State Parks. To highlight this partnership, RAS is proud to offer an **Audubon in the Parks** series of walks!

SEPT. 2 (Sun)—First Sunday Walk in Kennedy Dells County Park

Meet Veronika Krause at 8am in the Kennedy Dells parking lot, North Main Street in New City. Stroll through the park looking for both resident and migrating bird species. This trip will run 2 to 2.5 hours. Call the trip leader for directions. 845-359-9294

SEPT. 8 (Sat)—Birding the Stony Point Battlefield (Audubon in the Parks)

Co-sponsored by RAS and Stony Point Battlefield State Historic Site. Meet Alan and Della Wells at 8am in the main parking lot at the end of Battlefield Rd.—accessed from Park Rd. off Route 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

SEPT. 16 (Sun)—Tallman Mountain State Park (Audubon in the Parks)

Meet Carol Weiss at 7:30am in the main parking lot of Tallman Mtn. State Park off Rockland Rd. in Sparkill (should be before the parking fee is charged.) We will look for birds around the playing field and then walk eastward, first to the north picnic area and then to the swimming pool. From the picnic area there is a fantastic view of the marsh and river and we may see migrating hawks. Plan on 3 hours; bring a snack and a drink, especially if it will be a hot day. 845-358-3659

SEPT. 22 (Sat)—Hook Mountain Hawk Watch (Audubon in the Parks)

Meet Jim Previdi at 9am 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. 914-656-2509

OCT. 7 (Sun)—First Sunday Walk in Kennedy Dells County Park

Meet Peter Johnson at 8am in the Kennedy Dells parking lot, North Main Street in New City. Stroll through the park looking for both resident and migrating bird species. This trip will run 2 to 2.5 hours. Call the trip leader for directions. 914-261-2895

OCT. 14 (Sun)—Doodletown (Audubon in the Parks)

Meet Carol Weiss at 8am at the parking area on Route 9W, opposite the Doodletown historic marker. We will take the old road, stopping to bird as we go uphill. We will be looking for hawks and passerines migrating southward. The trip will take from 3 to 4 hours. Bring a beverage and a snack. 845-358-3659

OCT. 21 (Sun)—Trees of Tallman Mountain State Park (Audubon in the Parks)

Meet Matt Beckerle at 8am at the south entrance of Tallman Mountain State Park off Route 9W to learn about the trees of the park and view the fall foliage. 845-735-5411 or 914-656-2509

OCT. 28 (Sun)—Piermont Pier for Beginners

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

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

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

The Observer

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