



Vol. 66, No. 2

May – August 2013

www.rocklandaudubon.org

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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.

Ten Strategies to Improve Backyard Habitat

By Jim Previdi, RAS President

1. Keep your large trees healthy. They take decades to replace.
2. Leave dead trees standing if they pose no threat to people or property.
3. Leave fallen trees to decompose where they fall.
4. When taking down trees, a 10 foot stump or “snag” can sometimes be safely left to decay in place. It will provide insects and shelter for wildlife.
5. Establish a brush pile in a corner of the yard. Creatures such as wrens and cottontails will love you for it!
6. Consider leaving a portion of the lawn un-mowed to create a meadow environment.
7. Fallen leaves can be left to decay out of sight in portions of the property.
8. Avoid dead-heading flowers. These seed heads are vital to wildlife.
9. A rock pile or loose fitted rock wall is an excellent addition to the habitat.
10. Rocks with shallow depressions to collect rain water are a low cost, no maintenance way to provide essential water.

Most of these steps fall into the category of what I call benign neglect. Depending on the general character of your neighborhood you can adopt some or all of these strategies for unseen and little used portions of the property.

Bringing Back Eastern Bluebirds

By Laurie Lago Rispoli, RAS Member

In the early part of the twentieth century, we saw a decline in the Eastern Bluebird, when the more aggressive European Starlings and House Sparrows were introduced to the United States. The 1960's started an effort to recover the population of this species and people began putting up nesting boxes designed to keep the larger European Starlings out.

The male Eastern Bluebird is royal blue on the back and head with a reddish-brown breast. The female is more grey on the head and back with blue tinges on the wings and tail feathers, and more subdued reddish-brown feathers on its breast.

Bluebirds sleep in nest cavities and on sheltered branches of trees and shrubs, which is why they are attracted to nesting boxes. When they are ready to mate, the male entices the female to a nesting spot by carrying material in and out of the proposed nest, perching and fluttering his wings. Once the female accepts his invitation, she creates her actual nest, constructed loosely of grasses and pine needles and lined with fine grasses.

The Eastern Bluebird lays between 2–7 eggs in a clutch, incubates for 11–19 days and nests for another 17–21 days. They can have anywhere from one to three broods per year. Their eggs are a pale blue and 0.6–0.7 inches wide, by 0.7–0.9 inches long.

If you live in the Eastern U.S., there are things you can do to attract and help bring Eastern Bluebirds back to your area. Here are some suggestions:

- **Landscape with native plants to provide fall and winter food.** This could include flowering dogwood, American holly, mulberry, juniper, wild grape, blueberry, viburnum and Virginia creeper to name a few. That “weed” you may have in your yard – pokeweed – is also a food source for this bird
- **Avoid using pesticides on plants in your yard.** This is something that is important to help all wildlife and life in general!
- **Put up bluebird houses.** Houses should be specific for bluebirds. If you install more than one house, it is suggested that they are 100 yards apart, allowing the bluebirds to establish a territory; and 3-6 feet from the ground facing open areas and away from prevailing winds. Having a tree or other suitable perch, 40-100 feet away from the house, helps young birds on

their first ventures out of the nest. Install a predator guard below the box to prevent predators from climbing up and a 5" roof overhang to prevent attacks from above. It is also recommended that the nests of any House Sparrows that may take up residence be removed. Personally, I let any critter take up residence in my bird houses – which once included a flying squirrel.

- **Provide dietary supplements.** If you decide to supplement their diet, their preferred food is mealworms. They can be purchased at many stores, including Wild Birds Unlimited and Lowe's. Suet may be a lifesaver for bluebirds during cold winter months when their natural diet of berries and insects is scarce, but you may have to coax them to the suet. You can do this by crumbling the suet into bite-sized pieces and putting it on a platform feeder with mealworms and/or berries that they like. Make sure your suet is tasty by having items like peanut chips, berries and sunflower hearts incorporated into it. They occasionally eat shelled sunflower, safflower and peanut chips, but do not usually eat mixed birdseed.

I hope that this information will encourage you to help bring bluebirds back to your area. For more information, please see these websites. Happy Wildlife Gardening!

Check the internet (or books) on bluebird houses, or one of these websites for more specific information on Eastern Bluebirds and their abodes.

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Bluebird/id

<http://www.sialis.org/eablbio.htm>

<http://www.lohud.com/article/20111126/NEWS03/111260317/bluebird-Rockland-Audubon-Society>

<http://www.audubon.org>

Binoculars, Scopes & Cameras Too

By Richard Tkachuck, Newsletter Co-editor, Cayuga Bird Club

(Reprinted with permission from Cayuga Bird Club Newsletter)

For perhaps more than a hundred years, binoculars have been an indispensable tool in aiding birdwatchers by bring close distant birds and aiding in their identification. Somewhat later, around the 50s and 60s, big glass entered the arsenal of the viewer. With binz and a spotting scope in their bag of tricks, birdwatchers were able to view distant birds. Photography of birds was still limited to those birds that were very close by, or if not close, captured through very expensive optics and cameras using very expensive film.

Early in the 1990s, digital cameras made their appearance; and through the innovative work of some, the techniques of digiscoping, that of putting a digital camera next to the ocular lens of a spotting scope and thus taking a picture, improved so that one could take reasonably good pictures-- sometimes very good ones, at magnifications of 20 to 30 times. Digiscoping, however, has proved to be a difficult task to work with requiring that the bird first be located in the spotting scope, and then the camera placed over the lens and centered on the viewing screen, and then the picture taken.

Initially, digital cameras were expensive and had limited ability to increase magnification. However, over the past two decades, cameras with amazing abilities have now come within the reach of most birders. These cameras had the added benefit of not requiring film and, thus, not expensive film processing. As the pixel density on the chips within the camera have increased and with the added abilities of taking movies, the addition of a camera to the arsenal of the birder has become something to consider.

What advantages might the camera bring for the birder? Several possibilities come to mind.

First, might be rarity documentation. Each of us, especially when we were first birding, seemed to find birds that were rare; and when we told others about them, we got funny looks because we were not believed. Julian Bell notes on his website the following: "For most birders this (rarity documentation) is the prime reason to take pictures and was the motivation behind the purchase of my first camera. Tiring of finding rarities that were often hard to document I took this step and never looked back. This was, and remains, essential as 95% of my time in the field is on my own. In this digital age, it is

expected that any rarity found is well documented with photographs and if getting a record accepted is important to you, then you'd best have some kind of camera with you.

Second, used as an aid in identification. Most of us bird in the same locality for most of the time. On occasion, we might be able to travel to some distant area where the birds are unfamiliar. This happened to Cyndy and me on a recent trip to Costa Rica where we were volunteering. Here, many of the birds were unfamiliar; and without a human guide, we were limited in our ability to identify birds we had seen. (When we did use a human guide, the camera was rarely used.) Upon seeing an unfamiliar bird, we would attempt to photograph it even before trying to identify it from our printed guide. In most instances, we were able to see the bird for only a few seconds before it disappeared into the brush. Remembering if it had a bi-colored bill, or if there was a wing bar, or some other subtle characteristic was difficult with an unfamiliar bird. However, with the camera, we were able to take pictures with enough quality to identify almost all of the birds we had seen. We estimate that had we not taken pictures, we might not have been able to add 30-40 species to our list. In some instances, by taking multiple pictures quickly we were able to make a composite of a bird that was making its way through a brushy area and from this composite were able to piece together a species. Taking pictures can also help not making a fool of yourself.



Author's Note: An example of how we were able to identify this bird. This is a really bad shot of a Chestnut-backed Antbird. In the predawn light we saw only a small dark shape moving through the brush. By increasing the ISO to a very high value I was able to capture the bird. It was only by looking at the picture and magnifying it on the camera's LCD screen that we noticed the blue around the eye. As the light was very poor, it was not seen through binoculars. This shot is only a very small portion of the entire picture taken.

Third, bringing young people into birding. With the almost universal access to either smart phones with really good cameras or with inexpensive cameras with amazing abilities, photography might be a good way to introduce new people to birding. No matter how poor the photo might be, it is still a thrill to immediately see an image you have captured. Realizing that it is not good enough yet, there is the tendency and desire to get a better one. Memory images through a binocular are good for those of us who have been birding a long time, but having an image you can take home is even better for those who are just beginning and for some of us older birders also.

Fourth, adding a bit of spark to your birding. For those who do not travel much seeing the same birds repeatedly may produce a bit of boredom with few new life birds coming by. Developing a collection of "new life camera birds" may add a new spark to your walks and get you out more frequently. A collection of pictures at your feeder or in your yard can add hours of enjoyment.

Getting Started

First, realize that there is really a limited chance that with an inexpensive camera and little experience that you will be on the cover of *National Geographic* or that you will make a living taking pictures of birds. There are an enormous number of professional photographers out there competing for these markets. Decide early on that the camera will be a tool to identify or for your own personal fun. There is a slight chance you might get lucky, and when you do, rejoice. But, don't count on it.

Second, in selecting a camera, be sure you are not confused by the advertising about how many X magnification the camera is or how many pixels an image will capture. If you already have a camera, take it with you the next time you go out and see how it works. If it is helpful, then you might consider upgrading.

Third, share your photos. There are numerous sites on the web for displaying what you have seen.

Also, look at these sites to see what others are doing and from these get some ideas how to compose your shots. For club members, the annual January show is a great way to share.

For me, I don't expect to ever make a shot that will be published. Just being able to add to my bird list is enough reason to carry a camera into the field. On occasion, however, I do get lucky and a good image results.

http://www.trails.com/guide_8432_review-bird-watching-digital-cameras.html

<http://www.bhphotovideo.com/insights/blogs/photography/birding-budget.html>

<http://www.all-birds.com/cameras.htm>

http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/bp/lenses/document_view

<http://www.naturalbornbirder.com/articles/superzoom.html>

Author's Note: The following is a discussion that was posted on the BIRDCHAT list. The first explains some confusing aspects of the magnification metrics that are used by camera manufacturers and explains what to look for when picking a camera with an advertised zoom lens. The second piece is more technical and compliments the first. Used with permission.

Joel Weintraub of Dana Point, CA writes:

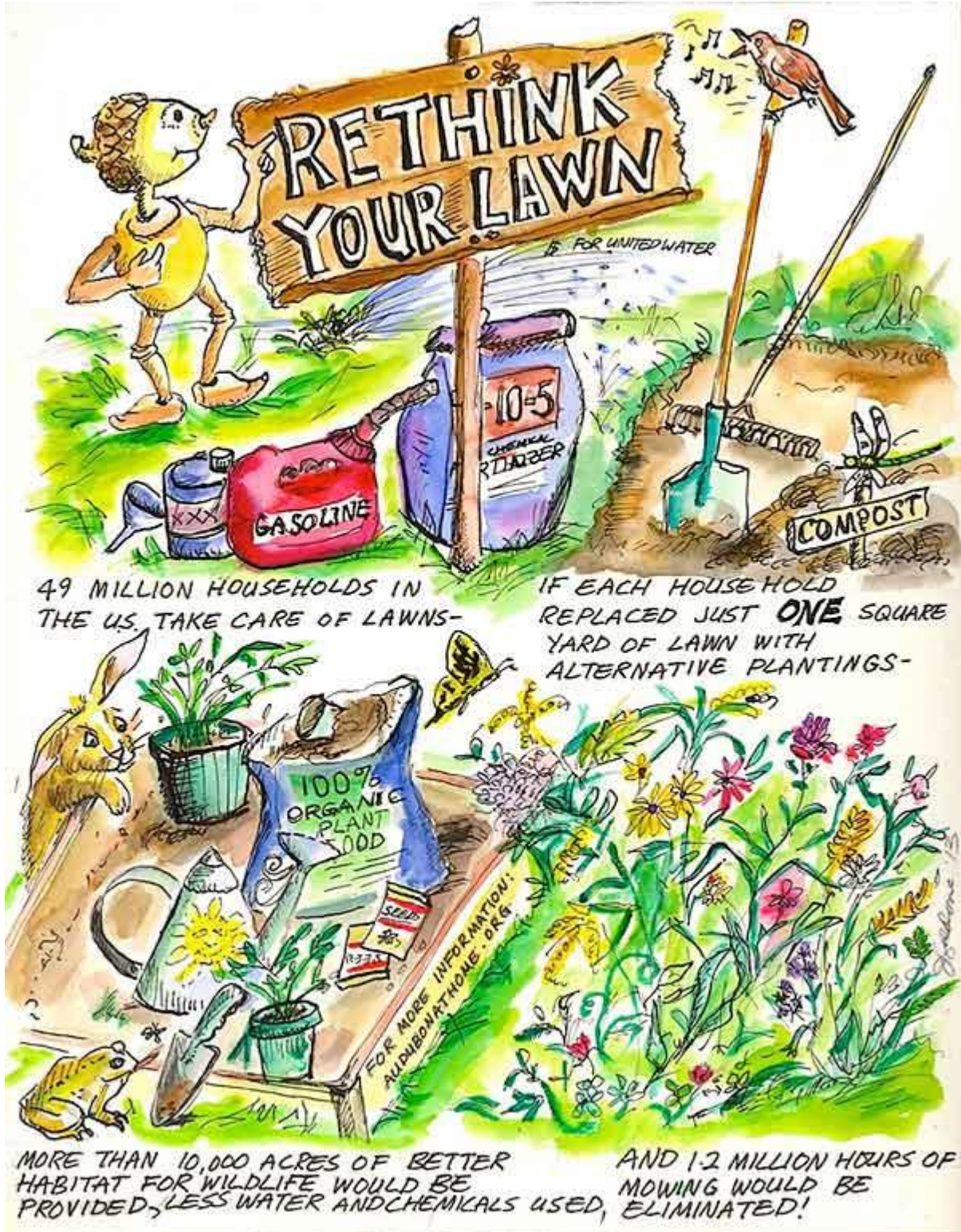
It's been my experience that zoom cameras, and we have been having a number of discussions on using such for birding, have false magnification figures, at least compared to magnification information on the binoculars and scopes we use. Let me explain. If I were to look at a scene through an empty tube, that's 1X or one power. If I bought a non-zoom lens for a SLR camera and wanted it to produce pictures that resembled what I see (e.g. 1X), I would get about a 50 mm focal length lens. Now, my 10X binoculars therefore, are equivalent to a 500 mm lens ($50 \times 10 = 500$). The object appears 10X bigger in my binoculars (compared to my naked eye) and the same is true for the 500 mm lens. So far, so good. But let's look at how the power is calculated, for example for my Olympus SP-590UZ "super-zoom" camera which I always have when I bird now. It says it goes up to 26X (optical image). OK, does that mean it is equivalent to $50 \times 26 = 1300$ mm focal length lens? If I look at the specifications however for the camera, it says the maximum focal length of the lens is 676 mm. 676 divided by 50 is 13.5X not 26X. What happened? Well, many (most? all?) zoom cameras have their own way of calculating magnification. They take the smallest focal length of the zoom lens (26 mm in my example which is about 1/2 X used for wide angle photos) and divides that into the longest focal length (676 mm) to get the magnification they advertise ($676/26 = 26X$). So if we are discussing zoom cameras for birding, the magnification shown on the camera might not be the best thing for our comparisons, but rather the highest focal length that the camera can obtain.

Jim Hully Mundelein, IL answers:

You need to be careful to separate the zoom range from the (true & apparent) focal length from the field of view. For example, using Joel's example, the Olympus SP-590UZ has a 26x zoom range. It starts at 4.6mm and zooms optically to 119.6mm. Those are the true focal lengths of that zoom. It is the size of the sensor that determines the field of view, apparent focal lengths, and image magnification. The sensor in that Olympus SP-590UZ is 1/2.33" (an ancient and confusing metric) which is the smallest of the popular sensor sizes. Compared to 35mm (which is the unofficial standard), the linear dimensions of the Olympus sensor are approximately 1/5.62 times smaller; and in terms of sensor area it is over 34 times smaller. Back to the lens that comes with the SP-590UZ, it has a focal length of 4.6mm, if that is multiplied by 5.62 you would get its apparent focal length (using a 35mm sensor) which gives you the 26mm stated for that camera. I hate the way manufacturers present this type of data - "bigger is better" but they forget to tell you that the sensor is tiny. Canon sells a camera with a native field of view equivalent to 1200mm (SX50 with a 50x zoom). You don't get this kind of magnification without paying a penalty - sensor size! Obviously a bigger sensor is better but the size of the equivalent optics gets big very quickly. More focal length is usually good but keep an eye on the lens aperture and the frame rate/buffer capacity if you are using compact superzoom with their tiny sensors. All too often, the images will look grainy with poor color or your camera locks up because of memory issues. I'm more impressed with the quality of the video that comes from these types of cameras (I have an old Panasonic FZ38) than the still images. If you can afford it take a look at the new Panasonic FZ150. Only reaches 600mm in apparent focal length but it has a fast lens and better memory management than most, making it in my opinion, the best compromise as a carry anywhere camera for documentation purposes.

Rethink Your Lawn

By Joanna Galdone, RAS Board Member



An Opinion: Water Conservation is a Worthy Project for Rockland County

By Vicki Beaumont, RAS Board Member

We all understand that water is vital to all life and that all living things are interconnected. So when we “fill” and pave over a wetland area and a species is hurt, that affects other species as well.

While we should be concerned with saving water, unfortunately, too many of us are not. For some, this stems from the illusion that resources are limitless. The fact is that in this part of the world, you can turn on the tap and find no shortage of water.

We pave and pave and cut down trees without any thought to consequences. We also build without limits, to the extent that even now, a huge aquifer is being threatened with development (Patrick Farm). Are we really this shortsighted or is this selfishness and self-interest?

United Water is now proposing a desalinization plant in Rockland County to meet the ever-increasing demand for water by our ever-burgeoning population. While there is much controversy over this, to their credit, they planted a nice xeriscape garden and invited us all to consider similar measures in our own yards. They also sell low water-usage showerheads and suggest that we only water our lawns and gardens in the early morning rather than midday, when much water is simply lost to evaporation. United Water recommends buying more efficient toilets that waste less water; using soaker hoses and other conservation measures.

While these are good suggestions, not everyone will comply. The efforts also do not go far enough – they are the *least* that we can do.

Last summer we had extremely high temperatures, but I never heard that we were prohibited from watering our lawns, as I believe we should have been. Consider for a moment the dilemma of the suburban lawn. It looks beautiful and has become an ideal for many of us. But it's my belief that we have been sold on this ideal by the manufactures of lawn products and lawn mowers.

Before the invention of the lawn mower, in fact, many minions would have been employed to cut grass by hand. Hence, only kings and queens would have such lawns. Many areas of the world were forested, except for a clearing for home and garden. Only the richest had lawns.

Because of the introduction of the lawn mower, lawns have become a cherished ideal. Toward that end, we began using fertilizers and weed killers – all of which filter into the underground water supply or wash off into our many storm drains. Either way, our water is polluted.

These pesticides eventually enter the digestive systems of birds, as was an issue some years ago with the Bald Eagle and DDT.

These perfect lawns are also monocultures – meaning a predominance of one plant species, such as grass. Therefore they support very little wildlife, unlike a more natural lawn, which is diverse in its plant species makeup. Some would call the dandelion, ajuga, clover, purslane and other plants “weeds,” but they in fact provide more sustenance for bees, bunnies and other creatures.

The perfect lawn can be expensive, not just in wasting the resource of water, but also wasting hard-earned dollars. The water, seed, fertilizer and pesticide needed for a high-maintenance lawn costs a lot of money – not to mention the expense of mowing and gasoline.

On the other hand, a lawn can be replaced by sedges, which need none of the above except for twice yearly mowing. Another way to replace the expensive lawn is with a meadow. Wildflowers are not only pretty, but they attract beneficial insects, like bees, as well as birds and butterflies.

In the Southwest, where drought has been a more obvious problem than in the Northeast, some cities have taken real measures to save water, with tremendous success. El Paso, Texas took drastic measures to prevent the real life crisis of a looming water shortage. They recognized that citizens had to change their mind-set about water and about lush green lawns. To do this, they first removed grass

from public spaces, installing rock and cactus gardens. They then offered residents financial incentives to do the same. Over a 20-year period, the city paid \$1 per square foot to those who removed their grass and replaced it with gravel or other alternatives. The city also instituted permanent restrictions on watering days. Despite last year's drought, El Paso's conservation efforts have paid off. They have not experienced shortages, while other communities are scrambling to find new water sources before their towns literally run dry.

Other cities are now attempting to duplicate El Paso's success. San Antonio began a similar conservation program in 2008, but so far only 360 residents have agreed to take part. Yet the utility company estimates that even this small number of homes has saved one-million gallons annually.

The new goal for many cities is to have homeowners replace their grass with xeriscape gardens, incorporating rock and gravel with plants acclimated to dry climates. Green lawns would be only an occasional, rather than a common sight. However, this will require a philosophical change in how we view our landscapes, as well as our perception that water is abundant and even limitless.

Recently there was an article in our local paper about how businesses and large homes irrigate lawns during hot, dry summers by using an average of 8,000 gallons a day for a one-acre lawn – enough to supply almost 30 homes for drinking and bathing. The author stated that the desalinization proposal should only be advanced “when all conservation alternatives have been thoroughly...considered.” I cannot agree more.

Further, there are some alternatives. According to a recent U.S. Geological study of Rockland's ground water, we are sending 14 billion gallons of water into the Hudson River each year. Not only should this number be greatly reduced through our own conservation efforts, there is potential to reuse some of this water. Other sustainable water strategies like limiting building and the resulting deforestation would also help. Our plants and trees not only clean the air for us, but they also help the soil retain water.

Apparently, our neighbors in New Jersey also have concerns about water quality. I have seen signs protesting plans to sell land near the reservoir in Oradell rather than leaving a natural watershed area – where no one would be applying fertilizers or pesticides that could runoff into the water supply.

We need to change our mindsets to one where we realize that a lawn is not only unnecessary and unnatural, but even a little bit selfish. Let's try to make real efforts to manage the water we have more sustainably.

President's Message

It is the last day of February as I write this. Migration has already been underway for weeks as short range migrants like Red-winged Blackbirds are already back in their breeding grounds.

In the coming weeks and months, birds that have spent the winter in the tropics of central and south America will join them. The population of many of these latter species has declined sharply in our lifetimes. There is much research, as well as speculation on the cause of these reduced numbers.

Clearly birds that travel annually between continents face many challenges. Deforestation of their wintering grounds, severe weather, indiscriminate use of pesticides, and fragmentation of their breeding grounds are just a few. Addressing many of these problems require cooperation on an international scale. National Audubon's Atlantic Flyways Initiative is one such effort.

On a local and very personal level, landowners can take steps to enhance the value of their property for wildlife and create an oasis not only for migrants passing through, but for resident birds as well. This issue of The Observer contains a couple of articles on how to do just that.

That such a natural refuge does wonders for our sense of well-being need not be explained to Auduboners.

Jim Previdi

Welcome New and Returning Members!

Jill Aloia, Frank Bassett, Carol Boldish, Daniel Brownstein, Dominick A. Capuano, Barbara Chen, Laiq Chouhan, William Draper, Thomas Englert, Robert A. Fliegel, C.M. Gardella, Patt Gaynor, Doris E. Goldberg, Meredith L. Golden, Kate Gorman, Robert & Beverly Houghton, Mike Jenkins, Henry Jodry, Gerald Franz Karnow, M. Lewis, Kevin Mahatcek, Mary Kay Meehan, Maria Minichiello, Elizabeth Nicholson, Rosemary Orr, Robert Ortman, Edythe J. Puff, Dominick Peluso, Rafael A. Rivera, Jeanette Rodriguez, Mary Root, Rita Sabatino, Lou Salamone, Eugene Schmidt, J.P. Schuerholz, Anna Semel, Sima D. Shain, Ann Stahl, Peter Taub, Elizabeth Thomas, Skylar Waldman, Barbara Weinberg, Eugene Wilson, Elizabeth Yim, Kirsten Young

Notes and Sightings:

December 2012 - February 2013

Compiled by Carol Weiss

December sightings were few - most of the news is associated with the Christmas Bird Count. But there are always good birds at the Pier and in one's backyard, which is Central Park for one of our younger members.

Dec. 23, 2012 – Drove out on Piermont Pier today at about 1:30pm. It was low tide, but not much going on. There were two small rafts of Canvasbacks, about 24 birds each. Also small numbers of Ruddy Ducks and Buffleheads. Jim Previdi

Dec. 26 – I have a few sightings I would like to share: I was at Rockland Lake last Saturday and saw three Rusty Blackbirds at the southwest corner of the lake just before the path runs parallel with Knickerbocker Road. They were hanging around the thickets and trees at the edge of the water. This past week at my feeder two Red-breasted Nuthatches have been visiting consistently - they especially love the suet! I have not seen Red-breasted Nuthatches in about a decade. I remember seeing them very often when I first began feeding birds, but after a few years they seemed to disappear entirely. And Cooper's Hawks have been very active in my backyard this week - at least one adult and one immature. Also, birding in Central Park this fall has been excellent! Some good sightings include Clay-colored Sparrows, a White-crowned Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, Winter Wrens, a Merlin (swooping down and grabbing a sparrow!), an American Kestrel, a Northern Waterthrush, Wood and Hermit Thrushes, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, and a sleeping Whip-poor-will! Through my dorm room window, I often get good looks at Peregrine Falcons which nest under the West Side Highway. Two weeks ago I was able to witness quite a spectacle: Two Peregrine Falcons repeatedly dive-bombing a Red-tailed Hawk that had apparently ventured too close to their nest! It was amazing to see two of the fastest members of the animal kingdom in action. The red-tail did manage to evade each attack with a last minute flick of its body, and narrowly escaped. Kevin Quill

Dec. 28 – I took a drive out on the Piermont pier. About halfway out on the south side of the roadway there was a group of Canvasback Ducks, 40-45 strong. I had heard other reports of people seeing them, but these were the first I have seen this season. Peter Johnson

January's weather brought in a number of good sightings, Snow Geese and Common Redpolls among them. Doris Metraux, however, had the best: a sub-species never before recorded in our county.

Jan. 5, 2013 – Tuxedo: Last week, after Tom and I were semi-convinced that the bears were in for the season, we gradually started putting out the feeders. We spotted one Common Redpoll at the thistle feeder late last week, so we decided to put out our other thistle feeders. A dozen redpolls visited them a few days ago, but today, there were over 50! There were so many we couldn't get an exact count. They were everywhere, on the feeders, preening in the trees, hopping along under the trees, and even eating snow off the shed roof! It was a spectacular sight! We are trying to pull a Hoary Redpoll from the flock but haven't managed to yet. Elyse Fulller

Note: On Jan. 7, several Auduboners who were counting birds for the annual winter census in Harriman State Park stopped by the Fullers' house and saw the redpolls.

Jan. 10 – Kevin Smith, a fisherman at Piermont Pier had a sighting of 200 Snow Geese. The birds landed on the south side of the Pier, stayed for about a half-hour, then flew away downriver.

Jan. 12 – Drew Ciganek had a first-time ever visitor at his feeder in Piermont: a Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Jan. 13 – Here is the newest guest at my bird diner. She's been here about a week and likes thistle seed. I wasn't sure what she was (Common Redpoll) until I saw the red marking on the top of her head. Caroline McDonald



Common Redpoll © Caroline McDonald

Jan. 19 – Two Snow Geese were among a flock of about 50 Canada Geese on the northern side of Piermont Pier, near the condos. Carol Weiss

Jan. 20 – At Lake Tappan Ray Wright counted four Bald Eagles near Convent Rd., and 15 along Blue Hill Rd.

Jan. 25 – I was puzzled by something bright white in one of my shrubs and had a frontal view of a White-winged Junco that clearly wanted seed, which I throw on the ground. Since I have no photo my description will have to do: He was quite a bit larger than his wintering cousins, had a snow-white belly, a bone-colored big bill, black lores and was otherwise pale gray with a light brown wash on his back. He also had two distinct wing bars on each side. He was by himself and seemed insecure. I have not seen him since. I am aware that this type of bird has been included with dark-eyed juncos. Doris Metraux

Note: The 1998 edition of Bull's Birds of New York indicates no New York records for this subspecies, the White-winged Junco. (Oregon and Pink-sided have been recorded from Rockland.) Also, Rising's (1996) Sparrows of the US and Canada gives no indication that they stray this far East. May be worth a query to other NY birders for possible sightings, but this seems to be a first record for Rockland County and New York State. Alan Wells

Jan. 28 – Checking on my back yard Monday morning, I noticed two Northern Cardinals and a House Finch on one sunflower feeder. All three were absolutely motionless. Aha – the Cooper's Hawk must be back. So I went to another window where I'd seen a Cooper's last week and saw a Peregrine Falcon sitting on a high branch in a neighbor's tulip tree. This was not the same perch the accipiter had used. The falcon was there for at least three hours. It returned on Feb 4. Carol Weiss

Jan. 29 – During yesterday's snow storm, in addition to the usual suspects, we had a couple of unusual visitors to our feeders. A Northern Mockingbird spent most of the morning gorging on suet. While we have several mockingbirds in the yard, we have not seen them at the suet before. Even more unexpected was the Brown Creeper, also feeding on the suet. It fed just long enough for us to snap a few photos and then it disappeared into the woods. Della and Alan Wells

Jan. 30 – 500 Ring-billed Gulls at Piermont Pier, a very high number. Carol Weiss

Even though February was snowy and cold, Rockland birders were out checking the local hotspots – and keeping their eyes on their feeders as well.

Feb. 2 – I have a male Hairy Woodpecker at the feeder, today and also yesterday. Hadn't seen him in awhile. Caroline McDonald

Feb. 5 – While sitting in my car at about 7:15am, waiting for the Haverstraw Ferry, a large bird flew to the river in front of me. I quickly spotted a white head and tail and realized I was watching a mature Bald Eagle on a fishing trip. Seconds later it glided low, scanning the water. The next thing I knew the eagle had a fish in its talons and flew right over my car, fish dangling! Across the Hudson on the Grand Central-bound train, I saw another Bald Eagle south of Ossining, which was flying over the river. Caroline McDonald

Feb. 5 – A screeching Killdeer flushed from a heated sidewalk on the Pfizer campus as snowflakes fell. I thought I'd mention it in case it's anywhere near the early arrival date for Rockland. Tom Fuller

Note: *Gene Brown found one on the end of the Pier, 1/15/02, our only January record. For December records, Killdeer have been seen on many Christmas Bird Counts.*

Feb. 9 – An Iceland Gull was on the north side of Piermont pier around 1:00pm. Gulls gather here at low tides. Evan Mark

Feb. 13 – At about 9am, on the north side of Rockland Lake between the inlets behind the Nature Center, a friend and I saw an unusual number of Great Blue Herons: a group of seven huddled on the ice and another eleven in the shrubbery on shore. Veronika Krause

Feb. 16 – I saw a Wood Thrush on our terrace just outside the door last week after the snow had been shoveled. I was thrilled to see this declining bird so close to the house. I suppose it was returning from its wintering grounds in Central America and looking for food. I do hope he found the berries remaining on some of the bushes. Stephanie Garber

Note: *From Bob Deed's book, "This thrush is another of the punctual spring arrivals and fall departers. Year after year it arrives on or about Apr. 26 and leaves around Oct. 12. Our earliest spring date is April 22, 1960 at West Nyack; our latest fall date is Nov. 4, 1957 at West Nyack."*

Feb 18 – Road walking in Harriman State Park today, the sky was a clear blue that seems only to come on really cold days. I first walked Rte.106 from the Kanawauke parking lot to the end of Little Long Lake and back. Two Dark-eyed Juncos, one Black-capped Chickadee, and a Pileated Woodpecker were all I could find. At Lake Tiorati I walked from the parking lot to the dam on Tiorati Brook Rd., where there were even fewer birds. I heard but one White-breasted Nuthatch. Back at the car I had a thermos of tea waiting. I made a fire in one of the grates and sat watching a Tufted Titmouse try to pull apart a quarter of a bagel I had tossed on the ground. The bread was as big as he was, but he went at it with the heart of a hawk. Peter Johnson

Feb. 19 – Red-winged Blackbirds returned to the marsh at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, and a group of three American Robins stopped for a visit. Linda Pistolesi

Feb. 20 – I drove to the end of the Pier this afternoon and was delighted to see four Lesser Scaup. Two days ago there were four Common Goldeneyes. Earlier in the month I found a single Ring-necked Duck in with the Canvasbacks. Carol Weiss

Feb. 25 – There have been many mentions of Red-breasted Nuthatch at feeders this winter. One day in November I was delighted to see two sitting on the edge of my heated birdbath. Then for weeks I saw only one. Today as I was confirming a behavior – that the Red-breasted Nuthatch waited until other birds had flown off before it flew down to snatch a sunflower seed – I realized there was a pair. First one and then the other flew down to the feeder to choose a seed. The first bird was more brightly colored than the second. Carol Weiss

Feb. 26 – Peter Johnson reported seeing returning American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck and Gadwall at Rockland Lake.

Please send your sightings and observations to Carol Weiss at cweiss1124@optonline.net . The spring period includes March, April and May and will be reported in the next issue of The Observer.

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 contribute a sweet or savory treat for the refreshments table, please add your name to the sign-up sheet at the meeting!

May 10, 2013 *SECOND FRIDAY*****

Special 65th Anniversary Celebration

Join Us at 6:45pm for Delectable Appetizers and Comraderie!

"Birds of Ecuador" Program at 7:30pm



Red-winged Wood Rail © Rudy Gelis

Speaker: Rudy Gelis

Researcher, naturalist, and trip leader, Rudy Gelis, who lives in Ecuador, will discuss the amazing birds and conservation measures being taken in Ecuador. He will also highlight Christmas Bird Counts, private- and community-owned Protected Areas, and a Bird Nest Monitoring Project.

June 7, 2013

Snowbirds!



Brown Pelican © Alan W. Wells

Speaker: Alan Wells, RAS Webmaster

Each winter countless birds migrate to warmer climes. Similarly, each winter countless humans also migrate to warmer climes. Follow Della and Alan in their attempt to jumpstart spring by migrating to Florida for the winter. Experience the wildlife of the coastal strand, estuaries, mangrove swamps, pine flatwoods, and much more. The diversity of wildlife living amongst the human residents is truly astonishing!

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 <http://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!

MAY 3 (Fri)—Weekday Walk at Ironwood Drive (Audubon in the Parks)

Meet Elyse Fuller at 9am at the cul-de-sac at the end of Ironwood Dr. in Tuxedo. This section of Sterling Forest State Park can be good for spotting Golden-winged Warblers, Indigo Buntings, Prairie Warblers and other shrub land species. Over by 11am. 845-351-2893

MAY 5 (Sun)—First Sunday Walk in Kennedy Dells County Park

Meet Carol Weiss at 8am in the Kennedy Dells parking lot, North Main Street, New City. Stroll through the park on graveled paths, looking for resident and migrating bird species. Trip runs 2 to 2.5 hours. Call the trip leader for directions. 845-358-3659

MAY 12 (Sun) — Birding the Stony Point Battlefield (Audubon in the Parks)

Co-sponsored with 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 a spring stroll through this historic site on the Hudson River. 845-942-5751 or Park Phone 845-786-2521

MAY 25-27 (Sat-Mon)—Birding Delaware, Memorial Day Weekend

Three-day Trip. Call Alan and Della Wells for details. 845-942-5751

JUNE 1 (Sat)—Galeville Airport During Nesting Season

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

JUNE 2 (Sun)—First Sunday Walk at Kennedy-Dells Park

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

JUNE 6 (Thu)—Evening Bluebird Walk at Kennedy Dells

Meet Tom Fuller at 6pm at the far lot closest to the trails. Wear long pants as there may be a chance to peek inside nest boxes. Over by 8pm. 845-351-2893

JUNE 9 (Sun)—Doodletown for Beginners (Audubon in the Parks)

Meet Della and Alan Wells at 8am at the pull-off on Route 9W, south of Bear Mountain, just north of the Iona Island causeway. Practice bird ID and binocular use. Some uphill walking. 845-942-5751

JUNE 16 (Sun)—Dragons & Damsels of Rockland (Audubon in the Parks)

Meet Alan and Della Wells at 9am at the Commuter Parking Lot, Route 9W in Stony Point (just south of Hogan's Diner) for carpooling. Learn to ID common dragonflies and damselflies at Lily Pond in Harriman State Park. Bring water, snack, binoculars (preferably close focus); camera optional. Call if rainy or overcast. 845-942-5751

JULY 7 (Sun)—First Sunday Walk, Kennedy Dells County Park

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

AUG. 4 (Sun)—First Sunday Walk, Kennedy Dells County Park

Meet Carol Weiss at 8am in the Kennedy Dells parking lot, North Main Street, New City. Stroll through the park on graveled paths, looking for resident and migrating bird species. Trip runs 2 to 2.5 hours. Call the trip leader for directions. 845-358-3659

AUG. 11 (Sun)—Birds and Cameras at Jamaica Bay

Meet Alan and Della Wells at 7:30am at the Commuter Parking Lot, Route 303 North in West Nyack for carpooling to this birding hot spot. Alan's group will photograph shorebirds and Della's group will not. Full day trip. 845-942-5751

Special Events

Audubon's Aviary: Part 1 of The Complete Flock - Mar. 9 to May 19, 2012

New-York Historical Society, 170 Central Park West @ 77th Street

Visit <http://www.nyhistory.org/exhibitions/audubons-aviary> for more information
(admission charged)

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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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*.

The Observer

Editing	Caroline McDonald
Layout	Della Wells
Copyediting	Alan Wells Della Wells

Newsletter submissions welcome!

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

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