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## Observations of the Clausland Mountain Fire

By Peter Johnson, RAS Board Member

The wildfire that was quickly consuming Clausland Mountain was first reported about 1:15 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 14. When I came out of the Northvale, N.J. Shoprite at 2:00 p.m., I immediately saw the smoke rising from two miles away.

It seems to have started in an area known to locals as TZ Rock. This is a large outcropping at the base of Clausland. The rock is renowned as each year it is painted red and white, with the year of the graduating class from Tappan Zee high School, which sits on the ridge to the west.

The fire quickly worked its way, not only towards the top, but north along Greenbush Rd. Along this stretch of road there are at least a dozen homes and there was much concern for the well-being of the residents.

What made matters worse was that the woods were very dry from the lack of rain that had gone on for months. On the forest floor, besides all the leaves from the fall, were hundreds of trees blown down from Sandy and Irene the previous year. The firemen did a heroic job over the course of that day and the next and by early Saturday the fire was somewhat under control. There were still a number of hot spots, but the safety of life and property seemed assured.

My thoughts now turned to the welfare of the birds and wildlife that call Clausland Mt. home. I have hiked these woods since my teens and know them fairly well. My first trip into the forest after the fire was on Tuesday afternoon, Nov. 19. I entered from Tackamack Park off Clausland Mt. Road and headed south on the Long Path.

Outside the burn area squirrels were chattering and blue jays were jabbering away, but once I crossed the burn line there was a strange stillness. No bird songs, no squirrels. As I worked my way deeper into the woods, the ground was scorched and leaf-free.

The next thing I noticed was the randomness of the burn. Looking closer, I saw that the established, healthy trees seemed to be fine, with some only singed at the base. Trees that had been toppled or appeared to be unhealthy were charred. During that entire walk I heard but one Black-capped Chickadee and saw only one Turkey Vulture flying overhead.

This side of the mountain is very steep and rocky and it is hard to walk there under the best of conditions. Beneath the dry leaves that covered the ground was a compost-like substance, about four to six inches thick and built up over many years. This can and does burn, and it holds heat. There were a number of hot spots that seemed ready to flair up because of a steady breeze blowing out of the west. It was evident that a good, soaking rain was needed to finish off this fire.

It took 150 local firefighters, with the help of companies from Westchester, Orange counties and New Jersey to put out the fire. Helicopters also dropped water from Lake Tappan. All of this must have been hot and thirsty work for firefighters, as the ground was littered afterwards with dozens of empty water and Gatorade bottles. Because they could not have been expected to clean up while fighting a fire, I decided to make a project of picking up the empties.

To my amazement, two days later when I returned with the purpose of picking up the empty bottles, the woods were alive as if nothing had occurred at all. Where previously there was silence, today there were birds singing, white-tail deer browsing and chipmunks running about. I saw five species of woodpeckers, a White-breasted Nuthatch, Tufted Titmice, Black-capped Chickadees and American Robins. The thrill of the trip, however, was around dusk when I heard the hoot of a Great Horned owl. I quietly followed the call and was able to locate the owl about 200 yards from where I first heard him. He flew away as I got closer, but he had been in a tree maybe 30 feet up, where all the undergrowth was burned away.

Since then I have returned a half-dozen more times, twice bringing friends to show them, and also to note the progress. Everyone remarked on the randomness of what did and did not burn and one friend noted that some of the burned out tree stumps resembled cigar butts.

Observing first-hand the effects of the fire—that burned so hot and heavy and so close to home—has been like a science project. I will continue to return and next spring I expect to see these woods lush with vegetation, birds and other animals.



After the fire on Clausland Mountain © Peter Johnson

# Our 67th Christmas Bird Count Results

By Alan Wells, RAS CBC Compiler & Webmaster

Thanks to all of our field counters and feeder watchers who braved the snowy conditions on Sunday, Dec. 15, 2013 to complete Rockland Audubon Society's 67th Christmas Bird Count!

**Field Observers** (31 adults, 1 fledgling, a.k.a. 18 or younger.): District 1: Alan Wells, Della Wells, Julia Warger (part time); District 2: Gene Herskovics; District 3: Frank Kemmer, Caroline McDonald, Joyce Greenwald; District 4: Joanna Galdone, (+Alan Wells, Della Wells, and Susan Freiman part time); District 5: Susan Freiman, Karen D'Alessandri, Pat Murray, Peter Johnson, Zenon Bachir; District 6: Stephanie Garber, Michael Garber, Veronika Krause, John Woods, Walter Aurell, Suzanne Barclay; District 7: Carol Weiss, Ken McNichol, Bernie Doyle, Simon Streatfeild; District 8: Jim Previdi, Dan Albantides, Gene Brown, Ron Conzo; District 9: Vince Plogar, Tom Dow, Chris Healy, Drew Ciganek, Karl Knocklein

**Feeder Counters** (10 Locations): Karen D'Alessandri, Vicki Beaumont, Jane Lampkin, Doris Metraux, Caroline McDonald, Donna Nye, Laurence Pringle, John Tyler, Carol Weiss, Philip Yacuk

**Coverage:** 277 miles traveled by car, 42.5 miles traveled by foot; 50 hours on foot and 30 hours by car.

**Weather:** Temperatures ranged from 28 to 38 °F with Dew Point temperatures ranging from approximately 24 to 30 °F. Peak wind gusts averaged approximately 10 mph from the NW in the morning and increasing to 22 mph from the W in the afternoon. Approximately four to six inches of snow covered the ground and most ponds were 90-95% ice covered. The Hudson River was nearly ice free. Some count areas were inaccessible due to the snow from the previous day.

**Results:** The 67th Rockland County Christmas Bird Count was held Sunday, Dec. 15, 2013. Thirty-two field counters and 10 feeder counters tallied 14,572 individuals representing 81 species. Four additional species-- Snowy Owl, Horned Lark, Cedar Waxwing, and Chipping Sparrow--were found during Count Week. The number of species is about average for the post-1978 period (when count areas were standardized), but slightly below average for the past 10 years. The number of individuals counted is well below the median count for both periods (post-1978 = 25,820; post-2003 = 20,367). The top five species— Canada Goose (4,401), Common Merganser (1,452), European Starling (1,346), American Robin (1,089), and Dark-eyed Junco (880)—made up 63% of the total number observed.

## Some Highlights:

### **Increases**

**Canada Goose** – 2013 was the highest recorded count, 4,398 in the field was 39 higher than the previous high of 4,359 observed in 1998.

**Hooded Merganser** – the 2013 count of 147 surpassed the previous high of 130 in 2001.

### **Decreases**

**American Crow** – The 194 counted in 2013 is a new record low since 1970 and the fifth lowest since 1947. The 2013 count represents a 94% decline from the average 1947-2012 count of 3,484.

**European Starling** – Despite being the third highest species count of the 2013 CBC, the 1,346 individuals tallied represents a 72% decline from the average 1947-2012 count of 4,774.

**Canvasback** – The 221 counted is an improvement over the 18 counted in 2011 and 16 counted in 2012. Still, the count is well below average, representing a 57% decline from the 1947-2012 average of 513.

**Common Grackle** – The 158 birds counted in 2013 was an improvement over the 40 seen in 2012, but still represents a 55% decline over the 1947-2012 average of 355. The large roosting flocks typically found in Piermont Marsh were again not evident.

**Rock Pigeon** – The 164 seen in 2013 is a 53% decrease from the average 351 seen from 1947 through 2012.

**Mourning Dove** – The 147 seen in 2013 is up slightly from the 123 seen in 2012. The 2013 count represents a 45% decline from the 1947-2012 average of 258.

## Misses

**American Kestrel** – seen in 54 of 67 years; none in 2013. Rare since 1990.

**Field Sparrow** – seen in 55 of 67 years; none in 2013.

**Fox Sparrow** – seen in 57 of 65 years; none in 2013.

**Purple Finch** – seen in 58 of 67 years; none in 2013.

## Other Counts of Note

**Snowy Owl** – A single Snowy Owl was reported on the New York State Birds list server. This species has been counted on the RAS CBC only one other time, a single individual during 1971. The 2013 bird was originally reported by Sean Camillieri. The following email exchanges detail the circumstances: From Sean Camillieri on Dec. 12, 2013: *There is a Snowy Owl currently perched on an empty gravel barge in the middle of the Tappan Zee Bridge Construction Site. The barge is on the North side of the bridge in the middle of the river, just west of the channel.* From Sean Camillieri on Dec. 18, 2013: *Not sure if it's the same bird as last week but there is one perched on a floating pier just south of Petersons Boat Yard in Nyack. Scope required.* In response to my inquiry as to the location, from Sean Camillieri on Dec. 18, 2013: *Alan, TODAY'S Snowy Owl is 100% on the Rockland side. It was on a small floating pier not far from shore. The only landmark would be an apartment complex south of Petersons Boat Yard. Last week's owl was out on a barge in the middle of the river so that would make it a Westchester bird.*

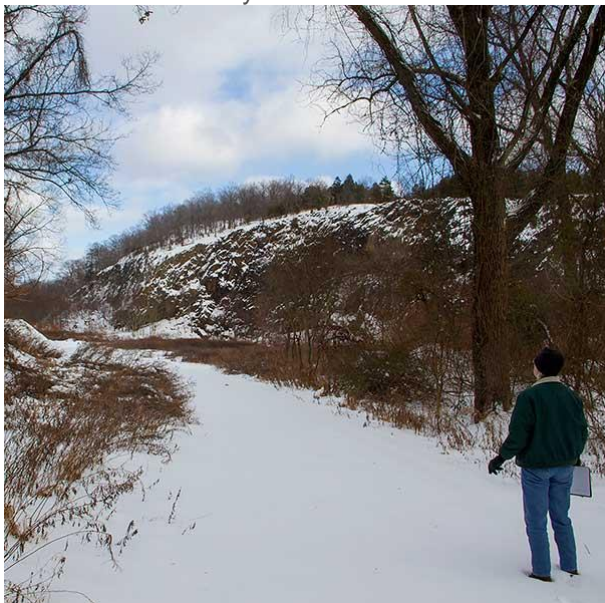
**Red-headed Woodpecker** – A single juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker was seen in the backyard of a private residence along the shoreline of Lake DeForest (District 4). This species has been recorded on only three other Rockland CBC counts since 1947 (1956, 1979, and 1994).

**Northern Pintail** – A single bird was seen at the north end of Rockland Lake (District 8) in 2013. Since 1947, a total of 11 Northern Pintail have been seen during the six years they have occurred.

**Black Vulture** – In 2013 Black Vulture was once again reported. The species first occurred on the 1995 count but was not seen consistently until 2005. The count of 53 individuals this year is typical of post-2005 counts.

**Common Raven** – The Common Raven count of 12 was the second highest Rockland count since the species first made its appearance in 1998. It has been seen every year since that count.

**Bald Eagle** – The 2013 count of 21 (15 juveniles and 6 adults) was short of the record count of 44 individuals (18 juveniles and 26 adults) in 2012, but was still impressive. Bald Eagle occurred on the CBC regularly but in small numbers up until the about the mid-1960s. After that time, they were almost entirely absent. They began to recur in small, but more or less regular, numbers after the mid-1990s. After about 2003 their numbers began to increase dramatically.



Della Wells in Gurnee County Park during RAS CBC © Alan W. Wells

For more information on this and previous CBCs, please visit the "Christmas Bird Count" page on RAS website!

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# My 65th Christmas Bird Count

By Gene Brown, RAS Member, Nyack, N.Y.

It was my 65th RAS Christmas Bird Count, Sunday Dec. 15, 2013, as I started along North Broadway, Upper Nyack in a white, snowy landscape. Over the years I have missed only two counts. Nearing the base of Hook Mountain, I suddenly heard an awesome musical trumpeting from overhead. A single Snow Goose made two complete circles before sailing away, trumpeting continuously as if to call a flock from which it had become separated.

My very first Christmas Count was with Bob Deed known as the “Dean of Rockland County Birders,” who took me, well before dawn, to Rockland Landing. There he hoped to hear a Barred Owl or a Great Horned Owl along the quarried cliffs. It was very dark and no owls sounded, however.

At one count, I began at 6:00 a.m., intent on seeing an owl (could I see it in the darkness?). A quarter-mile from home I looked intently into the pines lining the sidewalk. There in the dim light of a distant street lamp, an Eastern Screech-Owl posed nicely while being checked as first on my list.

Then there was the count day when I trudged through an old wooded estate to reach the Hudson. Just as I arrived at the river a strange-looking duck paddled past, quite close. Later, a sketch was drawn and given to Bob Deed. Bob, in turn, sent my sketch to Dr. Nichols at the Natural History Museum, where the bird was quickly identified as a winter-plumage female Oldsquaw (now called Long-tailed Duck).

In the early days of RAS, the Northern Mockingbird was just becoming known in the area. One of its first stations was near the entrance to Nyack Beach State Park and it has haunted the area ever since! On one count I checked a plot of shrubbery where those first “mockers” often hid. My exploration into the thicket disturbed not a Mockingbird, but a Brown Thrasher, rare in the winter, who stared at me with beady eyes.

Most of Dec. 31, 1950, was spent compiling the RAS Bird Count. My mother’s diary notes: “At 1:30 a.m., Gene was in communication over the phone with the Herald Tribune reporter...”

So it goes; may it long continue!

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# Wind Policy Jeopardizes Bald and Golden Eagles

Audubon has stated that it supports strong federal protection for the Bald Eagle and the Golden Eagle under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. A December 2013 rule by the U.S. Department of the Interior, however, would weaken protections for eagles by making it possible for wind energy companies to acquire 30-year permits to kill and injure eagles.

Presently wind companies must obtain a five-year permit, which can require them to take steps to conserve eagles. But in moving to 30-year permits, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has not approved a single advanced conservation practice (ACP) that is scientifically defensible, so permits cannot be written now with scientifically sound practices for reducing eagle mortalities. Furthermore, the agency also has made clear that it does not have the resources to monitor these permits adequately.

Audubon said that while it strongly supports properly sited wind energy, this new Interior Department rule fails to provide the protection eagles need. You can read the full rule at this link: [http://www.ofr.gov/OFRUpload/OFRData/2013-29088\\_PI.pdf](http://www.ofr.gov/OFRUpload/OFRData/2013-29088_PI.pdf).

To help, send a message to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell online through the [Audubon Action Center](#) or by mail to Secretary Sally Jewell, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW, Washington DC 20240.



Bald Eagle © Alan W. Wells

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## President's Message

The holidays have just passed and they were for me, as I suspect they were for most people, a time for reminiscing. People, places and times are all parts of a treasure trove of memories that each of us hold dear. One of the things we do best at Rockland Audubon, I think, is to create fond memories.

In visiting the many places we've been going to for years, I find myself recalling the wonders I have seen. Often the memories are very specific. In Doodletown is a split in a certain Tulip Tree that held the first Screech Owl I found on my own. It might be a particular snag that housed a Pileated Woodpecker nest or a patch of Mountain Laurel where I once flushed a Ruffed Grouse. I check all of the various spots every time I go past them, but more often than not the experience is not repeated. That's the way memories are, a bookmark of a place in time. They warm the heart, but so does the knowledge that there are more to be made.

Jim Previdi

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## Welcome New and Returning Members!

Barbara Ballard, Eleanor Battaglia, Nancy Bolan, Marianne Burkhardt, Dominic Butler, Jack Caulk, Linda A. Chisholm, Annmarie Dagati, Jocelyne Daniel, Helen Dean-Marino, Gerard Gribbon, William G. Gonyea, Jennifer Hirsch, Barbara Howell, Peter Ianniello, Stephanie Katz, Marguerite Konz, Tint Kyu, Madeline Quinn, Malcome Alexander Viner, Vivian Walker, C.P. Whittingham

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## Notes and Sightings: September – November 2013

Compiled by Carol Weiss

Here is the latest compilation of unusual bird sightings in Rockland County. Fall sightings came in from hawk watches and field trips, as well as RAS members out on their own or with others. Please send your sightings for December 2013 and January and February 2014 to [cweiss1124@optonline.net](mailto:cweiss1124@optonline.net) or call at 845-358-3659.

**Sept. 3:** Hook Mountain: A remarkable—and remarkably vast—aggregation of Chimney Swifts appeared soon after I arrived for the hawk watch this morning. They appeared en masse from the east and the sky was full of them, high and low. They looked like a cloud of gnats. Insects must have been plentiful because they fed extensively over the summit and the southern drop-off before moving off to the west. The initial wave of swifts

tapered off gradually over a period of about 15 minutes. Counting was difficult, but I estimated 1,500 birds, which may be low. There were two barn swallows with the swifts. Two Merlins flew over 25 minutes later. I watched them from the horizon over Hemlock Hill all the way past the black monolith office tower to the southwest. The two were dog-fighting all over the sky and gamboling in tight formation for the entire transit. I don't believe they even noticed the decoy owl on the mountaintop. These were very vocal birds which I could hear from quite a distance, continually braying and chirping at each other. John Phillips

**Sept. 8:** Two Blackburnian Warblers were in my elm tree this morning. Beverly Simone, West Nyack

**Sept. 14:** On the Stony Point Battlefield trip, RAS members spotted three Scarlet Tanagers. An adult Bald Eagle flew around and around until everyone had a chance to spot it.

**Sept. 15:** At Tallman Mt. State Park, 11 RAS members counted 40 species in three hours. Highlights were seven Great blue Herons, two Snowy Egrets, two Northern Harriers, five warbler species including Blackburnian, Black-throated Green, Common Yellowthroat, Black-and-white, Magnolia, and five or six Red-eyed Vireos.

**Sept. 17:** Rockland Lake State Park. Remember the active Eastern Bluebird nest that Drew Ciganek found in a stump a few years ago? The stump was subsequently removed. Today in the same area, the underbrush is being noisily eliminated. The intent seems to be the creation of a tidy, well-groomed landscape of shapely trees and manicured, ever-expanding lawns, eliminating all shrubs, vines, wildflowers and ground cover. Where have all the towhees gone? Gene Brown

**Sept. 22:** The Hooded Warbler may be fairly common in Rockland County, but I had never before seen one in my birdbath. A brilliant male alternately drank and splashed for several minutes. Since the hooded male is not one of those "confusing fall warblers," this one was showing his vividly contrasting yellow and black plumage and flashing his white tail patches. Gene Brown, Upper Nyack

**Sept. 27:** This morning I saw what I thought was a warbler in the Pyracantha, but realized that with its black wings, it was a Scarlet Tanager—sans the scarlet! Beverly Simone

**Sept. 28:** A morning walk at Tallman Mt. State Park was lovely until I walked up to the Sawmill (formerly North) Picnic area. I lifted my binoculars expecting to see another Red-bellied Woodpecker at the top of a high dead tree and, wow, it was a Red-headed Woodpecker! It flew towards me and landed on another dead branch so I could have a closer look and then flew away to the south. A brief but satisfying sighting! Carol Weiss

Other Red-headed Woodpecker sightings were from Hook Mt.: On Sept. 19 A single bird flying north and Sept. 22, an adult Red-headed Woodpecker came in from the west, which maybe had spent the night down on the trail! The bird flew up to check out the plastic owl, passing it towards the east, then turned south and west towards Montclair. RAS members arrived in time to see it.

**Oct. 8:** Tallman Mt. State Park. This was a first for me: Hundreds of Common Grackles were eating pin oak acorns in a tree near the playing field. What a racket they made! Carol Weiss

**Oct. 13:** A Red-throated Loon flew over Doodletown, one of 35 species seen by a small group of RAS members.

**Mid October:** Pat Lutter and I saw two Eastern Bluebirds on the walk down Piermont Pier and another one on the way back. Joan Totton

**Oct. 24:** Piermont Pier, 6:30 p.m. While I walked back along the pier road, a bird landed near the grassy shoulder 10 yards in front of me. I could just make out the silhouette through my binoculars: low to the ground with a very long bill. A woodcock? As I approached it took off with a twitter and landed a bit further down the road. Each time I approached it took flight with the same twitter. I hated to disturb it but I was heading towards the parking lot. Eventually it took off for good. Linda Pistolessi

**Nov. 7:** This morning, a Hermit Thrush was splashing about in the bird bath. Beverly Simone

**Nov. 15:** Peter Johnson, Dan Albantides, Zenon Bachir and I took a walk at Kennedy Dells County Park where we saw the Barred Owl and a Pileated Woodpecker. Ron Conzo



Pileated Woodpecker © Alan W. Wells

**Nov. 17:** I took two walks today in the fog and mist. Near the Rockland Lake north swimming pool, 13 Wild Turkeys walked in front of me—11 in a hurry and two taking their time. I also counted eight Pied-billed Grebes as I walked around the lake. In the afternoon, I walked Piermont Pier, which was really soupy. There were a number of Dunlin in the rocks on the north side and when they flew up and around, I counted 13. On the ball field, a single Palm Warbler was joined by a Yellow-rumped Warbler. Carol Weiss

**Nov. 19:** Memorable day at the Hook Mt. Hawk Watch. John Phillips and I counted a number of migrating Red-tailed Hawks, an adult Bald Eagle, and a Cooper's Hawk. About mid-morning we observed a five-minute dogfight between a Common Raven and a Peregrine Falcon. After minutes of twisting and tumbling, the peregrine stooped on the raven, which eventually broke off the engagement. Then a second peregrine joined in. We did not believe these falcons to be migrating. At noon a large dark bird appeared out of the valley between Hook Mt. and Hemlock Hill. I knew immediately it was something notable and half a second later I called out "Golden Eagle." We looked down on the bird as it passed in front of Rockland Lake. The gold on the nape of this particular bird seemed more extensive than usual. In the perfect light it looked, in John's words, as if it was splashed with honey. The eagle had strong white at the base of the tail. The patches of white by the primaries were less distinct than usual for a young bird. Uniformity in the brown portions of the bird (all the feathers are the same age) marked this one as a probable first-year Golden Eagle according to "A Photographic Guide to North American Raptors." Jim Previdi

**Nov. 19:** Clausland Mt., Orangeburg, N.Y. I took a hike around and over the western shoulder of the mountain just south of Clausland Mt. Rd., to see what effect the fire had on the woods and wildlife. I was surprised to find quite a few "hot spots" that were about to flame up again because there was a good breeze blowing out of the west/northwest. In the trees outside of the burn line there were many squirrels chattering and several Blue Jays jabbering away. I heard one Northern Flicker. The only birds I saw were a Black-capped Chickadee and a Turkey Vulture flying overhead. In the burn area, healthy older trees looked fine, as if only the dead and/or sick trees had burned. The ground was cleared of the leaf litter but underneath was not really dirt but compost four to six inches deep, which can and will burn. To my way of thinking only a good, soaking rain will put that out completely. Peter Johnson



**Nov. 19:** Four Northern Mockingbirds dive-bombed a Red-tailed Hawk in Kennedy Dells County Park. The hawk was perched on a branch overhanging the edge of a field and remained fixated upon whatever it was watching on the ground. Though the bombardment persisted for several minutes, the hawk never appeared to notice. Who gave up first? Me. Pat Murray

**Nov. 21:** I went back this afternoon to the spot of the fire, planning to clean up the dozens of water and Gatorade bottles littering the ground. Even the youngest firefighter that worked this fire will be dead and gone before these empty plastic bottles decompose. The woods that just a few days ago were engulfed in flames were now alive and well. While there are still "hot spots," the number of birds and other animals that could be heard and seen was impressive. I saw five white-tailed deer, gray squirrels—too many to count and woodpeckers aplenty; Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied and three Pileated in the woods where the ground was burned. There were Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees and White-breasted Nuthatches. A Great Horned Owl gave me the biggest thrill. Peter Johnson

**Nov. 24:** I took a walk on Piermont Pier at 7:30 this morning. It was a cold 23 degrees, with a 10-20 mph steady wind and gusts up to 40 mph. I had the pier entirely to myself with not a single dog-walker to be found. The mud flats were void of any bird life despite the very low tide. I found a pair of Snow Buntings right on the path, however. They were very tame and were feeding just a few yards from me. Zenon Bachir

**Nov. 25:** Hook Mt. There were only a half-dozen hawks today, but we had good looks at many Eastern Bluebirds. The largest flock contained 18, but other groups had six, seven, eight and 16 bluebirds. We assumed we were watching the same birds returning to the same trees to feed. One juniper was loaded with bright blue berries. Carol Weiss, Ron Conzo, Ken McNichol, Bernie Doyle and Peter Johnson

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# 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**, 6 Gilcrest Road, Congers, N.Y., 10920. Meet at 7pm 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 contribute a sweet or savory treat for the refreshments table, please add your name to the sign-up sheet at the meeting!

**Jan. 3, 2014 (cancelled...reschedule date TBD)**

## **Bald Eagles: A New Dynamic**

**Consequences of Population Recovery in the Chesapeake Bay**



Bald Eagle pair © Alan W. Wells

### **Speaker: Courtney Turrin**

Since the 1972 ban on DDT and other organochlorine pesticides, the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) population in the lower Chesapeake Bay has been growing at an exponential rate. As the population approaches estimated carrying capacity, competition among bald eagles for food, mates, and nesting territory is increasing. This research focuses on examining behaviors associated with territorial interactions among Bald Eagles and quantifying pressure on breeding pairs. The effect of territorial interactions on reproductive success may contribute to the stabilization of population size as bald eagles approach saturation in the lower Chesapeake Bay.

After graduating from Bucknell University in 2011, Courtney Turrin interned at the Acopian Center for Conservation Learning at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, where she conducted research on dispersal behavior in American kestrels and co-authored an educational book, titled *Kestrels of the World*. Courtney went on to earn her Masters degree from the College of William and Mary, where she worked with Dr. Bryan Watts and the Center for Conservation Biology. The program she will present is part of her Masters research on population dynamics and behavioral interactions among Bald Eagles

## **Feb. 7, 2014**

### **Plant It and They Will Come: Creating the Bird-friendly Garden**



Pine Grosbeak in Crabapple Tree © Alan W. Wells

#### **Speaker: Kim Eierman**

Are Cedar Waxwings passing you by? No Eastern Towhees stopping in your yard? You can do a lot in your own landscape to help our many declining bird species. Learn how to attract and support our native birds and neo-tropical migrants with ecological design and proper plant selection. Kim Eierman, Founder of EcoBeneficial!, will share helpful tips on successful bird-friendly gardening and some of the best choices of native plants.

## **Mar. 7, 2014**

### **Central Park Birds Through the Seasons**



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher © Deborah Allen

#### **Speaker: Deborah Allen**

Central Park's reputation as one of the top birding hotspots in the country is well deserved, with the spring and fall seasons bringing a flood of migrant songbirds. In summer the park's 860 acres have hosted more than 34 species of nesting birds in recent years, including Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, and Peregrine Falcons nesting on buildings nearby. Winter visitors include a nice assortment of waterfowl and passerines. Deborah Allen, a freelance photo journalist specializing in birds, will present a photographic tour of Central Park which will include tips on finding birds in the Ramble and North Woods.

## Apr. 4, 2014

# Raptor Migration in Nepal



Steppe Eagle (juvenile) © Robert DeCandido

### Speaker: Robert DeCandido

Robert DeCandido has been conducting raptor migration research in Nepal since 1999. In his presentation, he will show remarkable photos captured at his watch site located at a 6,000 foot elevation, where 35 raptor species pass in the annual migration of 13,000 birds. He will discuss what is known about the migration such as where the raptors breed, where they spend the winter and what his years of raptor population studies have revealed. Join us for an exhilarating eye-level view of these magnificent birds in flight.

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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** <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!

### Jan. 1, 2014 (Wed) – Birding at Jones Beach, N.Y. (**Audubon in the Parks**)

Meet Della and Alan Wells at the Commuter Parking Lot, Route 303 North, West Nyack, at 5:45 a.m. See the first sunrise of 2014 and start your new “year list.” Bring water/snack...we will find a nice warm restaurant for lunch! 845-942-5751

### Jan. 5 (Sun) – First Sunday Walk in Kakiat County Park

Meet Peter Johnson at 8 a.m. in the Kakiat parking lot, Route 202 in Montebello. Park entrance is directly opposite the drive to Viola School. Stroll through the park looking for resident and migrating bird species. Trip will run 2 to 2.5 hours. 914-261-2895

**Jan. 12 (Sun) – Winter at Congers Memorial Park**

Meet Matt Beckerle and Jim Previdi at 10 a.m. at the main parking lot of Congers Memorial Park (6 Gilchrist Rd.). Check out the variety of trees and birds along the eastern edge of Congers Lake and more. Path is wheelchair-accessible, flat and paved. 914-656-2509

**Jan. 18 (Sat) – Pelham Bay Park**

Meet Jim Previdi at 8 a.m. at the Commuter Parking Lot, Route 303 North, West Nyack, for carpooling. Search for owls and waterfowl in this wild(er) corner of the Bronx. Dress warmly, bring snack and hot drink. Return by early afternoon. 914-656-2509

**Jan. 31-Feb. 2 (Fri-Sun) – Winter Overnight to Cape Cod**

A weekend trip to view birds in beautiful Cape Cod. Contact Jim Previdi for details. 914-656-2509

**Feb. 8 (Sat) – Winter Birding at Shawangunk Grasslands NWR**

Meet Jim Previdi at 2 p.m. at the Commuter Parking Lot, Route 303 North, West Nyack, for carpooling. See raptors and field birds. Northern harriers and short-eared owls are usually sighted just before sunset. 914-656-2509

**Feb. 9 (Sun) – Second Sunday Walk in Kakiat County Park**

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. in the Kakiat parking lot, Route 202 in Montebello. Stroll through the park on graveled paths, looking for wintering birds. This trip will run 2 to 2.5 hours. Call the trip leader for directions. 845-358-3659

**Feb. 15 (Sat) – Owl Prowl at Stony Point Battlefield (Audubon in the Parks)**

Meet Jim Previdi at 7 p.m. at the main parking lot at the end of Battlefield Rd., accessed from Park Rd., off Route 9W in Stony Point. Search for the resident Great Horned and Screech Owls. **This very popular walk is by advanced reservations only and will be limited to the first 35 registrants. Please call the Battlefield Museum at 845-786-2521, to register before Feb. 13th. Children must be 10 years or older. Free admission.**

**Feb. 17 (Mon) – Spend Presidents' Day Birding at Kennedy Dells Park**

Meet Vicki Beaumont at 8 a.m. at the main (upper) parking lot of Kennedy Dells County Park in New City. Walk through the park on graveled paths looking for winter species. 2-2.5 hours. 845-268-2990

**Feb. 23 (Sun) – Winter at Congers Memorial Park**

Meet Matt Beckerle at 10 a.m. at the main parking lot of Congers Memorial Park (6 Gilchrist Rd.). Check out the variety of trees and birds along the eastern edge of Congers Lake and more. Path is wheelchair-accessible, flat and paved. 845-735-5411 or 914-656-2509

**Mar. 2 (Sun) – First Sunday Walk in Kakiat County Park**

Meet Peter Johnson at 8 a.m. in the Kakiat parking lot, Route 202 in Montebello. Park entrance is directly opposite the drive to Viola School. Stroll through the park looking for resident and migrating bird species. Trip will run 2 to 2.5 hours. 914-261-2895

**Mar. 15 (Sat) – Woodcocks at Kakiat County Park**

Meet Della and Alan Wells at 5:30 p.m. at the Kakiat parking lot, Route 202 in the Village of Montebello, opposite Viola Elementary School. Bring a flashlight. 845-942-5751

**Mar. 23 (Sun) – Birding Tallman Mt. State Park (Audubon in the Parks)**

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. in the main parking lot of Tallman Mt. State Park (Route 9W, Sparkill) for a stroll through the park's picnic and swimming pool areas. A good time of year to find fox sparrow and other wintering species. 845-358-3659

**Apr. 6 (Sun) – First Sunday Walk in Kakiat County Park**

Meet Carol Weiss at 8 a.m. in the Kakiat parking lot, Route 202 in Montebello. Stroll through the park on graveled paths, looking for wintering birds. This trip will run 2 to 2.5 hours. Call the trip leader for directions. 845-358-3659

**Apr. 13 (Sun) – Palm Sunday Walk at Lake Welch (Audubon in the Parks)**

Meet Carol Weiss at 9 a.m. at the entrance to Lake Welch in Harriman State Park, off Route 106. An easy walk around the lake and along roadways, but could last several hours. Unexpected birds are often found in this area.

Also expect to see sparrows, woodpeckers, thrushes and early migrants. Bring drink and a snack. There is an ecumenical hiker's service at 3 p.m. at St. John's in the Wilderness Church nearby. After the service is a lunch for hikers and walkers in the barn across the road. RAS members can choose to participate in these late afternoon activities. 845-358-3659

**Apr. 19 (Sat) – The Celery Farm, Allendale, NJ**

Meet Peter Johnson at 8 a.m. at the Celery Farm parking lot on Franklin Turnpike, Allendale, N.J. Look for waterfowl and very early spring migrants. Great for beginners, may be wet underfoot. Over by noon. 914-261-2895

**Apr. 20 (Sun) – A Spring Stroll at Mt. Ivy Swamp**

Meet Veronika Krause at 9 a.m. at the Pomona Middle School parking lot on Pomona Rd. Look for Marsh Marigolds and chipping sparrows along the railroad embankment. Over by noon. 845-359-9294

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## Special Announcements

### Scholarship Available for Hog Island Audubon Camp Educator's Week, July 20-25, 2014

Rockland Audubon Society is pleased to offer a scholarship for Educator's Week (July 20-25, 2014), at the Hog Island Audubon Camp in Muscongus Bay, Maine. Eligible educators will live and work in Rockland County. Preference will be given to Science/Ecology teachers (or related discipline). The scholarship includes tuition, room and board. The recipient will be responsible for transportation to and from the camp and any personal expenses. To apply, please send a short note via e-mail to Karen D'Alessandri at [kdalessandri@optonline.net](mailto:kdalessandri@optonline.net) explaining how this experience will benefit the school and the students.

### 17th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count: Feb. 14-17, 2014

The Great Backyard Bird Count is a great way for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with nature and make a difference for birds. Anyone anywhere in the world can count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count and enter their sightings at [www.BirdCount.org](http://www.BirdCount.org). The information gathered by tens of thousands of volunteers helps track the health of bird populations at a scale that would not otherwise be possible. To learn more about how to join the count visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) and [view the winning photos from the 2013 GBBC photo contest](#). The GBBC is a joint project of the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) and the [National Audubon Society](#) with partner [Bird Studies Canada](#).

### Upcoming Presentations by Lorrie Pallant, RAS Education Chair

**"Birds in Winter"**

Feb. 8 (1 p.m.) at Nyack Library

**"Birding by Ear"**

Mar. 26 (7 p.m.) at Haverstraw Library

Apr. 8 (7 p.m.) at Suffern Library

### Change to Publication Schedule for *The Observer*

Starting with this issue of *The Observer* 67(1), the publication schedule is changing to three issues per year covering January through April, May through August, and September through December. *The Observer* is distributed electronically to members who provide an e-mail address. Those members who do not have e-mail can elect to receive a paper copy via US Mail. Please contact Della Wells, RAS Membership Chairperson, at [dmwells@optonline.net](mailto:dmwells@optonline.net) or 845-942-5751 to be added to our electronic distribution list or to request a member's paper copy. Monthly reminders will continue to be sent electronically to members and friends for whom we have e-mail addresses.

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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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## 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 four to eight weeks for delivery of *Audubon Magazine* and *The Observer*.

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## *The Observer*

<b>Editing</b>	Caroline McDonald
<b>Layout</b>	Della Wells
<b>Copyediting</b>	Alan Wells
	Della Wells

Newsletter submissions welcome!

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

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