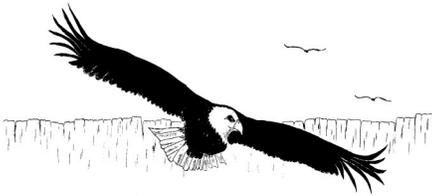


The Rivertown Naturalist

NEWSLETTER OF THE HUDSON RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY



Sep / Oct 2015, Vol. 43, No. 1

The Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester, Inc., is a non-profit chapter of the National Audubon Society serving the communities of Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry, Hastings-on-Hudson, Irvington and Yonkers.

Our mission is to foster protection and appreciation of birds, wildlife, and habitats, and to be an advocate for a cleaner, healthier environment.

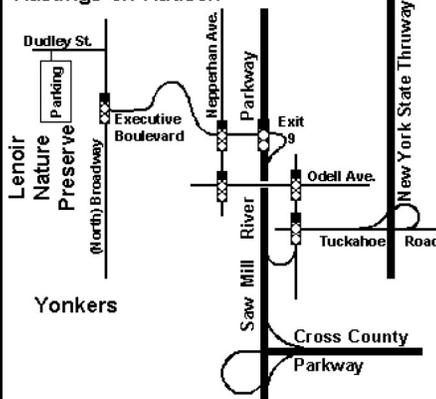
www.hras.org

Directions to Lenoir Preserve

The Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester meets at Lenoir Nature Preserve on Dudley Street in Yonkers, NY, (914) 968-5851.

By car: Take Saw Mill River Parkway to Exit 9, Executive Blvd. Cross over Nepperhan Ave and continue to follow Executive Blvd to its end at North Broadway and turn right. Dudley Street is the first left. Entrance and parking lot are on the left.

Hastings-on-Hudson



2015 BIRD-A-THON RESULTS

REPORT BY FRANCES GREENBERG, HRAS TREASURER

The 2015 Bird-A-Thon last May didn't get off to a promising start. The early morning rain kept many birds hunkered down, but the birders kept looking and listening. Team Eagle's captain, Panama Paul, come out of retirement from, you guessed it, Panama, hoping to lead his team to victory. The Raven-Loonatics were more than ready for the challenge. Weak hellos were exchanged between teams in the parking lot of Rockefeller State Park Preserve, where their paths crossed around 9 AM. Both teams were already soaked, rain was falling harder than ever, and there were hours to go until 6 PM quitting time. With the birder's motto in mind – the worse it is for humans, the better it is for birds – neither team would give up. When the rain stopped falling, we'd still be soaking wet, but the birds would be drinking fresh water and bathing. Our perseverance was rewarded, the sun came out late morning. We began to dry out. Team Eagle found a Spectacled Owl, which unfortunately couldn't count because it was a captive bird. Even if it could have counted, the Raven-Loonatics would have won handily. They found 113 species; Team Eagle, 85. Other birders, not with either team, found 54 species.

All combined, 120 Westchester bird species were seen. The Bird-A-Thon raised \$3630. The money will be used to support HRAS programs and activities. We are immensely grateful to the following donors. If it weren't for their generosity, getting soaking wet during the Bird-A-Thon would have been really annoying, and HRAS would be significantly poorer.

This year's contributors

(in no particular order)

Benjamin Moore Co. Matching Grant

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Ruth Kotecha

Norma Warner

Timothy and Marissa Frusciante

Robert Uchetel

See inside for the Program Schedule for Autumn 2015!

ScienceWatch Tuning into Your Host: A Parasitic Beetle Sings the Right Melodies

An ant colony is an impenetrable fortress. Any intruders are quickly detected and ripped apart by soldier ants using their huge mandibles. But ant nest beetles are ant parasites that can safely enter the colony. They are even welcomed by their hosts. Worker ants will swarm around a beetle, not to kill it, but to groom and possibly feed it—while the beetle is sinking its jaws into an ant and sucking out its body fluids.

Ant nest beetles are obligate parasites, spending all of their lives in an ant colony feeding on ant eggs, larvae and adults. It's an enviable lifestyle, with plentiful food and constant protection, and has given rise to an astonishing 10,000 species of ant nest beetles. The beetles and other ant parasites are accepted by the ants because they can produce the chemical signals (pheromones) that ants use to communicate among themselves.

Ants also produce sounds (stridulations) to communicate by rubbing two body parts together. One parasitic butterfly, the Mountain Alcon Blue (*Maculinea rebeli*), has gone beyond relying on pheromones to gain nest access. The butterfly spends its caterpillar stage being fed and cared for by ants. It gains this "royal treatment" because it can mimic the sound made by the queen ant. Now a report in the July 8, 2015 issue of *PLOS One* shows that one ant nest beetle species has also figured out how to get the royal treatment by hacking into the intimate communication systems of an ant species.

The study, by entomologist Andrea Di Giulio and colleagues at Roma Tre University, Rome, Italy, looked at *Paussus favieri*, an ant nest beetle that infiltrates nests of a Moroccan ant (*Pheidole pallidula*). First the team recorded the stridulations made by *Pheidole* ants housed in artificial nests. They found that the ants produce repeated pulses lasting up to 10 seconds and that each caste (workers, soldiers, and queen) makes a characteristic sound. Ants use the sounds to identify one another and as distress calls. For example, ants buried in a tunnel cave-in will elicit help from others to dig them out.

The researchers had already seen certain structures on the beetles that looked like they could produce sounds, and had used scanning electron microscopy to take fine-structure photos. The photos showed a finely ridged "file" on the hind legs that can rub against a "scraper," a row of tiny spines on the abdomen. Next, the team listened to

recordings of the stridulations made by male and female ant nest beetles living with the ants. To their great surprise, they found that the beetle stridulations clustered into three groups and each group closely mimicked the sounds made by a different ant caste.

To determine if the beetle stridulations were directed at the ants, the researchers set up tiny boxes with a speaker attached to the base and covered in sand. They placed *Pheidole* ant workers in the boxes and monitored behavior during playback of the ant nest beetle stridulations. When any beetle call was played, the ants moved toward the speaker waving their antennae in the same

"We were stunned by finding such a complex pattern of signals." – A. Di Giulio

way they would when investigating another ant. In some instances they began digging in the sand over the speaker as if to attempt rescue of a trapped ant.

Playback of "queen" beetle calls elicited a posture known as guarding behavior, which occurs when ants attend the queen, and was identical to behavior observed during playback of an actual queen call. Control groups of white noise elicited none of this behavior.

These results show that the beetle can move freely among the ants because it has learned to "speak" three ant "languages." The team concluded that "...by mimicking stridulations of the queen, *Paussus* is able to dupe the workers of its host and be treated as royalty."

"When we think of parasites, we are reminded of unpleasant simplified creatures," said Di Giulio. "But in this case, the parasite is actually more complex than the related beetles that are not parasites."

Ants have evolved a highly sophisticated communication system allowing them to efficiently function as a super-organism. But just like modern day identity thieves, *Paussus* ant nest beetles have hacked into the system.

Maybe the ants can change their passwords.

—SAUL SCHEINBACH



Hudson River Audubon Programs, Sep - Dec 2015

All Wednesday lectures begin with refreshments at 7:00 pm and program at 7:30

The Problem of Marine Pollution

Wednesday, September 30th

Presented by Dr. Judith Weis

What everyone needs to know: not just scientists, but students, nature lovers, fisherfolk, sailors, divers, and anyone interested in and concerned about the environment and the ocean. Dr. Weis is a professor and faculty expert of marine biology at Rutgers University. She has done extensive research on the effects of stressors like environmental contaminants, invasive species and parasites on the behavior and ecology of estuarine organisms. Dr. Weis is a member of a United Nations Environmental Committee, and at the time of this program will have just returned from a conference in Nairobi.

Annual Family Hawk Day

Saturday, October 3rd

9:00 to 12:00 — Hawk Watch on the lawn overlooking the Hudson River. Join any time, and our experts will help you to identify the birds that we see.

1:00 PM — Live Hawk Program. Jim Eyring, Master Falconer from Pace University will present a program with live raptors. There will be flight demonstrations if weather conditions permit.

Refreshments will be served.

Birds of Paradise

Wednesday, October 28th

Presented by Dr. Saul Scheinbach

The Hawaiian Islands make up the world's most isolated archipelago. Nevertheless, birds managed to reach the islands soon after they formed, about 5 million years ago. Lacking competition, these pioneers could adapt to a variety of niches and evolve in a manner similar to the better known Darwin's finches of the Galapagos Islands. These birds, known as honeycreepers, are found nowhere else. But sadly, they began to decline once humans arrived about 1,500 years ago. This lecture will describe the challenges they face from human encroachment even today.

The Nature of Yonkers

Wednesday, November 18th

Presented by Walter Chadwick,

HRAS Educator and Photographer

The largest city in Westchester County, Yonkers has an abundance of wild flora and fauna. You will view them in a variety of habitats — forests, rivers, and more -- that are home to mammals, birds, insects, and other wild creatures.

Tradition and Citizen Science: History and Trends of the Bronx-Westchester Christmas Bird Count

Wednesday, December 16th

Presented by Michael Bochnik, President of HRAS

Michael Bochnik, compiler for the last 25 years of the 92 year old count, will tell us about the rich history of Christmas bird counts, what the numbers mean, and how you can help. This famed Christmas Bird Count, started in 1924 by the Bronx County Bird Club, led the way to how counts are done today. It is rich in history, lore, and tradition, as well as nearly a century of local wintering bird data. Learn how different the bird life was in our area in the 30s and 40s, or the 60s and 70s, versus today. Discover what the data shows us about our past and what the future holds.

On the Wing: Upcoming Field Trips, Sep - Oct 2015

Outdoor activities such as birding and hiking with a group are a wonderful way to share your interests with like-minded people to learn more about nature, and to enjoy many preserves and natural areas.

All Hudson River Audubon Society field trips are free. Non-members and newcomers are welcomed.

Bring binoculars and field guides if you have them. Some are available for loan for those who need them. Dress appropriately for the weather. Car pooling for field trips may be arranged in advance by calling Ruth DeFord Kotecha at 914-478-3695, or by email at rdeford@hunter.cuny.edu.

For more information call Michael Bochnik at (914) 237-9331.

Saturday, September 19, 2015

Fall Migrants Bird Walk, 8 AM

Broad-Winged Hawk Migration, 9-11 AM

Meet at 8 AM at Lenoir Nature Preserve. Warblers, hawks, and other birds have started to head south. We'll take a walk around the preserve searching for them. We'll end up at our hawk watch site at 9 AM in front of the mansion. We will then search the skies for Broad-wing Hawks that will be making their incredible 4,300 mile migration from North America to South America.

<http://www.hras.org/wtobird/lenoir.html>

Saturday, September 26, 2015

Hawk Watch at Lenoir Preserve, 10 AM

<http://www.hras.org/wtobird/lenoir.html>

Saturday, October 3, 2015

Hawk Day at Lenoir Preserve

Join us at Lenoir Preserve, 19 Dudley St in Yonkers. 9 am to noon: Hawk Watch. We will be sitting out on the main lawn at Lenoir Nature Preserve to look for hawks heading south.

1 PM: **Live Hawks**, presented by professor and master falconer James Eyring of Pace University.

<http://www.hras.org/wtobird/lenoir.html>

Saturday, October 10, 2015

The Big Sit

A great way to enjoy birds with hardly any effort! Meet at Lenoir Nature Preserve any time between 8 AM and 3 PM. The object of the "BIG SIT" is to tally as many bird species as we can in a day from a single position. We'll be out on the Lenoir lawn (at our hawk watch site) overlooking the Hudson River and Palisades. Bring a chair, drink and snacks and join us anytime on that day and help us find the birds!

<http://www.hras.org/wtobird/lenoir.html>

Saturday, October 17, 2015

Hawk Watch at Lenoir Preserve, 10 AM

<http://www.hras.org/wtobird/lenoir.html>

Saturday, October 24, 2015

The Great Swamp, New Jersey

Meet at the Wildlife Observation Center, located off Long Hill Road at 8:30 AM. We will look for raptors, late migrants, and waders. Notable species include American Bittern, Red-Shouldered Hawk, Barred Owl, and Wood Duck.

<http://www.hras.org/wtobird/greatswamp.html>

Saturday, October 31, 2015

Tibbetts Brook Park, Yonkers

Meet at the flagpole at Tibbetts Brook Park by the parking lot at 8:00 AM. We will be looking for late fall migrants and early waterfowl.

<http://www.hras.org/wtobird/greatswamp.html>

Try out our new
QR code on
your phone!



Artists and Photographers: Get Ready!

Fall is a good time to begin preparing works for our "Seasons at Lenoir" Art and Photography exhibit, to be held during the month of March 2016. Fall asters and pineapple sage are blooming in the Hummingbird/Butterfly Garden, and there are many species of butterflies – including swallowtails, skippers, and monarchs – to be found. Beautiful fall colors will soon be on display throughout the grounds at Lenoir. Hawks and other birds are migrating to their wintering grounds, and there is no better place to view and photograph them than on the meadow overlooking the Hudson River. The only criteria for works is that they have Lenoir Nature Preserve as their subject, or are inspired by Lenoir.

Volunteers Honored at Member's Night

HRAS gave special recognition to three of our chapter's volunteers during our June meeting. These individuals have given an outstanding amount of their time and energies to help provide for the success of our numerous chapter activities. Cathy and Larry Mazzella. They re-vitalized the network of bluebird boxes throughout the Lenoir Preserve, often trudging through the deep snow during the winter in order to have them ready for nesting season. They also worked for many hours to restore and beautify the rain garden at the rear of the nature center. Ruth DeFord Kotecha. Ruth assumed responsibility for providing hospitality (doing much of the baking herself) for all of our events, including all monthly programs, as well as the "Seasons at Lenoir" Art/Photography Exhibit reception. In addition, she coordinated carpooling arrangements for all field trips during the year.

Project FeederWatch:

Call for Leaders and Volunteers!

FeederWatch is a citizen science program sponsored by the Cornell University Ornithology Lab. Once again, HRAS will be participating in Project FeederWatch at the Lenoir Nature Center. We help track the bird population by counting the birds at our feeders behind the nature center. We sit inside, with binoculars, and look out through two large windows.

A host for each session tallies the numbers of each species, and the information is passed on to Cornell by Carol Lange at the end of the season. Our first session will be Saturday, November 14, 2015 and we will finish near the end of March 2016. We will count for two hours, two days in a row, approximately every two weeks.

We are looking for volunteers to host one or more two-hour sessions, and we are looking for lots of interested people to help the hosts count the birds. The host, who chooses the time of day for the count, usually brings some refreshments, such as bagels and cream cheese, or crackers and cheese, etc. In addition to counting the birds, we have a rip-roaring social gathering, with lots of stimulating conversation! For those who are new to birding, it's a wonderful way to learn to identify the birds.

If you are interested in being a host, or if you want to be added to the email list to receive the times of each count a few days before, please contact Carol Lange at 914 668-5101 or email CarolLange@aol.com.

The schedule for November and December 2015 is as follows:

Sat., Nov. 14 / Sun., Nov. 15

Sat., Nov. 28 / Sun., Nov. 29

Sat., Dec. 12 / Sun., Dec. 13

Sat., Dec. 26 / Sun., Dec. 27

The schedule for January to March 2016 will be announced in the next newsletter.

Farewell Lenoir!

A note from Mindy Swope Quintero

Although my stay at Lenoir has been short, I just wanted to say a big Thank You to everyone at Hudson River Audubon Society. From day one, HRAS supported me and fought for the Curator position to be reinstated. HRAS is one of the most involved groups I have encountered at the nature centers. For such a small group, you manage to provide many programs, trips and do an outstanding job of maintaining the butterfly garden. I am proud to say that I feel like I have become at least an intermediate birder and will greatly miss those frigid days spent Feeder Watching and eating bagels. Don't worry, although I am now at the northernmost nature center you will still see me around. I hope I have met your expectations as a Curator and I consider each and every one of you my friend. Again, thank you for all that you do for Lenoir and its staff!

With much appreciation,

Mindy Swope Quintero

Curator, Trailside Nature Museum

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
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Join the Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester!

Every membership supports Audubon's vital efforts to protect birds, other wildlife and natural habitats. Membership includes a subscription to Audubon magazine and affiliation with the National Audubon Society. As a member, you will also receive our chapter newsletter, *The Rivertown Naturalist*, and an open invitation to all our guest lectures, field trips and events.

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