

# THE RIVERTOWN NATURALIST

Newsletter of the Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester



June 2011, vol. 38, no. 8

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, other wildlife and habitats, and to be an advocate for a cleaner, healthier environment.

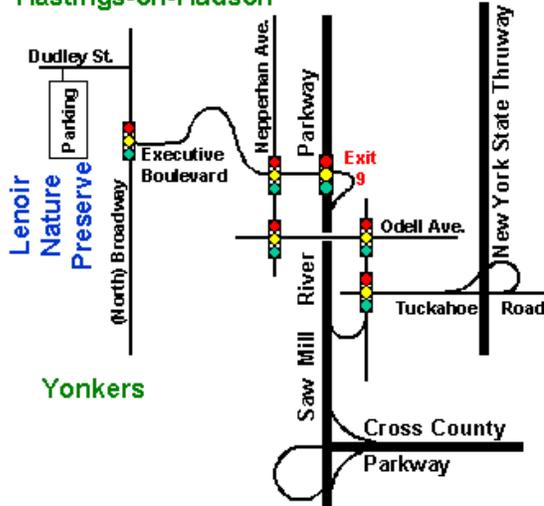
[www.hras.org](http://www.hras.org)

## DIRECTIONS TO LENOIR PRESERVE

Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester, Inc. holds its meetings at Lenoir, a Westchester County Nature Preserve, on Dudley Street in Yonkers, New York (914) 968-5851.

By car: Take Saw Mill River Parkway to Exit 9, Executive Blvd. Take Executive Blvd. to its end at North Broadway and turn right. Go ¼ mile on North Broadway and turn left onto Dudley Street. Parking lot is on the left.

### Hastings-on-Hudson



Wednesday, June 22, 2011  
7:00 pm Lenoir Nature Preserve

## Member's Night Nature Slide Show

Selected volunteers will be recognized for their special contributions to HRAS during the year. *It is our volunteers who keep our chapter strong, vital, and active.*

Officers of the Hudson River Audubon Society will be elected.

HRAS members are encouraged to share favorite nature slides and digital photos, taken during the past year, with us. Please bring no more than **10 to 20 images**, and prepare a five-to-ten-minute presentation. For digital images, pictures must be on a CD, UBS drive, or memory card: contact Michael about format. You may expect to see photos from HRAS field trips, as well as members' nature and birding trips.

Refreshments will be served at 7:00 PM and the program begins at 7:30. For those who wish, there will be a leisurely walk around the Preserve at 6:00 -- meet behind the Nature Center.

*This is the final meeting of the season. Have a great summer! We look forward to seeing you at the first fall program on Wednesday, September 28th.*

## Dragonfly and Damselfly Day Saturday June 18, 2011

11:00 am Lenoir Nature Preserve



Winged wonders, aerial acrobats, dragonflies have been around since before the dinosaurs. Their flight is studied by the United States military and NASA. They come in a variety of colors from muted browns to brilliant blues and greens, bright reds and neon, they sparkle like dazzling jewels. Join us on June 18, 2011 at 11:00 AM at Lenoir for an introductory program to learn about their lifestyle, the different species in our area, followed by a field session as we attempt to capture and observe these fleet flyers. After the field session we will have dragonfly crafts.

## Summer Stroll Saturday July 2, 2011

10:00 am Lenoir Nature Preserve

Join us on this Summer Stroll as we take an easy walk to explore the preserve in summer. What birds, insects and flowers are here? What is happening at the pond and the meadow? We will also take a walk in the forest and see what is happening there. Fun, free and informative for the entire family. Come join us.

## Gardening through the seasons with a Master Gardener

Volunteers needed for our Butterfly Garden

Come and learn about the needs of a garden throughout the seasons by helping in the maintenance and care of the Beverly Smith Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden at Lenoir Nature Preserve. Planting, transplanting, types of plants, history of medicinal and edible plants of the garden, soil, addressing microclimates are some of the topics that will be addressed during the maintenance.

Join us in the garden between 11 Am and 3 PM on the following dates: Sundays June 26, August 7, September 25 and October 23, 2011. Contact Mary Harrington at [tctallon@aol.com](mailto:tctallon@aol.com) for more information

## Riverfest

**Sunday, June 12, 2011**

Mt. St. Vincent College

1:00 PM to 6:00PM

This is a family event, hosted by the college of Mt. St. Vincent at 263rd St and Riverdale Avenue, on the border of Yonkers and the Bronx. There will be food, music and entertainment. Featured also will be rides on the Mystic Whaler, tugboats, the Museum Barge, and medieval battles. HRAS will have a section with handouts and activities for children. Mary Harrington, our Master Gardener, will lead a family nature walk.

Please join us for an afternoon of fun

## ScienceWatch – City Birds are Smarter Birds

**“We were interested whether behavioral flexibility can increase the chance of a given species to successfully colonize cities.” – A. Maklakov**



What do you need to survive in an urban landscape? A big brain if you are a bird, according to evolutionary biologist Alexei Maklakov. Maklakov and his team from Uppsala University, Sweden, looked at the ratio of brain size to body size for various passerine species—small perching birds— found in 12 cities in France and Switzerland. This ratio, known as Cuvier’s fraction, has been widely used as an indication of intelligence in birds and mammals. The 22 avian families represented by the 82 species the team studied ranged from the big-brained *Corvidae*, (crows, rooks and magpies) *Sternidae* (starlings) and *Paridae* (tits, chickadees and titmice) to smaller-brained *Oriolidae* (orioles) and *Hirundinidae* (swallows and martins).

The researchers found that species breeding in cities have relatively larger brains in relation to body size than those that avoid urban environments and that the differences were statistically significant. In addition, families with larger brains, on average, contributed more species to city populations than the smaller-brained families. According to lead author Maklakov, “Species with relatively larger brains tend to have broader diets, live in diverse habitats and have a higher propensity for behavioral adaptations in foraging”. It should come as no surprise that birds like the carrion crow (*Corvus corone*), jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*) and European magpie (*Pica pica*), all well-known for their intelligence, can readily adapt to—and take advantage of—the new habitats and food sources provided by cityscapes and humans.

Other city dwellers include the Eurasian wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), Eurasian nuthatch (*Siitta europaea*) and the blue tit (*Cyanistes cearuleus*). The latter is famous for having figured out in the 1960’s how to remove the foil cap and drink the cream from milk bottles delivered in England. This behavior was culturally transmitted to subsequent generations until recently when home milk delivery virtually stopped.

The scientists expressed concern that small-brained birds like flycatchers are being squeezed out of viable habitat as farmland is urbanized. One small-brained group, swallows, seems to be an exception because, “... they are lucky enough to find niches in urban habitats that are by coincidence a pretty good approximation of their original habitats”, said Maklakov.

Although not studied because they are not passerines, pigeons (*Columbia livia*) are small-brained birds that certainly flourish in cities. “Pigeons probably represent a great example of a bird for which we inadvertently created a fantastic replica of their original habitat (cliffs) with plenty of nesting places, near lack of predators, and an ample food supply”, was the explanation offered by Maklakov.

For similar reasons New York City has seen an upsurge in the once-rare peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), which, hopefully, makes the city a bit less hospitable for pigeons.

Saul Scheinbach

## Field Trips

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. Hudson River Audubon Society field trips are free. Non-members/ newcomers are welcome

Bring binoculars and field guides if you have them. Some are available for loan for those who need them. Dress appropriately for the weather. For more information call Michael Bochnik at (914) 237-9331 or contact him at bochnikm @ cs.com. Additional information with maps and directions to each location is available on our web site at [www.hras.org](http://www.hras.org).

**Sunday June 5, 2011**

### **Wallkill NWR and the Black Dirt Region of Orange County**

Meet at Liberty Marsh on Oil City Road at 8 AM

A fresh water marsh, open fields, a sod farm and onion fields make this a unique place to visit. Birds such as Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink and Meadowlark will be looked for. Last year the area hosted Blue Grosbeaks and a Dickcissel.



#### **Directions to Liberty Marsh (Wallkill NWR) (GPS use-163 Oil City Rd, Pine Island, NY**

From NYS Thruway take Route 17 West to **EXIT 126**. Turn **LEFT** onto Rout-94.

Go 4.3 miles to traffic light. Proceed straight onto Meadow Road/Route 25.

Go another 2 miles to the T intersection and turn **LEFT** onto Route 6 / Pulaski Hwy.

Take Route 6 for 5.3 miles and turn **RIGHT** onto Route 1/Pine Island Turnpike.

Go 0.7 miles and stay straight onto Liberty Corners Rd / Route 88.

Go another 2.3 miles and turn right onto Oil City Road.

Take Oil City Road to gravel parking lot on the left.



## **National Audubon's 2011 Bird-a-thon**

Two teams competed to try and see as many species of birds in the New York area on May 14 to raise funds for the chapter. We like to thank all those who donated or pledged. Don't forget to send in your pledges. We also thank our bird-a-thon participants; Paul, Katherine, Joe, Lee, Fran, Mike, Kelli, Saul and Jackie. The two team, "The Raven-Loon-atics" and "Team Eagle" found a combined 151 species! The Raven-Loon-atics retained their championship.

A special thanks for who help recruit people for our Facebook Causes Page – Joe, Sandra and Mike. This was a great success as people were able to donate by credit card over the web for the first time.

Some donations are still arriving and we expect a few matching grants from employers of donators – so we don't have a final number yet. It does seem that we will meet our goal this year. Thanks!

**HRAS BOARD MEMBERS and VOLUNTEERS**

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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 National Audubon. 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.

**SIGN ME UP AS A NEW MEMBER.  
ONE YEAR FOR \$20**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to:

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