

The Rivertown Naturalist



Jan 2017 Vol. 45, No. 3

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.

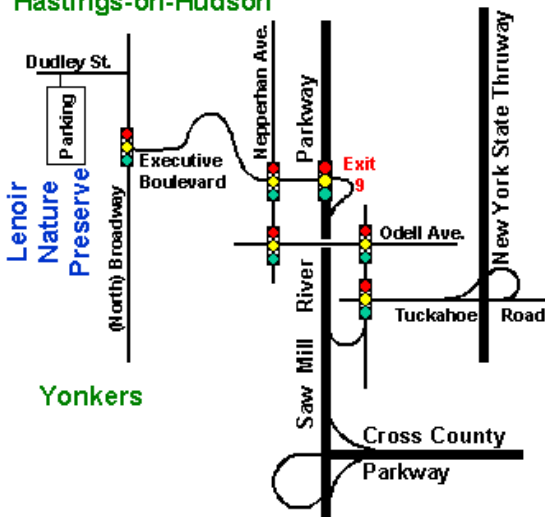
www.hras.org

DIRECTIONS TO LENOIR PRESERVE

Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester, Inc. holds its meetings at Lenoir, a Westchester County Nature Preserve 19 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, January 25, 2017

Refreshments, 7pm; Program, 7:30

Adventures in eBirding

Great Program to start the year

Have a New Year's Birding resolution? Come and learn how to use eBird to organize your birding records or track your 2017 sightings. Learn to use eBird when travelling, to explore new birding hotspots or to connect with local birders. Any recent sightings of rare birds? What eBird can tell about seasonal patterns and the movement of birds across our area month by month.

Learn how to get started with eBird.

In addition to explaining how to use this simple but powerful program, this entertaining, multimedia program includes images of Westchester birds taken by local photographers.

Presenter: Anne Swain, Exec. Director, Saw Mill River Audubon

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Owls and Eagles

Everyone, young or old, is fascinated by owls and eagles. So, we've scheduled two field trips early in the year to look for these favorites. Join us for one or both of these field trips

Sat. Jan. 21 Owls at Pelham Bay Park

Meet at 8:00am in the far left corner of Orchard Beach Parking Lot. Best local area for **Great Horned, Long-eared and Saw-Whet Owls**

Sat. Feb 4 Thompson Pond Preserve, Pine Plains, NY Dutchess County

Good opportunity for wintering **Golden Eagles**. See Page 4 for Driving Directions (approx. 1.5 hours)

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ScienceWatch – Clever Crows

"We had occasionally seen birds using stick tools at our two breeding facilities, but hadn't thought much about it." – B. Masuda

In college I learned humans are special in many ways. One such trait is the ability to use tools. But in 1964 primatologist Jane Goodall shattered our self-centered sense of superiority by showing that chimpanzees are also tool users. Since then many other animals have been observed using tools and birds are no exception. Indeed, the second tool-using animal Goodall documented was the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) using rocks to break open ostrich eggs.

Aesop's fable, "The Crow and the Pitcher," demonstrates that crows have long been regarded as highly intelligent tool users. The fable, in which a thirsty crow raises the water level in a partially filled pitcher by dropping in stones until it can get a drink, was found to be fact for New Caledonia crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) (<http://www.hras.org/sw/swoct09.html>), which are also capable of sophisticated tool-making that rivals the crafting of tools by early humans (<http://hras.org/sw/swjan08.html>).

Now a new study adds a second crow species to the tool-user list. Writing in the September 13, 2016 issue of *Nature*, a team co-headed by Christian Rutz, University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews, UK, and Bryce Masuda, Institute for Conservation Research (ICR), San Diego Zoo Global, Volcano, Hawai'i, shows that the Hawaiian crow (*Corvus hawaiiensis*) is an innate tool-maker.

The Hawaiian crow or 'Alalā (pronounced: 'a-la-lah) evolved from the common raven in Hawai'i where it is endemic. Sadly, by 2002 this rarest corvid was extinct in the wild. As of September 2016, the entire world's Hawaiian crow population comprised 131 birds, all of which are kept in two ICR facilities, on Hawai'i Island and Maui. The ICR has been conducting a captive breeding program for 'Alalā in Hawai'i and is planning to release birds into the wild this year.

Masuda and others noticed the birds occasionally using stick tools, but since tool use had been well-documented in the New Caledonia crow, they paid it little mind. Meanwhile, Rutz, who studied the New Caledonia crow, was looking for other crow species with similar features – straight bills and large, mobile eye – that should enable them to manipulate tools. The Hawaiian crow looked like a good candidate so he contacted Masuda. Learning of his observations, Rutz decided to examine the tool-using skills of 'Alalā under controlled conditions, and so the St. Andrews and San Diego groups joined forces.

The researchers provided adult birds with a log containing several drilled holes, each with bait (usually a waxworm) and an assortment of sticks (longer, shorter, straight, and curved). Bait was also placed on the log to encourage exploring it. The birds were tested one at a time and each test lasted about an hour. The scientists tested 104 out of 109 'Alalā and found that 78% of birds spontaneously picked up sticks left by the researchers and used them as tools to probe and retrieve the out-of-reach bait. Many of the birds also shortened the sticks as needed and some even made their own tools by cutting sticks from bushes just as New Caledonia crows do.



'Alalā and New Caledonia crows split off from each other about 11 million years ago. So the authors believe tool use evolved independently in the two species, an example of convergent behavior. "It is striking that both species evolved on remote tropical islands in the Pacific ocean that lack woodpeckers and ferocious bird predators—perfect conditions, apparently, for smart crows to become accomplished tool users," said Rutz.

The scientists also tested seven naïve juvenile ‘Alalā that had never seen an adult use a tool. These birds were given an assorted sticks and a wooden platform containing food-baited vertical and horizontal holes and crevices. Within a few days the youngsters began carrying sticks in their beaks, probing with them and getting the bait. According to Rutz, “Using tools comes naturally to ‘Alalā. These birds had no specific training prior to our study, yet most of them were incredibly skilled at handling stick tools, and even swiftly extracted bait from demanding tasks. In many regards, the ‘Alalā is very similar to the New Caledonia crow, which my team has been studying for many years.”

This study shows us how important it is to save every species. We had never seen ‘Alalā use tools before they became extinct in the wild. Saving them allowed us to learn what a few crows on the brink of extinction can do. Let’s hope they will be released successfully back into the wild.

William Beebe, first curator of birds at the Bronx Zoo said, “The beauty and genius of a work of art may be reconceived, though its first material expression be destroyed; a vanished harmony may yet again inspire the composer; but when the last individual of a race of living beings breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one can be again.”

- - *Saul Scheinbach*

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Your Audubon Membership

Every newsletter, we ask you to join Audubon. If you already have – thank you. You may not realize there are two kinds of memberships. You can become a chapter-only member of the Hudson River chapter or join as a member of the National Audubon Society. What’s the difference? Your choice determines where your membership dollar goes.

If you become a chapter-only member, 100% of your dues stays within Hudson River Audubon Society and supports our local programs and walks. If you join the National Audubon Society, only 5% of your dues comes back to our support local programming.

As either a chapter-only or National member, you receive our newsletter and all our programs are open to you. As a National member, you will receive a lot more mail – both what you might want, like the Audubon magazine, and what you might not want – frequent requests for donations. Audubon Magazine is also available on-line (www.audubon.org) to all, members and non-members alike.

When you sign up at www.audubon.org you are signing up to be a National Member. If you want to become a chapter-only member, mail a check for \$20 payable to the Hudson River Audubon Society to HRAS, P.O. Box 616, Yonkers, NY 10703, specifying that you want chapter-only membership. Your membership is tax-deductible to the extent of the law, HRAS is a 501 C(3) non-profit organization

If you want to join National Audubon but can’t go on-line, send a check made out to Hudson River Audubon Society to HRAS, P.O. Box 616, Yonkers, NY 10703, and specify that you want to join National Audubon.

Confused? Write Fran Greenberg (HRAS, P. O. Box 616, Yonkers, NY 10703) or greenberg.fran@gmail.com.

Upcoming Field Trips



Birding and hiking with a group is a wonderful way to share your interests with like-minded people, to learn more about nature, and to enjoy many new preserves and natural areas. Our field trips are free. And open to all. Non-members/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. For more information call Michael Bochnik at (914) 237-9331, or cell 914-953-7409.

Saturday, January 21, 2017

Owls at Pelham Bay Park

Joint trip with Huntington-Oyster Bay Audubon Society

Meet at Pelham Bay Park at 8 AM; far left corner of the Orchard Beach parking lot.

Best spot for wintering owls. We will also search the woods in the bays and, maybe, seals.

Directions: <http://www.hras.org/wtobird/pelhambay.html>

Saturday, February 4, 2017

Golden Eagles at Thompson Pond Preserve

Meet at Thompson Pond Preserve at 9 AM

Directions: (approx. 1.5 hours)

Take Taconic Parkway to the exit for Route 199.

Go east on Route 199 to Route 82;

Follow Route 82 south to Pine Plains.

Turn right onto Lake Road, and follow 1.6 miles to the parking area and preserve entrance on left.

Saturday, March 25, 2017

Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge

Meet at the Refuge at 8 AM

Late wintering ducks and possible Barn Owl

<http://hras.org/wtobird/jamaicabaywildliferefuge.htm>

Friday to Monday, April 28 – May 1, 2017

The Delmarva Peninsula

– DELaware, MARYland and VirginiA

Thursday- Drive to Cambridge, MD

Friday – **Blackwater NWR, MD**

Saturday – **Chincoteague NWR, VA**

Sunday – **Milburn landing SP, MD**

Monday – **Bombay Hook NWR, DE**

Searching for American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Red-headed Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Prothonotary and Yellow-throated Warblers.

Friday May 5, 2017

Evening at Tibbets Brook Park

Meet at the flag pole in front of main building at 6 PM

<http://hras.org/wtobird/tibbetts.html>

Saturday May 6, 2017

Cranberry Lake

Meet 8 AM at the nature center.

<http://hras.org/wtobird/cranberr.html>

Saturday, May 13, 2017

Annual Birdathon

Bird like crazy in Westchester County to raise money for our chapter. Details to follow.

Sunday May 14, 2017

25th Annual Mother's Day Warbler Walk

Lenoir Nature Preserve 8 AM

19 Dudley St. Yonkers

Meet us for our 25th year of this Audubon tradition.

Spring migrants will be searched for; followed by refreshments at the nature center.

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

Saturday- Sunday May 20,21 2017

Bashakill Marsh

Drive up Saturday afternoon and stay overnight for Whip-poor-wills, American Bittern, Virginia Rail, and Alder Flycatchers.

<http://hras.org/wtobird/bashakill.html>

FeederWatch Continues. Volunteers Welcome

Our popular FeederWatch continues. This is a fun citizen science project sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The name explains it all. We sit snugly inside Lenoir Nature Center watching and identifying the birds that visit bird feeders located just outside large picture window. We also count the number of birds we see and then send this data to Cornell where it is combined with reports from thousands of other FeederWatch sites around the country to provide a real-time information on the number and variety of our wild birds.

This is a great way for beginning and novice birders to hone their ID skills and learn more about the habits of our local birds. The atmosphere is friendly and welcoming to all. Some believe that the social aspects and the delicious food treats (for humans) may attract more volunteer watchers than the birds do.

Feel free to participate for only a few minutes or stay for the entire watch. It's flexible. So join us. It is pleasant way to spend a few minutes on a cold winter day. But be warned, it can become addictive.

Up Coming FeederWatch Schedule:

Sat., Jan. 14 Fran Greenberg
 Sun., Jan., 15 Kelli and Michael Bochnik
 Sat., Jan. 28 May Guglielmo
 Sun., Jan. 29 Mary Harrington
 Sat., Feb. 11 Kelli / Michael Bochnik
 Sun., Feb. 12 Fran Greenberg
 Fri., Feb. 24 TBA
 Sat., Feb 25 Sandra Wright



Sat., Mar., 11 Judi Veder /Saul Scheinbach
 Sun., Mar., 12 Cathy / Larry Mazzella
 Thur, Apr 06 TBA
 Fri., Apr.0 7 TBA

Mark Your Calendar

Annual Spring Luncheon

Saturday, April 22 The Riverside – Hastings Noon 'til 4:00AM

We are planning a great time, delicious food, good company and a wonderful program with amazing photos of our Trinidad trip – hundreds of scarlet ibis, leatherback turtles, 5" tarantulas and 17 species of hummingbirds.

Plan to Join Us!

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**Join National Audubon Society.
Become a Member Today**

For only \$20 you can become a member of the National Audubon Society and of our local chapter. Your small contribution supports nature and environmental causes and rewards you with a subscription to the award-winning *Audubon* magazine as well as our chapter newsletters filled with information on local activities, lectures, programs and field trips.

Becoming a member is easy.

Go to our website: www.hras.org Click on the **Membership** link in the upper right corner and follow the instructions. That's it. Or you also join by mailing a check made out to Hudson River Audubon Society to HRAS, P.O. Box 616, Yonkers NY 10703

Join today!

While you are on our site, look around and see everything that is happening in your area.

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