

RIVERTOWN NATURALIST

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Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester, Inc is a non-profit chapter of National Audubon.

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

www.hras.org

DIRECTIONS TO LENOIR NATURE PRESERVE

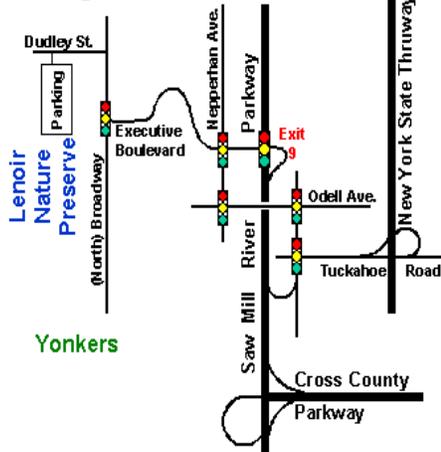
Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester, Inc. holds its meetings at Lenoir Preserve a Westchester County Nature Preserve, 19 Dudley Street, Yonkers,

Directions:

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



Because of concern about the covid pandemic we have suspended all in-person programs and lectures. However, we are sponsoring and joining with other Audubon Chapters in Westchester to provide outstanding virtual programs

Virtual Program:

Why Bird Sing and How to learn their Songs

Thursday, March 11, 2021 7:00 PM

Make your reservations at [HTTPS://bit.ly/birdsong-mar2021](https://bit.ly/birdsong-mar2021)

It takes energy to sing. So why do most birds spend so much time vocalizing? What the different between songs and calls? Are songs learned or innate?

Tom Stephenson, co-author of the acclaimed *The Warbler Guide* overviews bird vocalizations, how they are acquired, and how the song-learning process unfolds. We'll discuss why in early spring you might hear very odd songs from common species, and what that tells us about the singer. He'll also cover how many different kinds of vocalizations one individual bird might make, what they may mean, and why some species sing only one song while others have hundreds of different songs.

Tom will explain why traditional field guides aren't much help in identifying bird songs. Finally, he'll discuss and outline a simple and very effective technique for memorizing many bird songs.

More about Tom Stephenson

Tom Stephenson has been birding since he was a kid under the tutelage of Dr. Arthur Allen of Cornell University. His articles and photographs are in museums and many publications including *Birding*, *Birdwatcher's Digest*, *Handbook of the Birds* and *Handbook of the Mammals of the World* and *Guide to the Birds of SE Brazil*.

He is well known in the birding world as a lecturer, guide and author.

As a musician he worked with several Grammy and Academy Award winners such as the Grateful Dead, Phil Collins and the FBI.

Be sure to check inside for additional virtual programs on other interesting topics such as bird photography and the music of bird flight.

President's Message



An astute observer of birds does not anthropomorphize.

We are humans, they are birds, we must not project our feelings on them.

But who can deny what fun it is to do exactly that, even as we know what we're doing is scientifically inaccurate: love birds, angry crows, wise owls. A number of parrot owners are certain parrots are not simply mimicking their phrases but using them to communicate.

The most well-known pair was scientist Irene Pepperberg and Alex, an African Grey Parrot. He started out as her subject in her research on animal intelligence. He became more than that: her friend. Pepperberg noted how he perched near a woman working in the lab, asked her over and over if she wanted nuts, wanted corn, wanted water. No surprise there,

that's what he was asked in Pepperberg's experiments. But here's the surprise. Frustrated by the worker's noes, he asked, "Well, what do you want?"

I'm going to project a feeling of optimism on birds. I freely admit to being on shaky ground. Spring starts March 20 – soon – and everything about spring turns a confirmed pessimist like me into an optimist. The landscape comes back to life, migrant birds return from their winter quarters to stake out territory, find partners, build nests and reproduce.

What optimists those migratory birds are. I think of the courage a ruby-throated hummingbird has, leaving the warm subtropics to launch itself across the Gulf of Mexico, make a refueling stop or two on the southeast coast of the US and head north, maybe even to our butterfly garden at Lenoir. Without either supplies or a GPS. I can't even go a mile without packing water, a snack, most importantly my cell phone, in addition to wearing clothing suited for the weather I'm going to encounter, which I know thanks to satellites beaming down information. I wonder what a ruby throat thinks as it flies across the Gulf – will I make it? Did I take a wrong turn? What's the insect supply going to be like in Alabama? The hummer probably doesn't have enough extra brain cells to support such worrying questions.

We know a lot about migration, but the central mystery remains. We know that birds can see polarized light (we can't) so have a compass in their brain. They can recognize and remember geographical landmarks. We know so much more than nineteenth century ornithologists, who thought swallows hibernated in the mud. What we don't know is the precise location of migration controls in the avian brain. We can only observe this remarkable feat of daring and optimism and let ourselves feel in a totally inappropriately anthropomorphic way, inspired.

I know birds aren't optimists, or pessimists, but their migrations, to me, symbolize optimism. My spirits lift, hearing and seeing the warblers, the thrushes and all the other migrants in the spring.

After this winter, given all the pandemic restrictions we've endured, spring migration is going to be more cheering than ever.

- Fran Greenberg

ScienceWatch – Sexy Birdsong Re-Emerges During Pandemic

“We were shocked to find that even though they are softer, their songs are transmitting at twice the distance — almost three times.”

– E. Derryberry



Elizabeth Derryberry, associate professor of ecology and evolution at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, has been studying the songs of white-crowned sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) for over a decade.

In 2012 Derryberry showed that over four decades male sparrows in the San Francisco Bay Area adjusted their song to overcome the increasing din of traffic noise. Unable to compete with the constant anthropogenic hum, the birds did what we do at a noisy party or restaurant; they responded by singing louder and converting lower frequency notes of their song to higher frequencies. But their top frequencies remained unchanged, limiting the bandwidth they could use to produce the trills in their song.

Males use their song to advertise their fitness, which both repels other males and attracts females. The frequency bandwidth exudes strength, and the trilling demonstrates stamina, says Derryberry. Higher song volume and pitch could make them heard, but comes at a breeding cost. “The wider the bandwidth [of the trill], basically, the sexier they are,” Derryberry contends. This gets at a fundamental trade-off that these birds in noisy areas are facing where they can’t be both sexy and transmit their song at a great distance.”

Last spring California was in the middle of a state-wide COVID-19 shutdown. Traffic over the Golden Gate Bridge was back to levels not seen since 1954. Expecting a concomitant drop in background noise, Derryberry realized she had the perfect conditions to test whether or not white-crowned sparrows would revert to singing their earlier “sexier” song.

Derryberry couldn’t travel to the San Francisco Bay Area, but her colleague, Jenny Phillips, a behavioral ecologist at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA, could, and she began recording birds there. Reporting in the October 30, 2020 issue of *Science*, Derryberry, Phillips and colleagues show that male white-crowned sparrows did indeed change their tune in response to the drop in ambient noise levels.

The team looked at birds in rural Marin County and compared their songs with those in two urban areas (San Francisco and Costa Counties). They compared background noise levels and songs recorded before (April-June of 2015 and 2016) and during (April-May 2020) the shutdown. Noise levels decreased in both areas, but the urban drop was much greater during the shutdown, approaching levels found in the rural areas.

Lacking competing background noise, urban area birds sang more softly, 30% softer, on average, yet could be heard at more than twice the distance. In addition, they sang at lower minimum frequencies, yielding songs with greater bandwidth that hadn’t been heard for decades. Birds in the town of Richmond in Costa County began using low frequency notes not recorded there since 1971. Rural birdsong changed similarly, but much less so.

“This study shows that when you reduce noise pollution there’s almost an immediate effect on wildlife behavior and that’s really exciting because so many things that we do to try to help the environment take a long time to improve,” said Derryberry.

Why did the birds change their tune? Lower frequency sounds travel greater distances, so male birds could sing at lower volumes and still ably advertise themselves. By doubling their communication distance males could establish clear-cut boundaries, avoiding the stress of territorial conflicts and raising their overall fitness.

Moreover, in the same way that a skilled musician can show off his talent by playing both high and low notes, male birds were now able to show females their virtuosity at both ends of their musical scale. Females thus gain more information on the fitness of their potential partner.

With a mean life span of 13 months, it's clear that the sparrows monitored before and during the shutdown were not the same, so Derryberry says it's impossible to know whether the adaptation was due to changes in gene expression (phenotypic plasticity) or that males underwent a genetic change favored by natural selection (evolution).

Even as traffic returns, Derryberry believes that the legacy of this "silent spring" will be long-lasting, and that songbirds in other cities may be experiencing similar effects. "Whether it's plasticity or selection, whatever it is, I think these birds are on a new trajectory," she said. "Their songs have entered an acoustic space they haven't been in over 30 years. I really doubt they're just going to go right back to where they were before."

- Saul Scheinbach



Congratulations Again to Wisdom

Oldest bird mother and oldest banded bird



Wisdom, the world's oldest known Laysan Albatross, is a mother once again. At age 70, she hatched a new chick on Midway Atoll in the Pacific this February.

Wisdom was originally banded on Midway in 1956 by Chandler Robbins, author of the well-known *Golden Guide to Birds*. Estimated to be six years old at that time, she has roamed the oceans returning once per year to Midway to lay a single egg. Experts say she has had at least 35-40 offspring.



Do birds have eyelashes?

Some birds do have a row of bristles that protrude from the ends of their eyelids and could be called eyelashes. While human eyelashes are hairs, bird's eyelashes are modified feathers.

They are found mostly on large, non-migratory, non-waterfowl species. The eyelashes are believed to serve a protective function preventing particles from getting in the eye while flying, running, or burrowing.

Don't look for eyelashes on your backyard birds. But you can see them on Ostriches in Australia and Secretary Birds in Africa.

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Results of Christmas Bird Count

The 97th Bronx-Westchester Christmas Bird Count found 120 species on Sunday December 27, 2020. Four above average. Plus an additional 3 species were seen count week.

Highlights included

- First ever record of Common Eiders off Mamaroneck and the East Bronx.
- The 3rd record for Semipalmated Plover in the East Bronx,
- Iceland Gull on the Hastings-on-Hudson waterfront,
- Common Redpolls in Hastings and in Rye.
- First Spotted Sandpiper during count week.

New high counts were recorded for Common Loon, Black Vulture, Bald Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, Common Raven, Carolina Wren. There was a 29 year high number for Great Blue Heron, and for Savannah Sparrow.



How Climate Change Will Impact NY Birds

National Audubon has created a comprehensive guide clearly showing how continuing climate change could affect each species of New York birds. In an easy, understandable way this guide explains what might happen and how you can help prevent undesirable changes.

Check this site to see what might happen to your favorite bird.

<https://www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees/state/us/ny>



How do birds learn their songs?
How can we learn
the songs of birds?

Thursday, March 11
7:00 pm via Zoom
Presenter: Tom Stephenson

Sponsored by all five Audubon chapters in Westchester
Bedford Audubon, Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon, Central Westchester
Audubon, Hudson River Audubon of Westchester, Saw Mill River Audubon

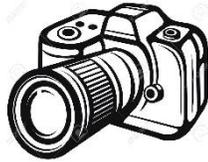
The advertisement features a close-up photograph of a yellowthroat bird with its beak open, as if singing. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

More Virtual Programs

Improve Your Bird Photography

Wednesday, March 24, 2021 7:30 pm

Technology has played a huge role in helping us to achieve sharper bird images. But as rewarding as it is to capture a nice photo of a bird in flight, it can seem somewhat daunting to learn about the many equipment options and settings available.



Tom Warren, photojournalist and HRAS member, is a skilled bird photographer as evidenced by being included in **the Audubon Photography Awards Top 100** four times.

Tom will talk about the latest options for adding photography to your birding arsenal and share some tips he has found helpful in the field. His presentation will focus on using Digital Single Lens Reflex cameras (DSLR) He will also discuss longer, yet portable lenses, “mirrorless” and other more compact options.

You can learn to take better photos.



Birds in Flight and Music

Wednesday, April 28, 2021 7:30 pm

Join the virtual Learning in Concert program of The **New Bedford (Ma) Symphony Orchestra** which will explore bird flight patterns paired with classical music that moves in the same motion as each flight pattern.

Featuring a performance by the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra, the program will include the world premiere of Jamie Allen’s Nightingale Concerto as well as music by Mendelssohn, Haydn, Vaughan Williams, and Strauss. Featured guests include Xavi Bou, photographer for the Project, Cisco the Great Horned Owl from the Buttonwood Park Zoo, and Stanford University’s David Lentink.

Following the program, Ruth Deford Kotecha, HRAS board member and Professor Emerita of Music History at Hunter College, will lead a discussion and Q&A.

If you wish to participate in any of our on-line programs, send an email to hrasbirder@gmail.com requesting access and sign-in information

Spring is Coming

Some birds always seem to rush nesting season; they can be heard singing even as February snow flies.

The northern cardinal leads the pack of early singers, closely followed by the tufted titmouse and chickadees. Listen for the cardinal's *cheer cheer* and *birdy birdy birdy birdy* songs, which are associated with pair formation and bonding, and territory establishment. Note, too, that both male and female cardinals sing. Chickadees, too, start their courtship songs early. You might hear their *chickadee-dee-dee* vocalizations throughout the year, but their *fee-bee* or *fee-bee fee-bay* songs are associated with pair bonding. Another species that sings early is the mourning dove. Actually, mourning doves have been observed nesting and laying eggs in every month of the year. Mockingbirds, too, start singing often in February, and some don't stop their spring song until well into August! House finches sing throughout the year, but in February they begin singing more vigorously.

If you need a winter pick-me-up, take a walk in nature, and be sure to listen for cold-weather songsters.

Thank You

Thanks to all of you who generously donated to our Annual Appeal. Your support pays for all our programs and activities and continuing concern for birds, wildlife, and our environment.

You make it all possible



Digital Newsletter

You can find an enhanced version of this newsletter on our website. www.hras.org It includes lots of extra content and features that are not included in this printed newsletter. There is information on birds, bird feeding, butterflies, environmental issues, resources, poems, and other interesting and informative articles.

Field Trips Resume

Limited to 8 participants. Participants MUST pre-register, wear masks and maintain 6 ft of social distancing.

Register for field trips by emailing Michael Bochnik at bochnikm@cs.com. Details will be sent out one week before the trip.



Saturday, March 27, 2021

Edith G. Read Sanctuary

Edith G. Read Preserve is one of the top places to bird watch in Westchester County. Spring maybe in the air and both lingering winter birds and the first vanguards of spring should be seen. We will explore the lake, inlets, marshes, shoreline, woods and ponds.

Saturday, April 24, 2021

Hempstead Lake State Park

Spring migration will be underway. The first few warblers may be found at this Long Island park. This is also the best time to come across a southern overshoot such as a Prothonotary or Yellow-throated Warbler or even a Summer Tanager.

Mark your Calendar

Saturday, May 15, 2021

Spring
BIRD-A-THON



Group Names for Birds: A Partial List

A bevy of quail	A murmuration of starlings
A bouquet of pheasants [when flushed]	A murder of crows
A brood of hens	A muster of storks
A building of rooks	A nye of pheasants [on the ground]
A cast of hawks [or falcons]	An ostentation of peacocks
A charm of finches	A paddling of ducks [on the water]
A colony of penguins	A parliament of owls
A company of parrots	A party of jays
A congregation of plovers	A peep of chickens
A cover of coots	A pitying of turtledoves
A covey of partridges [or grouse or ptarmigans]	A raft of ducks
A deceit of lapwings	A rafter of turkeys
A descent of woodpeckers	A siege of herons
A dissimulation of birds	A skein of geese [in flight]
A dole of doves	A sord of mallards
An exaltation of larks	A spring of teal
A fall of woodcocks	A tidings of magpies
A flight of swallows [or doves, goshawks, or cormorants]	A trip of dotterel
A gaggle of	An unkindness of ravens
A host of sparrows	A watch of nightingales
A kettle of hawks [riding a thermal]	A wedge of swans [or geese, flying in a "V"]
	A wisp of snipe

Any of these group names may properly be used by birders who wish to display their erudition, although it is probably linguistically inaccurate (and it certainly is bad manners) to upbraid someone who refers to "a bunch of ravens" by saying, "Surely you mean `an unkindness of ravens,' my good fellow."

Most of these terms date back at least 500 years. Some of them have been in continuous use since then; others have gone out of fashion and been resurrected in the last century or two; still others only exist on lists.

Changes to Migratory Bird Treaty should save birds

The Biden administration announced it would delay the implementation of a last minute rollback by the Trump administration to ignore the intent and language of the law to protect and conserve birds.

“It’s clear the new administration heeding the courts and hearing the countless Americans, and state, tribal, and international officials, and other leaders who said this rollback was bad policy,” said Greenberger.

New science has revealed the loss of **3 billion birds** in North America since 1970 and that **two-thirds of those birds are at risk of extinction** due to climate change. In light of these alarming reports, the National Audubon Society is advocating for a multi-front approach to reinstate the longstanding and common sense interpretation this foundational law.

“This is an important opportunity to not just reinstate the original policies, but strengthen the MBTA by pursuing a reasonable permitting process to manage incidental take,” said Greenberger. “We look forward to working with the Biden administration to make it happen.”

Just last month, Audubon and **several other conservation groups filed a lawsuit** challenging the final rule. The case is now slated to be heard by Judge Valerie Caproni, who overturned the legal basis for the rollback in August of 2020. The Trump administration proceeded with finalizing the rollback, despite Judge Caproni’s ruling.

The change by the Trump administration centered on the enforcement of “incidental take.” It attempted to limit the MBTA’s protection only to activities that purposefully kill birds, exempting all industrial hazards from enforcement. Any “incidental” death—no matter how inevitable, avoidable or devastating to birds—became immune from enforcement under the law. If this change had been in place in 2010, BP would have faced no consequences under the MBTA for the more than one million birds killed in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

“We also hope to see Congress pass the Migratory Bird Protection Act to clarify these longstanding protections and authorize this common-sense approach,” said Greenberger.

The **Migratory Bird Protection Act** was passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee in the 116th Congress and had a bipartisan group of 90+ co-sponsors. The bill would secure protections for birds and direct the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to develop a permitting process for “incidental take” through which relevant businesses would implement best management practices and document compliance, further driving innovation in how to best prevent bird deaths. It would need to be reintroduced in this Congress in order to be considered again.