

The Rivertown Naturalist



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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.

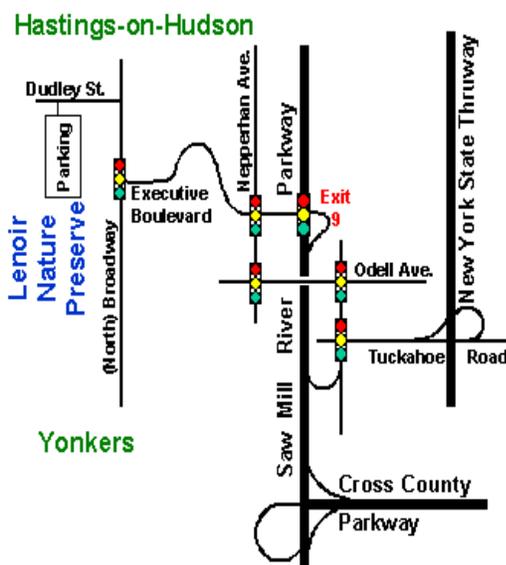
Our mission is to foster protection and appreciation of birds, other wildlife and habitats, and to be an advocate for a cleaner, healthier environment.

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.



Program:

Birds of the Gaspé Peninsula

Wednesday May 23th

Refreshments 7:00pm; Program 7:30pm

Charlie Roberto, from Saw Mill River Audubon, will introduce us to Canada's little known area -- the Gaspé Peninsula.

Located in the Province of Quebec at the mouth of the Saint Lawrence River, it is slightly larger in area than the country of Belgium but with a population of only 150,000, the peninsula is a natural wonderland.

Charlie, a knowledgeable naturalist and gifted speaker, will discuss some of the over 360 species of birds as well as other natural findings including moths, mammals and flowers.

Member's Night

Wednesday, June 27th

Refreshments 7:00pm

Program 7:30pm



At our last meeting of the season, we encourage all members to share their favorite photos of the past years. Please bring no more than 10+ images. Digital images can be on a CD, USB thumb drive or memory card (contact Michael Bochnik for details on acceptable formats).

See spectacular photography as well as images from HRAS field trips. We will also honor volunteers who selflessly contributed to the success of the chapter in the past year.



ScienceWatch: An Uncertain Future for Frogs

“They’re not in large numbers—their

abundances are low. But we think that as more time goes by, we’ll find more species that we thought were lost.” –J. Voyles

In a 1999 *ScienceWatch* I described multiple threats faced by frogs worldwide (<http://www.hras.org/sw/SW5-24-99Frogs.htm>). One such threat* came from an emerging pathogen *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (BD), a chytrid fungus first discovered in 1993 in dead and dying frogs in Queensland, Australia and later found in Panama.

BD is an aggressive pathogen infecting the skin of frogs, causing it to thicken. Since frogs need a porous skin for hydration and respiration, death quickly ensues. This emerging disease, chytridiomycosis, caused massive die-offs wherever it was found and spread from one continent to another, probably by the pet trade. By 2004 the fungus triggered a worldwide epidemic threatening to wipe out a whole class of amphibians. Recent estimates are that over 200 frog species have gone extinct and hundreds more are endangered.

Emerging pathogens learn new tricks to overcome host defenses but they rarely cause extinction of the host population. Usually they shift from being highly lethal at first to a later period when host and pathogen coexist because host defenses improve and/or the pathogen naturally loses its virulence. The threat of worldwide frog extinctions beginning in 2004 prompted wildlife biologists to conduct captive breeding programs to save the remnants they could find in the wild, hoping to reintroduce them when and if the disease abated.

Now a study in the March 30, 2018 issue of *Science* provides both good and bad news. Some frogs have become naturally resistant to BD, but its virulence has not declined and many other frogs are still dying off.

The lead scientist, Jamie Voyles, studies emerging infectious diseases at the University of Nevada, Reno, NV. Her team looked at nine frog species devastated when BD first appeared in Panama but

have since returned to pre-epidemic levels. They tested the possibility that BD was less deadly now due to a decrease in virulence by infecting frogs with fungus collected during the disease outbreak in 2004 and comparing the results with fungus collected from the rebounding frogs. By all measures (growth rate, spore size, severity of infection) both samples were equally virulent.

Next they tested the possibility that rebounding wild populations had become resistant to BD. They took skin secretions, which normally contain antimicrobial peptides, from these frogs and from “naïve” frogs that had been collected before the outbreak and kept in captivity and compared their ability to block the growth of BD in petri dishes. The inhibitory effectiveness of frog secretions from the wild was much greater than that from captive-bred frogs. “We had multiple species that were between two and five-fold different [between wild and captive] in their effectiveness, which is pretty striking” said Dr. Voyles, who speculated that mutant frogs with more effective secretions survived the disease outbreak and passed down their resistant genes.

But Karen R. Lips, who studies chytridiomycosis at the University of Maryland, is not convinced that just looking at skin secretions is the answer. She says that to prove skin secretions protect against BD researchers would have to infect frogs to see if stronger secretions keep more frogs alive. Moreover, resistance may also stem from the switching-on of genes that make immune-related proteins that thwart infection. It’s possible that both factors matter.

Whatever the cause for the rebound there is still no reason to be complacent. The nine recovering species in Panama represent only 12% of those present before the epidemic.

“I want to put out the message that this is still bad,” said Dr. Voyles. “The rebound is a glimmer of hope. But it does not mean by any means that everything is back and there is no problem.”

– *Saul Scheinbach*

I also discussed the disruption of frog embryonic development possibly caused by the herbicide atrazine. Subsequently, it was shown that atrazine turns male frogs into females and is linked to cancer in humans. Found at high levels in drinking water, it was banned in Europe but is still the second most widely used herbicide in the US.

Good News, Sad News at Lenoir Nature Preserve

The good news is that Westchester County has finally funded and hired a full-time naturalist/curator for Lenoir Nature Preserve, something we have urged for many years.

The new naturalist will begin her duties in mid-May. We look forward to working closely with her to improve Lenoir's value to the community and to the future efforts of our Audubon chapter.

The sad news is that Melissa Sullivan, who has been working with us at Lenoir for almost ten years, has left us. She has always been an eager supporter of our activities and was a pleasure to work with. We wish her well.



Summer Field Trips

Call Michael Bochnik at 914-237-9331

for more information
Visit our web site at www.hras.org

All field trips are free and open to the public. Bring binoculars (some are available for loan). Bring lunch and refreshments for all day trips. Dress appropriately for the weather.

Saturday, May 12, 2018

BIRD A THON

On this day members and friends will scour Westchester County to spot as many bird species as we can and to raise money for our chapter. See details

Sunday May 13, 2018

Mother's Day Warbler Walk Lenoir Nature Preserve 8:00 AM 19 Dudley St. Yonkers

Meet us for our 27th year of this Audubon tradition. We start with a leisurely walk around the preserve on the newly paved paths. Spring migrants should be abundant. After the walk; please join us in the nature center for light refreshments.

Saturday June 23, 2018

Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge

Meet at the refuge at 8:00 AM

Our visit may yield grassland species such as Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows and. Maybe. Upland Sandpiper, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Henslow's Sparrows. A Dickcissel appeared last year.

The refuge entrance is on Hoagerburgh Road, Wallkill, NY in Ulster County. Expect a 1^{1/2}hour drive. Bring water to keep hydrated as there is no shade in the grasslands. For Detailed Directions visit <http://www.hras.org/wtobird/shawangunk.html>

Another Great FeederWatch Season

We have just completed our 20th year participating in Project FeederWatch, a Citizen Science project organized by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Thanks go to Carol Lange for co-ordinating the efforts of more than 50 people who participated this year and for faithfully submitting our data to Cornell.

On the surface, FeederWatch may seem more like a social event than a scientific endeavor. We sit in warm, indoor comfort while identifying and counting the birds that come to our bird feeders on frigid winter days. While observing we also chat and feast on goodies and comradery. A good time. Finally, we transmit our data to Cornell where it is combined with data from thousands of other FeederWatches across the country. Collectively this data gives

ornithologists and scientists an ocean of information on the abundance and location of bird species.

Although we did not see any truly rare birds this year, we did make some observations.

First, we saw more Fox Sparrows and Chipping Sparrows than we have seen in recent years. But, we did not see any Red-breasted Nuthatches. In fact, we haven't seen any for a few years. And our final FeederWatch of the year in April marked the first appearance of both Palm and Pine Warblers. You can't predict trends based only on our experience. But when scientists combine our data with data from other FeederWatches, they may have solid evidence to explain changes in species population and movements.

Join us again next year to help science and eat fresh goodies.

Bird - A – Thon Pledge

Hudson River Audubon’s BIRD-A-THON will be held Saturday, May 12th to raise money for the activities of the chapter. You can help by making your pledge today.

A BIRD-A-THON is like a walk-a-thon, bike-a-thon or any other "-thon" in that we ask you to pledge X amount of money per lap, mile, or as in our case, bird species seen, within a 24 hour period. We will have teams of bird watchers roaming Westchester County to find as many birds as possible. The combined list for the teams should be between 100 to 150 species. Pledges can be given for a flat rate such as \$25.00 or you can pledge per species such as 25 cents/bird. If we see 120 species your pledge will come to \$30.00. We will send out reminders after the bird-a-thon on how much you pledged.

Thank you for your generous support!

HUDSON RIVER AUDUBON BIRDATHON PLEDGE CARD

<p>___ I am happy to pledge \$ _____ . _____ per species in support of your birdathon.</p> <p>___ I prefer to pledge the enclosed gift of \$ _____ . _____</p> <p>___ I will give you an additional \$ _____ . _____ if the team spots a _____ (bird species)</p>	<p>From:</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Your Name</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Address</p> <p>_____</p> <p>City State Zip</p> <p>(_____)</p> <p>Telephone</p>
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Send to: Hudson River Audubon Society
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Make Donations Payable to HUDSON RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

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