

# 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.

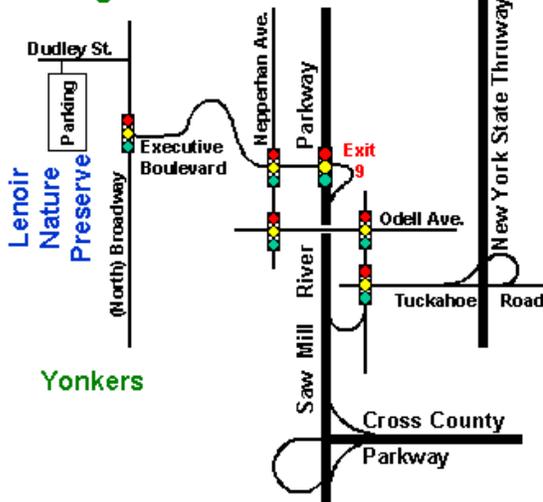
[www.hras.org](http://www.hras.org)

## 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, November 30, 2016

Refreshments, 7pm; Program, 7:30

## Status of Wood Thrush in Rockefeller State Park



Even if we can't identify it by name, many of us are familiar with the haunting flute-like song of the wood thrush. Rockefeller State Park has been designated an Important Bird Area, in part because of the breeding population of this declining migratory species. But do straight numbers of breeding birds tell the whole story? How do they currently use the habitat and how might we better manage for their breeding success?

Dr. Elijah Goodwin of Whimbrel Nature will present preliminary results from his first two years of a multi-year study of wood thrush productivity on Preserve Lands. What have we learned so far from the wood thrushes, what can they tell us about the health of our forest, and where do we go from here?

\* \* \* \*

Wednesday, December 21, 2016

Refreshments, 7pm; Program, 7:30

## The Artist , The Musician, and Birds of America

Anthony Philip Heinrich was a little-known 19<sup>th</sup> century American composer whose life was closely intertwined with that of John J. Audubon – so much so that he is buried with the Audubon family in New York City. His music which includes “American Woodsman,” and “Beethoven in America” drew inspiration from the wilderness and wild birds of the continent.

Recently new examples of Heinrich's work were discovered, including one specifically dedicated to Audubon. Learn about this unlikely and unusual connection, with images provided by Audubon and music by Heinrich.

Presenter: Fred Baumgarten, Director of Foundations, Government, and Corporate Relations, Sarah Lawrence College

\* \* \* \*

**ScienceWatch –**

## ♪ Baby It's Hot Outside ♪

“It’s as if the parents are preparing the chicks for the temperature they will experience after hatching.” – M. Mariette

Last month 200 countries finally agreed to reduce their use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFC’s), the greenhouse gases used as coolant in refrigerators and air conditioners. Molecule for molecule HFC’s are 10,000 times more active than CO<sub>2</sub> so the agreement to limit HFC’s could reduce global temperatures by 0.5°C (0.9°F). But the average annual global temperature has already increased by 0.8°C (1.4°F) since 1880, and is expected to rise by 1.1°C to 5.4°C (2°F to 9.7°F) by 2100, depending on how aggressively we limit future greenhouse gas emissions.



This is bad news for humans. For example, melting glaciers are expected to raise sea levels 0.8 to 2.0 meters (2.5 to 6.5 feet) by 2100, enough to inundate coastal cities. But how will other organisms deal with global warming?

A report in the August 19, 2016 issue of *Science* provides an example of how some birds may cope with rising temperatures. The study by Mylene Mariette and Katherine Buchanan, behavioral ecologists at Deakin University, Geelong, Australia, suggests that parents can prepare their offspring for impending warming even before they hatch by calling to the unhatched embryos.

While studying how parent zebra finches (*Taeniopygia guttata*) communicate with each other during nesting, Dr. Mariette noticed that sometimes a parent would perform a squeaky serenade only when alone on the nest and when the ambient temperature was above 26°C (79°F). This “incubation call” was only uttered within five days of hatching, presumably when the embryos could hear it.

Suspecting that the incubation call was related to higher temperatures, she and Dr. Buchanan artificially exposed eggs to recordings of either incubation calls (treatment) or non-specific control calls (control) during the last five days of incubation. The nestlings were then placed in nest boxes in an outdoor aviary with maximum daily nesting temperatures that varied as much as 6°C (10.8°F) above ambient depending upon the amount of sunlight each nest received.

Newly hatched treatment and control nestlings showed no apparent differences. However, once they began growing the two groups sharply diverged. Treatment nestlings were always smaller than control nestlings. Moreover, higher nest temperatures caused treatment nestlings to respond in the opposite manner than control nestlings. After 13 days of growth, treatment nestlings weighed less and less with increasing nest temperatures while control nestlings got heavier. This disparity in growth rate could be seen as early as one day after hatching.

You might expect that skinnier birds would fare worse than fat ones. But the scientists found the reverse. Once they began reproducing on their own the skinnier birds that grew up in hot nests raised many more progeny than the fat ones. Thinner birds also preferred warmer nest spots.

Only one other case of birds using an incubation call is known (<http://hras.org/sw/swjanfeb2013.htm>). Australian superb fairy wrens (*Malurus cyaneus*), which are parasitized by Horsfield’s cuckoos (*Chalcites basalus*), teach their unhatched young a unique note in the nest when the cuckoo embryo doesn’t have enough time to learn it because it hatches a few days earlier. If a cuckoo chick takes over the nest by evicting the wrens born a few days later the parents stop feeding it because it hasn’t learned the password.

For zebra finches it’s clear that the incubation call yields skinnier birds, and as temperatures rise they do better, but why? One possibility is that thinner birds can lose heat more readily than fatter ones, so by warning their embryos that it’s hot outside parents give them some adaptive advantage in dealing with higher temperatures. Maybe by losing heat more easily thinner offspring can put more energy into reproduction and less into trying to stay cool. Whether or not this is true, no one currently knows how parental signaling causes the physiological changes that yield thinner progeny.

As this example demonstrates, some organisms are preparing for a hotter planet. It’s time we did the same.

- Saul Scheinbach

## Upcoming Field Trips



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.

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, December 3, 2016**

### **Croton Point Park**

Meet at 8 AM in the large parking lot

We will search the meadow for American Pipit and other grassland birds such as Savannah Sparrows and Eastern Meadowlark. American Tree Sparrow should be common along the wooded edges. This will be a long walk with hills as we circle the meadow.

Directions: <http://hras.org/wtobird/croton.html>

**Saturday, January 21, 2017**

### **Pelham Bay Park**

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

Pelham Bay Park is known for its wintering owls, such as Northern Saw-whet, Great Horned, and Long-eared. We will also search the woods and water for winter birds. American Wigeon, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Merganser should be in the bays. The woods here are good for Fox Sparrows and other half-hardies.

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

### **Christmas Bird Count**



If you're looking for a local birding activity that's not only fun and exciting, but helps with valuable winter bird population data, come on out and help on a Christmas Bird Count. They are censuses, near Christmas, of the number of each species of bird seen in a 24-hour period in a particular area or count circle.

Our local count, the Bronx-Westchester CBC, will be held Monday December 26, 2016. The Peekskill CBC and the Greenwich CBC will be held a week early on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>.

There is no particular meeting place for these events. Different groups of volunteers start at various locations throughout southern Westchester and the Bronx and canvas that area for birds.

You can also participate by identifying and counting the birds at your feeder on the count day and phoning in the results. We will form a group specifically for Tibbetts Brook Park. Call for time and meeting place.

We will tally the results from all the groups at the Compilation Dinner (\$10) at the Lenoir Nature Preserve in north Yonkers. For more information, see the count's web site at <http://www.hras.org/bwcbc.html> or call the Bronx-Westchester Count Compiler, Michael Bochnik at 237-9331, or e-mail him at [bochnikm@cs.com](mailto:bochnikm@cs.com).

# President's Message

Dear Chapter Members:

As we look forward to a new year of interesting programs and exciting field trips, I would like to thank all of our board members and other volunteers that make Hudson River Audubon a vibrant and friendly chapter. Our Lenoir Hawk Watch is winding down and our Project FeederWatch is up a running. We hope you'll participate and look forward to seeing you.

Unfortunately programs and newsletters are expensive. We hope you can help by giving to our Annual Appeal. Look for a donation envelope in this newsletter; if there isn't one you can always send a check; made payable to Hudson River Audubon Society, and mail it to: HRAS, PO Box 616, Yonkers, NY 10703.

We have other challenges ahead. In the past few years we have faced a hostile county government trying to either close nature centers or eliminate the staff especially at Lenoir Nature Preserve in Yonkers. We fought for a replacement of a full-time curator only to lose it a few months later. The maintenance of the preserve and the safety of its patrons rely on this position.

We like to welcome our new Newsletter Editor, Hank Weber. We'd like to thank Stan Cho our out-going editor for his exceptional editing skills the last couple of years. Our newsletter has been the best it has ever been!

We can always use new board members to guide the chapter with a fresh look and new ideas. If you'd like to sit in on a board meeting; usually held now on Saturdays at Lenoir a week before the chapter meeting; please ask a current board member about the next meeting.

We can use more volunteers as well; at the garden, at meetings and festivals, and as FeederWatch hosts. Contact information can be found on the back page of the newsletter.

Thank you and we do hope to see you at our programs and field trips this season.

- Michael Bochnik, President

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## Plan Ahead - Field Trips in 2017

Saturday, January 21, 2017  
**Pelham Bay Park**

Saturday, February 4, 2017  
**Thompson Pond Preserve**

Saturday, March 25, 2017  
**Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge**

Friday to Monday, April 28 – May 1, 2017  
**The Delmarva Peninsula**



Friday May 5, 2017  
**Evening at Tibbets Brook Park**

Saturday May 6, 2017  
**Cranberry Lake**

Saturday, May 13, 2017  
**Birdathon**

Sunday May 14, 2017  
**25<sup>th</sup> Annual Mother's Day Warbler Walk**

Saturday- Sunday May 20&21 2017  
**Bashkill Marsh**

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## Wanted: Volunteers for Project FeederWatch

Again this year we are participating in Project FeederWatch, a citizen science program sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The idea is simple. We sit snugly inside Lenoir Nature Center watching the host of birds coming and going to the many bird feeders located just outside the large picture windows. Not only do we enjoy watching the birds (that's the fun part), we also count and record the number of birds we see (that's the scientific part.) Then we transmit our data to Cornell where it is combined with data from tens of thousands of other FeederWatch sites around the country. This data gives ornithologists and scientists valuable insight on the changes in status of bird populations.

We plan each FeederWatch session to last about two hours, and we do sessions on two consecutive days (usually the weekend). Join us for a session or stop by for part of a session to sample what it is all about.

Watching the birds is enjoyable. Generating scientific data seems rewarding. And for some, the best part of FeederWatch is the social aspect. We always have a mix of really nice people who participate, all ages, all levels of birding skills. Conversation and camaraderie abound. Another benefit is abundance of refreshments – coffee, tea, juice, bagels, cookies and other delicacies.

For those new to birds and birding, it's a wonderful way to learn and sharpen your skills in bird identification.



If you are interested or want to learn more contact Carol Lange. Or ask to be added to our email announcement which goes out just before each scheduled FeederWatch session. Contact Carol at (914) 668-5105 or email [CarolLange@aol.com](mailto:CarolLange@aol.com).

### FeederWatch Schedule

Saturday, November 19, 2016  
10 AM -Noon  
Hosts: Kelli and Michael

Sunday, November 20, 2016  
10 AM -Noon  
Host: Ruth

Saturday, December 2 / Sunday, December 3

Saturday, December 17 / Sunday, December 18

Thursday, December 29 / Friday, December 30

Saturday, January 14 / Sunday, January 15

Saturday, January 28 / Sunday, January 29

Saturday, February 11 / Sunday, February 12

Friday, February 24 / Saturday, February 25

Saturday, March 11 / Sunday, March 12

Saturday, March 25 / Sunday, March 26

Thursday, April 6 / Friday, April 7

**BOARD MEMBERS**

**President** 914-237-9331  
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Jane Metzger Mark Testa  
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**Join National Audubon Society.  
Become a Member Today**

For a price as low as 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](http://www.hras.org) Click on the **Membership** link in the upper right corner and follow the instructions. That's it.

Join today!

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

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