



EST. 1947

The BIRD CALL

Winter 2019

Newsletter of the Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society, Inc.

The Monarch Who Hitched a Ride

By Sandy Morrissey

What is the Jet Blue rule on bringing a butterfly aboard in hand luggage? I'm sure my question makes good dinner conversation for the agent who takes my call. After searching pet regulations and coming up only with "comfort animals allowed," we agree that while butterflies were not mentioned, who would know anyway? There is no risk the Monarch will bark or squawk and bother other passengers. But she advises me to check with TSA, as they might have a strong opinion on the matter.

I search the TSA website and come up with "pets allowed but subject to search," with vague warnings about the search process.

Not one to be deterred, I take a chance.

First some background. On a late October day, bluebird monitor Linda Keil found a Monarch caterpillar desperate to feed on a leafless stem of milkweed. Knowing I raised Monarchs, she called me.

The weather had turned cold and with the milkweed finished for the season, the tardy Monarch caterpillar would most likely starve. If it did reach the chrysalis stage, it would emerge in mid-November, with no chance to migrate the 2000 miles to Mexico. Butterflies are cold-blooded, and like all insects, can't fly when temperatures are below 55 degrees.



Late emerging Monarch caterpillar feasts on milkweed

It so happens my husband and I have a birding trip planned to Texas the following week. Maybe it could catch a ride with us? At worst, the Monarch would meet its inevitable demise, same as if we did nothing. At best, it would have a chance to continue the trip to Mexico, hang out for the winter and head north to Texas next March to lay eggs for the next generation of Monarchs – completing one of the miracles of the natural world.

As Linda delivers the Monarch, I retrieve my rearing cage from the attic and find the last vestige of milkweed leaves in my sleeping gardens. The Monarch caterpillar perks up and spends the next few days munching. Reaching its fat and chubby limit, it goes – on schedule – into first its "J" stage, and then morphs into a beautiful chrysalis.

Our departure date approaches. After careful thought and planning, I pack for the Monarch. It is going to spend about five days of the trip as a chrysalis, bouncing around on the airplane, in the rental car, and in and out of hotels. It needs the right luggage.

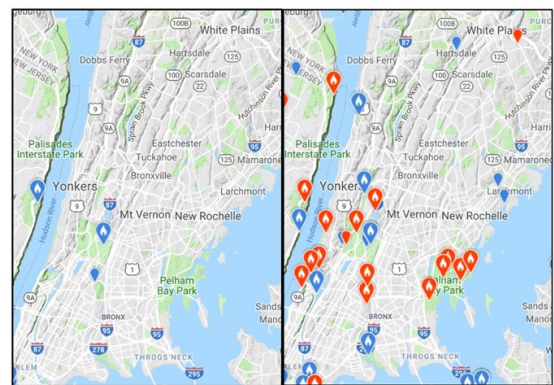
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Unusual Bird Visits this Winter

By Ted Kavanagh

Bird-watchers in our area may be noticing certain uncommon species showing up at their feeders this fall. The cause? Variations in normal food supply, causing birds that usually spend the winter farther north of us to shift south in search of more fruitful foraging. Such unusual influxes of birds are called "irruptions," and the 2018 - 2019 winter is shaping up to feature this migration pattern.

The abundance of pine cones and birch seeds in the northern boreal forests of Canada are markers watched by ornithologists and naturalists as predictors of population density for many species. Arborists in Canada have noted poor development of pine cones there this fall. The evidence of a 2018 irruption is already showing up on the eBird website. The maps to the right show our area with Red-breasted Nuthatch sightings reported to eBird in 2017 (Aug-Nov) to the left and in 2018 (Aug-Nov) to the right. While only three locations in the area (blue



Extracts from the eBird website showing (left) reported sightings of the Red-Breasted Nuthatch in our area in Aug-Nov 2017, and (right) the same data for Aug-Nov 2018

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is a chapter of the National Audubon Society
serving the communities of
Bronxville, Eastchester, Edgemont, Hartsdale,
Larchmont, Mamaroneck, Mount Vernon, New
Rochelle, Pelham, Scarsdale, and Tuckahoe*

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As we leave for the airport, I put the chrysalis in a small plastic cup (using no metal that could set off TSA alarms). I hang it from the lid (punched with airholes) and cushion it inside with a tissue. The cup goes into a pocket in my purse, where it glides through the TSA radar, and onto and off the plane undetected.

Once into our journey in Texas, I must be mindful of my precious cargo. When we go into a restaurant for lunch, or both leave the car for any reason, it goes with us, as I don't want it to cook in the hot car. Otherwise, it rides with us in a pocket in my backpack I secure in the backseat. Of course, it sleeps in the Hampton Inns with us in a cozy corner of my suitcase – but doesn't eat the free breakfast.

When it gets close to the day it could emerge, I switch it to more spacious accommodations – a quart-sized Chinese take-out container. Again, I hang it from the lid, but let it swing freely, so it will have plenty of room to hang out and dry its wings once it emerges.

Now, anxious waiting. On day 10 of the chrysalis stage – the earliest day it could emerge – I'm disappointed to see it still green and unchanged. The chrysalis turns black 12 – 24 hours before the adult butterfly emerges, and I was hoping for this sign that the caterpillar was having as good a time on the trip as I was. But maybe I'd asked too much of it.



Monarch hanging on container lid as it dries its wings

Then morning of day 11, I open my sleepy eyes to see a black chrysalis. Nature is doing its magic! The black chrysalis rides belted in its backpack pocket as we head out and tour yet another wonderful national wildlife refuge. When we stop for gas before the next leg of our trip, I peek in the backseat and am thrilled to see the Monarch has emerged, somewhere along Route 77. It is now pumping its wings full of fluid. We drive on to King Ranch, our next stop, and I'm thinking what a suitable location to release the Monarch, which is royalty in my eyes by now.

At King Ranch I am happy to find a small garden teeming with butterflies. It's been about two hours since "Texie" emerged, so his (it's a boy!) wings should be dry. Now it's safe to place him in the garden. I select a popular patch of ageratum. He continues to hang onto a bloom for the hour we wait for our bus tour. He tests his wings, and I even catch him batting off other butterflies who want to claim his spot, but he remains on the ageratum.

As I board the bus, I sigh and give him a farewell wave. After learning about different breeds of cattle and getting great looks at a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (the reason I picked this vacation), the bus returns. I race to the garden to find – happily – he is gone. I can only believe "Texie" is safely winging his way to Mexico.



Chrysalis rides undetected in pocket of Sandy's purse



Chrysalis has turned black and adult will emerge soon

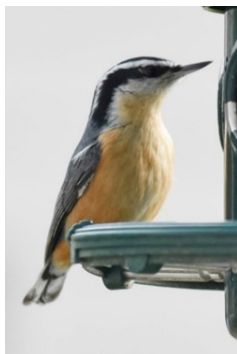


Monarch nectaring on ageratum blooms before leaving for Mexico

Sandy Morrissey got hooked on Monarchs while visiting a nature center in NJ with her granddaughters. The nature center encouraged her to raise Monarchs to help them reach the adult stage. BRSS Audubon now does a Monarch program for groups interested in learning more about Monarchs and how to help all our local butterflies. Contact brssaudubon@gmail.com.

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markers) reported sightings in 2017, ten times as many locations have reported sightings so far this fall (with birding “hot spots” indicated by the red markers).



Red-breasted Nuthatch at a Westchester feeder

Besides the Red-breasted Nuthatch, certain finches and grosbeaks, and the Blue Jay, also display irruptive behavior. While Blue Jays are commonplace in southern Westchester (so a few extra birds this time of year may not be so noticeable) the Red-Breasted Nuthatch is far less typically seen here than its White-Breasted Nuthatch cousin.

The Red-Breasted Nuthatch is slightly smaller than the WB variety (4½” versus 5¾” long) and, as shown in the photo, it features a rusty breast, versus the white breast and small reddish-colored vent area displayed by the WB nuthatch. The striking black stripe across the eye of the Red-Breast is distinctive, by contrast with the White-Breasted’s white face and dark gray crown. Both birds feature a very slightly upturned bill, and both behave in classic nuthatch fashion, typically skittering head first down a tree-trunk, hammering away at the bark, looking for insects.

While primarily insectivores, both species are omnivorous and will happily explore a variety of feeders. They like peanuts (and peanut butter), sunflower seeds, mealworms and suet.

If, then, you have a few unusual visitors this winter, don’t (immediately) blame global warming. You may just be seeing evidence of a periodic bird irruption. Enjoy it while it lasts!



White-breasted Nuthatch waiting for its turn at a feeder

Many Flock to BRSS Audubon Year of the Bird Celebration

The Greenburgh Nature Center served as the perfect venue for the BRSS Audubon celebration of the Year of the Bird. Over 120 people attended, all enthusiastic to learn more about the wonder and joy of birds.

Attendees rotated through different stations that featured fun hands-on learning activities. Children used tweezers to build nests of moss and grass. A funnel became the beak of a swallow – the right shape to catch insects (popcorn) in midair. A chorus of birdsong arose when it was time to find a “mate.” Paper plates turned into colorful birds-of-paradise. A child discovered she has the wingspan of a red-tailed hawk, her Dad the wingspan of a great blue heron. Birds were spotted hopping, running, eating, and preening on the bird walk.

Midway all gathered for the Birds of Prey feeding. The bald eagles got fish, the owl and hawk less-appetizing dishes. Head naturalist Travis Brady explained that each bird was injured, which prevented it from living in the wild. He also emphasized that without strong bird protection laws, such as the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Endangered Species Act, we would have very few of these birds surviving in the wild.

We are grateful that Supervisor Paul Feiner was there and proclaimed 2018 as the Year of the Bird in the Town of Greenburgh. The Town of Scarsdale had also declared it was the Year of the Bird at their last village board meeting. Big thanks go to the many Audubon board members who helped, along with other volunteers from our chapter. We greatly appreciate the cooperation we received from Margaret Goldberg, Executive Director of the Greenburgh Nature Center, giving us full usage of the building and grounds, and promoting our event.



Paper plate becomes a bird-of-paradise



Let’s see if we can spot a bird hopping.



Paul Feiner declared it was the Year of the Bird in the Town of Greenburgh. BRSS Audubon president, Sandy Morrissey is holding the proclamation declaring it is the Year of the Bird in Scarsdale.

If You Stand Still, They Will Come: Birding From One Spot

By Doug Bloom

I spend most of my weekends leading birders on walks through wooded areas or marshes or grasslands in pursuit of seeing as many different species of birds as possible. I have found recently that it is not always necessary to travel beyond my own village, or in this case specifically, to travel beyond a single corner in my village to see a large variety of birds. I am a crossing guard near the Murray Avenue School in Larchmont. I am stationed at one corner near the school twice a day; in the morning and again in the afternoon. After my duties are finished and all the children are settled in school or safely on their way home, I am able to take advantage of the quiet time and can observe from my corner the sights and sounds around me. I noticed during these quiet times a large number of different species of birds, so I began to keep a record of what birds I had seen from my corner. In an eleven month period, from January to November, I recorded a total of 74 different species of birds. Some Audubon Chapters do a BIG SIT, which is a way of counting all the birds seen from a certain size circle. It is sometimes done as a fund raiser. Among the birds I have observed are commonly seen species such as House Sparrow, Canada Goose, American Goldfinch, Red Tailed Hawk, Turkey Vulture, and American Robin, but also on my list are American Kestrel, Merlin, Cooper's Hawk, Warbling Vireo, Tennessee Warbler, Orchard Oriole, and Bald Eagle.



I shared my list with the librarian of the Murray Avenue School who thought I should speak to the students about all of the birds I had seen at the school crossing. One particular first grade teacher, Ms. Nolan, includes a segment on birds in her curriculum, so I went to speak to her class about all the birds I had seen near their school. Ms. Nolan invited me to speak every month to her class and I spoke to them in November about Turkeys, in December about Geese, Swans and Partridges and will go in January to talk about Monk Parakeets and in February to talk about Eagles. I will be doing this through May or June.

These children, (hopefully future birders), have now learned a little bit about the abundance of birds that are all around them. Now they know that all they have to do to see all these birds is to stand still, listen, and look around ... even if they are just waiting for the light to change at their school crossing.

Dark-Eyed Junco

By Ted Kavanagh

The Dark-Eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) spends winters in these parts, typically arriving mid-November and heading northward by the end of April. A member of the Emberizidae family (including American sparrows, buntings, and longspurs) the juncos in this region are two-toned with slate-gray backs and snowy white breasts. Also known as "snowbirds," they summer across Canada and into Alaska, displaying a range of coloration depending upon where they are seen across the continent (see photos), though all have a light-colored bill. Males and females look similar, with the males showing a bit more contrast in color.

These are perky little birds with bright black eyes, often puffing out their feathers to stay warm while foraging for food under the snow. They come to feeders, but are typically seen on the ground below, hopping backwards to scrape back the snow with their long claws.



Usual eastern North America colors of the Dark-eyed Junco



Like Lay's potato chips, you can't have just one. If you see one junco early on a cold morning, you're probably going to see six or more of them. Their song is a one-note trill, but normally you will just hear little chirps as they call to their flock-mates across the yard. Suggesting that Westchester winters can't be all that bad, the first junco sighting is something to look forward to as the days grow shorter

"Gray-headed" Junco coloration - Pikes Peak, Colorado - note rusty patch on back of male



FIELD TRIPS 2019



Please Contact Doug Bloom at (914) 834-5203 for info or to register.

Jan. 5, Saturday - Montauk

Meet at 6:30am at Scarsdale Village Hall. Looking for wintering birds. Possibly Snowy Owls.

Jan. 19, Saturday - Jones Beach

Meet at Scarsdale Village Hall at 7:00am . Looking for wintering birds.

Feb. 9, Saturday - Eagle Fest

Meet at Croton Point Park at 9am. Looking for eagles.

Mar. 3, Sunday - Connecticut Coast

Meet at 7:00am at Scarsdale Village Hall. Looking for late winter migrants.

Apr. 20, Saturday - Larchmont Reservoir/Hommocks

Meet at 8:00am at Larchmont Reservoir. We will be looking for early migrants; warblers and other songbirds that are passing through.

May 5, Sunday- Central Park

Meet at 7:30am at 77th street at statue across from Museum of Natural History. We will be looking for spring migrants such as warblers, orioles and others.

May 11, Saturday- Rockefeller Preserve

Meet at Rockefeller parking lot at 8:00am. Looking for Spring migrants.

May 18, Saturday- Doodletown Road

Meet at 8:00am at Doodletown Road. Best place to see Cerulean Warblers nesting and other migrants.

May 25, Saturday - White Memorial Park, CT

Meet at 7:00am at the Scarsdale Village Hall. We will be looking for early migrants; warblers and other songbirds that are passing through.

May 31 - June 2, Friday-Sunday - Delmarva Peninsula

looking for spring migrants

PROGRAMS 2019

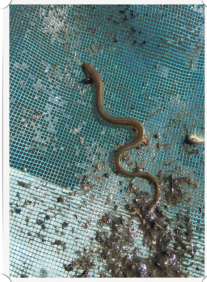
Mar. 26, Tuesday, 7:00 - 9:00pm- Migratory Fish Species on the Bronx River & Volunteer Engagement Opportunities

Speakers: Michelle Luebke (Director of Environmental Stewardship) and Diana Fu (Education & Stewardship Associate) from the Bronx River Alliance

The speakers focus will be on anadromous Alewife herring, which live in the ocean and spawn in freshwater, and catadromous American eels, which live in freshwater and spawn in the ocean.

Location: Tuckahoe Community Center, 71 Columbus Ave., Tuckahoe

This program is sponsored by the Tuckahoe Public Library and BRSS Audubon.



April 10, 2019, Wednesday, 7:15pm - The Timber Rattlesnake and its Conservation

Speaker: Tom Tynning. Tim has been a Professor of Environmental Science at Berkshire Community College since 1999. He was a Field Biologist and Master Naturalist for the Massachusetts Audubon Society for 24 years. An authority on New England natural history. His main interests are amphibians and reptiles.

One of the most endangered vertebrate in the Northeast: the Timber Rattlesnake. Already gone from two New England states, the Timber Rattlesnake is endangered in all others and declining over much of its former range in Eastern North America. Conservation efforts, new understanding of the snakes remarkable behaviors and survival strategies, and a look at the current state of knowledge of this fascinating reptile are highlighted.

Location: Eastchester Public Library, 11 Oakridge Pl. Eastchester

Seed Sale



Thank you to all the customers who purchased birdseed through our fall seed sale. Our next seed sale is upon us - see form in this newsletter. This is our main fundraiser during the year. Our profit on the fall sale was \$3917. There were \$1627 in donations. Some of the proceeds from the seed sales go towards sending kids to the nature camps in the county parks, publishing this newsletter, our Bluebird project, and more.

Please feed the birds this winter and use the enclosed order form. Thank you for your support.

**Bronx River-Sound Shore
Audubon Society, Inc.**

(formerly Scarsdale Audubon Society)
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