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The BIRD CALL

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

Bluebirds 2022: It was Hit or Miss

By Sandy Morrissey

Last year the title of my report was, “For Bluebirds: It Was All or Nothing.” It is really the same this year, only worse. Where we had bluebirds, we had lots of bluebirds. But many locations – more than last year – missed altogether.

It was particularly a sparse year for bluebirds south of I-287. In fact, I counted just 7 locations that had bluebirds attempt to nest. Two of them never got past the egg stage. Six golf courses (including mine), all south of I-287, struck out. St. Andrews, which was on the hit list last year with 5 nesting pairs, squeaked out just 2, but happily successful, bluebird nests.

The biggest mystery and disappointment was Kensico Cemetery. Last year it was in the “hit” category, with 5 nesting pairs. This year – zip. This has never happened in the 18 years we’ve had nestboxes there. No explaining it. Lydia Blake, the monitor, saw one bluebird early in the nesting season and one nest which we’re sure was built by bluebirds – then nothing but tree swallows in all the boxes.

Who hit it big were hot spots north of I-287. The monitor with the most nests was Neil Powell. His cluster of 3 golf courses – Old Oaks, Century, and CC of Purchase – yielded 15 bluebird nest attempts – all successful except one. Fortunately, he gets highly rewarded when he makes his faithful

rounds of 23 nestboxes. At one point he had 7 active bluebird nests in various stages.

Another hot spot was Ossining. Who knew they had so many bluebirds waiting for our homes? We added 3 locations this year (Bethany Arts Community, Dale Cemetery and Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers), and all turned out to be productive. New monitor, Lee Hemphill, was busy all season juggling 8 bluebird nest attempts, and had the honor, along with Fr. Breen and Br. Al, to help band the last bluebirds of the season at Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers property.



Lee, Fr. Breen and Br. Al help band the last bluebird nest of the season at Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers.

We reached 86 nest attempts for the year. While this is down from 99 last year, I was greatly pleased. We had the slowest start ever with temps in the 40’s into the

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Got Water?

By Sandy Morrissey

This newsletter includes our bird seed order form, and we hope you will all buy our seed. That’s our major source of income.

Like me, you buy the seed so you can bring the birds in close to your home. What joy to look out to see the bright red cardinal, a perky chickadee or a rare Rose-breasted Grosbeak during migration.

But you only attract seed-eating birds to feeders.

Everyone needs a drink of water

When I give beginning birder talks, I always say water is more important than bird feeders to bring the birds in

close.

When I moved to my present property – 35 years ago and was much more hale and hearty – I built a mini waterfall to attract the birds with the sound of running water. All the feeder birds use it, but my big payoff comes in the spring and fall migrations when warblers, vireos, and other passing birds are drawn in for a drink or quick bath. Over the years I’ve had 18 species of warblers, plus other beauties like Scarlet Tanagers and Cedar Waxwings. Even the Ruby-throated Hummingbird will stop for a drink.

While a 22-bag cement project isn’t in everyone’s ability, buying a small pump and creating a mini water feature



Even the Red-shouldered Hawks need a drink.

is easily doable. Since I can never have too many birds, I recently added a micro-mini waterfall to my garden, inspired by the wildlife author, Julie Zickefoose. She had an article in the recently revived (yeah!) *Bird Watcher’s Digest* magazine. She calls it Warblerfall and you can learn all about

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Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society, Inc. 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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second week in May. It was good that the bluebirds didn't start on time, as they wouldn't find insects for their chicks in cold temps, as happened one year when the early spring was warm and then temps dropped after nests got started.

The number of bands was 318, over 100 less than the 424 last year. We banded 288 nestlings (down over 100 from the 396 we did last year) and 30 adults. I think the slow start added to fewer eggs being laid and smaller clutches, in addition to the fewer nest attempts. I was disappointed in the recaptures. Only had 27 this year, and mostly 2nd year and 3rd year birds. We did have two 5-yr birds, one at Rockefeller and one at Saxon Woods. Always good to know bluebirds are surviving well on golf courses.

On the brightest side, our success rate was very high this year – 86% of nests fledged at least one chick. This might be our highest success rate ever, despite a period early on where we had several dead adult bluebirds (maybe the cold spring problem). Golf course success rate was 82% and the non-golf location rate was a stellar 88%.

As always, we couldn't accomplish all this without the dedication of our many adult and youth monitors who check the boxes at least once a week, plus many others involved in our bluebird project. Thanks to Mike Vaughn, we have a new supply of nestbox kits, and thanks to Girl Scouts, we have new nestboxes ready to go in new locations. My inbox today has a request from a White Plains Girl Scout troop to help – so the future looks bright for our bluebirds!

More photos on Page 5



Neil sets banded bluebird free at Century CC. He worked to get permission to monitor boxes there and has been kept extra busy ever since.

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how to make it at this website (www.warblerfall.com).

The major requirement is you have a source of electricity outside your home. The pump was about \$25, and you can see from the picture, you can mostly fashion it out of things you might already own – a flowerpot and the largest flowerpot saucer you can get. Rocks are free.

Even in Winter

Don't forget birds still need a drink of water in the winter. It is often hard to find when temperatures are below freezing. A heated birdbath will pamper your birds and who knows what unexpected visitors you'll get!



New micro-mini waterfall fashioned out of a small pump, upside down flowerpot, large saucer, and rocks, which offer shallow depths for bathing. American Redstart jumped right in!



Mini bath works for the chickadee



Black-throated Blue Warbler visits



FIELD TRIPS



Please Contact Doug Bloom at (914) 834-5203 for info or to register. **LIMITED TO 20 PEOPLE.**

September 24, Saturday Marshlands and Read Sanctuary

Meet at 8 AM at parking lot at Playland near entrance to Read. Looking for fall Migrants

October 8, Saturday - Greenwich Audubon Center Hawk Watch

Meet at Greenwich Audubon Center at 8:30 AM. Looking for hawks in Migration and other migrants

November 13, Sunday - Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge

Meet at Jamaica Bay parking lot at 8:30 AM. Looking for fall ducks and other migrants

November 19, Saturday - De Korte Park - Meadows

Meet at 8:30 AM at parking lot at De Korte park. Looking for late fall migrants.

December 26, Monday Christmas Bird Count

Can do all day or a few hours. Call Doug if participating.

January 1, Sunday - Greenwich Point Hank Weber Memorial Bird Walk

Meet at 9:30 AM at Greenwich Point near bathrooms in main parking lot.

January 8, Sunday - Jones Beach

Meet at 8 AM Parking lot at Coast Guard Station West End. Looking for Alcids and other Wintering birds Possibly Snowy Owls.

January 21, Saturday - Montauk

Meet at 8 AM Parking lot at Lighthouse at Montauk Looking for wintering Birds including possible Snowy Owls.

February 4, Saturday - Eagle Fest - Details to Follow

February 11, Saturday - Eagle Walk

Meet at 8:30 AM at Croton Point Park parking lot.

March 11, Saturday - Shawangunk Grasslands NWR

Meet at Shawangunk Wildlife Refuge at 2:30 PM. Looking for late winter migrants, including Short Eared Owls and Rough-legged Hawks.

April 23, Sunday - Oil City Road

Meet at 8 AM at Liberty Loop Trail parking lot. We will be looking for early migrants.

May 7, Sunday - Central Park

Meet at 7:30 AM 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 13, Saturday - Rockefeller Preserve

Meet at Rockefeller parking lot at 8 AM. Looking for spring migrants.

May 20, Saturday - Doodletown Road

Meet at 8 AM at Doodletown Road. It is a great place to see Cerulean Warblers nesting and other migrants.

May 27, Saturday - Sterling Forest

Meet at 8 AM in parking lot at Visitors Center lot We will be looking for early migrants. Warblers and other songbirds that are passing through.

Mt. Vernon Milkweed Project Gets Good Reviews

Board Member, Henry May, adopted the mission to help Monarch butterflies by getting groups in Mt. Vernon to grow milkweed. These pictures are from enthusiastic members of the Boys and Girls Club of Mt. Vernon.

A director of the club recently sent this email to Henry:

My members and I had a great time this year in the butterfly garden. Last year Ms. DonnaMarie Mckenzie worked with the members planting. This year I worked with the members to plant, water, and care for the 2 Gardens (The Butterfly garden and Healing garden).

I look forward to our ongoing involvement with saving the butterflies.

Best,

Halima B. Penny

Director of Outcome Measurement

Boys & Girls Club of Mount Vernon, NY Inc.



All in the Family

By Ted Kavanagh

There are about 10,000 species of birds in the world, of which about 900 can be reliably observed in the continental United States (including Alaska). Of those 900, there are 15 species that have been determined to be US endemics, found nowhere else in the world. While some of those endemics are rare and threatened, like the Florida Scrub Jay and the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, others are as commonplace as the Fish Crow, which we see (and hear) regularly in Bronx River-Sound Shore territory, and the Seaside Sparrow for which southern New York marks the north end of its year-round range. Another US endemic we less frequently see along the Sound is the Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow.



Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow

The world's 10,000 bird species are divided amongst some 250 taxonomic families. Many of the families will be familiar to even casual birders. Even if we don't know the Latin names, most of us know hawks (family Accipitridae); ducks (Anatidae), hummingbirds (Trochilidae); gulls (Laridae); doves and pigeons (Columbidae); woodpeckers (Picidae); and owls (Strigidae). Over half the families, some 140 of them, subdivide the order Passeriformes (the "songbirds" or "perching birds"), which are distinguished from birds in other orders by the arrangement of their toes: three pointing forward and one pointing backward. Again, many of the passerine families will be known to casual birders, among them the crows and jays (Corvidae); the cardinals and grosbeaks (Cardinalidae); thrushes like the Robin (Turdidae); mockingbirds and catbirds (Mimidae); the chickadees and titmice (Paridae); and the wrens (Troglodytidae).



Eastern Kingbird

Giving up on the idea of putting a big dent in the 10,000 species, some birders decide to embark on the (slightly) less ambitious quest of seeing at least one representative of each of the +/- 250 families. You may not be able to see all the Accipiters, but you've at least seen the Red-tailed Hawk. "One down, 249 to go!" Seeing all 133 species of Corvids sounds daunting, but you've seen the Blue Jay, so you can tick that box. A very large family is the "New World Flycatchers," or Tyrannidae, which includes some 400 species! Good luck seeing all of them, but you don't have to look too hard during the summer to find an Eastern Phoebe, an Eastern Kingbird or an Eastern Wood-pewee, all Tyrannids.

While one can find only 10% of the world's bird species in the Continental US, one can find representatives of roughly one-third of the bird families. That's an encouraging statistic, but you'll have to venture pretty far afield to see many of the other families. You can see sugarbirds (Promeropidae) only in Africa; rheas (Rheidae) only in South America; emus (Dromaiidae) only in New Zealand; and leafbirds (Chloropseidae) only in Asia. The single bird family found *only* in the US is Drepanididae – the Hawaiian honey-creepers.



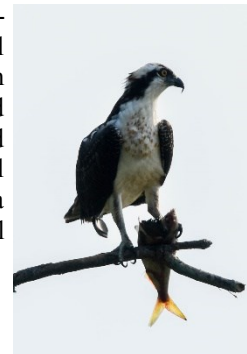
Cape Sugarbird

The true ornithological oddities are the monotypic birds, where the entire family consists of a single species. In human terms, this might be like saying that not only don't you have any siblings, you have no cousins! Noting that while there is disagreement amongst the world's birding authorities as to the number of such families, according to the latest Clements Checklist (August 2021) maintained by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, there are 33 monotypic bird families (see table on Page 5) each comprising just one species.



Hoatzin

How odd are these birds? The singularity of some is clear. Blue-capped Ifrita has poisonous feathers. The Oilbird might as well be a bat: it's nocturnal, lives in caves, and eats fruit. The Hoatzin looks like it might be the "ur-bird," maybe not too far removed from Archaeopteryx. The Secretary Bird stands four feet tall and struts across the plains in black knickers. The Shoebill of central Africa has a truly enormous bill. The Ibisbill has coloring like a gull, a necklace like a plover, but a bright red down-curving bill like an ibis.



Osprey

What makes some of the other monotypic species unique may be more subtle – sometimes related to physiognomy and sometimes related to behavior. New Zealand's Stitchbird looks like other small sunbird/honeyeater-type birds, but it is the only bird species that mates face to face. The male Magpie Goose has a harem, all of whom lay their eggs in a communal nest. The beautiful red-highlighted Wallcreeper looks and be

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has like a nuthatch, but lives on the sheer face of cliffs. The monotype we perhaps know best in BRSS territory is the Osprey. It looks and behaves like many other raptors: fishing and nesting like the Bald Eagle; hovering over the water like a harrier. But the Osprey has one unique feature – its outer toe is reversible. It can face either forward or backward, which is a great advantage when catching its prey and carrying it back to the nest.

Non-Passerines			
Magpie-Goose	Anseranatidae	Australia & New Guinea	Early branch off waterfowl line
Limpkin	Aramidae	Florida through S. America	Brown, snail-eating bird related to cranes and rails
Shoebill	Baleanicipitidae	Africa	Large gray stork-like bird with gigantic bill
Crab-plover	Dromadidae	circum Indian Ocean	Resembles something between a plover and an avocet
Sunbittern	Eurypygidae	Central & S. America	Wading bird with "sunburst" pattern on spread wings
Ibisbill	Ibidorhynchidae	Asia	Shorebird with down-curved blood red bill
Cuckoo-roller	Leptosomidae	Madagascar	Akin to woodpeckers/hornbills/kingfishers
Hoatzin	Opisthocomidae	South America	Prehistoric-looking tree-dweller
Osprey	Pandionidae	Global	Fish-eating raptor with adjustable toe
Plains-wanderer	Pedionomidae	Australia	Shy, quail-like grassland dweller
Magellanic Plover	Pluvianellidae	South America	Plover-like, but feeds young from crop
Egyptian Plover	Pluvianidae	North Africa	Plover-like, but not a plover
Kagu	Rhynochetidae	New Caledonia	Pale gray with long red legs: stands about 2 feet tall
Secretary-bird	Sagittariidae	Africa	Large raptor, standing up to 4' tall
Hamerkop	Scopidae	Africa	Small brown wader with hammer-shaped head
Oilbird	Steatornithidae	South America	Nocturnal, cave-dwelling, fruit-eater; should be a bat
Passerines			
Black-capped Donacobius	Donacobiidae	South America	Loud thrush-like wetland dweller
Palmchat	Dulidae	Caribbean	Fruit-eating palm dweller
Spotted Elachura	Elachuridae	Asia	Waxwing-like forest dweller
Wattled Ploughbill	Eulacestomidae	New Guinea	Large pink wattles on male
Rail-babbler	Eupetidae	South Asia	Ground dweller with colorful face pattern
Hylocitrea	Hylocitreidae	Indonesia	Waxwing-related forest-dweller
Hypocolius	Hypocoliidae	Middle East	Waxwing-related fruit eater
Blue-capped Ifrita	Ifritidae	New Guinea	Small poisonous bird (poison in feathers)
Stitchbird	Notiomystidae	New Zealand	Small colorful nectar feeder
Bearded Reedling	Panuridae	Eurasia	Colorful male with black "beard"
Olive Warbler	Peucedramidae	Central America	Wood-warbler related mountain dweller
Bornean Bristlehead	Pityriaseidae	Kalimantan	Spectacular forest-dwelling herbivore
Mottled Berryhunter	Rhagologidae	New Guinea	Close to woodswallows and butcherbirds
Rosy Thrush-tanager	Rhodinocichlidae	Central & S. America	Somehow bridging tanagers/wrens/sparrows
Broad-billed Sapayoa	Sapayoidae	South America	Close to Asian broadbills and pittas
Wallcreeper	Tichodromidae	Eurasia	Colorful nuthatch-like cliff-dweller
Przevalski's Finch	Urucynchramidae	China	Mountain-dwelling seed-eater

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Scarsdale Girl Scouts, who built boxes for us, learning how to take bird measurements of bluebirds nesting at Westchester Community College.



Brownie Girl Scout Charlotte gets a real "hands on" experience with bluebirds. She helped her troop make boxes in the spring.

Please Order your Bird Seed for the Fall. Seed Sale form included in this newsletter!

**Bronx River-Sound Shore
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