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# The BIRD CALL

Spring 2022

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

## BRSS Annual Meeting June 2 – Five Islands Park

By Sandy Morrissey

With great optimism, we announce we will hold our Annual Meeting in person on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, at Five Islands Park in New Rochelle. It will be held in an outdoor pavilion, so do dress appropriately. The business meeting starts at 6:30 p.m., with an optional bird walk at 6:00 p.m.

It's a great opportunity to meet and chat with other members after two years of zoom. Wine and cheese, plus other light refreshments will be served. ALL BRSS members and friends are encouraged to attend.

### Honoree is Madelaine Eppenstein

While we selected Madelaine as our honoree back in March 2020, we kept her waiting in the wings until we could honor her "in person." She deserves it! Madelaine is doing a "tree-mendous" job making Scarsdale greener and safer. A Westchester resident for 37 years, and now retired lawyer, she is one of the go-to people to get conservation jobs done.



Among her major accomplishments is getting over 1000 native trees and shrubs planted in Scarsdale. When president of Friends of the Scarsdale Parks (FOSP), she worked to get the town to stop dumping snow in the park between the library and high school. With her lawyer skills, she succeeded. Now every spring she applies for a grant for the free trees, and the FOSP holds a Scarsdale Community Planting Day involving hundreds of volunteer children and adults.

A member and past president of the Scarsdale Forum, she works tirelessly on many issues to make Scarsdale greener and more sustainable. She advocates for best practices for village parks, recreation fields, and open green spaces including a no-pesticide policy. She campaigns for traffic-calming regulations and making the village more walkable and bikeable.

An avid gardener, with a garden-tour worthy garden, she promotes using native plants. She works with FOSP on the long-range plan for the improvement and maintenance of the Scarsdale Library Pond and gardens, and involves high school students in FOSP projects with the same goal as BRSS Audubon: to get them to appreciate the out-of-doors, with hopes it leads them to protect the environment as adults.

Madelaine first intersected with BRSS Audubon when she learned of its bluebird project. As a member of Saint Andrew's Golf Club, she got

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## A Hidden Gem in South Carolina

By Jeff Zuckerman

The ACE Basin may not be something you are familiar with. My wife, Clare, and I are so fortunate to be able to spend time every winter on a barrier island in the South Carolina Lowcountry just 30 minutes south of the magical city of Charleston. Less than an hour south of us is perhaps the largest undeveloped coastal estuary area on the East Coast of the United States. Rice plantations once covered this huge landscape which now supports important waterfowl habitats. After the Civil War only three plantation homes survived in the area, and much of the

land was used solely by hunters and outdoor enthusiasts.

Not surprisingly, the 1970s and 1980s



*Bear Island in ACE Basin*

saw the rise of developmental pressures, prompting concerned citizens to petition local, state, and federal authorities to assist with preserving the basin. In 1989, the ACE Basin Project was formed which formalized the cause for preservation and conservation. Important partners included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited and other private groups who have combined over the years to preserve hundreds of thousands of acres of marshes and

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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*

## The Brilliant Crow

By Alex Pinnock

There are ten thousand species of birds on the planet. Having been around since the Jurassic Period, birds have had millions of years to diversify and become the feathered, toothless, beaked creatures we know today. Over those years birds have become gradually smarter and smarter. The best example of this is the Corvid genus, being home to birds such as crows, ravens, and



magpies. These birds have exceptional intelligence, compared even to primates! Crows have been seen having a comprehension of tool use, using things around them to catch their food. They also can hold grudges, just like a person can. The bird recognizes the person's face that wronged them, they tell their friends, and every time they see the person, they'll act aggressively towards them for a long time. Crows will even have funerals for when one of their species dies. We even know that they can understand basic physics like water displacement to get at food! Crows and other Corvids are exceptional birds when you look past their dark plumage and to their brains. Next time you see crows in their giant communal roosts at night or you see a raven flying high above, just take a second to stare in awe that you have seen one of the smartest animals in the world in your local park.

### Bird Seed Sale Results

Thank you to all of our customers who bought birdseed through our February seed sale. This is our main fundraiser during the year and we appreciate your continued support. Our profit on the second seed sale was \$3519. The total profit for the two seed sales this year is \$8174. The donations for year were \$4816.

Doug Bloom, Birdseed Chairman

We would like to acknowledge the following people who donated through the seed sale this year.

Louise Abel, Maria Albano, Paul Basch, Mary Alice Becker, Julie Behounek, Doug Bloom, Eileen Bower, Sheryl Breuninger, Leslie Brill, Steve Cadenhead, Ernestine Colombo, Cathy Corbin, Maria Cornacchia, Marin Cosman, Julia De Carlo, Joe DiMartino, Cece Fabbro, Margaret Falk, Clare Gorman, Elizabeth Harriss, Kathryn Heintz, Lee Hemphill, Edmond Herve, Lois Hertzberg, Marjut Herzog, Emita Hill, Tina Hoerenz, Phil Horner, Ted Kavanagh, Jocelyn Kleinman, Stephen Landon, Don La Sala, Kelly Mac Pherson, Valerie Marini, Dave Margulis, Scott Mellis, Sandy Morrissey, Wendy Murphy, Ingrid Nardoni, Francine Naughton, Suzi Oppenheimer, Dorothy Patterson, Sue Peppers, Donald Pinals, Neil Powell, Karen Raggins, Barbara Roca, Mary Ruebens, Nicole Russo, Ehud Rybak, Yusuf Salim, Vern Schramm, Joan Shapiro, Sheldrake Environmental Center, Mark Sotsky, Barbara Spiridon, Jean Stephenson, Marc Straussberg, Victoria Sturner, Karen Thomas, Ellen Valle, Marilyn Varley, Toni Viscio, Jan Von Mehren, Lisa Wagner, Joan Weissman, William Wertheim, Sidney Witter, Josette Zichello, Jeff Zuckerman



# FIELD TRIPS



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

**May 1, Sunday - Central Park**

Meet at 7:30 AM at 77<sup>th</sup> street at statue across from Museum of Natural History. Will be looking for spring migrants including warblers, orioles and others.

**May 7, Saturday - Rockefeller Preserve**

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

**May 14, Saturday - Doodletown Road**

Meet at 8 AM at Doodletown Road. Best place to see

Cerulean Warblers nesting and other migrants.

**May 28, Saturday - White Memorial Park, Connecticut**

Meet at 8 AM at in the White Memorial Park parking lot. We will be looking for migrants including warblers and other songbirds that are passing through.

**June 4, Saturday - Larchmont Reservoir/Hommocks**

Meet at 8 AM at upper parking area at the reservoir. Looking for spring migrants.

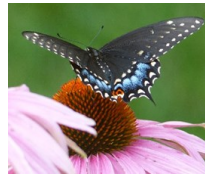
## Nature's Natural Nutrition

By Vern Schramm

Spring brings a bounty of plants to provide our flying friends a banquet of time-honored dietary delights. Weeping Cherry trees bloom early. As fast as the blossoms open, the spent blooms land on the ground, making a snow-like carpet. What's wrong with the Weeping Cherry tree? Nothing. They are providing a favored natural nutrition to House Finches and Cardinals. Neatly pulling blossom after blossom from the tree, the diners surgically snip the nectar-rich base and drop the spent blossom to the



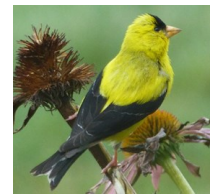
ground. Try it yourself. The base is richly sweet from the nectar with pleasant grassy overtones provided by the blossom base. Even with nearby feeders filled with black oilers and sunflower hearts, the birds turn instead to their preferred sources of natural foods.



Flower beds soon spring to life, providing pollen and nectar for the bees and butterflies. The Coneflower, most commonly the Purple Echinacea, provides months-long feeding for the Eastern Black Swallowtail and Monarch Butterflies. Coneflowers provide an easy entry to the pollinator-bird friendly garden. They are hardy self-propagators and only need to be thinned from time to

time. As the summer lengthens, and the Coneflowers mature, their seeds become a favorite for American Goldfinches.

Hints of green on the goldfinch back is a sure sign that the breeding season is over. The fall molt changes the brilliant yellow breeding plumage to the modest green of the winter costume.



Bird watchers love to attract birds and insects to their yards with feeders. And feeders play an important role to aid the wildlife through food-scarce winters. But there is no substitute for watching the joy birds and insects find in feasting on their native food sources.

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permission to get boxes installed there. Soon many bluebirds "joined." Last year St. Andrews had a record five nesting pairs in its boxes!



Madelaine is credited with bringing bluebirds to St. Andrews Golf Club

All towns and villages could use more "Madelaines." Join us in honoring her achievements at our June Annual Meeting.

### Election of Officers and Board Members

At the Annual Meeting, BRSS members will be asked to vote to approve the following officers for a two-year term: Sandra Morrissey, President; Doug Bloom, Vice President; Diane Morrison, Secretary; and Jeff Zuckerman, Treasurer.

The membership will also be asked to vote for the following slate of Directors for the Class of 2025: Leslie Brill, Bernie Conway, Johnny Flores, Henry May, Billy O'Connell and Tim Mack. Tim, a Hartsdale resident, is new to the board. An advocate for bringing birds into people's lives, he's had his own "birdscaping" business for years. He's on the same page as we – promoting native plants to bring insects to feed the birds!

**We hope to see all BRSS members and friends at Five Islands Park in New Rochelle on June 2<sup>nd</sup>.**



## Offshore Birding Tours

By Ted Kavanagh

Anyone looking to amp-up his or her birding activity might want to consider joining an organized birding tour. While it's possible to see over 1000 bird species in the United States, that leaves 90% of the birds in the world observable only if you travel beyond our borders.

There can be great satisfaction in heading off to some remote spot for a week or two of independent birding: there's nothing quite like spotting and identifying a "lifer" on your own – whether you're in upstate New York or in some Central American jungle. The resources available to anyone with a smartphone – Google Maps, eBird, and Merlin (with its freely available regional bird lists) – make planning and executing such an excursion eminently feasible.



*Breakfast in Mallorca -- Oriole*

plus the tour leader and a local guide); accommodations are comfortable (often beautiful, remote, eco-lodges) and meals are very good, and tailored for diets and sensitivities. Itineraries are well thought out and, in these days of COVID, tour operators are taking all the usual precautions and have adapted to the vaccination and testing protocols for international travel.

Some things to consider when pondering tour options:

- These are serious birding tours! There won't be any "off" days to lounge around the pool, and one should expect to be rising early for breakfast so as to be on the trail around sun-up (6:00 in the tropics). The day's bird sightings will be recapped after dinner, following which there may often be an opportunity for some evening owl-spotting.
- Most tours aim to cover a lot of terrain, typically spending only one or two nights in any one hotel. That frenetic pace won't be everyone's cup-of-tea, and there are itineraries based around a single location. My wife and I participated in a Field Guides tour in the Atlantic rainforest of Brazil, based the whole time at a beautiful lodge in the mountains NW of Rio de Janeiro. A tour with Oriole in Mallorca was based at a lovely old farmhouse.
- The physical exertion required for most tours will not be particularly demanding, but the tour operators are very good at describing the level of fitness required of participants in any given tour.



*Eco-lodge in Brazil – Field Guides*

about the country and its people, and you will have visited some beautiful, out-of-the-way spots.



*Birding at lunch in Guatemala -- Wings*

eBird takes in daily submissions from birders all over the world, so one can easily map out birding hotspots in any international location, for any season of the year.

That said, not everyone seeking to broaden his or her birding horizons has quite the same adventurous spirit, and there can be comfort in putting oneself in the hands of one of the many professional, birding-focused tour companies. Over the past five years, my wife and I have joined tours with three of the larger international tour operators: two based in the US (Field Guides and Wings) and one based in Mauritius (Rockjumpers); and with one more regional group based in the UK (Oriole). In our experience, there are more similarities amongst these groups than differences. They typically offer 10-day to 20-day tours, some with optional extensions. The tour groups are small (8-10 participants



*Stopping for ice cream in Thailand -- Rockjumper*

As anyone knows who has been on a BRSS birdwalk, 8 or 10 pairs of eyes will find more birds than will any individual birder. Particularly in tropical habitats, endemic birds can be very skulky and hard to spot. The guides who have led all of our tours have been extremely good birders: they know exactly what habitat (elevation, vegetation, etc.) will favor certain species; they know the bird calls; and they're keen to make sure all of the tour participants "get on the bird."

In addition to their birding knowledge, we've found that our guides also have known a lot about the history, cuisine, culture and overall wildlife of the countries we've toured. You'll think you've signed up for a birding expedition, but you'll find that you've learned more than you expected

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wetlands. Among the more famous individuals who have contributed to land conservation efforts include Ted Turner and the descendants of the RR Donnelley estate, which set up a foundation to support conservation efforts in the ACE Basin and throughout the Lowcountry. During his tenure in office, South Carolina's U.S. Senator Fritz Hollings procured \$53.8 million for conservation efforts in the ACE Basin.

In November 2014, National Geographic had a featured article celebrating 25 years of conservation efforts in the ACE Basin and the project celebrated 30 years of conservation efforts in December 2019. The purpose of this article is to introduce to our readers the magnificent ACE Basin and to touch very briefly on a few of the birds we encountered this year. I will not describe in great detail the habits of the birds I will mention below. Rather, I will offer just a couple of interesting facts about each bird to whet your appetite to explore further. (Clearly, each of the birds discussed here warrants a separate article in this newsletter and I am sure one of our writers will get around to that some day. Stay tuned). I have also included here some excellent photos of the birds I will discuss. In some instances the photos were taken by my wife, Clare.

We head down to the Ace Basin a couple of times each winter. We never know what surprises we will find. This year we were treated to 75-100 Tundra Swans who differ slightly from Trumpeter Swans. I am always amazed at the distances some birds migrate, and knowing that the Tundra Swans I was looking at had come from Eastern Alaska, a migration of perhaps 4000 miles, made me shake my head. These birds mate for life and teach their new offspring how to get to their wintering homes on the east coast. The Chesapeake Bay is a popular spot for Tundra Swans with the ACE Basin being their southernmost migration habitat.



*Baby Alligators*



*Tundra Swan*



*American Avocet*

We found about 30 American Avocet at the ACE Basin this year. They breed around wetlands in dry parts of interior North America, but during the winter many of them head to coastal lagoons, salt ponds, and mudflats. During the breeding season their plumage is brassy orange on the head and neck, continuing somewhat down to the breast. By the time we see them these bright feathers are swapped out for white and grey ones. In the ACE Basin their black-and-white bodies, long upturned bill, and elegant profile stand out among the other wading birds. They truly are beautiful and the minute I saw them I knew I had never seen one before. Let me offer just one fun fact about them: American Avocet chicks leave the nest within 24 hours of hatching. Day-old avocets can walk, swim, and even dive to escape predators. How great is it, really, to learn about the incredibly diverse world of

birds?

Also this winter at the ACE Basin we found large numbers of Roseate Spoonbills. Talk about an unusual looking bird! If you saw one in a Dr. Seuss book you would not think it out of place. The Roseate Spoonbill has pink plumage with a white upper neck and back. The wings and feathers under the upper feathers are a more distinguishable shade of light pink and the upper feathers are attention-grabbing bright pink. The beaks of these birds become flatter and broader like a spoon towards the end. This allows the Roseate Spoonbill to scoop food out of the water conveniently. There are so many interesting facts about these birds which were almost extinct in the United States, down to a few dozen nesting pairs in the 1940s, when it became a protected species. Today the population is stable.



*Roseate Spoonbill*



*American White Pelican and Brown Pelican*

Finally, the ACE Basin is a great place to see American White Pelicans. We are always amazed at their enormous size as they are one of the largest birds in North America. In fact, their 9-foot average wingspan rivals that of Trumpeter Swans and is second only in size to the California Condor. (I used to think of Brown Pelicans as large birds until I came across these huge White Pelicans). They breed in interior North America, moving south and to the coasts, as far as Central America and South America, in winter. Most of us have seen brown pelicans diving for food. However, the American White Pelican does not do that. Instead, it catches its prey while swimming. Each bird eats more than 4 pounds of food per day. Once again, however, much like the Roseate Spoonbill, these truly beautiful creatures were in a pronounced decline in the mid-20th century, attributable to the excessive spraying of DDT and other dangerous chemicals, as well as widespread draining and pollution of wetlands. But populations have recovered well after stricter environmental protection laws came into effect and are now stable or increasing today.

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