



The BIRD CALL

Winter 2022

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

No Holding Us Back

By Sandy Morrissey

Despite bad old Covid still hanging on, BRSS Audubon has been very active and accomplished a lot this past year. We resumed our field trips in January, masked and ready to share the joy of birds with our fellow members.

Fortunately, the bluebirds were oblivious to the pandemic, and since all activity is outdoors, we didn't skip a (wing)beat. A best thing about the bluebird program is the number of youths we involve, always a goal for us.

One of the most positive changes that Covid forced is holding programs via zoom. Most of us had never heard of it. Since no one had to travel further than the living room, the speaker included, we learned that the Westchester Audubons could easily share speakers, and even get speakers from across the country. Many of us were amazed when renown field guide author, David Sibley, admitted during his program

that he was actually in a hotel room in Italy.

Be sure to register for our 4 interesting programs coming up, including another nationally known author David Rothenberg (*Why Birds Sing*). Benjamin Van Doren will be speaking from Cornell. Our local talent is brag-worthy—Anne Swaim and Saul Scheinbach—experts in their fields.

Busy Bees

Can't have the birds without the bees and other insects providing food for hungry nestlings. We now know the importance of native plants to the insect population, so we are actively looking for native pollinator gardens to sponsor. To date, we have 9 gardens receiving our support. If you're part of an organization that wants to put in a native garden, talk to us. Most importantly, you must have a good maintenance plan to be considered.

If you want to learn more about the benefits of natives, and some recommendations of what to plant, sign up



While everyone might not let native pokeweed invade their garden, I did and was rewarded with Cedar Waxwings. Go native!

for Cathy Ludden's blog, *Around the Grounds*, which can be found on the homepage of the Greenburgh Nature Center

www.greenburghnaturecenter.org.

It's terrific.

Into the Woods

We joined a program started by Saw Mill River Audubon, providing *Mr. Lunetta's Explorer Bags* to public libraries. These backpacks, named in memory of the gentleman who inspired them, are available to borrow.

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In Memoriam, Hank Weber



With sadness we announce the passing of a dear friend, Hank Weber, who died on December 8 at age 82 from liver cancer. BRSS Audubon thought so highly of Hank that we honored him in 2016. While many of us have our own special memories of Hank and how he touched our lives, I think board member Diane Morrison expressed it best while Hank was still alive:

"I am so sorry to hear of Hank's illness. Hank is such a sweet, kind man... he is responsible for my interest in birding and feeding birds. I loved going into Wild Bird Center every week to pick up bird seed and to just wander around and look at all the things he had hand-picked for the store. My home and the homes of my family and friends have many items from the store and, as I am writing this, I see in my living room bookends, figurines, books on birding, Christmas ornaments, garden ornaments, and my first pair of binoculars, all gotten from Wild Bird Center.

"But it's not just about things... it's about Hank's knowledge of birds that he shared with others: his interesting bird walks, his integrity, his generosity, his kindness, and his quiet, humble way of passing on his love of nature to others that has always been appreciated."

BRSS AUDUBON

**P. O. Box 1108
Scarsdale, NY 10583
www.brssaudubon.org**

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sandyml0530@gmail.com

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TREASURER

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jeffzuckerman2000@yahoo.com

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*Committees***MEMBERSHIP**

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claregorman@yahoo.com

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Vern Schramm 576-2578
Susan Williams 917-385-9727

HOSPITALITY

Diane Morrison 725-7351

PROGRAMS

Doug Bloom 834-5203
Bernie Conway 413-210-0041
Erin Provenzano 845-531-8109

NEWSLETTER

Clare Gorman, Editor
claregorman@yahoo.com

WEBSITE

Erin Provenzano 845-531-8109

*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 Blue Jay

By Vern Schramm

Nobel laureate Marquez Gabriel García Márquez indicated that “everyone has three lives: a public life, a private life, and a secret life.” So it is with the Blue Jay. In its public life the Blue Jay knows how to make an entrance. Jays swoop with assurance onto the feeding station scattering any birds that might have been there first. Gulping down feed without taking time to extract the seeds from the shells, they are at the top of the avian-feeder food chain. The raucous call of the Jay makes everyone aware of its public life. When it cares to strike fear into the hearts of its neighbor birds, it makes a call that mimics that of the Red Shouldered Hawk, scattering its competitors and claiming their space for itself. Imagine the Jay’s impish satisfaction at watching birds scatter from this ruse. The flamboyant uniform of blue, black and white, the loud and frequent calls and aggressive flight patterns assures that all bird watchers are aware of the public life of the



Jay. Males and females sport the same coats, confusing field identification of the sexes. Females can be distinguished from males in the early spring, when a sole female will be pursued by small groups of males, all trying their best to impress her. Or by the male habit of providing food treats to the female.

Spring comes. After the noisy calling of spring rites to claim a mate and nest territory, most often located in a conifer tree, nest building begins. The Jays enter their private live. During the incubation and raising of the chicks, the Jays become remarkably silent. Every brood is carefully nurtured by the female who is solely responsible for incubating the eggs and protecting the chicks, with the male the sole provider of food for the female and hatchlings alike. There is no second chance, as Jays raise only one brood per season. Their private life is busy gathering food and trying hard not to reveal the location of the nest to predators. The secret life of the Jay is imbedded in its private life. Food searching includes predation of the eggs and young chicks of the Jay’s neighbors. The drive to feed the family creates the secret life of the Jays and creates a reputation as a robber to blemish the otherwise light-hearted and flamboyant existence in the Jay’s public life.

An exception to the silent private and secret phases of Jay life involves any crow or hawk wandering too near a Jay nest. Predators are incessantly mobbed by the Jays, joined by their friends and neighbors screaming to remove threats from their territory. Jays fearlessly swoop on hawks and crows, even striking perched or flying predators with their talons. Likewise, nesting songbirds raise a defensive alarm when Jays approach their territory. Despite its not-so-secret habit of predation, bird watchers are always pleased to hear the unmistakable call of the Jay and the striking flash of blue when walking through the woods.

Fall Bird Seed Sale Results

Thank you to all those who purchased bird seed through our fall seed sale. The order form for the winter bird seed sale is in this newsletter and online at <https://brssaudubon.org/>. These are our only fundraisers during the year. Thank you for your continued support. Our profit on the fall sale was \$4654. There were \$2471 in donations. The proceeds from the seed sales go to production of this newsletter, our Bluebird Project, making it possible for some to attend summer nature camps, sponsoring native plant gardens and much more.

Doug Bloom, Bird Seed Chairman



FIELD TRIPS



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

January 1, Saturday - Greenwich Point—Hank Weber Memorial Walk

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

January 8, Saturday - Montauk

Meet at 8 AM in parking lot at lighthouse in Montauk Looking for Alcids and other wintering birds, possibly Snowy Owls.

January 23, Sunday - Jones Beach

Meet 8 AM in the Coast Guard parking lot Looking for wintering birds including possibly Snowy Owls.

February 4 - 6, EagleFest - For more information go to <https://www.teatown.org/events/eaglefest/>

February 12, Saturday - Croton Point Park Eagle Walk

Meet at 8 AM in the Croton Point Park parking lot.

March 13 - Sunday Connecticut Coast

Meeting location to be determined. Looking for late winter migrants.

April 9 Saturday - Anglefly Preserve Somers

Meet at 8 AM at Anglefly Preserve. We will be looking for early migrants including warblers and other songbirds that are passing through.

May 1, Sunday - Central Park

Meet at 7:30 AM at 77th 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 early 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.

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They contain various explorer tools, including 2 binoculars. They are perfect to get any youth out exploring, and even adults who may have newly



Sandy Morrissey, President, Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society; Elaine Provenzano, Children's Librarian, Tuckahoe Public Library; and Clare Gorman, Membership & Newsletter Editor, BRSS Audubon

gotten into birding in the stay-at-home pandemic. It's a good chance to try out how great it is to see the birds through binoculars. So far, we've only

supplied them to the Tuckahoe and Greenburgh Public Libraries. Depending on their popularity, we hope to provide them at other libraries in our area. Central Westchester Audubon co-sponsored the backpacks at the Greenburgh Library.

Holy Child School Is for the Birds

While our Mt. Vernon "Learn Birds are Cool in School" program came to an abrupt halt because of Covid in 2020, we did do a version of the program this fall for the Holy Child School. Their interest in us doing the program was sparked by a pair of robins which chose a shrub by a school window to build their nest. The whole school had got involved in watching the nesting activity, as eggs were laid, chicks hatched, fed and fledged; then it happened again

with a second brood. They then called our Audubon chapter to learn more.

We did our sessions (for the sixth graders) on feathers, beaks, bird song and bird nests, then topped it off teaching about the Eastern Bluebird and building 4 nestboxes. The students helped install the boxes on the grounds and will monitor them next spring. No matter what species they get in the nestboxes (hopefully not house sparrows), their bird knowledge should keep expanding. And won't it be great if the robins return!

While it doesn't look like 2022 will be off to a good start pandemic-wise, BRSS Audubon (hopefully all members vaxxed, boosted and masked) will not let it hold us back!



PROGRAMS

January 27, Thursday 7 PM, via Zoom

Migration from a Bird's Eye View

Presenter: Benjamin Van Doren, Ph.D.

Benjamin Van Doren studies global bird migration across scales, from individuals to continents, and his work spans ecology, evolution, behavior and conservation. In this talk, he will explore how migratory birds respond to changing environments—including the influences of light pollution, bird feeding, and warming temperatures. Benjamin began birding as a teen among the Audubon chapters of Westchester County, New York and is currently a post-doctoral associate at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology with a Ph.D. from Oxford University and B.Sc. from Cornell University. Read more about Benjamin's studies and work at:

bvandoren.com

Zoom seating will be limited for this event. Reserve your Zoom link and receive email event reminders by visiting: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/191406631387>

February 2, Wednesday 7 PM, via Zoom

Backyard Birding, program of Greenburgh Public Library

Presenter: Anne Swaim

In these stressful times, birding can be a wonderful way to learn and recharge yourself. Birding as a hobby has skyrocketed with so many people staying at home because of COVID. Join us for what promises to be a lively program! We'll learn which birds are local to our backyards, best practices for attracting and maintaining feeders and hear about tools we can use to identify the birds who spend their time with us. Your new skills will leave you feeling more confident and familiar with our feathered community members. Anne Swaim, Executive Director and Educator, of Saw Mill River Audubon, will be our guide for this program offered by Zoom. Attend and get ready for the Great Backyard Bird Count (February 18-22) a major citizen-scientist program that is easy and fun to participate in.

This program is co-sponsored by BRSS Audubon and Central Westchester Audubon

To register for zoom link: visit www.greenburghlibrary.org

March 15, Tuesday 7 PM, via Zoom

Why Make Music with Birds?

Presenter: David Rothenberg

David Rothenberg spends a lot of time making music live with birds. From nightingales to lyrebirds, laughing thrushes to catbirds, he believes music can be used to help us communicate across species lines, and create forms of art no one kind of animal could make alone. In this online talk he shows you how it's done.

Musician and philosopher David Rothenberg wrote *Why Birds Sing*, *Bug Music*, *Survival of the Beautiful* and many other books, published in at least eleven languages. He has more than thirty recordings out, including "One Dark Night I Left My Silent House" which came out on ECM, and most recently "In the Wake of Memories and Faultlines." He has performed or recorded with Pauline Oliveros, Peter Gabriel, Ray Phiri, Suzanne Vega, Scanner, Elliott Sharp, Iva Bittová, and the Karnataka College of Percussion. *Nightingales in Berlin* is his latest book and film. Rothenberg is Distinguished Professor at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Sponsored by the following Audubon chapters: Bronx River Sound Shore, Bedford, Central Westchester and Saw Mill River.

To register for zoom link: visit www.brssaudubon.org/programs

April 6, Wednesday 7 PM, via Zoom

The Evolution of Beauty or How the Peacock Got Its Tail

Presenter: Dr. Saul Scheinbach

In 1871 Charles Darwin explained how a male trait like the peacock's tail evolved even though it is deleterious for survival. He called it "The Taste for the Beautiful." Male birds are beautiful because females choose attractive males. But female choice didn't concur with Victorian culture and it faded away. Today evolutionary biologists accept the idea of female choice, but debate its role in evolution. Many believe females choose males with elaborate plumage because it proves they are robust. Others have returned to Darwin, defending his idea that ornaments like the peacock's tail occur simply because females find them beautiful. Dr. Scheinbach will present both sides of this debate and review the state of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection today.

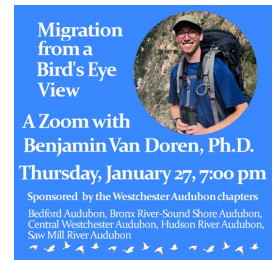
About the presenter: Dr. Saul Scheinbach spent his career working at a food company on various projects related to industrial microbiology and molecular biology, which he also taught along with other biology courses at nearby colleges. He has been an Audubon board member for over 25 years and twice served as president of Hudson River Audubon. Currently he is the vice-president, but his favorite role is that of science writer for the chapter. In his *Rivertown Naturalist* column, *ScienceWatch*, he reports on recent findings that may interest Audubon members and endeavors to explain the workings of science to non-scientists.

Since his days as a graduate student, evolution has been for him a fascinating subject, and rightly so. It forms the foundation for all of biology.

Tonight he will discuss a long neglected theory first proposed by Darwin to explain why birds are so beautiful.

Sponsored by the following Audubon chapters: Bronx River Sound Shore, Bedford, Hudson River and Saw Mill River.

To register for zoom link: visit www.brssaudubon.org/programs



Incidental Birding in the Novels of Patrick O'Brian

By Ted Kavanagh

An escape for me from the Covid doldrums has been to re-read the seafaring novels of Patrick O'Brian beginning with *Master and Commander*, which was first published over 50 years ago. The 20-volume series, ending with *Blue at the Mizzen* (1999), chronicles the career of Captain Jack Aubrey of the Royal Navy roughly straddling the Napoleonic Wars. It begins with then-lieutenant Aubrey receiving his first post as commander of a sloop in the Mediterranean in 1800 and ends in 1815 with Aubrey, now an admiral, after the Battle of Waterloo. The novels track Aubrey's triumphs and setbacks amidst the shifting allegiances of those years, on the water against a series of Spanish, Dutch, French and American antagonists, and onshore against competitors in the Admiralty and grifters seeking to waylay some portion of a successful Naval officer's fortune.

Aubrey's steadfast companion over the course of these adventures is Dr. Stephen Maturin, an often-seasick ship's surgeon, naturalist, and intelligence agent. Maturin, whose ignorance of warships, navigation, and naval warfare is vast, acts as the reader's eyes and ears; his education in these matters from Aubrey and the other mariners is *our* education.

Winston Churchill, when taken to task for impugning the traditions of the Royal Navy, commented "And what are they? They are rum, sodomy and lash." All of these feature in the books, where a captain aboard a man-of-war away from home for months or even years at a time, often out of communication with the admiralty, was akin to God. Every Sunday aboard a warship the hundreds of sailors and marines are mustered to the main deck and read the Articles of War, which stipulate the many capital offenses for which a man might be hung from the yardarm, and the many more minor which yet would result in a flogging. Aubrey is not a "flogging captain," but discipline is critical to good seamanship and fighting order.

While the connective tissue of the novels is the series of missions undertaken by Aubrey around the world, punctuated by grippingly articulated ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore engagements, the books' two great peripheral joys are, firstly, their depiction of the day-to-day life on-board a man-of-war and, secondly, naturalist Maturin's exploration of the flora and fauna of the lands encountered along the way. While Maturin is an incorrigible collector and dissector of all manner of plants and animals, his real love is for birds. As early as page 17 of *Master and Commander*, we have Maturin, after a "meet-cute" with Jack Aubrey on the island of Minorca, excitedly asking:

"Did you see that hoopoe?"

'What is a hoopoe?' cried Jack, staring about.

'A bird. That cinnamon-coloured bird with barred wings. *Upopa epops*. There! There, over the roof. There! There!'

'Where? Where? How does it bear?'

'It has gone now. I had been hoping to see a hoopoe ever since I arrived. In the middle of the town! Happy Mahon, to have such denizens.'"

Later in the book, while Aubrey is cruising the Mediterranean in search of fat merchantmen "prizes:"

"A dark form drifted from the sombre cliff-face on the starboard beam – an enormous pointed wingspan: as ominous as fate. Stephen gave a swinish grunt, snatched the telescope from under Jack's arm, elbowed him out of the way and squatted by the rail, resting the glass on it and focusing with great intensity.

'A bearded vulture! It is a bearded vulture!' he cried. 'A *young* bearded vulture.'

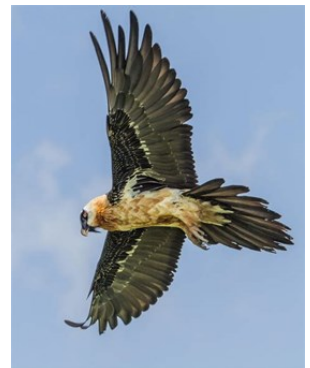
'Well,' said Jack instantly – not a second's hesitation – 'I dare say he forgot to shave this morning.' His red face crinkled up, his eyes diminished to a bright blue slit and he slapped his thigh, bending in such a paroxysm of silent mirth, enjoyment and relish that for all the *Sophie's* strict discipline the man at the wheel could not withstand the infection and burst out in a strangled 'Hoo, hoo, hoo,' instantly suppressed by the quartermaster at the con."

In a quiet side-bar afterwards, the first lieutenant comments to Stephen "There are times when I understand your partiality for your friend. He derives a greater pleasure from a smaller stream of wit than any man I have ever known."

O'Brian, who died at 86 in 2000 not long after the last of his Aubrey books was published, *must* have been a birder. What other sort of individual could capture the classic birding experience described in *Treason's Harbour* (Book 9)? Maturin and a naturalist colleague, having landed near the Nile delta, have hiked for miles through the mud, been stung



Eurasian Hoopoe



Bearded Vulture

Winging It: Mother-Daughter Birding in New Mexico

By Leslie and Violet Brill

Our trip to New Mexico, Violet's first trip out West, wasn't going to be a birding trip—it would be the height of the low season. But as birders, we were undeterred. New Mexico has the fourth most bird species of any state. We knew we'd see good birds!

Shortly after Hurricane Ida, before school began, we flew to El Paso, Texas, and drove to New Mexico's White Sands National Park (Violet at the wheel, having just acquired her license). Exclaiming over palm trees, mountains, and big sky, we spied Chihuahuan Ravens, Turkey Vultures, and raptors that kept us guessing.

At White Sands, a moonscape of gypsum dunes and soaptree yucca, we rented a sled and, with effort, slid down the dunes. Tiny, distant thunderstorms shared the horizon with sunbeams. No birds. As we left, mountains blackened against a raging sunset, storms still looming.

Next morning it was 3 hours to Carlsbad Caverns, the vast underground caves that are the state's top attraction en route, we pulled over—were these people birding? No, but we joined them in wading into the pale blue, super-squishy salt flats—fun! At Carlsbad, we took the elevator 750 feet down, explored the caves, then drove down the foothills to town, planning to return for the sunset flight of the bats.

Outside town, though, an Ida-level downpour with colossal lightning bolts surprised even locals. We pulled over, in zero visibility, until it passed. Later, nerves settled by a delicious dinner at the Trinity Hotel, we drove up to the Bat Amphitheater.

During a ranger's humorous presentation, swooping Cave Swallows retreated into the dusk. A ringtail cat crept across a ledge; a fiery planet appeared. Then, the bats! Countless, mostly Brazilian Free-tailed, directly overhead. Afterward, Violet led the cars down the winding road, which has a nighttime speed limit.

In the morning, we did some birding in our motel parking lot as Great-tailed Grackles and White-winged Doves watched us try to start our car, a white Volkswagen beetle whose ignition kept locking.

We rolled up to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge—a top US birding destination—in the afternoon doldrums. A ranger advised on where to see roadrunners (and coyotes, of course). No flocks of Sandhill Cranes for us, but the drive-through loop met us with Blue Grosbeaks, and Violet immediately spotted a Greater Roadrunner, along with a Western Kingbird and Green Heron.

The marsh boardwalk revealed a Neotropical Cormorant, a Black Phoebe, and a squadron of determined mosquitoes. When two parks people appeared bearing repellent, we were glad to learn we'd seen all the same birds.

A Great Blue Heron posed amid wild sunflowers in front of the mountains. A familiar bird in a novel setting is a treat. Exiting the dirt road, we stopped for Eurasian Collared Doves and an American Kestrel on telephone wires.

Next day, we left our Route 66 Albuquerque motel for nearby Petroglyph National Monument and its old-to-ancient rock carvings. Rock art includes a duck and a macaw—an early version of eBird? The entrance to Boca Negra Canyon's Mesa Point Trail, a fun climb, was hopping with Black-throated Sparrows and a Say's Phoebe. I didn't want to miss the Parrot Trail, but Violet stayed back to get more photos. Torn, I went and saw the macaw carving, while she saw a Green-tailed Towhee that I missed.

In brutal midday heat at Bandelier National Monument, we climbed through ancient Pueblo cliff dwellings until the trail descended into forest.

Woodhouse Scrub Jays screeched in the trees; a Spotted Towhee hopped down the trail. We lingered, as the main sight at



White Sands photo by Leslie Brill



Black-throated Sparrow Photo by Violet Brill

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our next stop, Taos Pueblo, was closed due to Covid. But Taos was worthwhile for the stunningly high Rio Grande Gorge Bridge alone (and the bison we passed along the way), and Taos Inn offered historic color.

In Santa Fe, we shopped for cowboy boots and piñon coffee, ate award-winning



New Mexican food at The Shed, and hit the Randall Davey Audubon Center & Sanctuary. After some

Audubon chat while watching Rufous and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds at the feeders,

we walked the parched trail, eye level with mountaintops, wind roaring among scrubby piñon pines and junipers. A Juniper Titmouse was our trip's last lifer. We savored this, knowing the next day we'd head back to hurricane-ravaged Mamaroneck.

*View from the Rio Grande Gorge Bridge
Photo by Violet Brill*



*Broad-tailed and Rufous Hummingbirds.
Photo by Violet Brill*

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almost to blindness by mosquitoes, pricked by thorns, and been bitten by a camel, only to observe "one common moorhen, two honest British coots, and a female chaffinch." That would be equivalent, in these parts, to having undertaken a similarly arduous trek, only to spot a Canada Goose, two Mallards, and a female Cardinal – in other words, a great disappointment. But Stephen relates to Jack that they also "have every reason to believe that the eagle-owl is present." They have seen owl scat, and have heard "a deep, strong uhu, uhu, calculated to strike terror into mammals as large as a gazelle, and birds the size of a bustard." Thus are the pains of their journey extinguished, replaced by the excitement of knowing that a truly dramatic bird is somewhere close at-hand.

If one were to choose to embark on this reading adventure, as I would heartily recommend, one might wish to have one or another of the following companion books nearby – not mission-critical, but certain to enrich the experience:

A Sea of Words: a lexicon and companion to the complete seafaring tales of Patrick O'Brian: by Dean King with John Hattendorf and J. Worth Estes.

Harbors and High Seas: an atlas and geographical guide to the complete Aubrey-Maturin novels of Patrick O'Brian: by Dean King with John Hattendorf.

Stephen Biesty's Cross-Sections Man-of-War: illustrated by Stephen Biesty and written by Richard Platt.



African Eagle-Owl



**Remember to Order Bird Seed
for the rest of the Winter**

**The Seed Sale Form is included
in this newsletter and may also
be found at**

<https://brssaudubon.org/>

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