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# The BIRD CALL

Fall 2020

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

## Bluebirds Make Remarkable Comeback

By Sandy Morrissey

As if nature wanted us to smile about something during the Covid pandemic, the bluebirds lived up to their reputation of bringing happiness.

After a record 10-year low last year, we almost doubled the number of nesting attempts – going from 68 in 2019 to a whopping 125 in 2020. This is the second largest number of nest attempts ever for us. An extraordinary comeback that took 3 years since the devastating parasite in 2017 that killed so many of our adults.

The number of birds banded and recaptured also almost doubled. We banded 335 nestlings and most of them fledged. Hopefully, we'll see our numbers increase again next year, with all these youngsters now adults and looking to have their own family.

We banded 37 adults, but more noteworthy, we recaptured 51 adults. That is a surprisingly high number after fledging so few bluebirds last year. I'm sure the mild winter contributed to this, and the survivors of the parasite could have yielded a hardy gene pool.

The nesting success rate was 70%, meaning 30% of the nests failed. A usual number is 80% success, but I attribute the cruel cold, rainy spring, with temps in the 40s in May after the nesting season was well underway, as the culprit for a lot of the failures. I believe it also contributed to having a lower than usual number of eggs laid, with many nests having only 3 eggs, instead of the usual 4 or 5 clutch size.



Highlights included one 6-yr bird, born at Westchester Community College in 2015, and now nesting at nearby Knollwood Country Club.

*6-year male bluebird, born at WCC in 2015, now nesting at Knollwood CC. Oldest known recaptured bluebird was 10 yr, 8 mo. We are going for that record!*

We had four 5-year birds. Two were a couple that have nested at the Fiore home in Carmel for the last 4 years. They are my 3<sup>rd</sup> confirmed couple that stayed together for at least 3 years, adding to data that bluebirds often remain "paired" till death do us part. I think it most interesting that all 3 of these pairs were in boxes built by and monitored by Girl Scouts. "Girl Scouts are loyal" was one of the 10 Girl Scout laws

when I was a child. These faithful bluebirds must be influenced by the Girl Scouts who care for them.

Another 5-year bird has been nesting at Saxon Woods Golf Course since it was banded as a 2<sup>nd</sup>-year adult in 2017. It has been recaptured in the same box every year since. This adds to the good news that bluebirds can do well nesting on golf courses, despite the chemicals they use on the courses.

Much thanks to all the monitors who faithfully check their boxes at least once a week, and to many others involved with our project. We couldn't monitor and maintain over 300 nestboxes without your help.

*Bluebird monitor Alex Pinnock explains our bluebird project to two of the ground crew at Crawford Park. They had wondered what the boxes were for, and Alex did a perfect job of educating and spreading the word of the importance of bluebird conservation.*



*Unusual sight of 2 males tending to a nestbox. Normally a nesting male would drive away any competing males from its territory. Also note the importance of insects. Without them we have no songbirds.*

### Please join us Virtual Annual Meeting

Wine & Cheese Social (BYOB)  
Wednesday, September 23, 2020  
6:00 pm

Optional virtual bird walk, 5:45

Please join our Zoom meeting by entering the following link in your browser

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85360325332>

or look for the link in our Constant Contact e-notice  
(More information on Page 4)

**BRSS AUDUBON**

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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*

## Programs and Field Trips

Due to the continuing Covid-19 danger, we are still not offering field trips and in-person programs. We hope by our winter newsletter this will change.

We do have one virtual program to offer at this time, co-sponsored by the 5 Westchester Audubon chapters.



### The Audubon Mural Project Virtual Tour

The Audubon Mural Project Virtual Tour is one hour, with time for questions and answers at the end. We will see about 40 murals - significantly more than can be on an actual walking tour.

The Audubon Bird Mural Project is an impressive effort to create, in NYC, murals of over 300 North American birds. Most of the murals are in the Harlem neighborhoods of Hamilton Heights and Washington Heights, where John James Audubon lived the last ten years of his life. Since all of the birds painted are threatened by climate change, the Project is designed not only to display the birds' beauty, but also to make us aware of the challenges that they face. Because the artists have license to represent the birds in any way that they choose, there is tremendous variation in the styles of painting. The 40 murals we will see range from lovely panels that fill in a former window to spectacular murals covering the entire side of a building.

Our guide will be Leigh Hallingby, a licensed New York City tour guide with more information about Leigh available at [HarlemWalks.com](http://HarlemWalks.com).

Register online for Zoom connection info at  
[www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register/murals](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register/murals)



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

## Squirrel-proofing your Birdfeeders

By Ted Kavanagh

The most common complaint heard by BRSS volunteers at our two annual seed sales is “those darn squirrels!” The tales we’ve heard about squirrels’ climbing, leaping, gnawing and overall problem-solving skills would lead one to think that no birdfeeder is impregnable.

While squirrels are tenacious, persistent and clever, there are things bird lovers can do to minimize the share of seeds that these furry geniuses are able to commandeer. The simplest fix is probably the baffle, such as the one shown in the photo to the right. This baffle is on a “shepherd’s crook” pole with a single crook. You’ll want a pole at least 6 feet tall, and you’ll want to situate it at least 8 feet away from the nearest launch-pad (wall, railing, or tree branch).



Various seed feeders are tricked out with gizmos that are meant to be critter-defeating, including motorized models that dislodge the squirrels by centrifugal force. This is not a paid advertisement, but we have found that birdfeeders made by a Canadian company – Brome – are effective, durable and backed up by a very good customer support group. These are not the least expensive feeders available, but they work and are long-lasting.



Brome makes a range of feeders – for peanut, nyjer (thistle), and general seed mixes – and all are built around a common “squirrel-resistant” philosophy. They feature internal springs that cause the feeding ports on the feeders to close down when anything larger than a blue jay tries to get access to the seeds. Squirrels will always climb up for a try, but they pretty quickly learn that they’re better off scrounging around below the feeder to grab what the birds invariably fling about. The previous photo shows Brome’s peanut feeder to the left and its nyjer feeder to the right.

In my experience (having had a number of Brome feeders for 10+ years), the feeders are well-built, easy to use week-in week-out, and easy to periodically disassemble for cleaning (which is encouraged for all bird feeders). When I’ve lost parts, or when anything (rarely) has broken, the Brome customer support people have been very quick to send out (gratis) replacement parts.

The photo below shows a Brome Squirrel-Buster Plus feeder (for general seed mixes) on the left, and a home-made suet log on the right. The suet log has pure suet stuffed into a series of 1” diameter holes. In my experience, squirrels will try to get at suet with intermixed seeds, but will pretty much leave pure suet alone. The pure suet also seems to be of less interest to sparrows, but attracts woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees.

Brome feeders can be found on-line at <https://bromebirdcare.com/>, and at better wild bird stores in



*Ted Kavanagh is a BRSS board member and enjoys feeding the birds and outwitting the squirrels at his home in Pelham..*

**Support BRSS Audubon and stock your squirrel-proofed feeders with BRSS Bird Seed Order form enclosed**

## Virtual Annual Meeting September 23 at 6:00 pm

Because it is still not safe to gather, we will hold our annual meeting using the Zoom app on September 23 at 6:00 pm. We will officially elect our officers and new board members, and report on past accomplishments and future plans.

As stated in the Spring 2020 newsletter, the officers up for election are: Sandra Morrissey, President; Doug Bloom, Vice President; Diane Morrison, Secretary; and Jeff Zuckerman, Treasurer.

The slate of Directors for the Class of 2023 are: Doug Bloom, Diane Morrison, Sandy Morrissey, Vern Schramm and Maria Albano. Plus Susie Williams for the Class of 2021, and Leslie Brill for the Class of 2022.

Our honoree is Madelaine Eppenstein, as noted in our spring newsletter. But we will wait until we can meet in person to give her a full tribute.

As many enjoy the traditional bird walk before our annual meeting, we will hold a virtual bird walk. To join this field trip just click on the zoom link at 5:45. If you want to share any of your bird photographs during this “walk” (perhaps a lifer you got or a bird in an exceptionally striking pose), please send the photographs in advance to [brssaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:brssaudubon@gmail.com) by Sept. 20.

Hopefully, most of you have used Zoom or a similar virtual meeting app by now. All you have to do is click on this Zoom link - <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85360325332>. If you are not signed up to get our e-notices, you will have to type the link into your browser.

We will send out several e-notices of our annual meeting with the link included. The simplest way to join the meeting is click on the link in the e-notice.

To sign up to get our e-notices via Constant Contact, please send an email to [brssaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:brssaudubon@gmail.com). We do not share the email list with anyone.

Looking forward to “seeing” you all at our Annual Meeting.

## Don't Just Hope – Vote

By Sandy Morrissey

Our board member, Henry May, has dedicated himself to helping Monarch butterflies by advocating for the planting of milkweed (the only thing Monarch caterpillars can eat). He has spent hours contacting big box stores and small local nurseries, seed companies and local establishments. He published an insert in our spring newsletter titled “You are what hope looks like to a butterfly.” We applaud Henry, marvel at his energy, and know that his personal efforts are already resulting in more milkweed planted, ensuring more Monarchs will survive. He is not just hoping the Monarch survives, he is making an individual effort to ensure they do.

Likewise, our bluebird initiative, written about often on these pages, involves hundreds of people actually doing something – not just hoping to see a bluebird. They build the nestboxes, monitor the boxes, and report on sightings. Through their efforts, the bluebird population has grown from being almost totally absent in our area in the 1900s, to being seen in our local parks and other open spaces.

I follow two wildlife authors, Julie Zickefoose who writes for *Bird Watcher's Digest*, and Margaret Renkl who writes for the *NY Times*. Both, within weeks of each other, lamented the lack of butterflies this summer. Julie lives in Ohio and Margaret lives in Nashville. I live in NY, and I was lamenting the same thing. Imagine a world without butterflies! Humans are surely responsible for much of this. Both authors and I are writing that individuals need to do something to help.

At this difficult time with seemingly unlimited problems, Covid being the latest thrust upon us, we can't sit back and just hope for a better future. We have to act.

We have a most important election coming up in November. The current federal administration has been on a tear to remove as many environmental regulations as possible – including the 100-year-old Migratory Bird Treaty Act, allowing drilling and mining in Alaska's pristine protected areas, encouraging the use of coal and fossil fuels that induce global warming, discouraging green initiatives such as solar and wind energy, and the list goes on. When the person in charge of the Environmental Protection Agency doesn't believe in environmental protection – we are in big trouble.

November 3 is a chance to do something – not just hope for it. I urge you to vote and encourage all in your circle of family and friends to make their voice heard. Change happens by individuals, one vote at a time.

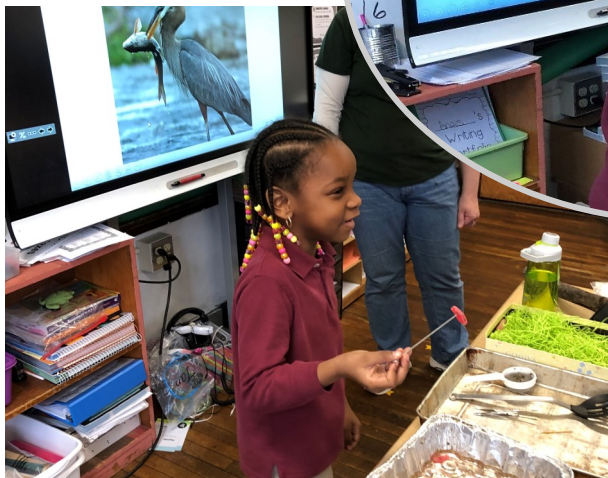
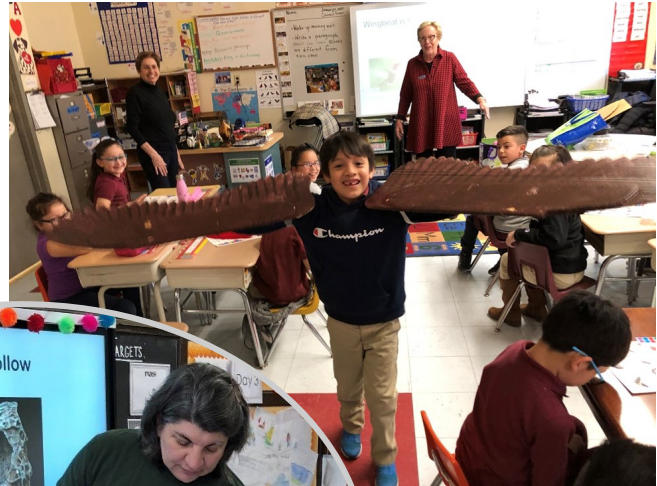
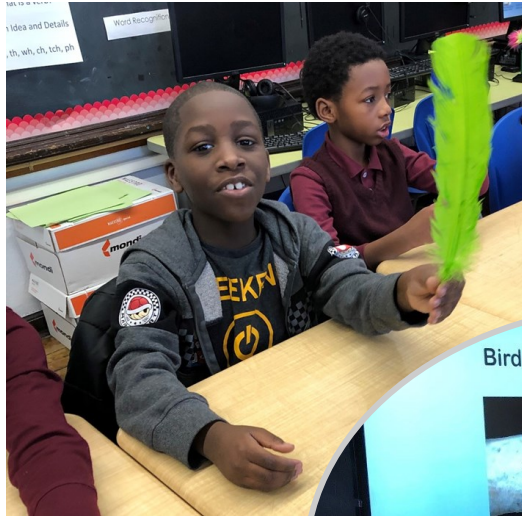


*Imagine a world without butterflies.*

## Mt. Vernon School Bird Program Returned for 9<sup>th</sup> Year

We got in two of our five scheduled sessions before Covid shut down the schools and all of our Audubon programs. We certainly plan to return when the schools open and are giving thought to how to offer the program “virtually” if the shut-down continues next year.

In our first two sessions, the students learned what makes a bird a bird and all about beaks.



**Bronx River-Sound Shore  
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(formerly Scarsdale Audubon Society)  
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