



The BIRD CALL

Spring 2018

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

BRSS Annual Meeting June 7th

By Sandy Morrissey

Five Islands Park will be the beautiful setting for our Annual Meeting, thanks again to the very generous hospitality of the New Rochelle Department of Parks and Recreation. The business meeting begins at 6:30 P.M., with an optional guided bird walk at 6:00 P.M.

It's a great opportunity to meet and chat with other members. Wine and cheese plus other light refreshments will be served. All BRSS members and friends are encouraged to attend.

Honorees are our Bluebird Nestbox Monitors

With over 300 nestboxes scattered throughout Westchester County and beyond, our Eastern Bluebird Project needs a lot of volunteers. One of the most important jobs is monitoring the nestboxes during the nesting season, March through July.

Volunteers are asked to check their "bluebird trail" at least once a week. We want to know if we are having success attracting Eastern Bluebirds, and just as importantly, if a non-native House Sparrow has taken over a box. If we put up a nestbox and then allow the House Sparrow to nest, we are doing more harm than good.

Monitors record the date of visit, the species nesting, and presence of any eggs, nestlings and adults. If House Sparrows are attempting to nest, they are required to remove the nest. This may sound cruel, but when you open a nestbox and see a dead bluebird killed by an aggressive House Sparrow, you soon have no trouble evicting the killer. Monitors are warned that there is often heartbreak along the bluebird trail. Besides marauding house sparrows, other despair awaits, as when you discover a nest of dead or missing nestlings.

But when a monitor does see success – a nest of adorable bluebird babies and their brilliantly blue-feathered parents actively feeding the darlings - all is worth it. Monitors help with banding the adults and nestlings, so they really get to see the bluebirds up close and personal.

Monitors come from all walks of life, and young and not so young. We've had Ethan Weinstein, who got started at

age 13 when he needed a Bar Mitzvah service project and stayed until he left for college. And we have Joan Heilman who is highlighted below. In between there have been over 50 dedicated, loyal bluebird enthusiasts, and we can't thank them enough for their service. See pictures of our monitors on pages 4 and 5.

Spotlight on Joan Heilman



Joan is among our very first nestbox monitors, beginning 15 years ago. But she got involved with bluebirds long before that. She is credited with starting the national movement to save the bluebird.

She is a free-lance writer and in the 1970s was doing articles for many magazines, including *Parade Magazine*, a Sunday supplement which went to 15 million readers across the country. In it she published an article titled "You Can Hear the Bluebird's Song Again," where she referenced the newly founded North American Bluebird Society (NABS), and a brochure they had on getting started helping bluebirds. The response to Joan's article was overwhelming. NABS received over 80,000 requests for their brochure and the national movement to save the bluebirds was launched.

About the same time in Joan's town, a retired banker named Beresford Proctor began making bluebird nestboxes and handing them out to anyone interested in helping bring back

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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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the bluebirds. She paired up with him and together they put up nestboxes at SUNY Purchase and other places in Westchester.

Over time those boxes disappeared, but when she heard about BRSS Audubon's bluebird project in the early 2000s, she joined right in. First thing we did together is put up nestboxes at SUNY Purchase. Joan now monitors at Saxon Woods Golf Course where, even after getting hit by an errant golf ball and needing stitches, she is not deterred from making her rounds.

An avid environmentalist, she is a long-time member of BRSS and has served on the board. She was instrumental in getting the Village of Mamaroneck to start a recycling program. She served on its Committee for the Environment from its founding in 2002 until recently.

We are grateful to Joan and our other 50 nestbox monitors. With them we are truly bringing back the bluebird of happiness.

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 slate of Directors for the Class of 2021: Miriam Beveridge, Clare Gorman, Jeff Zuckerman, and new to the board Ted Kavanagh and Erin Provenzano. Ted is a frequent participant in our field trips and seed sales. Erin interned for our Eastern Bluebird project while in college, and as an active environmentalist, she recently organized the Bronx River Earth Day Celebration.

We thank departing board members Elizabeth Poyet who contributed interesting articles for our newsletter, and Bob Wirsneck who served on the board for 15 years and could always be counted on to represent BRSS Audubon at events where we set up our display board.

We hope to see all BRSS members and friends at Five Islands Park in New Rochelle on June 7.

BRSS Audubon Participates in Bronx River Earth Day Celebration

The Crestwood Lake section of the Bronx River Parkway Reservation is a lot cleaner after an Earth Day clean up day organized by Erin Provenzano, a recent Master's degree graduate and nominee to join our BRSS Board of Directors. Erin, avid environmentalist, organized a 2-day event to celebrate the Bronx River and give it a cleaning up. She will be a great addition to the BRSS Audubon community.



Erin Provenzano, pictured second from right, and other volunteers including County Legislator Damon Maher third from the right.

A Haven for Wildlife in the Burbs

By Cece Fabbro

As I sit here writing this (April 6), it is below freezing. It has been a long winter. I am so ready to hear the wood thrush sing and the buzz of an emerging queen bumblebee. I am so ready to dig in the dirt. Hopefully, by the time you read this, warm weather will be here.

As spring arrives my one-third acre property will become Grand Central Station for wildlife. Busy birds, insects and other animals living or visiting my property will be looking for food, for mates, and to nest. I will awake to bird song, insect buzz and the smell of thawing earth. My property was not always so welcoming, however; I spent years making it so.

Fortunately, I was blessed with several tall native trees (tulip, beech, cherry) and understory trees (pagoda dogwood, spicebush). Unfortunately, I also had many invasives (oriental bittersweet, Japanese barberry). I started by removing the invasives and planting native shrubs that provided berries for birds throughout the season. That way resident birds, their fledglings and migrating birds would benefit. Next, because the majority of bird species feed their nestlings insects (hummingbirds included), I planted shrubs and perennials as nectar sources and host plants for the insects birds need to feed their young.

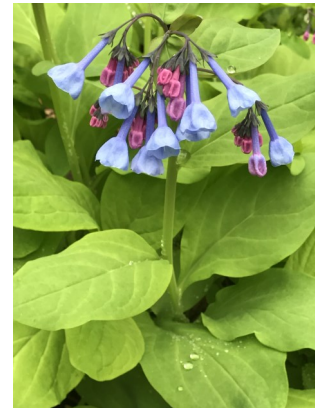
Some of the wildlife I enjoy watching now include Red-tailed and other hawks, Barred owls, Eastern screech owls, salamanders, garter snakes, and many species of native bees and butterflies. One of last summer's highlights was the return of monarch butterflies after many years of absence. I observed 10 caterpillars feeding on my swamp milkweed plants and watched 5 butterflies emerge from their chrysalis and launch.

If you have a haven or plan on creating one, some key points to keep in mind:

1. Select plants for early spring, spring, summer, late summer and fall bloom. Some pollinators emerge very early in the year, others at different times during the growing season, and many remain active until frost.
2. Reduce or eliminate pesticide use. If you want birds you need insects. Many pesticides kill the insects that birds eat. Many pesticides are lethal to flying insects including bees and butterflies. Let the birds remove your insects.
3. Think messy. It's OK to be a messy gardener. Try it in your backyard. Leave that downed limb. Find a place for it. Build a brush pile. Every winter I have a flock of White-throated Sparrows that use my brush pile for shelter.
4. Provide water. Especially during hot, dry periods. The birds and insects will thank you.
5. Mulch your leaves. Who wants to throw away free fertilizer?
6. Reduce the amount of grass you have. Replace with native shrubs, perennials, and ground covers.
7. Plant natives.



Barred Owl



Virginia Bluebells



Sphinx Moth Caterpillar on Virginia Creeper vine



Asters and Goldenrods for late summer/fall pollinators



Red-tailed Hawk



Monarch butterfly emerging from chrysalis on Joe Pye plant

Thanks Bluebird Monitors



Nadia Valla



Cece Fabbro



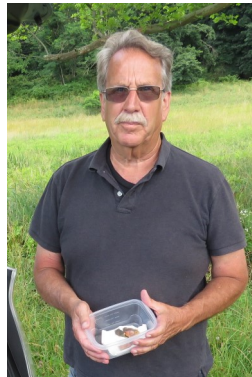
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Ethan Weinstein



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Penny Hofmann, Diane Falk & Matt Dutremble



The Christina Clark and Anik McGrory Families

It takes a village!



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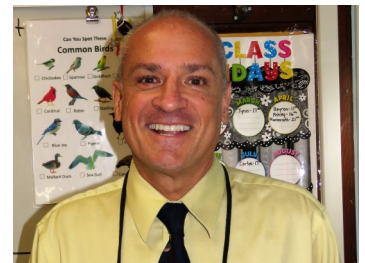
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Tolly Beck



Chloe Gagnon & Kenza Squali



Brian McGrath



Heather Kenny & Penny Hofmann



Helga & Tania Vernon



Sandy Morrissey



Carol & David Morse



FIELD TRIPS 2018



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

May 6, 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 such as warblers, orioles and others.

May 12, Saturday - Angle Fly Preserve- Somers

Meet at Angle Fly at 8:00 am. Looking for Spring migrants. See more information at <http://somerslandtrust.org/angle-fly-preserve/about-angle-fly-preserve>

May 19, Saturday - Doodletown Road

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

May 27, Sunday - Sterling Forest

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

PROGRAMS 2018

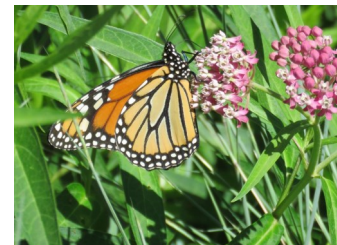
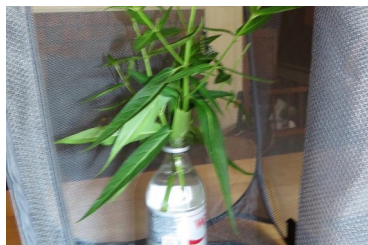
Saturday, May 12, 10:00 am - Learn How to Help the Declining Monarch Population and Other Local Butterflies

Location - Greenburgh Nature Center

Besides increasing environmental threats to the Monarch population, those that survive face many challenges in their natural life cycle, including other carnivores who eat them in their egg, caterpillar and chrysalis stage. You can help by raising them safely in your home until they reach the adult stage. It's easy, fun and educational for the whole family. This program will teach you how to do it, plus how to help our other local butterflies.

Since the only thing Monarch caterpillars can eat is milkweed, all families attending will be sent home with a milkweed plant to get them started attracting Monarchs to their yard and providing Monarchs with their vital food source.

Space is limited to the first 70 people who reserve. Please sign up by emailing brssaudubon@gmail.com.



Winter Bird Seed Results

Thank you to everyone who purchased seed this winter. We are the beneficiaries of \$2965 in donations and seed sale profits. This is the best we have ever done. All proceeds go to the publication of this newsletter, sponsorships of children to attend environmental camps, programs, our Bluebird Project, and more. The total profit for the two seed sales this year is \$9428. The donations for the year were \$2437. Thank you for your continued support.

We would like to acknowledge the people who gave donations through the seed sale this year:

Elaine Abrams, Paul Basch, Mary Alice Becker, Doug Bloom, Sheryl Breuninger, Leslie Brill, Robert Canora, Ernestine Colombo, Cathy Corbin, Julia De Carlo, Warren Douglas, Cece Fabbro, Clare Gorman, Elizabeth Harriss, Kathryn Heintz, Emita Hill, Tina Hoerenz, Phil Horner, David Kaufman, Alice La Sala, Kelly Mac Pherson, David Margulis, Valerie Marini, Scott Mellis, Rosemarie Meyer, Harriet Miller, Sandy Morrissey, Diane Morrison, Wendy Murphy, Suzi Oppenheimer, Nuala Outes, Donald Pinals, Neil Powell, Karen Raggins, Barbara Roca, Charles Ruebens, Anthony Santelia, Vern Schramm, John Slater, Jean Stephenson, George Vaida, Ellen Valle, Marilyn Varley, Lisa Wagner, Joan Weissman, Robert Wirsneck, Sidney Witter, Phyllis Wittner

American Goldfinch, the King of Contrast

By Vern Schramm

The days rapidly become longer as we emerge from the short days of winter into spring. We watch anxiously for the first yellow feathers to appear on the male American Goldfinches. During the winter Mr. and Mrs. Goldfinch are similar, both looking like greenish miniature sparrows with heavy white wing bars. One of the most faithful visitors to the winter thistle seed feeder, the gregarious little flocks arrive at once and are happy to feed family style, respecting each other's elbow room at the feeder, happily turning upside down and even enjoying the free ride as the wind swings the feeder. Not shy, they respond well to a feeder hung a few feet from the kitchen window, even better if it is under an eave to keep the thistle seeds out of the rain and snow. Near the window also provides you with a better view of the friendly finches as you enjoy your breakfast. Even when the feeders are full of thistle feed in mid-summer, gardeners cannot help notice the happy flock of Goldfinches finding seeds around the garden, relishing fully seeded dandelions and thistle. Goldfinches are one of the last birds of the season to build nests in New York, rarely nesting before the end of June. Thick bushes five feet or more above ground are preferred. Perhaps the late nesting is related to common nesting materials, grass, bark, strips of milkweed fiber (another reason to grow milkweed in addition to Monarch Butterflies) and almost always lined with thistledown. A locally common name for the Goldfinch was the 'Thistle bird' according to the NY State Museum report on Birds of New York, 1910 version. The Goldfinch were common in New York in 1910 and thankfully, they remain common today. On warm summer days their high, swooping flight is constantly interspersed with calls of 'per-chick-a-pee'. Listen for it from any high-flying undulating bird in the summer, they are more common than you think. The American Goldfinch is one-of-a-kind species in New York, despite its Lesser Goldfinch and Lawrence's Goldfinch relatives on the far side of the Rockies. But it almost had an uninvited relative. European Goldfinches were introduced into Hoboken in 1878. They are the same size and shape as the American Goldfinch but with a bright red face, black lores with white borders, black wings and tail, upper parts cinnamon brown and a white belly. By the winter of 1891 they were flocking with the local American Goldfinches, but could not tolerate the cold winters and had almost disappeared from North America by 1910. According to the NY State Museum report on Birds of New York, 1910 "...this beautiful species is not likely to become established so easily as the obnoxious European sparrow". Understanding the habits of our native Goldfinch forces us to rethink our bird-friendly gardens. A suburban garden overgrown with dandelions, milkweed and thistle would be perfect for our Goldfinch families.



Thanks to Mike Vaughn – He's a Cut Above!

Mike Vaughn just completed his 4th batch of nestbox kits. Each time he's made about 40 kits, ready to be hammered into homes for our bluebirds. That's 160 nestboxes – over half of all the nestboxes on our bluebird trails. The nestbox kits were put to immediate use by Deb Kessler's Girl Scout troop from Pawling.



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