



EST. 1947

The BIRD CALL

Fall 2017

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

Local Bluebird Population Takes a Hit

By Sandy Morrissey

In early April, a nestbox monitor had to call to say she found a dead bluebird in one of her boxes. While this happens from time to time, I had no idea that it was a precursor to our nesting season.

Subsequently, other monitors sent me reports of dead adult bluebirds, and I found several myself. Alarmed, I contacted an agency at Cornell that had tested some dead bluebirds once before. They agreed to test for us. So, I spent part of the nesting season packing up beautiful - but dead bluebirds -

sending them off in ice-packed coolers to the Animal Health Diagnostic Center.

Results of their testing was somewhat inconclusive, but at least we know many of the birds had died from a combination of a parasite and increased bacteria in their digestive systems. The birds were apparently eating pill bugs, which are hosts for the parasite's eggs. When a bluebird ate pill bugs, the eggs hatched inside the bluebird, and the parasite then attached to the bird's intestine. That, along with an increase in some bad bacteria, killed it.

In all, 18 adult bluebirds died in our nestboxes. Who knows how many died outside and undetected? What we do



Dead male bluebird. What's killing our bluebirds?

know is our numbers crashed.

Worst was that the success rate of our nesting attempts went from a normal of about 75 - 80% to an abysmal 40%. We had many nests of

Continued on Page 2

Two Happy Summer Campers

By Artemis & Scout Caporoso

We went to Marshlands Conservancy camp for a week, and we absolutely loved it!

The camp had lots of fun activities. One of our favorite things is when we went seining at Long Island Sound. We had a long net and dragged it into the water up to our shoulders. We caught lots of fish and a couple jellyfish. After a while, we stopped seining and just swam in the water. It was really really fun! Another activity we did was going to the cave. We went through, and the first time, for us, was a little scary, but we ended up going through multiple times after. The frog pond is also awesome. Going there, we caught several frogs, and went into the muddy pond a little deeper than our waists. Some people might think frogs are slimy and gross, but we think they are cool, and cute. One thing we did when we were hanging out at the lodge, was dig trenches which we ran water through. The counselors were all really nice. Special shout out to Leah and Lorenzo!!!



We played lots of fun games at camp. We played a game called Deer Tracks where one team, called the deer, has 20 minutes to hide, and after those 20 minutes, the other team, called the hunters, has to look for them. On the trail, and at every intersection, the team hiding would put an arrow made out of sticks going both ways, and the other team would look for them, trying to follow the right arrows. This game was super fun. Other games we played were Predator Prey - which is like Red Light Green Light - and Blind Old Owl. In Blind Old Owl, one person guards an "egg" (a rock or stick) with their eyes closed, and the others try to sneak the egg away from the Owl without the owl catching them. Camouflage, another game we played, is like hide and seek except the seeker stays in one spot, and the hiders have to camouflage themselves in their hiding spot while staying in view of the seeker. In conclusion, The Marshlands Conservancy camp is awesome!!!!!!:)



Artemis is age 11, 6th grade and Scout is almost 8, 3rd grade.

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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*

Continued from Page 1

eggs that never hatched. Presumably, the parents died and eggs were abandoned. We also had many locations with no bluebirds or a greatly reduced number of nests. The actual number of bluebird nest attempts dropped precipitously to 94 from a record high last year of 137.

Another depressing number shows up in the banding statistics. In our first year, 2011, we banded 290. We reached a high of banding 414 bluebirds in 2014. Last year we slipped to 376 bands, which I believe now was a sign the problem already had begun. This year we banded only 254 bluebirds. A drop of 33% from last year and a drop of almost half from our high in 2014. Mind you, we increase our number of nestboxes and locations every year, so what should be on the upswing is seriously down.

While there are lots of theories, no one really knows what's happening. Is it weather related? Are the bluebirds eating more pill bugs than usual and why? Are their normal bugs not available? And why do they go into the box to die? If it were mostly females found, that's understandable. They spend the most time in the nest incubating. But almost half were males.

I contacted other bluebird organizations. While a few were experiencing some problems, we seemed to be the hardest hit.

We can only hope that the problem in 2017 is local and cyclical, and that our bluebirds will rebound next year. But with the ongoing threats to our environment – the climate change deniers, the push to bring back polluting coal, the rollback of environmental regulations, the threats to turn national parks into mines for coal, gas and oil – one must have great concern!

Sandy Morrissey is President of the BRSS Audubon chapter

Bluebird Thanks Party



Despite the sad year for our bluebirds, the dedication and spirits of our bluebird monitors and supporters remained high. Thanks to all these great people for helping our beloved bluebirds.

The Single Girls Living in My Backyard

By Dave Kaufman

About 30,000 single girls live in my backyard. My wife doesn't seem to care much. They don't take up a lot of room, and during the day you will find them flitting about up to 3 miles away on other people's property, a good distance from my home. But come dusk, they are all back home safe and sound. They spend most of the day putting all their energy into making something sweet to eat. Most of you have probably figured out by now that I am a backyard beekeeper and have a hive that produces many gallons of honey during the summer.

Until last year I knew absolutely nothing about beekeeping. My wife read about a new-fangled invention out of Australia that was called a "Flow Hive." It was offered to the general public through a "kickstarter" campaign. That "Father's Day" I received two large boxes in the mail direct from Australia with wooden pieces and parts that, when hammered and screwed together, would become the beginnings of my "Flow Hive." My first attempt at keeping bees in 2016 was an abject disaster. I couldn't get the bees to lay their comb on the frames I provided. My first hive check revealed a chaotic mountain of comb which had no chance of ever producing collectable honey. I never quite identified the Queen and after several weeks it was clear that if there ever were a Queen bee, she was no longer part of this hive. Several attempts at replacing the Queen ensued, and finally ended during the winter of 2017 with an empty dead hive. I was consoled by my new bee keeping friends and told that, more often than not, initial attempts at keeping bees end in disappointment.

There are lots of important reasons to keep and raise bees. We are all familiar with the horrible blight affecting bees on this continent known as the "colony collapse syndrome." It is a scary and not completely understood phenomenon that has potentially dire consequences for the agricultural industry of this country. Simply put, without bees there would be little pollination of crops (birds and other insects contribute a small amount) which would result in agricultural failures, potential food shortages, and in a worst case scenario, famine. Bees are clearly important.

Spring 2017 started out on a better note. I found myself a beekeeping mentor who made all the difference in the world for me. I was introduced by a friend to her friend. She has been keeping bees in her backyard in Greenwich for over 10 years. She guided me, helped me purchase my new "starter pack" of bees, and assisted me during the necessary periodic "hive checks," which involve breaking down the hive and examining each frame to ascertain the health and evaluate the progress of the bees. My first attempt at harvesting honey was in late July. Using standard techniques of separating honey comb from wooden frames, I was able to separate about 3 gallons of a beautiful, tasty, light brown honey from the wax/comb wooden frames. I replaced those standard wooden frames for the second honey flow in August with the Flow Frames from Australia. Just yesterday I harvested another 3 gallons of a rich, dark brown honey in about an hour's time directly from the hive. The flow frames enable the beekeeper to "tap" honey directly out of the hive itself, while the bees are happily living there, without disturbing them or putting the bees at risk. They take a many hour job of separating the wax covering from the honeycomb and then centrifuging the honey out of the comb in a large stainless steel tank, into a very simple hour of "tapping" the honey directly out of the hive. What a huge improvement over old-fashioned hundreds of years old technology!



Bird Seed Sale Time



It is time to order your bird seed. This is the first of two seed sales for this coming season. These are the only fundraisers we do. All proceeds go to the publication of this newsletter, sponsorships of children to attend environmental camps, programs, our Bluebird Project, and more.

We count on your support.

Big thanks to John Fix and Cornell's True Value in Eastchester for taking delivery and helping with dispersing the seed.

Please see the enclosed form for all ordering details.



What I Did on My Summer Vacation

By Sandy Morrissey

While I did my normal summer activities – monitored and banded our nesting bluebirds, gardened, played golf, and spent a week at the Jersey Shore, nature gave me three exceptionally fun and entrancing experiences that I hope to repeat in future summers and maybe you can do them too!

Offered a Baltimore Oriole Café

In Vern Shramm's article in this newsletter, he referenced putting out oranges to entice Baltimore Orioles into close view. Sounds easy, but I tried for many years without success. Then over the July 4th weekend, I noticed a flash of brilliant orange among the white pedals of a blooming yucca plant. Determining it was the elusive Baltimore Oriole eating the nectar in the flowers, I quickly set up my orange feeder about a foot away from the yucca. Voila! By the next day, the oriole had found the orange and was feeding. And not just one. We had at least three, easily distinguishing the brilliant male from the more yellowish female and immatures.

Of course, I googled to learn more about Orioles visiting feeders. I discovered they will drink nectar – the same as I put out for hummingbirds. They also will devour grape jelly. I found an additional feeder online that was designed to offer all three entrees.

I gradually moved the orange feeders into the garden that's in view from our terrace, kitchen and family rooms. What a delight this has been! In addition to the Baltimore Orioles, I discovered that House Finches also have a sweet tooth. And, of course, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird drinks the nectar. On occasion, a butterfly will nectar at an orange or eat the jelly.

Looking on eBird, I see that most Orioles will have migrated out of our area by late September. Sigh! But the wintering ducks will be arriving, nature will go through its miraculous cycles and the Baltimore Orioles will return next year. The BIG QUESTION – having discovered my offerings, will they return to my garden?

Fostered Monarchs

While visiting a nature center in New Jersey, I learned that it is easy to help the declining Monarch population by becoming “foster parents.” Your role is to protect the Monarch from its natural predators through the egg, caterpillar and chrysalis stages. When it emerges as an adult, you release it.

The method is very simple and anyone can do it as long as you have a supply of milkweed leaves:

1. Find a Monarch egg by looking on the backside of any kind of milkweed plant. The eggs are tiny and look like yellow dots.
2. Cut a stem of several leaves including the one containing the egg and place it in a bottle of water. Place where you can easily observe what's happening. I set my milkweed “bouquet” on my kitchen table. Within 4 days, the egg should hatch. A tiny caterpillar will emerge and begin its milkweed feast.
3. After about day 7, put the bottle with leaves and caterpillar into a closed container, as the caterpillar might want to crawl off the milkweed when it forms its chrysalis. While there are many options, I bought a zippered mesh clothes hamper, and blocked its open holes with duct tape (being sure no sticky side was showing on the inside).

On day 10 to 14, the caterpillar will go into its chrysalis stage. Mine crawled up to the top of the mesh enclosure and attached itself by spinning some silk. After several hours, it shed its skin to reveal the chrysalis shell. This is the stage I'm at as this newsletter goes to press.

I expect the chrysalis stage will take another 10 days. Then the adult butterfly will emerge. I am to let its wings dry for at least 2 to 6 hours, then take it outside and release it near flowers. Hopefully, I'll have a beautiful picture of my adult in the winter newsletter.

Even if you don't want to rear Monarch butterflies, you can still help by planting milkweed in your garden. It's the ONLY thing a Monarch caterpillar can eat! And by the way, if you do decide to foster monarchs, it can be addicting. I have 4 under my care now and have fostered out others to family and friends. All a good thing for the Monarch population.



Monarch hanging from mesh enclosure, beginning chrysalis stage.



Caterpillar shed its skin to reveal this chrysalis shell.



Adult Monarch on milkweed. Plant milkweed and help our Monarchs!



3-way feeder has port for nectar and grooves on top to place grape jelly. The orange is attached through center hanging rod.



Mesh clothes hamper used for enclosure for late caterpillar stage.

Continued from Page 4

Birded for Shorebirds in a parking lot

I'm on eBird's rare bird alerts for Westchester and surrounding counties. This is how I found out that in Pelham Bay Park, the parking lot for Orchard Beach, is a current "Hot Spot" for shorebirds. August is the height of the shorebird migration, and apparently, this year anyway, they are stopping in the parking lot puddles, especially at high tide when chased off beaches.

I first went on a Saturday and was rewarded with 5 different species. The word was out, and another 50 or so birders showed up as well. A very rare Baird's sandpiper had been reported, along with a rare Pectoral. Even if we didn't see the rare ones that day, all of us were enjoying this "puddle birding," as a fellow birder coined that day. I've been following the reports and other rare sandpipers are showing up, the latest being two Red-necked Phalaropes and Whimbrels.

I talked to several expert birders, including one who has led bird walks in the area for 30 years. None had experienced this before. So again, next summer will be interesting. Will the shore birds return to the parking lot? Was this going on all the time and no one ever noticed? As always, time will tell. Nature has a lot of amazing things to show us. We just have to get off our electronics and go outside and look.

Dowitches and sandpipers finding something to eat in a parking lot!



Birders flocked to Orchard Beach for "puddle birding."



New York Visitors

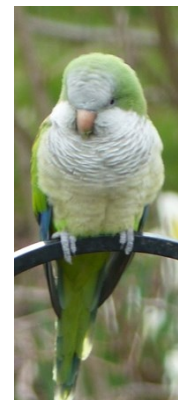
By Vern Schramm

Flashes of color are always welcome at backyard feeders. We anticipate the bright red of the Northern Cardinal and the warm brown of Mrs. Cardinal. Spring provides the remarkable change of green to brilliant yellow on the American Goldfinches. Walks through the woods yield even brighter reds on the Scarlet Tanagers. And placing an orange on a feeder in the spring is likely to bring the black, orange and yellow contrasts of the Orioles. But one color we rarely see in New York backyard birds is bright green...until recently.

The first green birds to appear in our New Rochelle neighborhood were the Monk Parakeets. Natives of South America, our climate is on the cool side for them. In response, communal nests are placed strategically to collect the warmth of electrical transformers. The transformers for lighting the school yard sports field serve as a new frontier for the Parakeet homestead.

The Parakeets began to appear in New York around fifty years ago. "New York's population of wild Monk Parakeets exploded into notoriety on December, 16, 1970 when the New York Times published an article on the bird by John C. Devlin, a noted birding reporter who, with his wife Gail, had written a biography of legendary birder Roger Tory Peterson." [<http://brooklynparrots.com/why-are-they-here/>] Although the origin of this population remains an urban legend, the Parakeets are likely to have come from a combination of shipping accidents (a crate of birds at JFK) and pet owner releases. Pet owner releases become understandable after hearing the volume of their piercing shrieks.

Monk Parakeets are social, always in groups, but docile. Even when a murder of crows aggregate on their nest in the spring, trying to snatch eggs or hatchlings, the Parakeets simply rebuild the nest as fast as the crows dismantle it. No mobbing for the Parakeets. Even House Finches and Sparrows share the sunflower feeders without being bullied by the Parakeets.



Monk Parakeet



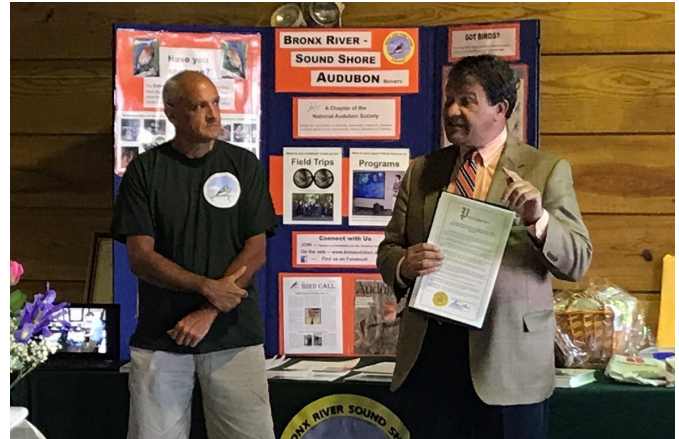
The Monk Parakeets are not the only green New York visitors. Rarely, the family of Monk Parakeets will play host to other visitors with similar avian politics. One of these is the Blue-crowned Parakeet, also known as the Blue-crowned Conure to pet-keepers. The Blue-crowned Parakeets remain rare, and we hope they prefer to remain so. Attempts to reduce the Monk Parakeet population have not been successful. However, from the occasional feather patterns in the grass, it is clear that our native Coopers Hawks enjoy an occasional "green meal".

Blue-crowned Parakeet

Annual Meeting a Great Success



Birding before the festivities.



Our honoree, Brian McGrath with NY State Senator George Latimer



Brian with some of his students.

National Audubon Convention

By Doug Bloom

The convention was held from July 14-17 in Park City, Utah. There were 482 participants including some international partners from the flyways. Main speakers were David Yarnold, Ken Kaufman, and Dr. Drew Lanham. Workshops included discussions on meeting elected officials on advocacy, and strategies on finding replacements for chapter officers as terms end. Meals were a time to network with other chapters and Audubon staff. There were breakout sessions on each of the flyways. One of the interesting workshops I attended was on birds and people. It involved a game that had a map with four sections. Teams placed pieces in solar, wind, farming, and ranching. The first round teams put pieces in areas they thought would be good. It then was scored. The second round had overlays of IBAs and floodplains and you got to change where pieces were placed, and then it was rescored.

On Monday there were field trips. I went on one to Antelope Island which is in the Great Salt Lake. At one point we stopped on the causeway and saw a flock of Phalaropes that numbered over a million birds, as well as a lot of Eared Grebes, many American Avocets and other species of birds.



FIELD TRIPS 2017/2018



Please Contact Doug Bloom at (914) 834-5203 for info or to register. Meet at Scarsdale Village Hall unless otherwise specified

September 16, Saturday - Larchmont Reservoir

Meet at 8 am Larchmont Reservoir upper lot. Looking for fall migrants.

September 24, Sunday - De Korte Park, NJ

Meet at 7:00 am Village Hall.

Looking for fall migrants. More information at <http://www.njsea.com/njmc/nature/parks-trails.html>



October 7, Saturday- Lenoir

Preserve Hawk

Watch/HRAS

Meet at 9 am at Lenoir.

Looking for Hawks and other fall migrants.



October 15, Sunday - Marshlands/Read Sanctuary

Meet at 8 am at Read Sanctuary. We will be looking for late migrants.



November 11, Saturday - Connecticut Coast

Meet at 7 am at Village Hall. Will be looking for late migrants and early waterfowl.

December 23, Saturday - Christmas Bird Count

Contact Doug Bloom to Volunteer for this important Bird Survey. You can do a few hours or all day.

January 7, Sunday - Jones Beach

Meet at 7 am at Village Hall. Looking for wintering birds. Possibly Snowy Owls



January 20, Saturday - Read Sanctuary

Meet at Read at 8:00 am. Looking for wintering birds.

February 10, Saturday - Eagle Fest

Meet at Croton Point Park at 9 am.

Looking for Eagles.



March 4, Sunday - Greenwich Point, CT

Meet at 8:00 am at Greenwich Point.

Looking for late winter migrants.

April 8, Sunday - Larchmont Reservoir

Meet at 8:00 am at Larchmont Reservoir. We will be looking for early migrants. Warblers and other songbirds that are passing through.

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 Anglefly 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 Village Hall. We will be looking for early migrants. Warblers and other songbirds that are passing through.

SMRA- Saw Mill River Audubon

Bedford- Bedford Audubon

HRAS- Hudson River Audubon

Welcome New Members

Ardsey - Anthony Natiello **Bronxville** - Joan Caicco, Edward Fennessy, Elizabeth Mattila, Dorsey McKeon, David Rosenzweig, Sarah Schlosser, Robin Starbuck, Allison Wolf **Hartsdale** - Michael Hauer, Irwin Klein, Jane Lawrence, Brian Peterson **Larchmont** - Angela Eaves, Lindsay Kerschner, Michael Korotkin **Mamaroneck** - Leslie Brill, Erin Byron, Laura Eisenstein, Jennifer Keefe, William Wasserman, Delia Welty **Mount Vernon** - David Lowe, Alexi Praskin, Andrew Vitolo, William Wertheim **New Rochelle** - Selma Berstein, Lisa Capelouto, Mohan Cheema, Michael Sheldon, Andrew Simons, Elaine Weiss **New York City** - Aslan Bilimer, Robin Hill **Ossining** Jane Cooke **Pelham** Nancy Lepre, Hernandez Rodriguez, Judy Shampanier, Kathy Wright **Scarsdale** John Coulter, Wendy Gross, Ajay Junnarkar, Fredric Krell, Todd Mannister, Gerald Peretz, Mark Sotsky **Tuckahoe** - Iffat Kahn **Wappingers Falls** - Phyllis Brown

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