



The BIRD CALL

Winter 2021

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

Look on the Bright Side

By Sandy Morrissey

When Covid shut down the world on March 12, BRSS cancelled all its field trips, programs, and our Annual Meeting was on Zoom. We regretted most having to cancel our Mt. Vernon school bird program, where we believe we make an impact on over 100 second-graders, getting them excited about birds.

While 2020 was full of negatives and great suffering, there were positives that emerged from the carnage.

On the bright side...

The birds were oblivious to Covid and continued to bring us joy, even through the gloomiest dark days of spiking cases. The Common Yellowthroat, Cedar Waxwing and a few other local birds had taught us that you can still look cool wearing a mask.



The Common Yellowthroat says, "Wear your mask!"

There are now record number of people looking at birds and taking an interest in nature. I live near Harts Brook Park, and because it is a passive park, there were always few people there – mostly dog walkers and some nature lovers like me who enjoyed walking the trails. After Covid hit, the park was overflowing with little masked children poking at wildflowers and adults finding their way on the circuitous trails.

Bird feeding made a quantum leap. A friend reported she couldn't replace her feeder that broke because, like Clorox wipes and toilet paper, bird feeders were "out of stock." A beautifully written article in the NY Times titled "The Birds are Outside," by Dan Sinker (google it), describes the journey from hanging one feeder up, to a father and son becoming passionate birders. I have to believe that most of these novice birdwatchers will continue down the path that will lead them to becoming strong advocates for bird protection and the environment.

We now have a president-elect who believes in science and gets it that climate change is a huge threat, and is committed to reducing fossil fuels. His EPA cabinet choice will actually believe in environmental protection and have a resume in environmental protection, NOT in the oil and gas industry.

Ford is running an ad saying they believe in change and commit to making all cars electric by 2050.

And the brightest of all – the vaccine is on the Fed Ex and UPS trucks!

Field Trips and Programs Resuming

By now we've learned how to exist in this Covid world. We've all got a good supply of face masks (in styles that fit our personality or breathability). We keep our social distance. BRSS now feels safe in offering field trips, as long as all masked and limited in number. We've learned to Zoom – even at our age! So BRSS is resuming our programs – all via Zoom for now. A positive is that you can attend from the comfort of your home, with a glass of your favorite beverage if you choose.

Hope to "see" you at our upcoming programs and field trips. Meanwhile, be safe and look on the bright side.

What Allows Birds to Survive Through The Winter?

By Alex Pinnock

Besides the things that allow other animals like mammals, amphibians, fish, reptiles, etc. to survive in the winter, birds have a few adaptations to help them survive in cold weather. One example is that they have something called a heat exchanger. This is a group of arteries and veins that redirect blood flow to lessen heat loss. A good description of what happens comes from [How Do Birds Feet Keep From Freezing and Shock](#). Here it is: "Warm blood flowing through arteries would normally flow into the bird's legs before re-

turning to the heart. When the legs are cold the artery in each upper leg constricts and forces blood to flow through the heat exchanger. Without going into a lot of detail, the cold blood rubs against the warm blood and this allows the blood to flow to the birds toes without much heat loss to the environment."

Obviously, there are other ways of getting/staying warm. Birds are able to fluff out their plumage and use that as a source of warmth or even go into a thick

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BRSS AUDUBON

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

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and Committee Members**

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Sandra Morrissey 949-2531
sandym10530@gmail.com

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Diane Morrison 725-7351

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claregorman@yahoo.com

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Susan Williams 917-385-9727

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Diane Morrison 725-7351

PROGRAMS

Doug Bloom 834-5203
Bernie Conway 413-210-0041
Diane Morrison 725-7351
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*

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patch of greenery where heat might be stored.

The Dark-eyed Junco

The Dark-eyed Junco is a kind of sparrow that is native to North America. In the summer, it resides up in Canada and around the North Pole, but in winter, they fly down all around the USA. This bird, nicknamed "the snowbird," really lives up to its nickname. Wherever you find a Dark-eyed Junco, there will be snow or cold weather nearby. These dark grey birds with black-ish heads are very common in the places I've mentioned and they will eat the common bird feeder foods offered (Sunflower seeds, Safflower seeds, etc.). Dark-eyed Juncos are ground foragers so they will be attracted to ground feeders or seeds that have fallen off the hanging feeder. To my surprise, when I looked up the nests of these "snowbirds," I found out that instead of making them in trees, they make nests on the ground! So the next time you see a Dark-eyed Junco, just remember that just because they are "common" doesn't mean that they are ordinary in any way.



Alex Pinnock is a middle school student and a volunteer monitor with our Bluebird Project.



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

Thank you to all those who purchased birdseed through our fall seed sale. Our next seed sale is in February. This is our main fund raiser during the year. Our profit on the sale was \$5332 and there was \$2105 in donations for a total of \$7437. Some of the proceeds from the seed sales go towards sending children to the nature camps in the county parks, production of this newsletter, and our bluebird project.

A huge thank you to Cornell's True Value Hardware in Eastchester for all their help with the sale.

*Thank
you!*

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

Louise Abel, Maria Albano, Paul Basch, Doug Bloom, Sheryl Breuninger, Leslie Brill, John Callahan, Suzanne Clephane, Ernestine Colombo, Cathy Corbin, Julia De Carlo, Robert Everett, Cece Fabbro, Margaret Falk, Clare Gorman, Ruth Gyure, Betsy Harding, Elizabeth Harriss, Kathryn Heintz, Marjut Herzog, Emita Hill, Tina Hoerenz, Phil Horner, Ted Kavanagh, Don LaSala, Glandorf Lutz, Kelly Mac Pherson, Valerie Marini, Scott Mellis, Harriet Miller, Sandy Morrissey, Wendy Murphy, Francine Naughton, Suzi Oppenheimer, Dorothy Patterson, Donald Pinals, Neil Powell, Kimberly Purvis, Karen Raggins, Douglass Reitter, Charles Ruebens, Vern Schramm, Joan Shapiro, Michael Stellman, Jean Stephenson, Ellen Valle, Jan Von Mehren, Lisa Wagner, Joan Weissman, Sidney Witter, Phyllis Wittner, Josette Zichello, Jeff Zuckerman

Those Elusive Kinglets

By Ted Kavanagh

I was sitting on the edge of the examination table, in a state of mounting indignation waiting for the doctor to arrive. In that exam room purgatory, I was looking out the second story window, across the parking lot about 100 feet to the only greenery in view on that mid-January afternoon in New Rochelle – a scraggly hedge of olive-brown cedar trees separating the parking lot from the street beyond.



My eyes caught a flutter as a little bird flew across the street into the hedge, joined shortly by another. The two birds flitted their way down the hedgerow in an unmistakable fashion – barely setting on one branch before darting towards the next. Two little gray blobs – too busy to be sparrows, not distinctive enough to be chickadees. Then I saw a bright flash of yellow, and knew I was looking at two Golden-crowned Kinglets.

Golden-crowned Kinglets and their cousins, the Ruby-crowned Kinglets, are among the smallest birds in North America. Only about 4” long and weighing less than a quarter of an ounce, they are just a little larger than a hummingbird. They spend their summers in the pine woods of northern Canada, and overwinter with us. They are so small, with so much surface area relative to their body mass, that ornithologists say they must increase their metabolism in the

winter, and they’ve been seen huddling together for warmth on cold nights. They are mainly insectivores who, when they’re with us in the winter, are grazing for insect eggs and mites on conifer branches and in tree bark.

Kinglets are feisty little birds who refuse to sit still long enough for photographers to get a good picture. The neon bright blazes of red and yellow on their crowns often are hidden unless the birds are agitated when they pop into view. The Ruby-crowned birds have bright white partial

eye-rings and two white wing-bars. The Golden-crowned birds have a bright white stripe over the eye, and one white wing-bar.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet with characteristic partial eye-ring

Whether you’re languishing in a doctor’s waiting room, or ambling down a path through the wintery woods, keep your eyes open for a little gray egg-shaped bird that won’t sit still. It will probably be a kinglet, and it will brighten your day.

Christmas Bird Count 2020

It was a chilly but sunny day for the 22 BRSS participants who helped count the birds this year. In the Scarsdale area of the Westchester-Bronx count circle, we saw 84 species of birds and a total of 7051 individuals. Those numbers were about average for a count. No surprise, the high-count species was Canada Geese (2854). Rarest was a Snowy Owl seen by a kayaker in New Rochelle, and a Common Eider seen at Edgewater Point in Mamaroneck. Blue Jay numbers were down, and it was disappointing that no Eastern Bluebirds were seen, even after we had a banner nesting year. We thank Doug Bloom who organizes the people and does the reporting for our Scarsdale count area.



Covid or not, the birds must be counted. Diane Morrison and Sandy Morrissey canvas Saxon Woods Golf Course.

No bluebirds, but we did have a good look at a Red-Tailed Hawk guarding its prey.



This Tufted Titmouse flew down beside us, as if to say, “Hey, count me too!”

Backyard Covid-19 Birds and Their Visitors

By Vern Schramm

Bird watchers driven indoors by the pandemic have made 2020 the year of the backyard bird feeder.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird visits frequently when the nutrient juice is fresh and the feeder is in an open location. Feeder competition for the hummingbirds comes from wasps. In aerial dog fights the hummingbirds lead wasps away on a wild flight and return to feed before the wasps can compete.



Open-platform feeders provide a landing spot for the backyard 'usual suspects'. Seed spilled to the ground attracts ground feeders. The Rufus-sided Towhee is a bonus. Backyard feeding requires tolerance for House Sparrows. Eight sparrow pairs from England were released in Brooklyn in 1851. They have done well in our urban environment. Ironically, in England there is concern for the dwindling population House Sparrows. Many birdwatchers might be willing to contribute surplus sparrow in a return favor to the UK.

Feeders and their birds attract interested observers. The Red Fox is attracted to any Mourning Dove that may not be paying sufficient attention. The Groundhog (aka Woodchuck) is always anxious for seeds on the ground. The ever-present squirrels can be distracted from the bird feeders briefly by a corn ear feeder. When they are full, they store excess corn in grassy hiding places for the winter. Then they return immediately to the feeders to compete with the birds. American Crows are fond of watching the squirrel hide the corn. The clever crows retrieve the food as soon as the squirrel is out of sight.



The Coronavirus pandemic has given extra home-time for backyard bird watchers. Heightened appreciation of our backyard birds will be remembered even in our post-Covid lives.



FIELD TRIPS



Please Contact Doug Bloom at (914) 834-5203 for info or to register. Meet at Scarsdale Village Hall unless otherwise specified. **FOR COVID SAFETY REASONS, FIELD TRIPS NOW LIMITED TO 10 PEOPLE, MASKS REQUIRED. NO CARPOOLING.**

January 17, Sunday - Jones Beach

Meet at Village Hall at 7:00 am. Looking for wintering Birds including possible Snowy Owls

January 30 - February 7 - Eagle Fest with a Twist

This will be an amazing hybrid event with a series of limited in-person experiences combined with engaging virtual content. Contact Teatown for updated information.

March 14, Sunday - Connecticut Coast

Meet at 7:00 am at Village Hall. Looking for late winter migrants

April 10, Saturday - Larchmont Reservoir/Hommocks

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

May 2, 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 8, Saturday - Rockefeller Preserve

Meet at Rockefeller park lot at 8:00 am. Looking for Spring Migrants.

May 15, Saturday - Doodletown Road

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

May 23 - Sunday, White Memorial Park, Connecticut

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



Sign up for Youth Bird Walks

We are resuming our youth bird walks in the spring. They will be limited to 10 participants, masks required. If interested, please send an email to BRSSAudubon@gmail.com. We will put you on the list and notify you of upcoming walks.

Alex and Carl with their moms.

PROGRAMS

All BRSS Audubon Programs are free and open to the public. Due to the continuing COVID-19 danger, we are still not offering in-person programs. All programs offered are virtual using the Zoom app.

REGISTRATION REQUIRED (AND LIMITED TO FIRST 100 REGISTRANTS). ONCE YOU REGISTER, YOU WILL BE SENT THE LINK THE DAY BEFORE THE PROGRAM AND YOU WILL BE NOTIFIED IF REGISTRATION IS OVER-CAPACITY.

Tuesday, January 12 - 7:30 pm via Zoom

WHY DO BIRDS HAVE DIFFERENT EYE COLORS?

PRESENTER: EAMON CORBETT

Eamon Corbett is a former young birder from Pelham who is now an ornithology PhD student at the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science. He will be discussing his background and path to making a career of studying birds, and his current research focus: why do birds have different eye colors?



While plumage colors get most of the attention in birds, their eyes can also be everything from white, yellow, red, or brown, to even blue, green, or purple! Eamon's research focuses on trying to figure out why that is, using a familiar group of birds - the grackles - to help understand the genetics of bird eye color.

Tuesday, April 13 - 7:30 pm via Zoom

**THE MIGHTY MONARCH:
BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION**

PRESENTER: TOM TYNING

Of all the groups of animals that are able to compete with birds for human attention, it is for sure, butterflies. As accessible, as colorful, and, as fascinating for their behaviors as birds, butterflies have gained a significant following of avid, even rabid, watchers in the past couple of decades. Every butterfly in your backyard has stories based in long-term geologic history, evolutionary biology, and relatively recent landscape changes since the landing of the European invaders. Many populations, also, are experiencing current changes in survival due to climate change, increase in pesticide use, and reduction of intact ecological communities. Some of the stories are truly incredible.

This presentation will highlight butterflies in general and focus a bit on the incredibly fascinating multi-generational Monarch butterfly migration that is nearly unique in the animal kingdom. Tom Tynning will show highlights from his several early trips to the wintering sites and encourage listeners to take heed at the precarious population changes in this, and other "leps." Tom hopes to share with you a bit of total excitement he had in gazing at a mountain of monarchs and the value of reading further details of ongoing research and conservation efforts.

Tuesday, May 11 - 7:30 pm via Zoom

**JAMAICA BAY, AN URBAN ESTUARY: ISSUES,
MANAGEMENT, AND WILDLIFE**

PRESENTER: DON RIEPE

Jamaica Bay is home to a great diversity of wildlife. Despite a century of abuse and 3 million people living nearby, over 340 species of birds, 110 species of finfish, 71 species of butterflies, and 700 species of moths have been documented by naturalists as using the estuary either for nesting, wintering, or migrating through the roughly 13,000 acre preserve. Management issues include a major airport on its eastern shore, 4 sewage treatment plants and three closed landfills along its borders.



Creative programs such as "Buffer the Bay", landfill conversions to parks, raptor management, marsh restoration, and national park status have helped restore and revitalize the bay waters and habitats.

Don Riepe has been involved with all these projects during his conservation activism during the past 40 years. His articles and photographs have been published in many journals and magazines including Smithsonian, National Wildlife, Audubon, Defenders, and the New York Times.

For 25 of those years, Don worked as a resource specialist and manager of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. During this time, he started a raptor management program for Ospreys and Barn Owls and continues working with this project today. In 2003, he retired from the National Park Service and currently works in the bay as the Jamaica Bay Guardian for the American Littoral Society, a coastal conservation organization. Also, since 1982, he has been an active board member of NYC Audubon and member of their advisory council. This program will cover the many issues and projects associated with wildlife management and habitat restoration Don has been involved with over the years.

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(formerly Scarsdale Audubon Society)
P. O. Box 1108
Scarsdale, NY 10583

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