



THE OSPREY

Spring 2021 — Vol. XLVI, No. 1

Plum Island SAVED

By John L. Turner



The lighthouse which can be seen from Orient Point and one of the seals that haul out on the Island.

Situated a mile east of Orient Point, the eastern tip of the North Fork and separated from it by Plum Gut, lies Plum Island, an 822-acre pork-chop shaped island that is owned by you and me (being the federal taxpayers that we are).

The Island's most well-known feature is the Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC), situated in the northwestern corner of the property, but Plum Island is so much more. On the western edge lays the Plum Island lighthouse which was built in 1869 to warn mariners of the treacherous currents of Plum Gut. On the east there's the brooding presence of Fort Terry, a relic of the Spanish-American War, with scattered evidence in the form of barracks, gun batteries, and the tiny tracks of a toy gauge railroad once used to move cannon shells from storage to those concrete batteries. (The cannons never fired except during drills).

And there's the stuff that excites naturalists:

- ✳ The largest seal haul-out site in southern New England located at the eastern tip of the island where throngs of harbor and grey seals swim along the rocky coastline or bask, like fat sausages, on the off-shore rocks that punctuate the surface of the water.
- ✳ The more than 225 different bird species, one-quarter of all the species found in North America, that breed here (like the Bank Swallows that excavate burrows in the bluff face on the south side of the island), or pass through on their seasonal migratory journeys, or overwinter.
- ✳ Dozens of rare plants, like ladies'-tresses orchids, blackjack oak, and scotch lovage that flourish in the forests, thickets, meadows, and shorelines of Plum Island.

✳ A large freshwater pond in the southwestern section of the island that adds visual delight and biological diversity to the island.

✳ *And, of course, the ubiquitous beach plums that gave the island its name!*

For the past decade a struggle has ensued to make right what many individuals, organizations of all sorts (including the more than 120-member Preserve Plum Island Coalition), and many public officials consider a significant wrong – Congress's order to sell Plum Island to the highest bidder, forever losing it as a public space.

This ill-conceived path of auctioning the island was set in motion by a half-page paragraph buried in a several thousand-page bill to fund government agencies in 2009. Fortunately, this struggle has been won – the wrong has been righted – as language included in the recently adopted 2021 budget bill for the federal government, repeals the requirement that the General Services Administration sell the island.

Thank you to Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, Senators Christopher Murphy and Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and members of Congress Lee Zeldin, Tom Suozzi, Rosa DeLauro and Joe Courtney!

Thank you is also due to New York State Assemblyman Steve Englebright who sponsored legislation that was signed into law creating a Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle area in the waters surrounding Plum Island.

While this victory is a vital and necessary step to ultimately protect Plum Island, it is a temporary and incomplete one since the island can still be sold to a private party through the normal federal land

Continued on page 3

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Into the New Year, feeders, walks and Zoom meetings

Byron Young

While I write this a Cardinal is waiting in the shrubs for the rain to stop or for me to put out more food. The birds have been quite active at my feeders this winter. I have a couple of Red-breasted Nuthatches that fly right up to the feeder as soon as I place fresh seed. Their cousins the White-breasted Nuthatch is a bit more reserved only dropping in for food when I am a safe distance away. The Cardinals are also quite shy as are the mourning doves. However, the Mourning Doves may be shy because of the neighborhood Coopers Hawk who is always lurking about looking to capture lunch or dinner. The ever alert Blue Jays have not been completely successful with their warning calls about the Cooper's Hawk. It is always fun to watch the flock of Dark-eyed Juncos picking up seed and chasing each other around the yard. The White-throated Sparrows tolerate the Juncos' antics while they look for their favorite seeds. The Chickadees and Tufted Titmice generally share the hanging feeders providing a constant string of activity when it is feeding time. The woodpeckers who stop to share some seed or suet provide some additional color. The most common is the Red-bellied Woodpecker, followed

by the Downy Woodpecker and then an occasional Hairy Woodpecker. The local Carolina Wren is usually announcing its presence by making a racket and stopping for a quick bite. Finally, there are the surprise visitors like a Brown Creeper stopping by to see what all the fuss is about. These visitors help keep away the winter blues. See the articles on page 4 & 5 to find out more about bird feeding.

As we move into the New Year, we hope everyone remains healthy and safe. ELIAS will continue to exercise the Health and Safety Guidelines provided by Audubon, State and Federal Officials. Limited participation field trips will be held and will be announced via email notification service, Constant Contact. If you are not on the list, you can sign up on the website.

Our first Members Zoom meeting was held on March 1. Cara Fernandes spoke about the History of Quogue Wildlife Refuge. We are working with the Quogue Wildlife Refuge staff we are trying to set up monthly Zoom meetings and we will announce these meetings via Constant Contact. The Refuge staff has been helping us with the set up as we learning how to manage a Zoom meeting so bear with us as we, as we familiarize ourselves with the Zoom application.

We will continue to publish our Newsletter but on a quarterly basis for the time being. I am sure that Sally would be interested in any article, story or observations that you might have.

I hope folks are getting out to enjoy our local birds on their own. Setting up a bird feeder, if you can will attract some local birds. However, there are several nice places to take a walk and check out the overwintering waterfowl, owls, and maybe one of the Bald Eagles that seem to be popping up all around Long Island. If you get out do not forget to bring your binoculars and your camera. We are always looking for pictures to put on the website or as candidates for the next iteration of the ELIAS Calendar. Don't be shy if you have a favorite bird photo and you are willing to share please consider sending it to Sally or to me for consideration. No matter, enjoy some time outside with our feathered friends.

Good Birding!

To reach Byron - his email is
youngb53@optimum.net

To reach Sally
eliasosprey@optonline.net

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Continued from page 1

disposition process if no government agency at the federal, state, or local level steps up to take title to the island.

The Coalition's next task, then, is to ensure that a federal agency such as the National Park Service (National Monument?), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (National Wildlife Refuge?) or the state of New York (New York State Park Preserve?) expresses a willingness to accept stewardship of this magnificent island, since they get first dibs to the island if they want it. A key enticement toward this end is the \$18.9 million commitment in the budget to clean up the few contaminated spots on the island.

Why the sale in the first place? Since 1956 PIADC has been conducting top level research on highly communicable animal diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease. To this end, several years ago staff developed a vaccine for this highly contagious disease that holds great promise in controlling the disease globally.

Despite this successful research, Congress determined the facility was obsolete and should be replaced, approving the construction of a new state-of-the-art facility, known as the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF), to be located on the campus of Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. NBAF is complete and will soon be fully operational so as a result PIADC is no longer needed; PIADC is expected to transfer all operations to Kansas and close for good in 2023.

Plum Island is a rare place – a remarkable asset that holds the promise of enriching Long Islanders' lives – your family's lives, if we can keep it in public ownership. The Preserve Plum Island Coalition, with the input from hundreds of Long Islanders, has painted a vision for the island... so, imagine throwing binoculars, a camera, and a packed lunch enough for you and your family into your backpack and participating in this realized vision by:

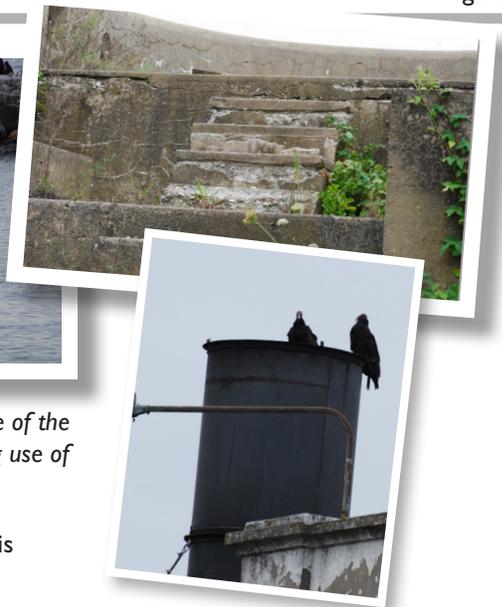
- ✦ Taking a ferry across to the island, debarking to orient your island adventure by visiting a museum interpreting the cultural and natural riches and fascinating history of the island before you wander, for countless hours, to experience the wild wonders



Top: Terns feeding near the dock Right: some of the remains of Fort Terry. Turkey Vultures making use of one of the abandoned buildings.

of the island. A most worthwhile stop is the island's eastern tip where, through a wildlife blind, you enjoy watching dozens of bobbing grey and harbor seals dotting the water amidst the many partially submerged boulders.

- ✦ Standing on the edge of the large, tree-edged pond, watching basking turtles and birds and dragonflies flitting over the surface.
- ✦ Birdwatching on the wooded trails and bluff tops to view songbirds, shorebirds, Ospreys and other birds-of-prey, swallows, sea ducks and so many other species. Perhaps you'll see a Peregrine Falcon zipping by during fall migration, sending flocks of shorebirds scurrying away as fast as their streamlined wings can take them.
- ✦ Strolling along the island's eight miles of undisturbed coastline, with the beauty of eastern Long Island before you, offering distant views of Great Gull, Little Gull and Gardiner's Islands, Montauk Point, and the Connecticut and Rhode Island coastlines.
- ✦ Lodging at the Plum Island lighthouse, converted into a Bed & Breakfast and enjoying a glass of wine as the sun sets over Plum Gut and Orient Point.
- ✦ Learning about the role Fort Terry played in protecting the United States and the port of New York as you explore the many parts of the fort — the barracks where soldiers stayed, the gun batteries that once housed the cannons angled skyward to repel a foreign attack.
- ✦ At the end of day, if you don't stay over, taking the ferry back to the mainland of the North Fork, tired after many miles



of hiking in the salt air of the East End stopping at a North Fork restaurant to share a chat among friends and family about what you've learned relating to this fascinating place.

This legislation has given Plum Island (based on the above perhaps we should call it Treasure Island!) a second chance and an opportunity for us to achieve this vision. But this law is only the first step. We need to take the vital second step of new ownership and management in the public interest if all of the above adventures are to become realities. We collectively need to tell those elected officials who represent us, and who can make a difference in determining the island's fate, that we want Plum Island protected in perpetuity and the opportunity for its many wonders to become interwoven into the fabric of life on Long Island.

Go to www.preserveplumisland.org to learn more about the Coalition, receive updates, and what you can do to help.

John Turner is the spokesperson for the Preserve Plum Island Coalition. This article first appeared in TBR News Media, it is used here with their permission and the permission of the author.



Photos were taken by Sally Newbert during a trip the ELIAS Board of Directors took to the island in August 2010. Yes, that is how long we have been trying to help in the fight to save this Island.

What Birds Eat

How to Preserve
the Natural Diet and
Behavior of
North American Birds

By Kim Long

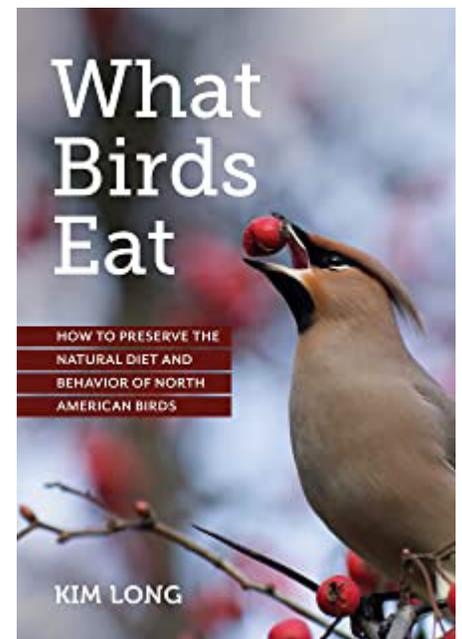
A Book Review by
Eileen Schwinn

At this time of year, we all know there is green grass under the snow, and perhaps a patch of garden that needs a little work. “What Birds Eat” can certainly help with the decision as to what to plant to attract and keep birds - and maybe butterflies - to your yard year-round. The chapters include: How Birds Evolved, the Anatomy and Physiology of How Birds Eat, Feeding Behavior, and Bird Diets. But this isn't a text book! It's designed for you and me – people who are interested in providing a little oasis for the birds, and hopefully, provide hours of enjoyment for the watcher! Don't clear that leaf pile! Don't cut that dead tree down (unless it possibly can fall on your home!). Provide a heated winter water source. Plant a berry producing, winter crop for the birds to dine on when the snow is on the ground. Mr. Long also provides about a third of the book profiling about 130 birds and their dietary favorites – from which bugs to which berries.

He explains the seasonal patterns and adaptations the birds make to survive. A few charts are scattered among the text. One which caught my eye in particular – “How Much Birds Eat” – a Domestic chicken takes in only 3% of its body weight a day, where a Blue Jay takes 10% of it's weight per day, a Chickadee 35% and a hummingbird, 100%. And that's in “normal” weather. During the winter and cold, those numbers increase. That explains why, if you hang bird feeders in the winter, they constantly have action, and need to be filled two or three times

a day. But wouldn't it be nice to provide a natural, yard buffet for them as well?

While not a book providing all the answers, it is a nicely illustrated, well written addition to anyone who is interested in making a welcome haven for the birds, year round, library. Lots of useful information – and Fun Facts - are packed into a little over 300 pages, and hopefully, a bunch of inspiration!



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What Should I Feed My Birds?

There are many different types of birdseed, but which is best for your birds and feeders? Understanding the different options and which birds prefer them can help you choose just the right treats for your backyard buffet.

8 TOP BIRDSEEDS

There are several types of seeds you can choose to fill your feeders, but knowing which birds will enjoy which seeds, as well as which feeders are best for different foods, can help you choose the best single seed or seed blend to feed your backyard birds.

Black Oil Sunflower Seed

These medium-to-large seeds are solidly black and pointed at one end. They are high in fat and calories, ideal to give birds exceptional energy and good nutrition. Any birds with good, thick bills will be able to crack through the shells to extract the seed.

Best For – All songbirds such as cardinals, buntings, jays, chickadees, nuthatches, etc.

Use In – Hopper, tube or tray feeders with medium or large feeding ports or open feeding space

Striped Sunflower Seed

These larger, gray-and-white striped seeds are just as nutritious and healthy for birds as black oil sunflower seeds, but the larger, thicker shells can be difficult for small birds to crack. Many sunflowers from the garden produce striped seed.

Best For – Larger songbirds with thick, strong bills such as cardinals, jays and grosbeaks

Use In – Hopper, tube or tray feeders with larger feeding ports and open feeding space

Sunflower Hearts and Chips

Sunflower seeds with the shells already removed are ideal for many birds because they offer the energy and nutrition of sunflower seeds with no effort to crack the shells. These seeds are more expensive, but are a great choice for picky birders because spilled seeds will not

sprout.

Best For – Seed-loving songbirds of all sizes, including finches, sparrows, buntings, etc.

Use In – Hopper, tray and tube feeders with medium feeding ports or open feeding space

Millet

These small, pinhead-sized seeds are round and lightweight, but they are a good source of carbohydrates for hungry birds. Both red and white varieties are available, and they often make up a good proportion of birdseed mixes.

Best For – Smaller seed-eaters such as juncos, sparrows and finches, as well as doves

Use In – Hopper or tube feeders with small or medium feeding ports, or protected trays

Nyjer

This thin, oil-rich seed is a high energy choice ideal for feeding winter birds, but it is very lightweight and can easily spill or blow away from the wrong feeder. This seed can be more expensive than other options, and fewer birds will sample it.

Best For – Clinging finches such as goldfinches, redpolls and siskins

Use In – Tubes with narrow feeding ports or mesh tubes or sock feeders

Safflower

This larger, thicker seed looks like a white sunflower seed, and it offers similar nutrition for birds. The seed taste is bitter and is a good choice to discourage squirrels from feeding, but the thick shell can be hard for small birds to open.

Best For – Large seed-eating birds such as cardinals and grosbeaks

Use In – Hopper, tube or tray feeders with medium or large feeding ports or open feeding space

Milo

This larger, round, BB-sized grain is often considered a junk seed, and many birds

kick it out of feeders as they seek better morsels. It is still a good carbohydrate source and an inexpensive filler for birdseed blends, but seed left on the ground may sprout.

Best For – Ground-feeding birds such as pigeons, doves, quail and pheasants

Use In – Hopper or tray feeders that include spillover trays to minimize mess

Cracked Corn

One of the least expensive birdseed options, cracked corn is the dried, fractured kernels of corn and is a cheap filler for birdseed mixes. While it has less nutrition for birds it is a decent carbohydrate source, and it will not grow if spilled.

Best For – Ground-feeding birds such as doves, pigeons, sparrows, quail and other game birds

Use In – Open hopper or tray feeders or ground feeding areas to sate hearty appetites

With so many different seeds to choose from, it is best to offer a variety of different seeds to backyard birds. In time, you will learn which seeds are preferred by your most frequent guests, and you can create custom blends of their favorites to fill all your feeders.

always available on our website <https://talmagefarm.com/>

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CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

QUOGUE/WATERMILL

Steve Biasetti

The 72nd Quogue Water Mill Christmas Bird Count – on eastern Long Island – took place on Sunday, December 20, 2020. Twenty-seven searchers covered the five sectors within the count circle, tallying 14,990 individual birds of 113 species. Another three species were recorded during count week. Species diversity compared well with previous Quogue Water Mill CBCs, comfortably exceeding the count average (95.8 species) since its beginnings in 1949. The number of observed individuals, however, continues a troubling trend: the last four years have tallied the four lowest counts over the past forty-five years.

A number of interesting birds were recorded on December 20th, including:

- Harlequin Duck (17th time on the count)
- Great Egret (19th time, all sightings since 1994)
- Bald Eagle (16th time, including the past 12 years)
- Clapper Rail (35th)
- Virginia Rail (14th)
- Red Knot (17th)
- Laughing Gull (14th)
- Snowy Owl (17th)

- Northern Saw-whet Owl (4th)
- Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker (21st time, all sightings since 1983)
- Common Raven (8th time, all sightings since 2012)
- Marsh Wren (14th)
- Eastern Bluebird (22nd)
- Common Yellowthroat (23rd)
- Chipping Sparrow (19th)
- Red Crossbill (13th)
- Pine Siskin (29th)

The vast majority of expected species were found on December 20th. Among the few tough misses were Eastern Meadowlark (missed for just the 6th time) and American Kestrel (8th year not recorded). Other birds regularly recorded on the Quogue Water Mill Count, but not found during the 2020 rendition: Northern Pintail, American Bittern, Wilson's Snipe, Brown Thrasher, and Brown-headed Cowbird.

Thank you to all who helped out. A full report of the 2020 Quogue Water Mill Count will be ready for distribution within the next week; please contact me via e-mail if you would like to receive a copy. The next Quogue Water Mill CBC is tentatively scheduled for December 19, 2021.

CENTRAL SUFFOLK CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Eileen Schwinn

The Central Suffolk Christmas Bird Count was first held on January 1, 1954, with 5 observers. This area encompasses a 14 mile wide circle, with a mid-point in Manorville, and it has remained the same circle over the years, extending from the ocean (Smiths Point and Cupsogue Beaches), and to the north into the Calverton area. The western point is Yaphank, and the eastern point is Westhampton Beach. Over the years, the Count has grown in participants and interest among local birders. A number of popular birding spots are included in the Circle – EPCAL, Peconic River, Hunters Garden, Terrell River Town Park, Wm Floyd Estate, Wertheim NWR, Southaven Park, and the Suffolk County Farm. The habitat ranges from ocean waters, lakes, grasslands, farm fields, and woods, and in spite of large sections of developed land over the years, the area covers enough diversity to provide food and shelter to a great number – and variety – of wintering birds.

On Dec. 27, 2020, the Count was held with 47 observers, including feeder-watchers, and a total of 126 different species of birds seen. Slightly over 25,000 individual birds were accounted for – a remarkable achievement, especially in the Time of Covid-19! Socially responsible distancing needed to be maintained, for everyone's well-being. There were 23 birding "parties", with most beginning the day in mid-teen temperatures, to check for owls pre-dawn, or to be in their assigned area by sunrise. Count Day ended, as usual, in mid to late afternoon.

The day turned out to be a relatively comfortable one, with sunshine and no wind – and temps in the mid 30's. Perfect for birds, and birders! The observers included long-time participants, who have covered "their" areas for twenty plus years, and some first-time observers, who hopefully will be back for many years to come. Birding ID skills are important, but beginners are always welcomed to the Count, usually teamed with an experienced birder. Sections are frequently "scouted out" ahead of Count Day, since birds frequently found tend to stay in place. And only birds seen on 27 Dec. are "official".

Some of our more interesting finds of the day, bird-wise, were Snow Goose, Blue-winged Teal, Red-necked Grebe, Snowy Egret, Red-shouldered Hawk, Long-eared Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Eastern Phoebe, Marsh Wren, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Boat-tailed Grackle. One Pine Siskin, and one Red-crossbill hung around from the earlier in the month "wave", and were counted. 12 Bald Eagles and 28 Turkey Vultures, and 6 Common Ravens were also found – remarkable and unheard of even 10 years ago in this Count Circle.

A complete listing of the species and number of birds seen, as well as the effort – time spent and distances traveled – can be found on the National Audubon website, under the Christmas Bird Count heading, in March, when all the data has been collected. And it's never too early to plan for 27 December 2021, if you're interested in a fantastic, historic birding adventure!!

Piping Plover Migrations

Byron Young



A tagged bird from one of the studies will help researchers learn about site fidelity.

It is mid-July along the ocean beaches of Rhode Island and Massachusetts and the Piping Plover are getting restless. After spending the late spring and early summer nesting and raising their young they anxiously await favorable wind conditions to begin their journey to overwintering locations. This journey has been taken by generations of Piping Plovers, yet it is not completely understood. During 2015 through 2017 researchers from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Canada and the US Fish and Wildlife Service fitted Piping Plover with VHF radio transmitters. Little is known about exactly when, under what conditions, and what routes these shorebirds take to reach their overwintering areas along the Southeast Atlantic seashore into the eastern central Caribbean Islands.

This study was part of an effort to better understand the migratory ecology of these birds, to assess their migratory routes and to provide data relative to the risks associated with the development of offshore wind farms proposed for offshore locations across the New York Bight. The birds were tracked by a network of 30 automated telemetry stations extending from Cape Cod, Mass to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.

The results of this work were published in *The Condor*, a publication of the American Ornithology Society (Volume 122, 2020, pp 1-16). The Article entitled, "Supportive wind conditions influence offshore movements of Atlantic Coast Piping Plovers during fall migration" written by Pamela H. Loring, James D. McLaren, Holly F. Goyert, and Peter W. C. Paton"

This study revealed that when wind conditions were favorable, blowing toward the Southwest, Piping Plover would depart from their summer beaches in Southern New England. A total of 75 piping plover were tagged with VHF radio tags during the three year study. The tags were affixed to the birds by clipping feathers along their back and gluing the small radio tracking device to the pinfeathers.

A total of 75 Piping Plover were tagged in Massachusetts and Rhode Island (25 each year). Unfortunately, about 25% of the transmitters dropped off before the birds migrated. This number was reduced during 2017 when smaller, lighter tag was used. These tags weighed 0.67 grams (.02 ounces) compared to the earlier tags which weighed 1.1 grams (0.38 ounces).

This investigation provides some insight into the flight patterns of Piping Plover once they leave their nesting locations.

Most of the tagged birds in this study departed between July 19 and July 29. They would lift off within three hours of sunset and migrate nocturnally. Once airborne, their flight paths took them SW across Block Island Sound and in some cases across Long Island where they might stop. However, some birds would simply head Southwest out over the New York Bight, not stopping until they hit southern New Jersey or points south. These flights took them well out over the ocean. This is important information for a couple of reasons. One, it adds to our knowledge regarding the migratory patterns of

Piping Plover. Two, it provides information to assess the potential impacts of the proposed wind farms planned for the New York Bight.

Examining the information gathered by averaging the distance flown, hours in flight, speed of flight and altitude of flight for the birds reveals some interesting data. The information from the seventeen birds successfully tracked, suggests a flight speed of 25.8 miles per hours (range 12.4 to 44.7 mph), at an altitude of 948.5 feet (range 301 to 1223 feet). The average distance flown was 360 miles with a range of 174 to 503 miles. The flight times ranged from 4.5 hours to 40 hours with an average flight time of 17 hours over open water. The longest flight records was from Cape Cod to Cape Hatteras, a straight line distance of 503 miles in 27.8 hours, a speed on about 18 miles per hour at an altitude of 1100 feet above the water.

Why is some of this information important? First the plans for large scale wind farms off the shores of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York would place the turbines in the flight path of this tiny shorebird. It does not necessarily mean that the wind farms would have an impact, however, it does raise a concern and one that needs to be further assessed. The reported height of the Rhode Island offshore wind turbines is 390 feet from the water to the tip of the rotating blades. This places the wind turbines generally below the flight altitudes reported.

This information is also important in that it provides us with new information of shorebird migrations, their timing, and the conditions which induce migration. Unfortunately, the VHF tags have a relatively short life span so the researchers will not be able to determine whether these birds return to their natal beaches. Possibly information from the leg tags as shown on the bird at the side of this article will provide clues about nest site fidelity.

This leaves one to wonder whether our local Piping Plover undertake a similar migration. Maybe in the near future researchers will be radio tagging Long Island Piping Plover adding to our knowledge of these remarkable creatures.

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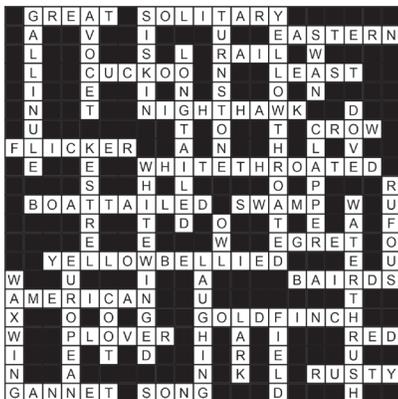
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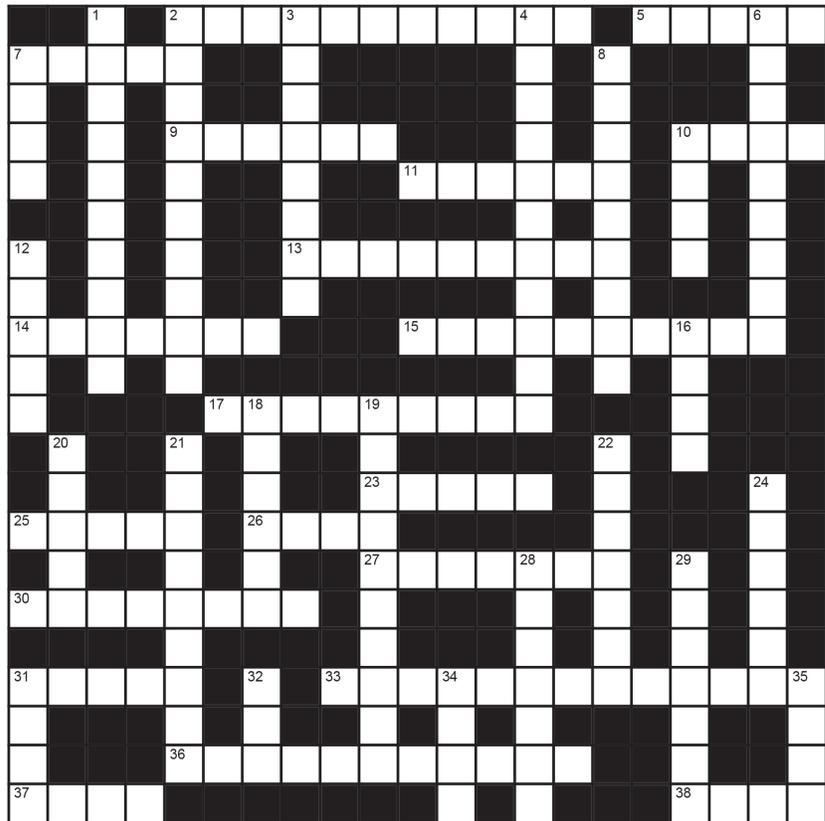
Our mission is to be an inspiration to those who feel a sense of kinship with Long Island by encouraging an appreciation for the natural world and a commitment to the environment.

Something to do while social distancing?

Answers to Fall/Winter puzzle by Tom Moran



Winter Sightings Tom Moran



Across

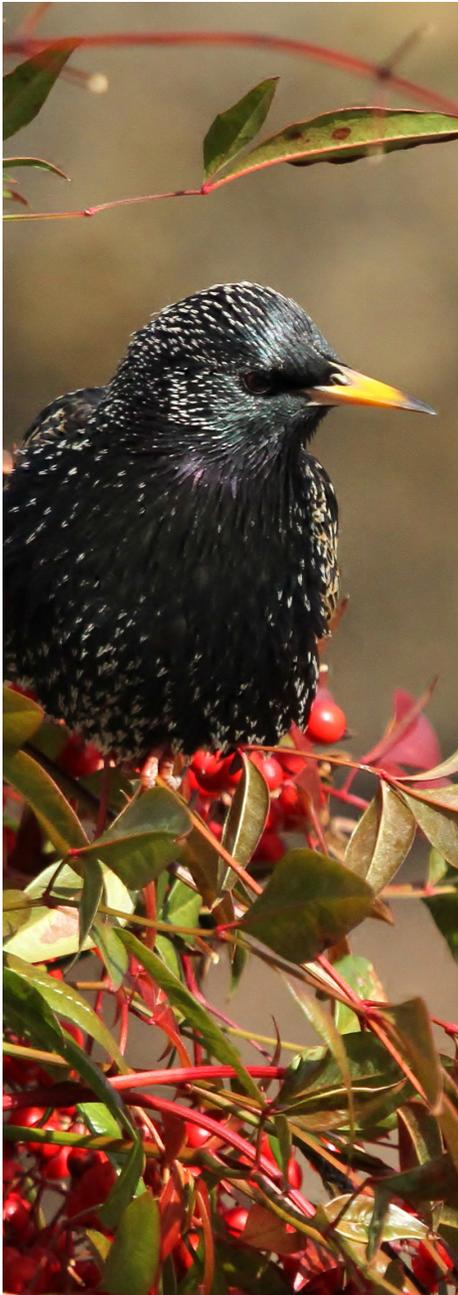
- 2 State bird of Florida, Northern _____
- 5 None of this, feathery? Woodpecker?
- 7 _____ Sparrow, Wren
- 9 *Calidris alpina*
- 10 _____ Road, Bittern seen here
- 11 Spotted _____, Baldwin Harbor Park, very rare sighting this winter
- 13 _____ Morton NWR, where they'll eat out of the palm of your hands
- 14 White-crowned _____
- 15 _____ Duck, previously known as Old Squaw
- 17 Four and twenty _____ baked in a pie (yum!!)
- 23 _____ Fork
- 25 Black or Yellow-crowned Night _____
- 26 _____ Sparrow, smaller than Fox
- 27 Yellow or Red shafted?
- 30 _____ Bay Marina Yacht Club, Glaucous Gull, 2019
- 31 Greater or Lesser, salt or fresh water...
- 33 _____ Sparrow.
Oh, Canada, better than Old Sam Peabody?
- 36 _____ Loon, bill in the air, snobby?
- 37 American _____ cock, and 35 Down
- 38 _____ Dove aka Pigeon.

Down

- 1 To be at a loss/confused duck
- 2 Eastern _____, try EPCAL grasslands
- 3 Check for broken-wing display near nesting site
- 4 See 7 Down, hovers
- 6 With 20 Down. Seen at Cullonen Pt this winter and last
- 7 See 4 Down, second word
- 8 Check the sod fields here for rare geese
- 10 The bird of peace
- 12 _____ Goose, stubby bill and less of a grin patch than Snowy
- 16 Pacific _____, seen Feb/Mar 2019 at Oyster Bay
- 18 _____ Black-backed Gull
- 19 Belted _____
- 20 See 6 Down
- 21 _____ for 24 Down, try Ditch Plains
- 22 Northern _____, aka Marsh Hawk
- 24 _____ 21 Down, often on rock jetties
- 28 American _____, small raptor
- 29 _____ White-fronted Goose, Tung Ting Park this winter
- 31 _____ Goose, look for grin patch
- 32 _____ Farm, good place to get geese at 8 Down
- 34 Blue or Green-winged _____
- 35 See 37 Across

Starling Success Traced to Rapid Adaptation

Genetic evolution doesn't always take millions of years



European Starling by Kathy Litzinger
Courtesy Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Ithaca, NY—Love them or hate them, there's no doubt the European Starling is a wildly successful bird. A new study from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology examines this non-native species from the inside out. What exactly happened at the genetic level as the Starling population exploded from just 80 birds released in New York City's Central Park in 1890, peaking at an estimated 200 million breeding adults spread all cross North America? The study appears in the *Journal Molecular Ecology*.

"The amazing thing about the evolutionary changes among Starling populations since they were introduced in North America is that the changes happened in a span of just 130 years in parallel with a huge expansion in the bird's range and population size," says lead author Natalie Hofmeister, a doctoral candidate at the Cornell Lab. "For a long time we didn't think that was possible—that it took millions of years for genetic mutations to change a genome."

The genetic differences found among North American Starlings are very subtle. In fact, after researchers sequenced the genomes of birds from widely distributed locations around the United States, the genomes were all remarkably alike—any Starling could undoubtedly mate successfully with another, no matter where they're originally from. But the researchers did find the genetic signatures of change in areas of the genome that control how Starlings adapt to variations in temperature and rainfall. Study authors concluded the birds had undergone "rapid local adaptation," adjusting to conditions not found in their native European range.

Another key factor is movement. The study points out that there's a lot of movement among Starlings. All that movement means Starlings kept establishing new populations as they spread westward, and each population had to adapt to new environments. The adaptation may not have resulted from a new mutation but from an existing genetic variation in the founding population.

"A genetic variation that might not have been useful in one environment could turn out to be very beneficial in another," Hofmeister explains. "So, a variation

related to temperature and rainfall that enhanced survival became more common in a new environment." The massive size of the total Starling population across North America meant these gene variants could be passed along across the generations.

European Starlings in North America are unusual in another way. Species with a highly restricted gene pool—a genetic bottleneck—are more likely to become extinct because of fertility issues associated with in-breeding, a problem that endangered animals also face. The introduction of just 80 birds in Central Park (released in an attempt to introduce all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's plays to North America) was one of many attempted introductions in other parts of the country. It's possible the resulting gene flow among these populations prevented the species from dying out. It's an area of speculation ripe for further study.

"What I think is really cool is that the Starlings in North America appear to have adapted to different conditions across the range," Hofmeister says. "So, it wasn't just that they reproduced really quickly, and then just kept reproducing. It's that they specialized once they arrived in new areas."

Despite their success and large numbers, the European Starling is now in steep decline, like so many other species in North America. The current population is half the size it was 50 years ago—down from an estimated 166.2 million breeding birds in 1970 to 85.1 million (Rosenberg et. al. Science 2019). The species is also declining in Europe.

Though Starlings are reviled for some of their less admirable habits and their impact on native species, Hofmeister says they're fascinating birds and really quite beautiful. And they're allowing scientists to follow one of the many threads that influence avian evolution.

Reference:

Natalie R. Hofmeister, Scott J. Werner, Irby J. Lovette (2021) Environmental correlates of genetic variation in the invasive European starling in North America. *Molecular Ecology*.

FIELD TRIPS

Patchogue Lakes

Rosemary Valente

On January 9th, a group of determined birders braved the cold winds to search the Lakes of Patchogue for winter ducks and other avian visitors. Since COVID protocols require us to be in small, spaced-out groups, one group started at Swan Preserve, where the first surprises of the day were 3 Wilson's Snipe very well camouflaged at the edge of the reeds. The other half began at Swan Lake, where there were good views of Gadwall, Ring-necked, Bufflehead and Mallards, along with the unusual (for this lake) Pintail and Long-tailed Ducks. A lone Northern Harrier made a pass and scattered the Canada Goose cohort; one Great Blue Heron made an appearance, along with a Carolina Wren.

The second spot on the tour for one group was Robinson Pond and Great Patchogue Lake for the other. There were Pintails at Robinson too, along with Gadwall, Mallards, Graylag Geese, and yet another Great Blue Heron. It was on to Great Patchogue Lake (at the 3rd Street viewpoint) and then West Lake, where there was a good showing of ducks,

including Lesser Scaup and Shovelers. A Pied-billed Grebe made a close swim-by.

By now it was much colder, and a few hardy die-hards went to the Roe Boulevard viewpoint for Great Patchogue Lake. Their determination was rewarded by more Pintails, another Great Blue Heron, four Green-winged Teal, and an Eastern Phoebe lurking in a tangle of brambles at the shoreline. An even smaller group trekked on to the feeder lake for Great Patchogue, Canaan Lake. Nothing but Canada and Mallard here, but the lake, which had been dredged to remove invasive plants and then stopped due to issues with spawning trout, has now gone from a thin stream of water to almost full again. (In case you want to check this lake out later in the year, parking is on one of the side streets. There is a protected walkway on one side of Traction Boulevard. The south side marsh is a good place to find Wood Duck, as it is very quiet).

All in all, it was a good start to birding this year.

Looking forward to the next walks!

Shinnecock Inlet East

Eileen Schwinn

A nice turnout on February 13 thirty people! Cloudy, cool (if 27 degrees can be called cool...), but very little wind! Not a mob of ducks but enough to keep everyone happy, and nice (at least for me) to hear the Black Scoters singing to us before taking flight.

Highlight for most was the Snowy Owl (and a tip o the Hat to Tom for pointing our brains in the correct direction!!!) I believe everyone in the group got a distant and decent view if the bird!

A small group of participants trooped out to Sagg Main St, to seek out the earlier in the day reported Lapland Longspur. We dipped on that bird, but did see a group of 12 or so Common Redpoll as a Consolation Prize, seen near a flock of approximately 80 Horned Larks.

As an aside, it must have been a Horned Lark Day – I saw three or four other small groups on my ride home from Sagaponack, along mostly back roads.

A successful trip (again!) made possible with excellent help from Byron, Ro, Suzi, and Chris! **A good team, All!**

Cold but happy, part of the group that explored Shinnecock East. Photo by Brad Miles



Future ELIAS Field Trips

Eileen Schwinn

Nothing is ever written in stone, and this has never been truer than the past year or so! We here at ELIAS have planned field trips, only to have them canceled or greatly reduced in number due to the pandemic. But we all see light at the end of the tunnel, so to speak, and here's a listing of POSSIBLE Field Trips for you to be aware of in the up-coming months! Although participation has been limited to 10, we hope to be able to have leaders, and locations which lend themselves well to two or three groups of 10, all to head out in different directions and cover the same territory at each location.

The specific dates have not been set yet – the local health situation being the major concern – but by having your name on our Constant Contact list, we can let you know where and when the trip will be offered. Just Text ELIAS to 42828, or use the Sign Up Now button on the Eastern LI Audubon Society Home Page of our

website, and your name will be added to our email list.

Here's a listing of possible Field Trips for the upcoming Spring Season:

March and April: Wertheim NWR, Wm Floyd Estate, CEED in Bellport, Southaven County Park.

May: Hunters Garden, Bald Hill, EPCAL, Pine Meadows, Rocky Point DEC Area 26, Manorville Hills, Hallock State Park, North Fork Preserve County Park, and Quogue Wildlife Refuge.

June: South Fork Natural History Museum Fields

We have missed the Field Trips as much as you have – and can't wait to see our returning birds in familiar places, along with your happy faces accompanying the Leaders!!

Two Quick Stops

Birding on your own – with just a few minutes to spare? Here are 2 small spots for a quick stop.

Swan River Preserve/Swan Lake in East Patchogue. The January Patchogue trip stopped here. But if you are in Patchogue the walkway around this pond is a very nice place to take a quick stroll. The little islands host a variety of nesting birds, on the far side see if there is any activity on the stream as you look over toward the bay.

The Marina at Timber Point Golf Course has had some interesting sightings. Check the flats by the Marina. Then, on the other side of the golf course is the Police Building with views over the adjacent marsh.

As you are traveling around Long Island – always keep your eyes out for any spot where there is a pull off where you can watch from your car or just outside of your vehicle.



DEC "I Bird NY" 2020

Eileen Schwinn

A few issues of *The Osprey* ago, I wrote about the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Challenge, I Bird NY. Two divisions on the Challenge were Beginner's Birding for those under age 16 and Experienced Birder, for everyone else. As many of us know, the Year of Covid has introduced many people to the hobby/sport/passion which has filled our lives for years! In November, two submitted entries to each category were chosen at random to receive a number of birding related prizes, including binoculars, a bird book and other related items. Each

completed entry, however, received a Certificate, a Sticker, and a wrist bracelet.

Here's hoping the DEC of NY will continue with this program in 2021 – and even more happy faces will result. I'll keep you posted!

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