



THE OSPREY

Fall 2022 — Vol. XLVII, No. 2

Peconic River Forage Fish Connections

Byron Young

Beginning west of the Brookhaven National Laboratory, the Peconic River, Long Island's largest stream flows eastward into the Peconic Estuary. The early settlers of Riverhead, then part of Southold built dams along the main stem of the Peconic River from Calverton to Riverhead to run small grist mills, sawmills, and textile mills along with other industrial needs. In the late 1800's dams were built along the Little River, a major tributary to the Peconic River, to support the production of cranberries. The Little River flows from Wildwood Lake through the Cranberry Bog Preserve and into the Peconic River adjacent to Grangabel Park. Cranberry bog dams were also built along the Peconic River. Remnants of these cranberry fields can be found in Cranberry Bog Preserve and along the head waters of the Peconic River near the Swan Lake Golf course.

The dam building was critical to the survival and development around Riverhead for the early settlers. This activity, unfortunately, resulted in blocking access to spawning grounds for a couple of fish species primarily River Herring and American Eels. While American Eels have the unique ability to climb vertical walls along the edges of the dam (a story for another time) River Herring do not have the ability to climb vertical walls nor leap even small dams blocking them from reaching their spawning grounds.



Alewives in the Peconic River. Gopro Photo Byron Young

The historic dam site in Grangabel Park, harnessed the energy of the river to produce textiles. It sits at the head of tide water and has blocked most fish passage for nearly 150 years. Five dams remain on the Peconic River (Grangabel Park Dam; Upper Mills Dam; Forge Lake Dam, Edwards Avenue Dam, and a dam at the Peconic River Sportsmen's Club. There is also one dam along the Little River (Woodhull's Dam) that blocks access to Wildwood Lake.

The Peconic River along with Alewife Creek provide the two largest River Herring spawning runs on Long Island. However, there is a major difference between these two streams. Alewife Creek flows generally unimpeded from its source in Big Fresh Pond while the

Peconic River continues to be impeded by a series of dams. These remaining dams date back into the late 1800's or even earlier. A great deal of effort has been expended over the past 25 years to improve fish passage in the Peconic River. Currently, there is one fish ladder under construction, one that may begin construction this fall and one that is seeking the necessary permits for construction.

The Peconic Estuary Partnership along with several other groups and governmental agencies have been working to construct fish ladders along the Peconic River. The first one was completed through the Grangabel Park Dam in 2010.

Continued on page 6



THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

The Weather!

Byron Young

Complaining about the weather is one of our favorite pass times. It's too hot, it's too cold, it's too windy, and so on. Did you ever think that humans have it nice, we can go inside our nice warm or cool houses, fix a nice meal, and let the weather roll on by. Sure, major storms (rain, snow, or wind) make our lives a bit more difficult. But how many of us think about our feathered friends. Yes, we feed them and provide some shelter for those birds that frequent our yards, yet they face the unyielding weather as they go about their annual cycles.

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*No matter what –
take some time to enjoy these
migrations. You never know
what you might encounter!*

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Each spring and Fall millions and millions of birds make their annual round trips between wintering grounds in Central and South America to their nesting grounds in North America. The total distance traveled varies depending on where the bird begins their journey and where it ends, but it can be thousands of miles. We can all manage to move around Long Island with relative ease if we chose our timing correctly, but millions of birds fly from South America to Canada have a more difficult task. It always amazes me to read about their journeys. The Red Knot, for example, migrates from the southern tip of South America to the northern edges of Canada each year a trip of 9000 miles each way with only one or two stops to refuel. Many of the migrating warblers and songbirds migrate from northern South American and Central America to their nesting grounds in North America covering hundreds if not thousands of miles each way.

This is dangerous business for these birds. They often fly for hours over the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico or out over

the Atlantic Ocean with nothing to perch on save a passing ship. They have little margin for error on these exhausting trips. Birds will undergo some physical adaptations prior to undertaking their spring or fall migration, molting into fresh feathers, and gorging to increase their body weight, think ounces not pounds.

Even with the physical changes the bird's need luck and good fortune to migrate between their nesting grounds and wintering grounds. This is where the weather comes in. Weather can delay, detour, or even speed up migrating birds. The spring birds that are looking for winds out of the South to push them along their migratory routes. Should they run into a strong northerly wind like we felt during the end of March it will hinder their northward migration. They might settle in a place and wait for favorable conditions if not they certainly will expend more energy flying against head winds. They can also be blown off course by a major rainstorm, snowstorms, windstorms, tropical storms, or hurricanes ending up hundreds of miles from their intended destination. This all changes in the fall when the migrating birds are looking for northerly winds to aide their southward migrations.

Birding during stormy days is not the greatest idea but sometimes foul weather can produce the most incredible migration phenomenon of all, a fallout. When migrating birds encounter bad weather, they have little choice but to land as soon as they can. We are fortunate to have one of those area close to us, Central Park in New York City. Birds migrating will find this oasis and land to refuel or rest before continuing. Smaller areas can be found locally along the Barrier Islands or in the hills of central Long Island.

Experienced birders rely upon a series of sources for information where concentrations of migrating birds may be found. First is their own notes and records, second is information passed on by other birders through various social

media sites, and finally checking the local weather forecasts. You can attempt to do this yourself by looking at NOAA Graphical Forecasts. However, you can let others do all the hard work and check out <https://birdcast.info>. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology produces forecasts during the spring and fall migration to give birders a glimpse of the bird migration activity for the country.

As you are reading these millions of birds are preparing for another migration over open water, past hungry predators, around tall buildings, and along their ancient migratory pathways toward their overwintering grounds. If your timing is right and the weather cooperates, you, might have a chance to see some of them stopover on Long Island for a brief visit. May is the prime time for springtime bird migrations. The Fall migrations are more protracted with late August through October providing some spectacular opportunities. Try to make some time to join one of our bird walks or venture out on your own to a local park or wildlife refuge to see what you can find.

So, remember, the next time you complain about the weather stop and think about what birding adventure it might hold for you. Stop by Smith Point after a major offshore storm and look for birds that may have been blown ashore. Consider going out after a cold front passes to look for birds that may be stopped by a sharp change in wind direction. In the spring winds from the north will generally slow down migrations and the birds will stop to feed and rest.

No matter what – take some time to enjoy these migrations. You never know what you might encounter!

Great Birding!

Byron



Monday Evening, October 3, 2022 @ 7:00 pm

How Birds Evolve

Douglas J. Futuyma

*Distinguished Professor Emeritus
Department of Ecology and Evolution
Stony Brook*

Ever since Darwin, birds have been subject of study by evolutionary biologists. In this lecture, I draw both on scientific studies and on my travels and observations to illustrate how evolutionary science explains some of the diversity of birds' behavior, life history, and distribution. I end by asking whether or not birds will adapt to a rapidly changing world.



Douglas J. Futuyma has been on the faculty of the Department of Ecology and Evolution at Stony Brook University becoming a Distinguished Professor. He has been a Guggenheim Fellow and Fulbright Senior Scholar, and received the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. He was elected President of the Society for the Study of Evolution, the American Society of

Naturalists, and the American Institute of Biological Sciences, and is an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Science and the National Academy of Sciences of the U.S.A. He is on the editorial board of *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* and is Editor of *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution, and Systematics*.

Professor Futuyma has been interested in natural history and biological diversity since boyhood. He is an active birder, and has pursued birding in almost 50 countries.

This program is free and open to all, will be at Quogue Wildlife Refuge.

MONDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 7 @ 7 PM

Bird Banding *What's it all about?*

Darlene McNeil

Darlene's program, originally scheduled for July, was postponed due to Covid. Now, Darlene McNeil is rescheduled for November 7. Please join us as we welcome our newest board member.

She is currently a sub permitted bird Bander in CT and has held permits to band birds in TX and GA. She has attended bird banding courses at Powdermill in PA, Braddock Bay in Rochester, NY, Appledore Island in NH and Belize. She had the unique opportunity to hold every eastern wood-warbler in the hand. She is currently doing a Suffolk County Big year and has held a top 5 position since January and cannot wait to meet

more birders in the field. She will be giving a presentation typically given during a bird banding demonstration.

Topics covered will be: What is bird banding?, Why band birds?, What have we learned from bird banding?, Super hero birds, How to band a bird, How to age a bird, Life cycle of birds, Parts of a bird (including specific wing topography), and some pretty pictures of birds in the hand.

This program is free and open to all, will be at Quogue Wildlife Refuge.



Monday Evening, December 5, @ 7:00 pm

ZOOM Program Bird Migration

Benjamin Van Doren

Postdoctoral Fellow

We will end the year with a Zoom Program. Benjamin is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Cornell Lab of Ornithology. He has been studying bird migration, focusing on understanding the drivers of change and flexibility in migratory behavior. Benjamin's work straddles ecology, evolution, behavior and conservation, and takes in diverse perspectives—from individuals to flyways, tracking to remote sensing, acoustics to genomics.

His recent work has focused on three major themes: (1) birds' innate migratory programs, (2) the impact of human activity on migration, and (3) continent-scale perspectives on migration systems. Since 2012, he has worked with the BirdCast project to study and predict large-scale migratory movements, including research on the effects of light pollution on migrating birds and a tool to forecast nocturnal migratory movements across the United States.

In today's era of "big data" ecology, he is eager to advance understanding and appreciation of one of the world's most captivating natural phenomena.

There will be a information on how to participate in this free program on our website.

Hear Birds in a Whole New Way

*Merlin Bird ID App Now
Identifies More Than 450
Birds by Song*



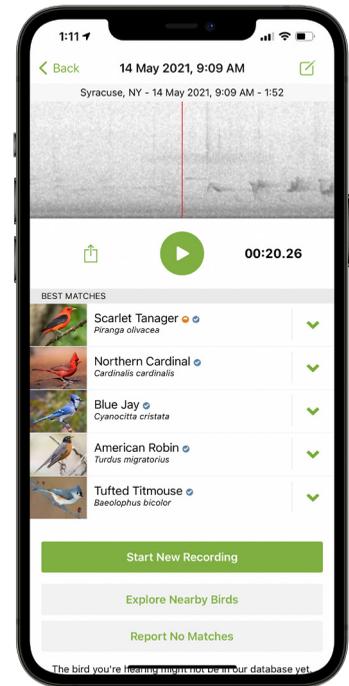
Ithaca, NY—The joyful sounds of bird song fill the air—but do you know who is singing? You can instantly identify birds by sound with the free Merlin Bird ID app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Its AI-powered sound identification feature recognizes the voices of 458 species in the United States and Canada. The app can pull up a likely ID no matter what song or call a bird is making—even if many species are "talking" at once.

Merlin app screens "Sound ID unlocks a whole new way of enjoying nature that produces not just one magical moment but many," said Jessie Barry, program manager of the Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab. "It really does feel like magic when you match a mystery sound with the name of the bird making it."

Merlin makes it easy to identify birds as they're singing. Simply hold your phone up, tap the Sound ID button, and Merlin shows you the name of each bird detected in real time, along with a photo to help you clinch the ID.

"You get not only the thrill of identifying birds with Merlin, but you can learn about each bird with ID tips, range maps, and more than 80,000 photos and sounds from the Cornell Lab's Macaulay Library," said Merlin project leader Drew Weber. "People are really blown away by Merlin's capability and depth. In addition to sound ID, Merlin can also identify birds if you upload a photo or answer five questions about the bird you saw."

Merlin's accurate and instantaneous answers are made possible by machine learning technology and by millions of birdwatchers who share their observations with eBird. Engineers at the Cornell Lab trained Merlin Sound ID using 750,000 recordings of bird sound from birdwatchers.



"Groundbreaking technological advances are part of the magic behind Merlin," said Cornell Lab research engineer Grant Van Horn. "But it's experienced birdwatchers who make this all possible by contributing to eBird's global database."

"This combination of technology and people power has opened up a whole new bridge to the natural world," said Weber. "It's helping people of all ages get involved in understanding and enjoying the outdoors more and, we hope, inspiring them to protect places that people and wildlife share."

Download the free Merlin Bird ID, featuring Sound ID and Photo ID, for both iOS and Android at the App Store on your phone. Search for Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab.

Comments from Merlin users:

"The app transforms birding—especially for relative novices like me. I had such a great time, finally getting to identify some birds that I hear all the time but am unable to see due to the dense foliage."

"For those of us with hearing-related disability, Sound ID is transformative. This is a technology that can change lives of people who have, until now, been denied access to an entire dimension of the natural world."

"It's a wonderful gift to be able to decipher the songs and sounds around me."



Planned Walks

September 10
North Fork Preserve

October 1
Robert Moses Hawk Watch

November 5
Suffolk County Farm

December
Christmas Bird Counts

January
Lakes of Patchogue

The dates, times, and how to sign up will be on the website and sent out via Constant Contact. If you are not already on our list, please go the website and sign up.

SUBMIT YOUR PHOTOS FOR THE ELIAS 2023 CALENDAR!

We are pleased to announce that we will be doing our calendar again this year!

There are only three requirements to submit your photos:

- You must be a current member in good standing
- The photo must have been taken on Long Island!
- Submit your photo before Sept. 15, 2022
- Please limit to 5 submissions

SUBMIT YOUR PHOTO TO:

SALLY NEWBERT
eliasosprey@optonline.net

AND

BYRON YOUNG
youngb53@optimum.net

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The fish passage in Grangavel Park. Photo: Byron Young

Continued from page 1

This is a nature-like fish ladder, so it looks like a natural flowing stream. A second fish ladder was completed at Edwards Avenue in 2016. The State DEC took advantage of funds and the opportunity to rebuild the Edwards Avenue Dam and install an Alaska Steep Pass and an American Eel pass in advance of work to be completed downstream.

Moving downstream of Edwards Avenue you first encounter the Forge Road dam. Roadway improvement and fish passage construction were scheduled to begin in the fall of 2022. Further downstream is the Upper Mills Dam. Conceptual plans are in place to construct a fish passage at this facility. Once fish ladders are completed at these two dams River Herring and American Eels will be reconnected to their historic spawning grounds along the entire main stem of the Peconic River to Connecticut Avenue.

Currently, a new fish ladder is being constructed on the Little River which drains from the Cranberry Bog Preserve and Wildwood Lake. Prior to the construction of Woodhull's Dam in the late 1800's River Herring, primarily Alewives, and American Eels could access these waters. Neither species of fish could access their native waters for a period of nearly 150 years. However, they persisted

by utilizing what limited spawning area existed in the upper reaches of the tidal Peconic River.

River herring is a collective term for two species of diadromous fish: Alewife and Blueback herring. These are diadromous fish meaning they spend a portion of their lives in fresh water and a portion in salt water. In the case of the Peconic River we are dealing with primarily one species of river herring, the Alewife. Alewives spend most of their lives in the oceanic waters off the east coast of the United States and Canada. Beginning around the first of March, the adult Alewives return generally to the streams where they were born. The spawning season lasts until early May.

Once the adults have spawned, they leave the stream and return to the ocean. The eggs hatch a few days after being laid. The juveniles will remain in or near the stream until fall when they begin their migration into oceanic waters. The young will remain in the ocean between three to five years before returning as adults. Adult Alewives can spawn multiple times unlike Pacific Salmon.

Prior to the development of fish passage at Grangabel Park in 2000 the surviving Alewives would spawn in the pool below the dam thus maintaining a small remnant population. It also helped that a few folks that fished for Alewives in the spring at Grangabel Park would toss a bucket or two of adult Alewives upstream. Beginning in 1995, with a small demonstration Grant provided by the Peconic Estuary Partnership, Alewives were captured and moved up stream along the main stem of the Peconic River. This effort was undertaken for a period of five years while a group of local citizens with interests in the Peconic River secured sufficient funds to purchase an Alaska Steep Pass and with the Assistance of Miller Environmental Association the fish ladder was placed, during the Spring of 2000, in the main spillway of Grangabel Park Dam. After a couple of modifications, the Alewives began to utilize this new access to a small portion of their historic spawning grounds.

The newly installed fish ladder at Grangabel Park was only a temporary fix as the DEC Permit required that the fish

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You will also find early migrating Great Egrets,
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waiting for an unsuspecting Alewife.*
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ladder be removed each spring after the spawning run was complete, generally around the first week of May. Again, Miller Environmental removed the fish ladder and stored it at their facilities on Edwards Avenue at no cost. Meanwhile plans were being developed to install a permanent fish pass at Grangabel along with a major rebuild of the dam structure which was falling into disrepair. Working with the Peconic Estuary Partnership the Town of Riverhead contracted to have the Grangabel Park Dam renovated after nearly 100 years of wear and tear.

During the Fall of 2009, construction work was commenced to rebuild the dam at Grangabel Park. Following the completion of the dam reconstruction, the work began on the permanent fish passage. The fish ladder in Grangabel Park is a nature-like fish design, meaning that it looks like a natural stream bed. The fish ladder was opened on February 22, 2010, and Alewives were observed passing upstream about two weeks later.

By now I am sure you are asking what this have to do with birds. It has been extremely interesting observing the return of several bird species and animal species to the areas opened to Alewife spawning. The main beneficiary of this new bounty has been the local Osprey population. They very quickly found the concentration of Alewives at the base of Woodhull's Dam. It took a few years longer for the Great Egrets, Great Blue Heron and Black-crowned Night Herons to discover this feast. An unexpected bird taking part was the local Turkey Vulture population who stop by to clean up the dead Alewives left by the raccoons. Raccoons, after they have had their fill will catch Alewives and only eat the heads. Another mammal that has made its presence known along the Peconic River enjoying a tasty Alewife is the River Otter. This animal has been making a comeback on Long Island and having healthy runs of river herring will aide this animal after a long winter.

Once the fish passage work is completed nearly 300 acres of Alewife spawning habitat and American Eel nursery habitat will be opened. Production of these species will add to their coastal populations providing food for numerous birds and animals found throughout



The fish passage on the Peconic River, near River Road in Riverhead. Photo: Byron Young

their respective ranges. For us locally, the birds of prey, Osprey, Egrets, Herons, and Kingfishers, will all benefit from their increased presence. Raccoons, River Otter, possibly a Mink or two, will visit the stream looking for a meal. In the Peconic Estuary, the local seal population will become more visible in downtown Riverhead. We may have to teach them to stay out of the local traffic circles. Marine fish such as Striped Bass and Bluefish will feast on this species along with their more oceanic cousins, tuna, sharks, and other large pelagic fish. Marine mammals such as dolphins and whales will feed on them.

With the improvement of the riverine habitat through fish passage effort we reconnect the flow of nutrients from the marine environment to the freshwater environment and vice versa. This riverine reconnection has not come easy with seeking permission from the dam owners to construct fish passage, obtaining preliminary designs for fish passage at each dam, no two are alike, securing the necessary funds for final design plans, securing the necessary permits, letting a construction contract and finally construction.

This Peconic River habitat restoration effort is the work of the following: the Peconic Estuary Partnership, the Towns of Riverhead, Southampton and Brookhaven,

Suffolk County, New York State, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the United States Geological Service, the local electric Power Company, and numerous citizen volunteers. It is through the efforts of a local citizens group organized in the mid-1990's that provided the impetus for this effort.

Once the fish ladder at Woodhull Dam is completed it will be a great place to visit in Mid-March 2023 for the return of the Osprey who enjoy a good Alewife dinner. You will also find early migrating Great Egrets, and Black-crowned Night Herons either perched in a tree or along the shoreline waiting for an unsuspecting Alewife. If you are really lucky you might encounter a River Otter seeking a meal. So, take some time in the future to stop by to see the benefits of reconnecting our oceanic migrates to the fresh waters of the Peconic River system.



Blue Grosbeak takes off
Photo: Bob Gunning



House Wren poses nicely
Photo: Bob Gunning



Cedar Wax-wing with food for its nestling
Photo: Bob Gunning



Bob Gunning captures images of the nesting and singing birds. Photo: Eileen Schwinn

Birds of the meadows and woods at SOFO

Eileen Schwinn

A group of 18 folks met on Saturday, June 11th, to walk and remember the late Eric Salzman, a member of ELIAS and member of the Board at the South Fork Natural History Museum, Bridgehampton.

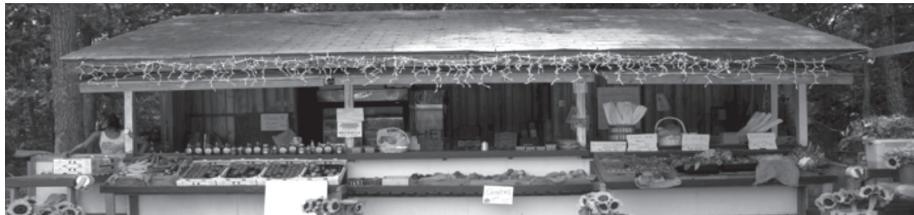
Meeting at the carefully mowed and maintained open field behind the SoFo Education Building, we took advantage of the partially cloudy, windless 70 degree day to walk an approximate mile, covering a number of birding habitats. Co-Led by Frank Quevedo and Eileen Schwinn, this walk visited the birds of the meadows and

woods. A total of 25 species were seen or heard by all. Bob Gunning was able to capture photos of some of the most cooperative – and colorful – birds on the walk, including resident nesters Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Purple Martin, Cedar Waxwing, Blue-winged Warbler, and Indigo Bunting.

A big surprise, much to the delight of all, was a male Blue Grosbeak who posed for us, providing a great end of the walk sighting. Plan to join us next year, to enjoy early summer birds, and honor the memory of one of the East End of Long Island's most inspirational birders, Eric Salzman.

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Saturday, November 5th from 9:00 am – 2:00 pm

Start the winter off with plenty of seed! The birds will thank you all winter long when you order enough seed to be set for the winter when the birds really need you.

Please have your order in by Friday, October 21st. This is a fund-raiser for Eastern Long Island Audubon Society and the Quogue Wildlife Refuge. Special thanks to the generosity of Talmage Farm Agway.

Please pre-order your seed.

On-line orders will be accepted in October at the Quogue Wildlife Refuge website: www.QuogueWildlifeRefuge.org and at the ELIAS web site: www.EasternLongIslandAudubonSociety.org.

Qty	Description	Price	Total
_____	25 lb Black Oil Sunflower	\$30.00	_____
_____	50 lb Black Oil Sunflower	\$55.00	_____
_____	20 lb Fancy Flight Premium Wild Bird Mix	\$22.00	_____
_____	40 lb Fancy Flight Premium Wild Bird Mix	\$36.00	_____
_____	11 oz Suet Cake	\$ 2.50	_____
<i>Orders must be picked up on Saturday, November 5, 2022 between 9am and 2 pm</i>		SUBTOTAL	_____
		DONATION	_____
		TOTAL	_____

Please make checks payable to: Quogue Wildlife Refuge. Orders must be pre-paid.

Please charge my card AMEX VISA MasterCard Discover

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Signature _____

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City/State/Zip _____ Telephone _____

Thank you for your order!

Return this order form to Quogue Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 492, Quogue, NY, 11959

Orders must be received by Friday, October 21, 2022

Nature Matters:

The Moon Birds

John Turner

In the early evening of a mid-June day, eleven intrepid participants hiked through the globally rare Dwarf Pine Plains, a unique forest of pygmy pines found in the Long Island Pine Barrens. Their mission? To hear the night-time calls of the “moon birds” — Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-will’s-widows (or “whips” and “chucks” in birding vernacular), ringing out over the dwarf pines. For these nocturnal birds, the central Pine Barrens is their Long Island stronghold.

We know for the Whip-poor-will, and suspect for the Chuck-will’s-widow, their reproductive cycle is tied to the phases of the moon. “Whips” typically mate shortly after the full moon in May and the young hatch about 10 days before the next full moon in June. As the moon moves through its waxing phase and its reflected light gains in strength, Whip-poor-wills can see better at night enabling them to hunt more efficiently for the moths and large beetles they eat and feed to their young. During this active time both species vocalize, their onomatopoeiac calls repeated often — one student reported a Whip-poor-will calling 1,088 times consecutively! No wonder their common names were derived from the calls they make!

While their calls were very much appreciated by the night’s participants, it hasn’t always been the case their calls were welcome sounds. Superstition and meaning abound. A popular belief claimed that whoever hears a Whip-poor-will will soon die; a variation portends a death of someone the listener knows. Or a Whip-poor-will calling outside a house meant the death of an inhabitant, and perhaps,

allowing the bird to grab their soul as it departs their body, which if they did would lead to further calling by the bird. If the bird failed in capturing the soul it would fall silent. Other legends imparted only bad luck but not death to the hearer of a call.

Another legend has it that a person with back ailments who does somersaults in cadence with the Whip-poor-will’s call will see their back problems soon cured (makes you wonder, though, if a person could do somersaults every two to three seconds then maybe their back wasn’t in such bad shape to begin with?)

Another “first of the year call” legend meant good luck — if you made a wish upon hearing your first call then that wish would come true. In Louisiana gardeners would use the date of the first call of the Whip-poor-will as a guide to planting garden peas.

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“Whips” and “Chucks” belong to a group of birds known as “goatsuckers”, a name derived centuries ago from the mistaken belief they use their large, supple, flesh-lined mouths to suck on the teats of goats.

According to folklore legend, Whip-poor-wills had importance to single women. If an unhitched woman heard her first Whip-poor-will call of the year but the bird then went immediately silent, she would stay single all year long; but if she was quick enough to wish to be married upon hearing the call she would soon be so. Still another legend notes that if a single woman hears a Whip-poor-will call before morning light and another Whip-poor-will responds, her “future man” will think of her that day.

Native Americans were also intrigued by Whip-poor-wills. The Iroquois, for example, believed that moccasin flowers (pink lady’s slippers) were the shoes of Whip-poor-wills while Utes believed Whip-poor-wills were gods of the night.

Henry David Thoreau had a different, more basic take on a Whip-poor-will’s call: “It could mean many things, according to the wealth of myth surrounding this night flyer. The note of the Whip-poor-will borne over the fields is the voice with which the woods and moonlight woo me” he said.

“Whips” and “Chucks” belong to a group of birds known as “goatsuckers”, a name derived centuries ago from the mistaken belief they use their large, supple, flesh-lined mouths to suck on the teats of goats. They were even accused of blinding or killing livestock once they latched on! This perception of “goat-sucking” isn’t totally off-base since the goatsucker name developed in Europe where residents often observed European nightjars flying around goat pens. They weren’t there to latch onto goat teats but rather were likely attracted to the insects stirred up by the goats.

Even the family of birds these species belong to — the *Caprimulgidae* — underscore this mistaken connection. *Capra* in Latin means goat and *mulgare* means “to milk”. Even a very wise person, Aristotle, apparently believed the bird-goat connection noting: “Flying to the udders of she-goats, it sucks them and so it gets its name”.

In addition to Whip-poor-will’s and Chuck-will-widow’s there are six other members belonging to this family in North America — Buff-collared Nightjar, Common Poorwill, Common Pauraque and Common, Lesser, and Antillean Nighthawks — and three occur on Long Island — “whips”, “chucks” and Common Nighthawks. This latter species is a very rare breeder on Long Island, if at all, but passes through in fall migration in the low thousands, as evidenced by the recent annual totals at the Nighthawk Watch conducted at the Stone Bridge in Frank Melville Memorial Park in Setauket by the Four Harbors Audubon Society.

These North American goatsuckers can be grouped into two categories: nightjars and nighthawks. “Whips” and “chucks” are nightjars — they have more rounded wings and plumper bodies than their Nighthawk brethren, and also have large rectal bristles lining each side of their mouths, similar to

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Continued from page 11

cat whiskers, that assist them in catching larger prey. Nighthawks lack these bristles which are actually highly modified feathers.

While nighthawks like the Common Nighthawk generally feed on small aerial insects as they zip around – gnats, midges, mosquitoes, and the like – nightjars, so called due to the jarring call of some species, feed on larger insects, bigger moths and beetles mostly, flying up from the ground or from a perch. Chuck-will's-widows are also known to eat birds and lizards. When viewed in a picture the birds appear to possess small mouths because of their small bills. But looks can be deceiving as their mouths are enormous. In fact, the genus *Antrostomus* means “cavern mouth”.

One of the distinctive features of both “whips” and “chucks” are their cryptic coloration. They blend in remarkably well with the leaf litter on the forest floor, a good thing since they are ground nesting birds and they and their eggs (typically two) and chicks are more vulnerable to predation.

There is available on the Internet one photograph of a Whip-poor-will on the forest floor and it is simply indistinguishable. In another closer photo the bird is partially revealed; it's not until a second, even closer photo that the bird's face and elongated body can be clearly seen.

This ground nesting habit is one reason why both species have declined. As Long Island becomes more developed and natural areas get fragmented by development, animals associated with that development – namely dogs, feral and free ranging pet cats, and wild animals such as raccoons attracted to easier food in suburban areas – frequent wild areas adjacent to the homes preying on a variety of vulnerable species including these nightjars.

A reduction in the abundance of their insect prey appears to be another contributing cause. From 1980-1985 New York conducted its first statewide breeding bird survey; it replicated the effort in 2000-2005. In the first survey Whip-poor-wills were detected in 564 quadrangles (one square mile of land); in the latter survey the species was detected

TAKE AN EVENING TO SEE THE NIGHTHAWKS FLY

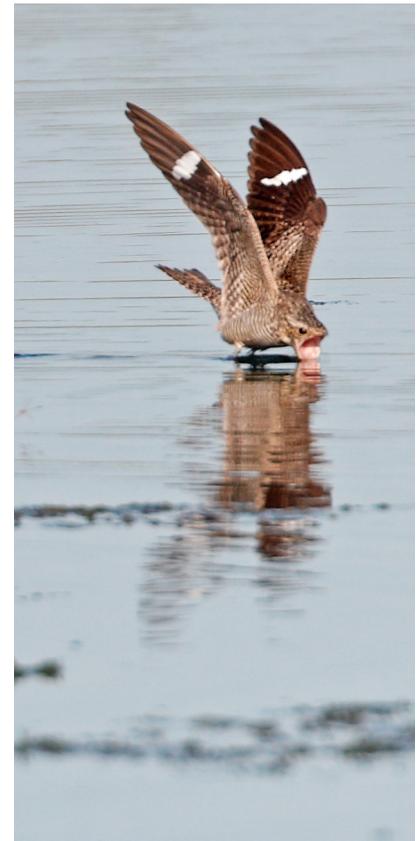


Sally Newbert

Nighthawks may not breed here, but they do migrate across Long Island on their way to their wintering grounds in Brazil and Argentina. One of the best places to see them is at the Stone Bridge in Setauket next to Frank Melville Memorial Park. Every evening from Saturday, August 27 to Thursday, October 6 a group of birders gather to watch and count the Nighthawks as they fly over the pond catching insects in the air and sometimes on the surface of the pond.

This will be the sixth year this watch/count is taking place. It is organized by Four Harbors Audubon and most evenings you will find John Turner or other experienced birders there to help you identify the birds. The watch begins at 5:30 and goes to dusk. There is some fine birdwatching at the park and in the surrounding ponds, too. Check out the ducks while you are there. Maybe you will find Wood Duck.

One of the best ways to identify the Common Nighthawk in the air is the distinctive vertical white stripes on each wing. Perched they blend with a wooded background and are difficult to pick out.



Sitting on a branch, the Nighthawk blends with the background, flying, the vertical wing bars are distinctive. Top photo: Sally Newbert, Photo showing wingbars and large mouth by Rahikanta Meetei



Continued from page 12

in only 241 quadrangles, a reduction of 57%. A similar trend occurred with the Chuck-will's-widow, with a 62% reduction. A third bird survey began in 2020 and will be completed in 2025; at that time we'll have an up-to-date picture of the status of these two nightjars.

Contrast this with John James Audubon's 1838 account: "Hundreds are often heard at the same time in different parts of the woods, each trying to out-do the others; and when you are told that the notes of this bird may be heard at the distance of several hundred yards, you may form an idea of the pleasure which every lover of nature must feel during the time when this chorus is continued. Description is incapable of conveying to your mind any accurate idea of the notes of this bird, much less of the feelings which they excite".

.....
They blend in remarkably well with the leaf litter on the forest floor, a good thing since they are ground nesting birds and they and their eggs (typically two) and chicks are more vulnerable

As I walked back to the car, ruminating about the experience of the "moonbirds" calling beneath the Strawberry Moon, some close enough to cause excitement, a random thought popped into mind – how human experience can be so enriched when we connect with other forms of life we allow to co-exist. May Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-will's-widows call under full moons for many decades to come, serving all the while as harbingers of life, not death.

John Turner is a resident of Setauket and conservation chair of the Four Harbors Audubon Society, author of "Exploring the Other Island: A Seasonal Nature Guide to Long Island" and president of Alula Birding & Natural History Tours.

Second star to the right and then straight on till morning.

- J.M. Barrie

Rare Birds, Rare Appearances



Bar-tailed Godwit, a bird that was spotted for several days on the mud flats at Cupsogue County Park. Photo: Barbara LaGois

I guess sometimes, the birds just take a wrong turn. The Bar-tailed Godwit nests in Alaska and Siberia, then flies non-stop to Australia and New Zealand, the longest non-stop migrations of any bird. This bird found on the Cupsogue County Park mud flats was identified on the ebird list as a Bar-tailed Godwit, "likely a drab Siberian-type bird. The bird is fairly long-billed like a Marbled, but it also appears rather drab gray, lacking the upper part checkering of a Marbled, with fine streaking on the coverts, and subtly longer primaries projecting beyond the tertials and tail -all seeming consistent with Bar-tailed."

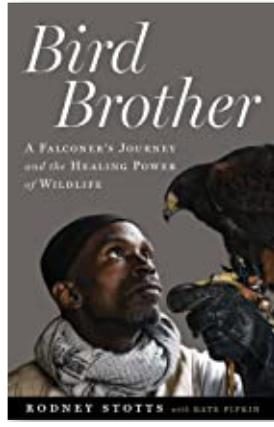
By the way – The Stellers Sea-Eagle we featured last issue is still being seen in Canada and Newfoundland. There is a facebook site that follows the bird.

Sally

Fall Reading

Reviews by
Eileen Schwinn

When you can't go birding - why not pick up a book to explore the world of birds from your favorite chair!

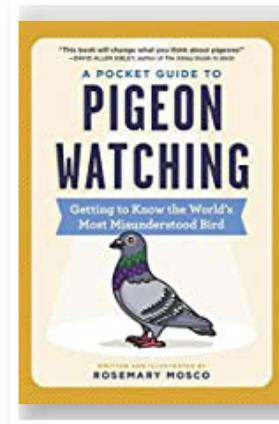


Bird Brother

A Falconer's journey and the Healing Power of Wildlife
by Rodney Stotts

I must admit, this book took me by surprise – I was intrigued by the title, and I picked it up at my local library. Mr. Stotts and I could not have come from more different backgrounds, yet I found his story and his dedication truly riveting. Raised by a single mom in Washington, DC housing project, along with his brother and sisters, the teenaged Rodney was a drug dealer and “business man” during the 1990’s, complete with guns and dogs. On a lark, he attended a local job fair at a nearby housing project. Of the two jobs which interested him, (one was as a maintenance man), he chose the other – to join a group called Earth Conservation Corps, which was charged with the task of cleaning up the Anacostia River, which runs through the eastern part of DC before joining the Potomac. For years, a dumping ground of trash, and in the 1980’s and 90’s a place to buy drugs and drop bodies. The ECC, a non-profit organization was founded with the goal of not only cleaning up a river, but to show young adults an alternative to the lifestyle which many were headed toward – an early death by drugs or violence. While involved in the cleaning of the river project, something clicked with Rodney – a love of the out of doors and a deep affection for the avian wildlife the river supported. Not an easy path to follow, the story of Mr Stotts follows him through ups and downs, from being jailed on drug charges to the dedication of his life to working toward becoming a Master Falconer – and everything in

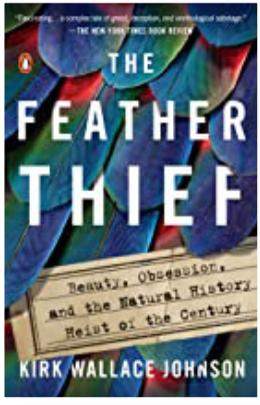
between. The dad of five, he is now a dedicated educator and conservationist, and was featured in National Geographic, NPR and the subject of the documentary, *The Falconer*. As the jacket of the book states, his story is “eye-opening, witty and moving... and a reminder that no matter how much heartbreak we’ve endured, we still have the capacity to give back to our communities, and to follow our wildest dreams.”



A Pocket Guide to Pigeon Watching

Getting to Know the World's Most Misunderstood Bird
by Rosemary Mosco

What did Claude Monet, Gypsy Rose Lee, Roy Rogers, Walt Disney and Yul Brynner have in common? All kept pigeons as pets! A slim little volume, great to read on a trip, or while sitting on a park bench somewhere, while the pigeons poke around you, this book will make you re-think your mind-set of Flying Rats! Historically treasured, bred for color and plumage variation, used in peace time and war, and kept in Pigeon Palaces or roof-top coops, the pigeon has had a place alongside humans for over 10,000 years – as food, as pets and as messengers. Not heavy into the science of pigeons, this delightful little book wanders into other birding topics at time – always informative and fun to read, with catchy little illustrations sprinkled among the chapters. I guarantee you’ll learn something new in the pages – and you will never think, “oh, that’s just a pigeon” the next time you see one!



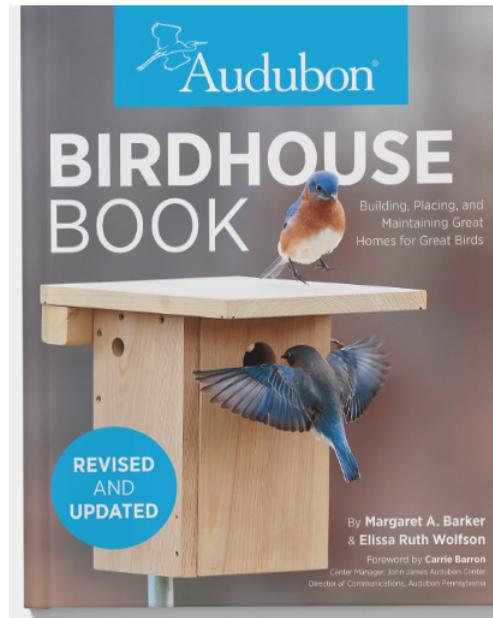
The Feather Thief

Beauty, Obsession, and the Natural History Heist of the Century

by Kirk Wallace Johnson

This book follows the history of the world's fascination with feathers – adornment, talismans, and fishing fly-tying. In 2009, a 19 year old, flute-playing, American college student, studying in Great Britain, took a train ride, and broke into the British Museum of Natural History. The thief's intent was to steal as many beautiful bird specimens as he could cram into his suitcase! Undetected for weeks, this bizarre crime is “a fascinating exploration of obsession, and man's destructive instinct to harvest the beauty of Nature”. The author not only reports the story, he was instrumental in helping to track down some of the missing bird skins, and having them returned to their rightful place – the British Museum. The authors motivation is also clear – to help him resolve some personal inner conflicts about his US government work in the Iraq War, and the ethical relocation of Iraq civilians after the US withdrawal from the country. We may never know the truth or motivation behind the theft, but the book is well written and presents a picture of an obsessed young man and his shocking crime. And those who are sometimes willing – without any thought of cost or morality – to obtain the objects of their desire.

Audubon's Birdhouse Book Got a Makeover



The Audubon Birdhouse Book is the most authoritative book available for creating safe, sturdy, and easy-to-build homes for many of North America's favorite birds. This updated second edition includes important new and timely topics including impacts of climate change on birds, nestbox monitoring for community science, native plants, and how birders can help birds.

Audubon Birdhouse Book explains how to build and place functional DIY bird homes that are safe and appropriate for more than 20 classic North American species, from wrens to raptors. Each of the easy-to-build boxes and shelves within is accompanied by cut lists, specially created line diagrams, and step-by-step photography, making the projects accessible to those with even the most rudimentary woodworking skills. In addition, this practical and beautifully presented guide is packed with color photography and information about the bird species covered: Wrens, Warblers, Bluebirds, Flycatchers, Swallows, Titmice, Owls, Flickers, Kestrels, Chickadees, Ducks, Mergansers, Swallows, Doves, Swallows, Robins, Finches, Phoebes, Loons, Swifts, Herons, and Ospreys.

THE OSPREY

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