



The OSPREY

July/August 2010 — Vol. XXXV No. 4

BIRDATHON 2010 *Birders vs. Weather*

Beth Gustin

The weather forecast for this year's Birdathon was similar to 2009 – rain in the morning with partial clearing in the afternoon. Remembering that we did pretty well last year despite a torrential downpour and distant lightning, I was cautiously optimistic this May 8 when our team of Jay Kuhlman, Richard Kaskan, and I assembled at 4:15am to start our Big Day of Birding.

4:45-5:15am – We begin again at Gabreski Airport and easily hear Whip-poor-will. The chorus of Towhees and Robins soon heats up and although we strained to hear a Chuck-will's Widow, it was not to be heard. As the time for sunrise approaches we notice how dark it still seems and as dawn finally breaks we can see the fog which has delayed the light.

5:38am – We decide to walk through Terrell River County Park in Moriches to get some woodland species while waiting for the fog to lift. The woods are pretty quiet but we get some of the regulars – Blue-winged Warbler, Great-crested Flycatcher, Carolina and House Wrens. A pair of dueling Blue-winged Warblers nearly fly between Jay's legs as they battle for territory rights. As a few spits of rain start to fall, a Ring-necked Pheasant is heard calling across the creek.

5:50am – The songs of a Wood Thrush and a Common Yellowthroat are encouraging signs that the birds are waking up.

6:30am – Along the sandbar that separates the creek from Moriches Bay we see Great and Snowy Egrets and an American Oystercatcher. We also spend a few moments watching an Osprey taking a bath in the shallow water along the sandbar.

7:40am – As we make our way back to the trailhead, we encounter an active oak tree where we see lots of Chickadees and Titmice and also pick up Blue-headed Vireo and a gorgeous male Blackburnian Warbler.

8:50am – We drive to the end of Union Ave. in Center Moriches where we see a Common Tern, Willet, and some Barn Swallows. We also hear Purple Martins although they are invisible because of the thick fog that refuses to lift. We continue

Continued, next page



BETH GUSTIN

Beth's Birdathon team: Pearl, Jay Kuhlman, Pearl's owner and Richard Kaskan.

Summer Field Trips

Saturday, July 17 at 8:00 am

PIKES BEACH, DUNE ROAD Westhampton Dunes

Meet at bay-side parking lot.

Trip Leader: Eileen Schwinn

Let's again catch the early shorebird migrants as they move through our area on their way South! Meet with trip leader, Eileen Schwinn, at Pikes Beach (Dune Road in Westhampton Dunes) at 8 am, and look for Oystercatchers, various sandpipers, plovers, and other shorebirds. We'll keep our eyes open for various sparrows as well. On this field trip, ELIAS will provide Town of Southampton Temporary Parking Passes for those who need them. Please contact your trip leader at 516.662.7751 for more information.



Saturday, August 7th at 8:00 am

THE ISLANDS OF MORICHES INLET

Trip Leader: John McNeil

This trip is always a big hit with our membership; so...let's catch the wave of shorebirds as they pass our area on their migration. We will have an outgoing tide for the morning. Meet at the parking lot of Cupsoque Beach County Park before 8 am, The county usually starts collecting tolls for parking around 8 am so come a little early. We will spend the morning birding the islands off the inlet. Be prepared to get wet as we will be wading across water to the islands. Wear appropriate footwear, bathing suits and/or shorts that can get wet. On the way back the water can be waist deep. Each year someone usually takes an untimely bath. For details, contact John McNeil at home: 631.281.2623, email: birdwchr@gmail.com, or on the day of the field trip, by cell 631.219.8947.

Birdathon continued from page 1

on to the Kuhlman house for a pit stop and to pick up our canine teammate, Pearl.

9:55am – It may be getting a little brighter as we arrive at Hunter's Garden. The woods are discouragingly quiet however. We decide to venture further and are able to hear Black-throated Green Warbler, Northern Parula, and Eastern Woodpeewee. A wild Turkey is heard calling and we soon come across some very large tracks in the muddy trail which can only be from that bird. A few good species tallied, but disappointing considering this is a hotspot of local spring birding.

10:40am – A Northern Mockingbird and Eastern Bluebird are seen as we drive down County Road 51 and we finally arrive at what will be a very productive location at the bike trail. In a short walk along the trail we see a Ruby-throated Hummingbird whiz by, a brilliant Indigo Bunting, Brown Thrashers, Field Sparrow, and the beautiful Prairie Warbler.

12:10pm – We decide to head down to Dune Road. The weather is finally improving and by the time we get to Westhampton Dunes, the sun is peeking through the clouds. We quickly pick up Little Blue Heron and Lesser Yellowlegs. On the bay side at Cupsogue we see flocks of hundreds, perhaps a thousand shorebirds. In these flocks we pick out Dunlin, Short-billed Dowitcher, Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers, and Least Sandpiper. Richard spots a Peregrine Falcon perched on a low post in the marsh, perhaps watching the flocks of shorebirds as we are. On the ocean side of Cupsogue Richard sets up his spotting scope through which we observe the amazing spectacle of Northern Gannets plummeting into the ocean as they feed on fish.

2:20pm – So far our species count is only 81. We start to wonder if we will hit the 100 mark. We stop at Quogue Village marsh in hopes of getting a Saltmarsh Sparrow but only wind up with a White-throated.

2:50pm – On the bay side of Triton Lane we pick out a Ruddy Turnstone among a flock of shorebirds and a Least Tern flies by. On the ocean side, Richard's eagle eye

picks out a lone Bonaparte's Gull bobbing about in the water. Jay spots a Piping Plover on the beach. Two great tallies!

3:30pm – Among a flock of Willets that are flying overhead, there are four different birds—Whimbrel!

4:15pm – We make our way to Quogue Wildlife Refuge in hopes of picking up some wood warblers and anything else that we missed in the foggy morning. Even a Red-bellied Woodpecker will be greatly appreciated as we have not seen one yet today. We split up into two groups – Richard and I see no new species in our walk around the ponds and Jay and Pearl only see one new species at Fairy Dell – a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

5:00pm – The early morning start, the drab weather, and the low species count have sapped my energy. We decide to call it a day, a bit earlier than in past years. After we split up I stop at Pheasant Meadows in East Moriches and see a Red-tailed Hawk overhead. Jay makes several additional stops and tallies Scarlet Tanager, Gadwall, Ruddy Duck, Northern Flicker and finally a Red-bellied Woodpecker! Later in his own yard he sees an Eastern Screech Owl.

The final species count for our team of three was 101 species – a slow day but at least we broke 100.

Two other teams participated this year and reported the same trouble with the weather and lower than usual numbers. Some good additional species were seen by Jim and Alice Osterlund with Dan and Allyson Wilson – Wood Duck, American Kestrel, Black Skimmer, Eastern Phoebe, Black-throated Blue and Blackpoll warblers, and Orchard Oriole. Sue Benson also ventured out this year and added Green Heron, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Clapper Rail, Hairy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Redstart, and Savannah Sparrow. **Grand total for all teams was 118 species.**

Thanks to all birding participants and to everyone who made donations in support of our teams. As birders, we are always at the mercy of Mother Nature. But spending a day birding with nice and fun people is always a success, no matter how many species you end up with.

New York State Young Birders Club Coming to Long Island on Sunday July 18

ELIAS is sponsoring a walk for young birders from all over NY State on July 18 at Pikes Beach in Westhampton Dunes. NYSOA (New York State Ornithological Association) is the sponsor of this new club for young birders between 10 and 19. ELIAS is happy to be a sponsoring club and is looking forward to welcoming the young birders to Long Island. If you know of a young birder who would like to join the group for this walk, please call Bob Adamo at 631-369-1958 for more information. Your young birder must be registered to attend.

You can check out www.nysyoungbirders.org to learn more about the club.



BETH GUSTIN

Pheasant Meadows Bluebird Trail

Beth Gustin

Our new Bluebird trail in East Moriches unfortunately has not attracted any Bluebirds this year. However, we do have Tree Swallows nesting in three of the boxes. The property also has Red-winged Blackbirds, Yellow Warblers, and Song Sparrows nesting. A Red-tailed Hawk is frequently seen soaring overhead. There is a nice patch of skunk cabbage at one soggy edge of the field, and I saw an Eastern box turtle along the trail on my last visit.



SAVE THE DATE

Come Fly
with
ELIAS
at the
Annual Dinner
as we
celebrate
this year of
birding

Wednesday, October 20th

Expect an invitation in
early September

We are looking for
raffle prizes.

If you would like to
make a donation
please call
Ridgie Barnett at
631.288.3628
or Chris Schmitt
at 631.727.2860

NATURE PROGRAMS Program Chair, Bob Adamo

Monday, July 12 at 7:15 pm

Salt Marshes

Dr. Judith S. Weis

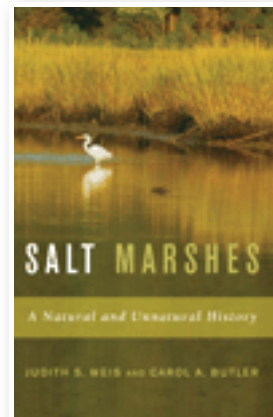
Dr. Judith S. Weis is a Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Rutgers University. Her research focuses on salt marsh and estuarine ecology and ecotoxicology. Dr. Weis will discuss the impact of humans on our marshes and estuaries, the importance of these habitats to us and all living beings, and how they can recover their health and needed vitality.

She, and her family, live in NYC, but have a summer home out east, and therefore, is aware of our local concerns.

Her academic and professional credits are truly too long to list in full. Dr. Weis was President of the American Institute of Biological Sciences. She has also authored over 200 scientific publications and is the co-author, along with Carol A. Butler, of the critically acclaimed book *Salt Marshes*.

"Judith Weis and Carol Butler have created a clear, wide-ranging, nontechnical explanation of salt marshes that will engage readers at every level of knowledge. Coastal residents, biology students, environmental planners, consultants, and naturalists should read this book." — Erik Kiviat, executive director, Hudsonia Ltd

She will be bringing books to sign and sell for anyone interested.



Monday, August 2 at 7:15 pm

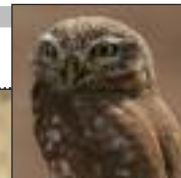
Birds of Israel

Eric Salzman

Israel is situated right on one of the world's greatest migration routes for raptors, land birds and wetlands species – travelling between Africa and Eurasia – and it is the only country on this route where birds are not extensively trapped or shot. It is also hosts a



ERIC SALZMAN



A Hoopoe and Little Owl, seen in Israel
large number of wintering birds (including the world's greatest concentrations of cranes and storks) as well as many Mediterranean and Middle Eastern breeding species. There are now birding centers on many of the kibbutz in the Rift valley, on the Mediterranean and even in the desert. Eric Salzman had the good luck to be there at the end of winter and beginning of spring and was able to travel the country from bottom to top and from west to east to visit many of the top sites.

Eric Salzman is a composer, author and music-theater innovator.

Meetings are held at Quogue Wildlife Refuge. There is a nature chat at 7:15 pm, a meeting at 7:30 and the speaker at 8:00 pm.

All programs and field trips are free, and open to all



“Boy, they sure all do look alike”

Review by Eileen Schwinn

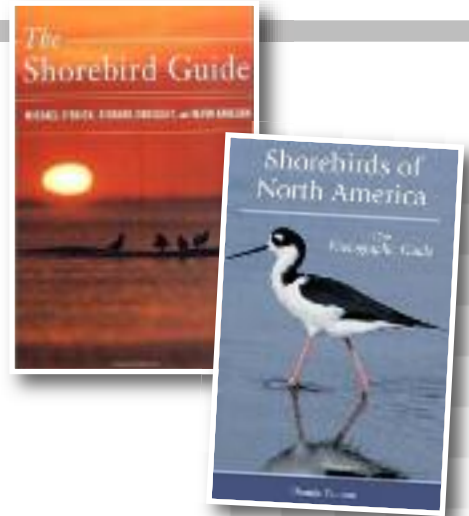
Birders hate shorebirds. Yes, I know. That’s a pretty strong statement to make, but a fact is a fact. Nothing can be more frustrating to any birder than IDing those distant, fast moving, easily spooked flocks of “boy, they sure all do look alike” birds. Some stay the summer, and others, well, we get a week or two in late spring and a bit longer in the fall to see them on their – in some cases – extremely long migrations. And those names! Just how confusing can it be! Black-bellied Plovers have black-bellies, yes, but they also have black chins, chests, and ARMPITS! But not all of the time! And Dunlin – their BELLIES – only their bellies – are black most of the time we get to see them. So, why then is a Black-bellied Plover called a BBP when..... But, living where we do, on Eastern Long Island, shorebirds are what we have to deal with, along the mud flats and mosquito infested shorelines that surround us!

Shorebirds of North America – the Photographic Guide, by Dennis Paulson, and **The Shorebird Guide**, by Michael O’Brien, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Karlson, are really “must haves” for your birding book shelf. Both use photographs to capture just about any variation of plumage known.

Range maps are lacking in the Paulson guide; however I feel his well-written descriptions – which precede the photographs – are quick and easy to scan for the information you are seeking. While this guide does not contain as many shots of each species, it does present them with rather uncluttered backgrounds, making for easier focus on the bird rather than its surroundings.

The Shorebird Guide has the advantage of a short verbal description and range map, introducing an excellent portfolio of photographs for each species. The more commonly encountered birds are cataloged first, with Rarities and Regional Specialties following. The photos range from close up – an eyeball with eye-stripe – to birds hidden by grasses or amid mixed flocks – just as we encounter them in the real world. Another advantage, at least for us East End birders, is that a good percentage of the photos are taken in NY as well as New Jersey. Nice to see our “local birds” the stars!

Photographer Kevin Karlson has presented birding programs over the past few years at Jamaica Bay, and from personal experience, he is a down to earth, interesting guy to bird with! The “jizz” - or



General Impression of Size and Shape of the bird – is a process of identification this text emphasizes. Written details of each species follows the photographic section.

I would be hard pressed to choose one of these guides over the other - I think both are necessary as complete resources for anyone trying to learn and resolve their shorebird questions. Both books are a little bulky to take along in a pocket, but are better off in your car than on your bookshelf during the summertime. Both are worth the time and effort to acquire if you want to be more comfortable in figuring out just what the heck those things are that are racing along ahead of the shoreline waves.

Editor’s note: These books are offered at Amazon.com at a variety of price levels.



A sampling of shorebirds likely to be found at Pikes Beach. Eileen will be leading a trip to Pikes Beach in Westhampton Dunes so we can test our skills together.

KALER’S POND

Jay Kuhlman

The nature center is open Thursday through Sunday for July and August,

The children’s program, Audubon Adventures, takes place on Thursday and Friday this July from 9 am until noon. The campers will be exploring the natural world around us. Registration forms are on the Kalers Pond web site.

Our Spring Celebration was a success with over 75 attendees buying and learning about our locally grown native plants, any left overs were planted in the wildlife gardens. We are looking forward to seeing them bloom.

Conservation Column

Beth Gustin

“Nobody can do everything but everyone can do something”

Keep conservation in mind during your summertime activities.

Taking a road trip? There are some very simple ways to improve your gas mileage:

- ☉ Check the tire pressure.
- ☉ Go easy on your acceleration and braking.
- ☉ Slow down! Gas mileage significantly decreases at speeds over 60 mph.
- ☉ Use your cruise control on the highway to keep a constant speed.
- ☉ Avoid idling whenever possible. Idling gets 0 mpg.

Keep your birdbaths filled and clean.

It is good to supply a fresh water source for birds during the warm and dry summer months. Remember to scrub the birdbaths at least once a week with a sturdy brush and perhaps a mild detergent. Using bleach is not necessary and is harmful to birds and other wildlife. Bleach is also toxic when it gets into our streams, ponds, and bays.

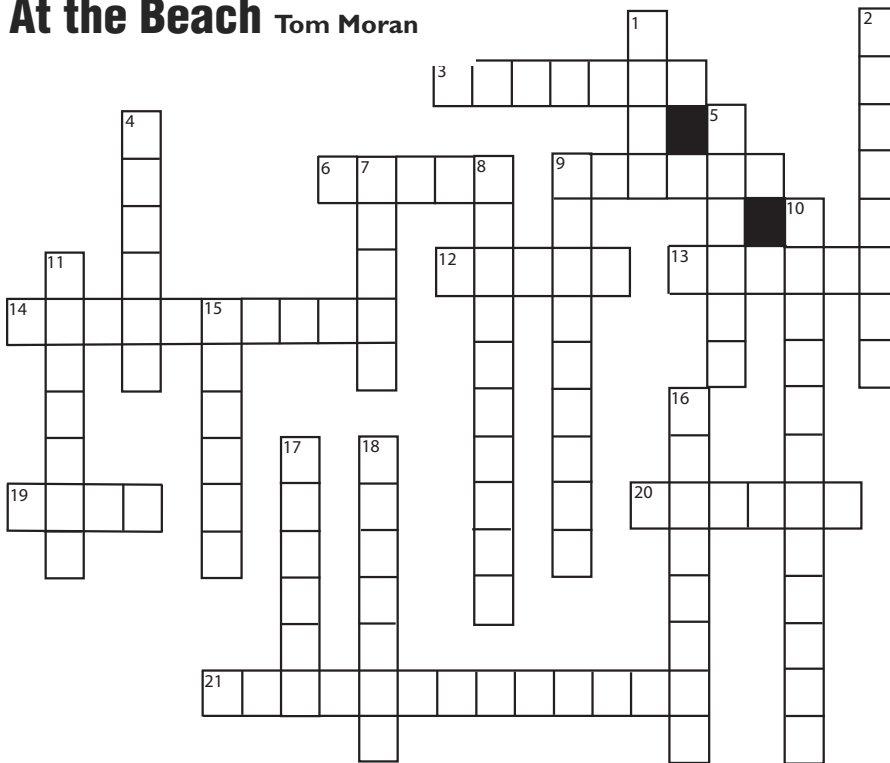
Pick up litter when you are out walking. Or if you are spending some time on the beach, pick up a few pieces of litter that someone else left behind as you are leaving for the day.

Conserve water. Use your sprinklers early in the morning or late in the evening. Watering during the heat of the day causes significant evaporation. If you have an automatic sprinkler system, go outside and check it every now and then. When I am out on my early morning run, I often see automatic sprinklers that are successfully irrigating the asphalt road or shooting straight up like Old Faithful.

Shop at local farmstands or farmer's markets. Buying locally saves energy, reduces pesticide use, and tastes better. Look for locally produced meats and cheeses. Take advantage of our ocean's and bays' bounties by buying fish and shellfish at local seafood markets. If you have ever had a Peconic Bay scallop you'll never go back to grocery store scallops.

Enjoy these lazy days of summer!

At the Beach Tom Moran



Across

- 1. Yellowlegs with colored bill
- 4. Acronym for our favorite birding group
- 7. Greenbird with downward drooping bill
- 12. Golden-footed egret
- 13. Like a jet but with gey legs
- 14. The leader is here identified by go-judell
- 16. The more red bellied called downtown
- 18. Thicket macrobrachyid
- 21. The bird that looks like the jet but is called down while riding its nose

Down

- 1. One good one deserves another, bird-wise
- 3. A phrase used to describe that one seen
- 5. Sandpaper that does rocky juries
- 6. A phrase with road off nesting areas
- 7. Sandpaper that is not out yet
- 8. A wave caller

10. Feeds like a sewing machine

- 11. Power that is not wash its stomach?
- 13. Horatio's 0-30 egg cycle: 2 words
- 15. aka shorebirds
- 16. Poorly soiled bird's nest?
- 17. Red-tailed screech owl seen on local red farms
- 19. SANDPAPER blocked by white wedge near shorebird



Answers will be in the next issue.

Saving the Gulf is a **click** away.



As the devastating oil spill spread toward vulnerable wildlife and habitats, Audubon was there. Now we need your help. There's no need to take out your wallet. Go to the website below and vote for Audubon once a week until August 22. Tell your friends too. With enough votes, Members Project® from American Express and TakePart will help fund Audubon's work to restore a devastated ecosystem. We've worked for birds, wild life and communities in the Gulf for decades—help us continue long after the head has faded.

Vote now at www.takepart.com/membersproject/vote



Our Two Cuckoos

Yellow-billed and Black-billed

Carl Starace

Some of their names are Pearly Breasted, Striped, Pavonine, Pheasant, Ash Colored, Dark Billed, Rufous Winged, Gray Capped, Little, even Squirrel and Lizard. They are all Cuckoos and the aforementioned list live in countries further south. This family, the *Cuculidae*, is a large one, having over 140 species worldwide. Their ranks include the likes of Roadrunners, (Greater and Lesser), and the Anis, (Smooth-billed, Groove-billed, and Great.) Within the borders of New York State are the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, (*Coccyzus Americanus*), and Black-billed Cuckoo, (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*). Both Yellow and Black-billed are breeders in Long Island's remaining woodlands.

But first let's look at the **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**. In shape it has a long, tubular shaped body with brown back and upper tail and a pure white throat and belly. Its tail is quite long and straight, and rounded at its tip. The underside is patterned black and white. This Cuckoo's bill is short, (but not stubby), and down curved. Its color yellow with a dark edge on the upper mandible. Juveniles bills, (Jun. – Aug.), lack the yellow color. The Yellow-billed's cheek and throat are pure white but its cap and nape are brown. The folded wings may show a rufous color on the lower half. When in flight this bird's primaries are bright rufous above and below.

Behavior – It frequently stays to one perch for some minutes before moving directly to its next perch. Full views of this bird are not the norm and if it comes onto an open perch it most likely will be high up in the tree. An agile flyer, it captures caterpillars, spiders, occasionally bird eggs, berries, even lizards, (in states to our south). It will walk, hop, even run along branches when pursuing prey, even hovering briefly. It flies point to point quickly, seemingly not wanting to be seen by others. This is a real skulker of a bird. Some days you will feel lucky just to see the top of its head and piece of its tail!

Breeding – The Yellow Billed Cuckoo breeds throughout the eastern U.S. and westwards to eastern portions of the Dakotas, Colorado, and New Mexico south into Mexico. It does breed in southernmost sections of Canada and in isolated pockets of our far western states.

Habitat – The Yellow-billed Cuckoos inhabit deciduous woodlands and their edges, even shrubby fields.

Vocalization – The common call is a speedy series of *cuk cuk cuk* notes that slow down and weaken to a shorter run of *kowlp kowlp kowlp* notes. A second call is a rapid *tok tok tok* that may have repeated runs. Lastly is a slower *coo coo coo coo* series that just fades away. This series can be confused with the Black-billed's call except that the Yellow-billed's is slower. Edward A. Choate pens, in his excellent book, *Dictionary of American Bird Names*, "Cuckoo, is an imitative name so appropriate that there are practically no others, in English or the foreign languages which have kindred words." Quite a statement don't you think? I would say our Black-billed Cuckoo's call indeed best fits the bill.

The Black-billed Cuckoo is leaner proportionally than the Yellow-billed. Its dark eye is red rimmed, except in juveniles, its bill, all dark, its body grayish brown atop. The narrower tail's underside is grayish brown with white stripes. The primaries do show rufous but it is more subdued.

Behavior – This bird is even more reclusive than the Yellow-billed. It rarely perches in the open nor takes to wing. It simply does not move about much in daylight making some suspect it is partially nocturnal, (it also sings at night). Its food items match the Yellow-billed. It is particularly fond of tearing open caterpillar tents. It is known to both feed and fly about




The Yellow-billed Cuckoo, look for the body shape, the striped tail and the yellow beak.

lower to the ground than our other Cuckoo.

Breeding – The Black-billed breeds throughout the eastern U.S., the exception being northern Maine and our southernmost states, but it does range farther north into southern Canada. It breeds as far as west as Central Montana and eastern Wyoming.

Habitat – It inhabits small woodlands, however it is not likely within a suburban setting, preferring forest edges and brushy thickets usually near water. It can also be found in mixed coniferous-deciduous woodlands.

Vocalization – As I mentioned, the Black-billed has a rapid run of *coo coo coo* notes, somewhat similar to the Least Bitterns. Its *Kawp Kawp Kawp* calls are higher in pitch and quicker than the Yellow-billed's. Both these species winter in South America.

Well, as you can see, these two can be a challenge. So what are you waiting for? Come on! Get out there and have a Look/Listen! Hunters Garden is my favorite place to find them in season. Good Birding to all Carl Starace 

If you would like to see the newsletter pictures in color, it is posted on the website in the newsletter archives.

Barry Truitt discusses Nature Conservancy's role in preservation on Virginia's Eastern Shore and the long tracked journey made by Hope, the Whimbrel

Reprinted with permission from Delmarva Now.com and brought to our attention by Dan Wilson.

BY BILL STERLING • STAFF WRITER • Barry Truitt, chief conservation scientist with The Nature Conservancy at the Virginia Coastal Reserve, was the guest speaker at a forum hosted by Chris Doyle, a Virginia financial advisor.

Barry Truitt, who has been with the Conservancy for almost 35 years, talked of the various programs the Conservancy is involved with on Virginia's barrier islands. The Conservancy owns all or part of 14 of the 18 barrier islands along the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Truitt said the Conservancy seeks to protect, enhance and restore the fragile strips of land that contain some of the "greatest biological diversity on the face of the earth."

"Some call it high-speed real estate," said Truitt. "The beaches can move up to 40 feet a year. Fourteen thousand years ago the coast was 50 miles farther out to sea than it is now."

Truitt emphasized the many partnerships the Conservancy has joined to promote conservation on Virginia's Eastern Shore, noting there are 114,000 acres in the two counties protected by a host of groups.

The Conservancy works with numerous other groups on projects that involve bird migratory studies, seagrass restoration and the growing of scallops and oysters. Truitt said oysters are developing a tolerance for the diseases that wiped out the population previously, and the resurgence of seagrass has been significant on the seaside.

Truitt noted recent newspaper stories had documented the amazing journey of Hope, a Whimbrel or Curlew, that had been fitted with a state-of-the-art 9.5 gram satellite transmitter on the seaside and then

Hope, a Whimbrel, wears the transmitter that tracked her journey for 14,170 miles from the mud flats of Virginia to Canada, Alaska and the Virgin Islands before returning to the same mud flats in Virginia.



tracked for 14,170 miles in less a year that took it to Canada, Alaska and to the Virgin Islands before it was spotted again on the same mud flat where it had been fitted with the transmitter the previous year.

Truitt said the key to most programs conducted by the conservancy and other groups is water quality. "The best water quality on the Atlantic Coast is here," said Truitt.

Truitt said the barrier islands are a great natural resource and open to the public for low-impact, non-commercial recreational use, such as hiking, bird watching, surf fishing and photography. Islands that can be used by the public include Hog, Cobb, Myrtle, Smith, Sandy, Rogue Godwin and Mink Islands, Dawson Shoals and Conservancy owned portions of Metompin

and Cedar Islands. Pets, motorized vehicles, camping and campfires are prohibited at all times. Parramore, Little Cobb, Ship Shoal and Revels Islands are closed to visitor use for scientific research and safety reasons.

Between April 15 to Sept. 15 the Conservancy asks that visitors remain at water's edge and avoid upper beaches, dunes and mudflats while respecting posted bird nesting areas. For more information, call the Virginia Coast Reserve office in Brownsville at 757-442-3049.



From the field...

William Floyd Estate, May 3

MaryLaura Lamont led the group as we looked for early migrants. A Blue-wing Warbler was quickly spotted near the parking lot. Several more warblers were heard, but not cooperative enough to be seen. Over 21 species were spotted. The highlight came at the marsh as we watched an aerial battle between a Bald Eagle and an Osprey. In the battle of the titans, the Eagle charged after the Osprey and the prize, a fish, the Osprey was carrying. The pair disappeared behind the tree line. Who got the fish will have to remain a mystery. There are some photos of the confrontation on our Facebook page.

Sally Newbert



Warbler neck at The William Floyd Estate

Maple Swamp, May 9, 2010

Eric Salzman

If a tree falls in the forest does it make a noise if no one is there to hear it? Well, of course, someone is there to hear it, a deer, a fox, a squirrel, a forest bird, maybe even a flock of forest birders.

We were a group of 15 who had signed up for the Maple Swamp walk. We had just turned down a side trail to look for the Hooded Warbler that was singing at the spot a couple of days ago, when a sudden cracking noise behind caused us all to turn around. A major tree branch – from a living tree – came crashing down to earth before our very wide eyes. We had walked past the spot just a moment or two before!

A crashing tree branch was the scariest, but not the only major, obstacle. The cool

weather and high, gusty winds made birding difficult. Even when birds came out to sing or feed, it was not easy to get a fix on them before they dashed off as if caught by a gust; or else they wouldn't come out at all. One of the best birds of the trip, a singing White-eyed Vireo, was barely glimpsed by a few of the group. A single Scarlet Tanager perched high on a dead tree trunk for a moment before whirling away. Some expected birds – including thrushes, vireos and flycatchers – were missed entirely.



Listening and waiting in the woods at Maple Swamp

Nevertheless, it was a walk with its exciting moments. A pair of Brown Creepers were seen, seemingly on a merry chase from tree trunk to dead tree trunk; possibly a courting pair getting ready to nest (Brown Creepers nest behind pieces of semi-detached bark on dead tree trunks of which there are plenty these days in Maple Swamp). Turkey Vultures were soaring on the breezes overhead (a relatively new sight for the area) along with a big buteo, probably a young non-red-tailed Red-tailed Hawk. Other species of interest were Hairy Woodpecker, Great Crested Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and few warblers. But the best sighting came on the way back and was seen by a single person. Cheryl van Tuyle spotted and flushed a gallinaceous bird off one

side of the trail. Her description of the bird on the ground and as it flew away – gray, smaller than a Turkey with a collar marking and obvious banded tail – was completely convincing as a RUFFED GROUSE! This magnificent bird has long been a resident of Maple Swamp but has been little seen in recent years.

Hunters Garden, May 16

Carl Starace

Sunday's bird hike was a stunning success and yes, we did get great looks at a pair of Yellow-billed Cuckoos! We were graced with an overcast, yet warm start at 7:30 am. The skies would very soon turn to brilliant blue. Our group of 7 went into the woods in a westerly direction. We made a full loop on the trail in a counterclockwise fashion, just the opposite of last year's hike. Birds immediately heard at the clearing were – Ovenbird, Black-throated Green Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Eastern Wood Peewee and Catbird. Due to the early leafing of trees, (by almost 2 weeks), the visual identification of birds proved to be quite difficult. Nonetheless, we managed to see, over a period of almost 3 hours, a few beauties. These included a pair of Yellow-billed Cuckoos, an Ovenbird, Pine Warbler, a brilliant male Scarlet Tanager, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Gray Catbird, Baltimore Oriole, Chipping Sparrow and Eastern Towhee. Along the trailside we were to hear singing Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Northern Parula, Blackburnian, Black-throated Green, Black and White and Blackpoll Warbler, Veery and Hermit Thrush. Yes, the songs of birds truly filled the woods all round. What more could one ask for?

Terrell River County Park, May 15

A wide variety of species was seen on our field trip to Terrell River County Park. Ten resident and migrating warblers were seen including Canada, Magnolia, Black-throated green, Black and White, Blackpoll, Yellow, Pine, Blue-winged, Common Yellowthroat and Northern Parula. Other woodland species seen were Red-eyed and White-eyed vireos, Eastern Towhee, and Great-crested Flycatcher. A



BETH GUSTIN

Having walked through Terrell River County Park, the group enjoyed a short respite at beach on Moriches Bay

Spotted Sandpiper was seen on the beach, an Osprey was observed on its platform, and a Turkey Vulture soared overhead. A total of 43 species was seen on the trip. Thanks to Jay Kuhlman for leading.

Beth Gustin

**Central Park NYC, May 20th
John McNeil**

After a delay of a day, a front finally passed and Bob Adamo and I were treated to a great day of birding that only Central Park could provide. Pleased that we found a parking spot on Central Park West at 72nd street, near the Strawberry Fields entrance, we walked into the park and right away we were treated to a Black-throated Blue. Then another, then a Bay-breasted then a Nashville Warbler. Our necks were twisting from side to side. We heard a Wood Thrush singing in the background, and then we sighted a Magnolia, Wilson's, Northern Parula, Black-throated Green, Chestnut-sided and a Black & White Warbler. Birds were everywhere and you could not see them all as they moved about on the treetops.

As we walked the other parts of the park we sighted other notable species. Yellow Warbler, American Redstart, Pine Warbler, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blackpoll Warbler, Northern Water Thrush, Baltimore Oriole, Rusty Black Bird, Common Yellow Throat, Black-throated Green Warbler, Brown-headed Cowbird, Cedar Waxwing, Canada Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Grackle, European Starling, White-breasted Nuthatch, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Red and White-eyed Vireo, Green

Heron, Mourning Doves, and Robins. Bob and I took a side trip over to Forest Park and heard a Philadelphia Vireo and got a great look a young Scarlet Tanager and a host of other common warblers.

**Hallockville Museum Farm & Jamesport State Park
Saturday, May 22**

It was a mild, but hazy day which provided a comfortable day for birding. There was a festive air while we waited to depart as the Fleece and Fiber Fair was also held that day. We expected a diversity of species as our route took us through agricultural land, forest and on to the coastal bluffs in the newly created state park.

Our leader, Jim Romansky, who serves on the Museum's board was pinch hitting for an ill MaryLaura Lamont. Jim enriched the walk with his identification of plants and their uses as well as geographical information about the area: its soil layers, glacial past, and rock identification. Richard Wines, a Museum member, provided information concerning the history of the farm. Their commentary was a bonus to a fine morning of birding.



TOM MORAN

Over the field and through the woods on to the top of the bluff overlooking LI Sound in the new Jamesport State Park

In the open farm fields we saw Barn Swallows, Killdeer, and Red-wing Blackbirds. In the hedges between fields we were treated to Baltimore Orioles, Yellow and Yellow-throated Warblers. As we entered the woods, we searched for a calling Bobwhite, who continued to lure us along but did not show itself. In the woods we saw an Eastern Wood Peewee, Belted Kingfisher, Redstart, Great Crested Flycatcher

and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. At the bluffs overlooking the Sound we saw Blue-winged Warbler and several Osprey. The hike was a little less than two miles.

Tom Moran



TOM MORAN

Watching the two pair of Osprey from the marsh at the William Floyd Estate

**William Floyd Estate May 23rd
John McNeil**

Nine hardy birders joined me as we tried to catch the tail end of the spring migration. Along the way we spotted and heard Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Carolina Wren, Pine and Yellow Warbler, Catbirds, Mourning Dove, Wood Thrush and Towhee. Tree Swallows were flying in the fields and sitting on their nest boxes.

At Moriches Bay we had a nice view of a pair of Osprey with a young sitting on a newly erected pole at Osprey Park in Mastic. Another pair of Osprey were setting up a new nest atop of an old boat in the marsh of the Estate.

Earlier this spring, while trying to spot early nesting Osprey, Bob Adamo and Carl Starace and I noticed that the nesting pole at Osprey Park in Mastic had fallen down in one of the storms this winter. We spotted several pairs of Osprey hanging around looking for nesting locations. I would like to thank John Turner and Jeff Kassner of the Brookhaven Department of Environmental Protection for their help in having a new nesting pole installed at the park. I am happy to report that one or more young are in the nest and as often as I can, I drive over to see how they are doing. Thanks guys, you did a great job.



Often overlooked, those black birds deserve a second look

Larry Penny

If you leaf through Peterson or Sibley, you will see that there aren't a lot of American birds that are pure black or nearly pure black. Almost all of those that are, at one time or another in their life cycle, flock together, some nest together in colonies, or rookeries. The females of these black birds are generally as black as their mates, but in some cases, as in the Red-winged Blackbird, more brown than black.

Blackness is not always a great attribute. Mosquitoes and other pests see black against the light sky and zoom in on it. Notice the high number of Crow and Grackle mortalities at the hands of the West Nile virus. On cold days with bright sun, blackness helps a bird warm up quickly. There can be some interspecies confusion. However, when not distinguishing each other by their unique calls, they can separate themselves by size. Vultures are larger than Ravens, Ravens larger than Common Crows which are larger than Fish Crows which are larger than Boat-tailed Grackles which are larger than Common Grackles which are larger than Red-winged Blackbirds and so on down the line.

What black or blackish birds there are tend to be far ranging. Some such as Grackles, Common Crows, Double-crested Cormorants, the three Scoters and Turkey Vultures are found on both coasts, Crows and, all save the Cormorant and the Scoters are found throughout the interior as well. You no longer have to leave Long Island to see some of them. Almost every one of them gets here during the year, many as nesters.

Common crows have probably nested here since pre-Columbian times. Common Grackles, Red-winged Blackbirds and Cowbirds have bred here for aeons. Black Ducks have reproduced here for many moons and were pursued by local Indians with their bows and arrows, before they were hunted with muskets and shotguns by European man. Some of these black birds are relatively new as nesters. The Fish Crow never was a common breeder here but throughout this millennium they

have become more and more common as residents and breeders. It is hard to go anywhere on Long Island near water and not hear their distinctive nasal "caws", sounding very much like juvenile common crows begging to be fed.

The Boat-tail Grackles didn't make it big here until the late 1900s, about the time Eric Salzman discovered a small colony around the Ponquogue Bridge in Hampton Bays. Double-crested Cormorants started nesting on Gardiner's and Fisher's Islands a little while later, and now maintain large rookeries on these islands and elsewhere in our vicinity. Two springs ago, Turkey Vultures began nesting in Montauk, and have – at least one pair – nested there every year since.

Who will be the next to breed? As Angus Wilson has been reporting in his South Fork Bird Notes, the Black Vulture is more frequently seen on the South Fork. One spent nearly the entire summer by the lighthouse in Montauk 15 years ago. While Ravens as breeders are quite rare in the east, found mostly in Appalachia, if they bounce back here the way they have in California, the Grand Canyon and other parts west, we will have them gliding about and uttering calls that are even more nasal and drawn out than those of the Fish Crow. By 2025 we should have Ravens breeding on Long Island, alongside Turkey Vultures and Black Vultures.

Early in the evening on Saturday of the Memorial Day weekend my wife Julie and I were visiting George and Cheryl Held in Sag Harbor, a stone's throw from Sag Harbor Cove. I was surprised to discover that Boat-tailed Grackles nested less than hundred feet away around a small vernal wetland which still held a lot of water throughout this spring because of March's record precipitation. George commented that they've been there for four or five years now. George's ex, Jean Held, a pro-found naturalist, was also there and she chimed in that around her house on the other (East Hampton) side of the village there were also Boat-tailed Grackles.

A while later we heard Fish Crows and Common Crows calling, Grackles chuck-

ing and rusty-nail singing, and the "twee-dee-dees" of Red-winged Blackbirds. There could have been a Cowbird or two lurking in the canopies and, I imagine, if one of us looked up during the entire time we sat outside, we might have seen a Cormorant pass over. The few times that we did look up, we saw three Chimney Swifts – Sag Harbor is one of the few spots on Long Island that annually sports this fly-catching species throughout the late spring and summer. Albeit, they're grayer than black except when they spend a lot of time pressed against sooty chimney walls. Cormorants are very conspicuous along Sag Harbor's waterfront May through August.

If you are at the Montauk Lighthouse in late spring or summer you might see a blackish Petrel or two fly low over the waves dipping now and then for krill. Come mid-fall, the Scoters begin showing up, followed by a handful of Great Cormorants. In winter during the Montauk and Orient Christmas counts covering both Forks, there is usually a plethora of Scoters to tally and one or more Great Cormorants, which are large, perch upright and stand out like sore thumbs.

The wings of birds carry them far, so we can't attribute the colonization by southern species to global warming. When left to be and not hunted into oblivion, they will continue to spread far and wide. Black birds get along with each other to a point, but not during the nesting season. I've seen Crows chase Vultures. On Friday May 28 at East Hampton Town Hall quitting time, I watched an armada of 30 Grackle and Red-winged Blackbird males chase a Crow for a hundred yards across Montauk Highway. Not a lot of black and blackish birds in North America, yes, but, nowadays, Long Island's East End and Sag Harbor at its center entertain almost all of them.





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Mark Your Calendars

Mon., July 12 Nature Program: Salt Marshes
 by Dr. Judith Weiss (See pg.3)

Sat., July 17 Field Trip: Pikes Beach, Dune Road
 (See pg. 1)

Mon., August 2 Nature Program: The Birds of Israel
 by Eric Salzman (See pg. 3)

Sat., August 7 Field Trip: The Islands of Moriches Bay
 (See pg. 1)

If there are any changes in programming, it will be announced on Facebook and on the website.



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