



Summer 2009
Issue 314

On the Wing

News from Saw Mill River Audubon

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Baby Bird Alert



Fledgling Grosbeak

Young songbirds, called fledglings, leave the nest *before* they can fly. They are fed by the parents after they leave the nest. This is a vulnerable time. Many fall prey to domestic cats and other predators. But "rescuing" fledglings is not usually a good idea. Once with humans, they often quickly lose the escape reflexes needed for wild survival.

Cats Indoors!

The Campaign for Safer Birds and Cats



Please do not let cats roam outside, especially this time of year. Indoor cats live longer and healthier lives. Cars, coyotes, foxes and great-horned owls are all very real dangers to outside cats. To learn more, visit the American Bird Conservancy Cats Indoors Campaign: www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/

SUMMER ADVENTURES

Join us! For more information call 914.666.6503 or visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org

Saturday, June 13 ♦ 7:00 am ♦ Various sites in the Saw Mill River Watershed Breeding Bird Survey: Saw Mill River Watershed

Come along with us for a morning drive with stops at various locations in the Saw Mill River Watershed to listen and look for breeding birds. Contact us at the phone number or email above and we'll let you know where to meet us and more details.

Sat June 20 & Sun June 21 ♦ 10:00 am to 8:00 pm ♦ Croton Point County Park Great Hudson River Revival Clearwater Festival

The Clearwater Festival is billed as the country's largest annual environmental celebration with music, dance and storytelling, education and activism attracting thousands of people of all ages to the shores of the Hudson River. Saw Mill River Audubon will have a table in the activist area this year. Stop by and visit us!
For more information visit www.clearwater.org



Saturday, July 18 ♦ 10:00 am ♦ Pruyn Sanctuary Summer Fliers at Pruyn Sanctuary

Come stroll through the garden, arboretum and woodland trails of Pruyn Sanctuary to learn more about butterflies, dragonflies, hummingbirds and other birds that may be seen at high summer in the sanctuary. Pre-registration required. Please call or email in advance. Suggested donation \$5/adults, children 12 and under are free.

Sun, August 9 ♦ 12:00 pm-6:00pm ♦ Van Cortlandt Manor, Croton-on-Hudson River Day at Van Cortlandt Manor

River Day is a celebration of the Hudson River and its tributaries. Costumed interpreters will be on hand to demonstrate various 18th century crafts and activities related to the human history of the Hudson. In addition there will be current day environmental and recreational activities including a table from Saw Mill River Audubon. Stop by and visit us! Activities will include boat building, open hearth cooking, fishnet tying, brick making, home and garden tours, kayak and canoe demonstration, children's crafts, musical entertainment, storytelling and more. Food and beverages will be available for purchase. For more details, visit Historic Hudson Valley at www.hhv.org.

Sunday, August 16 ♦ 8:30 am ♦ Jamaica Bay National Wildlife Refuge Birds and Cameras at Jamaica Bay

We're joining with our sister chapter, Rockland County Audubon, for a different sort of excursion to the Jamaica Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Rockland Audubon leaders, Alan and Della Wells, will offer two options for this day trip: those interested in photographing birds will walk with Alan while Della will guide a birding trip through the varied habitats of this internationally-known wildlife refuge in Queens. We're meeting at 8:30am at the Visitor's Center at the refuge. Please call or email to pre-register and also to let us know if you are interested in carpooling with us from Millwood.

Spring Birding Adventure Platte River Cranes

Wed, March 17 to Mon, March 22, 2010



Travel with **Saw Mill River Audubon** to Nebraska to witness one of the earth's greatest wildlife spectacles: viewing thousands of Sandhill cranes and waterfowl along the Platte River. **Deposit due Sept 1, 2009.** For more info: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/cranes

Trees for Tribs

On May 31st, volunteers from Saw Mill River Audubon are scheduled to gather alongside a stream in our Brinton Brook Sanctuary and replant the streamside buffer with native trees and shrubs supplied by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's **Trees for Tribs** program. The goals of Trees for Tribs—improved water quality and enhanced wildlife habitat—are achieved by planting the streamside or “riparian” buffers with vegetation appropriate to our lower Hudson Valley location. Thanks to project leader and SMRA board member Donna Lassiter and all our hardworking volunteers!

Office Wish List

Are you cleaning out your home or work office? Purchasing new office furniture to replace the old? If so, consider donating your gently used furniture to the SMRA office. We especially need a 5-drawer file cabinet (preferably 28.5 inches deep) and a 2-drawer file cabinet. If you have these or other items to donate, contact our office. SMRA will furnish a receipt for an in-kind donation that you can use in preparing your 2009 taxes.

Welcome Members

Briarcliff Manor Lisa Czachor, Joan Hraban
Chappaqua Mark Phelan **Cortlandt Manor** Irene Ebersole, Marianne Fennelly, Joan F. Harrigan, John P. Keil, Allen Weingast
Croton-on-Hudson Diane Albright, Gunnar Andersen, Robert Ceresa, Donald Dean, Rita Gleason, Bruce and Jen Laemmel, Richard Olver, Julian Power and Lisa Wyer, Emily Weinstock
Hawthorne Carol Boerner **Ossining** Nelly Balloffet, Henry Hart, Patricia Morgan, Darwin Stapleton, Jeffrey Weis, Lawrence Wohl
Peekskill Susan Rossbach **Pleasantville** Momodou Bah, Karen Cohen, Harry and Millie Gonzalez **Tarrytown** Linda Gazzola, Patrick Lee, Cynthia Weniger **Thornwood** Cynthia Carey

Welcome New Board Members

We are pleased to announce that on April 5, 2009, four members of Saw Mill River Audubon were elected to the Board of Directors: Arthur Green, Donna Lassiter, Valerie Lyle and Nina Romanoff. Erika Miller is leaving the Board. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Erika for her service.

A third-generation resident of Mount Kisco who lives near our Choate Sanctuary, **Arthur Green** joins the board of Saw Mill River Audubon to share his passion for the natural world and to promote the conservationist ethic in the communities in which he grew up. He attended Chappaqua schools and is an Eagle Scout. Apart from his work with SMRA, Arthur plays piano and writes music for synthesizers, watches birds, studies Japanese language, and also chairs the hawkwatch for the Bedford Audubon Society.



When she moved to Croton-on-Hudson from Manhattan five years ago, **Donna Lassiter** looked forward to making an English perennial flower garden in real ground and getting in touch with nature on the Audubon sanctuary walks. Her perspective quickly changed as she learned that the nature she cherished was depleted by invasives. Her gardening has since become more of a husbandry, with many native plants flowering and fruiting, and with brambles and thickets around the boundaries of her home. As a board member she would like to contribute to the maintenance and health of the sanctuaries with the addition of native plants for wildlife and control methods for invasives. She also would like to help promote native gardening and landscaping.

Walking in the woods, observing birds, wildlife, and nature in general have been a big part of **Valerie Lyle's** life since childhood. Since moving to Croton-on-Hudson in 2001, Valerie has enjoyed countless hours in SMRA's Brinton Brook and other sanctuaries. By serving on the board, she looks forward to helping to preserve and promote these properties for our area.

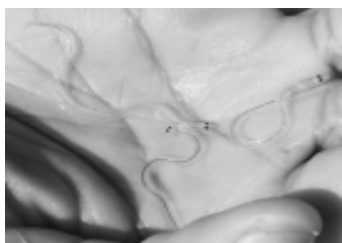


Nina Romanoff lives in Croton-on-Hudson adjacent to our Graff Sanctuary and has a growing interest in bird watching. The amazing variety of birds seen from her kitchen window has led to her commitment to help protect and maintain the diverse native habitats still found throughout northern Westchester. As a board member, Nina plans to join SMRA's sanctuary committee to work toward this important goal.

Hudson River Eels: Their Amazing Journey

While we are all familiar with the incredible journeys that many species of birds take each spring to return to our yards from their far-off wintering grounds, there is another less well known but equally amazing migration that takes place in our area. This is the annual return of young American eels (*Anguilla rostrata*) to the Hudson River Estuary and its tributaries.

American eels have one of the most unusual life cycles of any fish. They are born in the Sargasso Sea in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, over 1,000 miles from the Hudson River. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service describes their early life this way: “The buoyant eel eggs float to the ocean surface and hatch into small, transparent



larvae shaped like willow leaves. These larvae drift with the Gulf Stream and other currents, taking about a year to reach the Atlantic coast. By this time, the larval eels have developed fins and the shape of adult eels.” At this stage, the juveniles are

approximately 2 inches long, and are nearly transparent, which is why they are called glass eels (photo above.)

As the glass eels grow, they begin to develop gray to greenish-brown pigmentation, at which point they are termed elvers. Growing elvers develop into yellow eels (whose actual color can be yellow-green to olive brown), a stage during which the eel is sexually immature, but which may last for as little as 2 years or up to several decades.

When adult eels reach their full size-lengths of up to 5 feet for females and 3 feet for males, they become sexually mature, and are referred to as silver eels. Up to this point, the eel has spent most of its life as a bottom dwelling fish in fresh or brackish water that is relatively shallow. However, a silver eel's body must undergo a number of changes to enable it to survive the long migration through deep salt water back to the Sargasso Sea, where it presumably spawns and dies.

American eels have existed for millions of years and have been migrating for millennia to east coast estuaries and rivers, yet in recent years the eel numbers have declined at many sites in our region. To try explain the reasons for this, Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester County students and other community volunteers are doing research on migrating juvenile American eels in several Hudson Valley tributaries, as part of research being conducted by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Hudson River Estuary Program and the Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve. Approximately 60 students, teachers, college interns, and community volunteers are checking special nets at sites at Crum Elbow in Hyde Park, the Fall Kill in Poughkeepsie, Indian Brook in Cold Spring, Furnace Brook in Cortlandt, and Minnisceongo Creek in West Haverstraw.

Daily, at each location, project participants check a ten-foot cone-shaped “fyke net” designed to catch the year-old American eels, called glass eels counting and releasing them back into the water, and recording environmental data on temperature and tides. The work begins in late March and continues through late May. At some sites, participants also look for and count river herring that also migrate into tributaries at this time of year.

2009 marks the second year of monitoring at the Poughkeepsie and Cortlandt sites, and both locations are showing significantly greater numbers of migrating eels than were recorded in 2008. The project volunteers are gathering vital information about the status of eels in these tributaries. With minimal training, the local “citizen scientist” volunteers are making possible this important research, which will help answer basic questions about these very mysterious animals and the habitats they use throughout their far-reaching lives.

This study was inspired by the work of scientists Tom Lake of the Estuary Program and Robert Schmidt of Bard College at Simon's Rock. The project is made possible by the combined help of many partners, including Poughkeepsie High School, the Mid-Hudson Children's Museum, the Dutchess BOCES Academy of Environmental Science, Ossining High School, and the Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary.

For more information visit the project website:
<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/49580.html>

-- Mary Charbonneau, Education Manager at Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary

SMRA Field Trip Report

excerpted from the Hudson River E-Almanac

5/13 - Tarrytown, HRM 27: When we first started out along the trail on the Saw Mill River Audubon walk in Rockefeller Preserve, two young deer ran across our path. Shortly thereafter, a coyote loped across not far from us. Despite the unseasonably cool early morning air temperature, we were excited to encounter many birds that we haven't seen at our feeders, such as yellow warblers, an American redstart flitting across the canopy, a gray catbird clearly visible on a branch near the path, and an orchard oriole sunning itself high up in a tree. We also enjoyed seeing a gnatcatcher, which resembled a miniature mockingbird, as well as a wood thrush almost hidden amidst the branches of a tree. - Dorothy Ferguson, Bob Ferguson

The Hudson River E-Almanac is a weekly report of natural history sightings along the Hudson River available by email and reported by Hudson River Mile (HRM) measured north from HRM 0 at the Battery. To sign up to receive the E-Almanac send an email message to hrep@gw.dec.state.ny.us and write E-Almanac in the subject line.

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A PLACE FOR THE BIRDS

"Birds are intense, fast-living creatures... transformed fairy creatures dancing over sunlit meadows." *Loren Eiseley*

Our sanctuaries provide critical habitat for birds and other wildlife. Your gift to Saw Mill River Audubon helps us to encourage people to celebrate and protect these natural places! You may also join, give a membership gift, create a special tribute gift or a memorial donation online.



I WISH TO DONATE

Enclosed is:

- \$500 \$250 \$100
 \$50 \$20 \$_____

My employer will match my gift.

I'D LIKE TO JOIN
Saw Mill River Audubon!

Basic Chapter Membership:

- Enclosed is \$25
 Please send me planned giving info

Name(s)

Address

City/State/Zip

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Please make checks payable to:

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Deadline for Next Newsletter: August 1

Spring 2010 Adventure!
Join Saw Mill River Audubon when we travel
to Nebraska to see the amazing Sandhill Cranes.
See page 2 for details.

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