



Feb/Mar 2015



Peregrine falcon on the wing. Photo: Bonnie Talluto

Upcoming Events



Stellar team of birders on the Putnam Christmas Bird Count. Selfie: Christine McCluskey



Saw Mill River Audubon 5th Monday birding walk at Marshlands Conservancy in December. Photo: Bill Kellner



Crowd gathering for Charlie Roberto's "Eagles and More" walk at Croton boat ramp on Saturday, January 10. Photo: Anne Swaim

Visit our Google calendar at www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/calendar for more event details or call our office at (914) 666-6503 or email us at office@sawmillriveraudubon.org. Be sure to subscribe to our free, private email list to get additional details and early notice of new trips and events. Visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/list to subscribe. To receive our newsletters in color via email, visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/enews.

Every Monday, 8:30 a.m.: Free guided bird walks at area hotspots. 1st Mon: Muscoot Farm, 2nd Mon: Rockefeller State Park Preserve, 3rd Mon (except for February, see below): Kingsland Point OR Tarrytown Lakes (check our Google calendar month-to-month) 4th Mon: Croton Point County Park, 5th Mon: Marshlands Conservancy, Rye.

Every Saturday & Sunday, 8:00-10:00 a.m.: Project FeederWatch at Croton Point Nature Center. Stop by to learn & count local birds. (Ends April 5.)

Every Thursday in February, 3:45 p.m. until dark, Eagle Roost Monitoring at Verplanck Dock. Watch bald eagles come to roost along the Hudson River.

February

Wednesday, February 11: Film: *The Ordinary, Extraordinary Junco*. Black Cow

Saturday, February 14: Second Saturday Walk at Brinton Brook, Croton

Monday, February 16: Field Trip: Winter Birds on LI Sound & Lunch

Saturday, February 21: Third Saturday Seed Sale, Pruyn Sanctuary

March

Thursday, March 12: Public Program: Butterfly Gardening, Croton Library

Friday, March 13: Flight of the Woodcock. Croton Point Park

Saturday, March 14: Second Saturday Walk at Brinton Brook, Croton

Friday, March 20: BirdersU Birding by Ear, Croton Point Nature Center

Saturday, March 21: BirdersU field trip

Saturday, March 21: Third Saturday Seed Sale, Pruyn Sanctuary

SAVE THE DATE: Sunday, April 12, SMRA Annual Dinner. See page 5.

Check our Google calendar for additional events & weather-related changes. To enjoy this newsletter in color, visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/news

Birding Notes

Christmas Bird Counts

The 115th Audubon Christmas Bird Count took place from December 14 to January 10. Saw Mill River Audubon members joined the tens of thousands of participants around the world to connect with teams conducting an all-day census of local birds. I covered the Ossining area as part of the Peekskill Count, and two weeks

later, the Lake Mahopac area as part of the Putnam Count.

At the turn of the century, the Christmas "Side Hunt" was a contest to see which team could gun down the most birds. But with concern for declining bird populations growing, early Audubon Society officer Frank Chapman proposed a new holiday tradition: a census that would count birds instead. Thus began the Christmas Bird

Count. From 25 counts that day, it has now grown to over 2300!

Locally, our own storied past began when Ralph Odell, birder-mentor extraordinaire, put together the Peekskill count in 1954-1955 (with Putnam) with a small dedicated group of bird watchers. Sixty years later he still participates, and also sponsors the post-count compilation dinner in his lovely 18th-century home.

The teams partake and imbibe with long-lost outdoor buddies, swap stories of birding antics, and are wowed by the day's rare sightings.

I've often thought of the CBC as a day we give back to the birds that enrich our lives. But as I reflect on my enjoyment, I realize it simply represents a big, year-end holiday gift the birds are yet again giving me. I hope I find myself doing it for 60+ years, too.

Christine McCluskey

Saw Mill River Audubon

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Pileatedly Pleasing

The late afternoon light was diminishing as I headed back out on the South Mountain Reservation (NJ) trail. It was cold and quiet, and I moved slowly, conscious of the snow crunching beneath; I stopped every few paces to enjoy and appreciate the silence of winter woods.

After a few moments at the base of a large oak, just as I was about to step again, I heard a significant tap-tap-tapping right above me. I unsheathed

my pocket binoculars and peered up the tree until I spied movement.

Focusing, I saw what I thought was a small woodpecker with a large beak and a red stripe down its back—an interesting, cute little guy. I looked again, and realized what I thought was the entire bird was only its head—the head of a magnificent Pileated woodpecker. Wow, that baby was a monster! And a life bird for me—so cool!

Tom Ruth

Connecting with Nature: Your gift helps us connect people and nature.

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Listen for Great Horned Owls calling at dawn, dusk or even late afternoon in the mid-winter.



Education

Best Bird Song App

Saw Mill River Audubon recommends *Larkwire* as the best app for learning bird sounds. Called the “Rosetta Stone” for bird sounds, *Larkwire* remembers what you know and offers varying quiz levels including pictures and sound descriptions of all North America birds: www.larkwire.com

Friday, March 20, 7:00 p.m. Next BirdersU: Birding by Ear

Tune up your birding ears on the first day of spring! BirdersU is our seasonal series of small group birding skill workshops. Join us for this evening workshop on birding by ear and then come out with us the next morning to try out your new ID skills!

Cost is \$20/member of any Audubon group and includes a CD of local spring bird sounds; \$30/nonmember along with the CD and a new membership in Saw Mill River Audubon. Space limited. Send us an email or call us ASAP to reserve your spot(s). Payment at the door. Best for ages 10 and up. Held 7:00-8:30 p.m. at Croton Pt. Nature Center.

Sanctuaries



Trail Walker Reports

Trail Walker reports help us protect and maintain our sanctuaries. We encourage you to use our online Trail Walker report form to tell us about trail conditions, wildlife seen and visitors. Visit: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/walker

Boundary Surveys

Saw Mill River Audubon sanctuary boundaries total over eight miles!

We walk the boundary lines of our eight sanctuaries on a rotating schedule to replace our boundary signs and assess any boundary encroachment concerns.

New Invasive Found

SMRA volunteers have discovered Hardy Kiwi Vine (*Actinidia arguta*) at Brinton Brook Sanctuary. Hardy Kiwi Vine is considered an “emerging species of concern” by the Lower Hudson Partnership for Regional Invasives Species Management (PRISM). More info on PRISM: lhprism.org.

Advocacy



At our January board meeting, SMRA voted to join with the Hudson-to-Housatonic Conservation Initiative (H2H). H2H is a collaboration of regional conservation organizations and municipal partners and focuses on land use and stewardship of forested lands and waterways from Westchester and Putnam counties in

New York, and in southwestern Connecticut eastward to the Housatonic River. Its goal is to engage landowners and communities in new discussions about maintaining and improving the conservation values of their properties, as well as improving the quality of drinking water, protecting streams and other waterways and the

flora and fauna that depend on them. We are excited to join with this initiative in our membership area.

H2H is funded by a grant from the U.S. Forest Service, is led in our area by the Westchester Land Trust, and also involves Mianus River Gorge and Bedford Audubon.

Tom Ruth

More Birding Notes

Stray Kingbirds

November 2014 saw the flukish, simultaneous appearance of two way-off-course flycatchers in New York City. The first to be identified was Cassin's Kingbird, whose usual range encompasses parts of Arizona and California, but primarily Mexico. The Cassin's spent nearly two months in the Community Gardens at Floyd Bennett Field (yes, Kings County). There have been a few previous sightings of this species in New York but the bird is nonetheless quite rare in the Northeast.

Even more rare, and a first-ever New York State sighting, was a Couch's Kingbird, observed by a non-birder hanging around the West Village's White Horse Tavern (where, rumor has it, Dylan Thomas drank himself to death). It was positively photo-identified around Christmas time by a well-known NYC birder. Couch's usual North American range is limited to south Texas and a bit of Louisiana.

While I personally did not make it to Brooklyn, I fortunately was able to get great looks of the Couch's fly-catching from tree to fire escape at the corner of West 4th and 11th Streets in Manhattan along with many other birders. Too bad the



Couch's Kingbird on a Manhattan fire escape. Photo: Doug Gochfeld

Couch's never made it a little further south to King Street to complete the alliteration.

After viewing this beautiful bird, I was able to re-live a bit of my early days in Manhattan c. 1977 with a burger and a pint at Corner Bistro (not to the extent of Dylan Thomas, however).

For a brief period, Flatbush Avenue became the latter day version of the *Kingbird Highway** as it was pretty much a straight shot from Cassin's to Couch's. The Cassin's was last reported on Monday, January 5, 2015 and the Couch's about a week later, each perhaps succumbing to the lack of insects and the onslaught of cold weather – or perhaps they moved south beforehand.

Larry Trachtenberg

**Kenn Kaufman's Kingbird Highway is a chronicle of a 17-year-old birder hitchhiking across America in 1973 -- yes, that was done back then -- to see as many birds as he could in a "Big Year;" well worth the read. The bird that inspired his lifelong passion was an Eastern Kingbird.*

Chasing a Big Year

A big year is an informal competition among birders to see who can see or hear the largest number of species of birds within a single calendar year and within a specific geographical area.

As Wikipedia defines it (above) a big year is about competition between birders. But, for me, chasing a big year has mostly been a way to reignite my life-long love of birding and provide an extra incentive to get outside birding as much as possible.

My recent big year attempts have been quite modest: to see and/or hear as many different bird species as possible within Westchester County in one calendar year, recording my sightings at ebird.org.

For 2014, I managed to up my personal best to reach 209 species in Westchester. In comparison, other more experienced and active birds reach much higher levels. To our east, the highest 2014 eBird count was 281

species in Suffolk County. For all of New York State in 2014, the same birder, Shai Mitra, listed the largest total of 330 species! (And, number 330 was the Couch's Kingbird, see Larry's article about that bird to the left.)

For me, it is more than the numbers, although I confess that breaking 200 was big fun. Chasing a big year also gives value to even the most common birds as the year list resets each January. The first Downy Woodpecker on January 1 has equal weight with the uncommon Rusty Blackbird that visited Prun Sanctuary last week.

The same thing is true in keeping a list of birds you see on a single field trip or day-by-day in your backyard or neighborhood. Cornell Lab of Ornithology's free listing service at ebird.org makes it easy to keep track. We also offer an eBird list after each of our SMRA field trips.

Why not check out ebird.org and start your own big year list?

Anne Swaim



Bald eagle (1st year) carrying a fish
Photo: Bonnie Talluto

*Saw Mill River Audubon
presents*

Welcome to Spring Program

Sunday, April 12, 2015 – 6:00 to 9:00 pm

New Castle Community Center

10 Senter Street
Chappaqua, New York

featuring

Potluck Supper

Annual Meeting and Board Election for 2015

2014 Larry Light Youth Scholarship Winner – Alex Chin

Guest Speaker: Carol Gracie

***The Natural History of Spring Wildflowers—A Closer Look
and book signing***

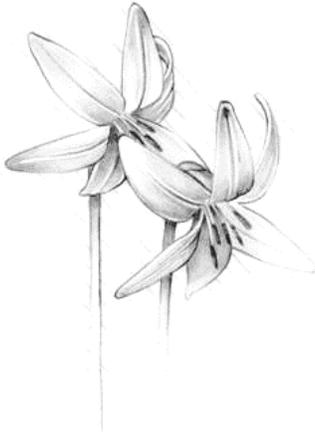
Multimedia Finale ~ Saw Mill River Audubon Places & Faces

Images from our 2014 events – will you be in the picture?

OPEN TO ALL & INVITE A FRIEND!

Suggested donation at the door of \$10/person to support
our local conservation work

**RSVP by phone to Jean Sparacin (914) 941-8422
or via the web at www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner**





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*Immature bald eagle seen on our January 10, 2015
"Eagles and More Walk" at Croton Point with Charlie Roberto
Photo: Anne Swaim*

Connecting People and Nature since 1953



*Adult bald eagle overlooking the Hudson River at Verplanck
Photo: Nick Colombo*

Special Inserts in this Issue!

For all members of Saw Mill River Audubon, please find enclosed your **2015 proxy ballot** for our April 2015 annual election of board members and officers. You can also vote your proxy ballot online: sawmillriveraudubon.org/proxy

Our 2015 Annual Dinner invitation is on page 5. Save the date, Sunday April 12, and join us for a fun community gathering! Online at: sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner

SMRA Supports EagleFest!

Saturday, February 7

Celebrate eagles! SMRA is proud to be part of the 2015 Hudson River Eagle Fest led by Teatown Lake Reservation on Saturday, February 7. (Snow date will be Sunday, February 8.)

Saw Mill River Audubon is, once again, hosting warming tents at the Croton boat ramp and George's Island, providing eagle spotters and offering bird walks and a raptor ID program inside Croton Point. We'll also be hosting an information table along with many other environmental groups inside Croton Point Park.

A full schedule of EagleFest activities will take place this day all along the Hudson River including Boscobel, Verplanck, Croton and Sleepy Hollow.

This is a great day for the whole family to learn more about our national symbol and take a break from the winter doldrums.

See eagles on the Hudson, live bird shows and films; there's also storytelling, a bus tour of eagle viewing locations, and a myriad of children's activities. **For more info and to register for special events, visit www.teatown.org**