



Summer 2016



Great Blue Heron in flight. Photo: William Golden



*Students at Pinecliff Sanctuary in May.
Photo: Anne Swaim*



*2015 Larry Light Youth Scholarship recipient Eamon Freiburger speaking at our Annual Dinner.
Photo: Bill Kellner. More photos pages 5-6.*



*SMRA President Valerie Lyle welcoming visitors to our Croton Earth Day display.
Photo: Anne Swaim*

Upcoming Events

Visit our **Google calendar** at www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/calendar for 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.

Every Monday, Starts 7:30 am in main parking at each location.

Free guided bird walks at area hotspots.

1st Mon: Muscoot Farm,

2nd Mon: Rockefeller State Park Preserve,

3rd Mon: Teatown Lake Reservation,

4th Mon: Croton Point County Park,

5th Mon: Location varies, see Google calendar on SMRA web site.

Every Second Saturday, 9:00 am, Guided Hike at Brinton Brook Sanctuary.

Check our **Google calendar** for details and updates for all the events on this page, especially for any weather-related changes, and for other field trips, including special “pop-up” trips that we may add with about a week’s notice as sightings and weather conditions suggest.

Weekend Events

June

Saturday, June 11: Second Saturday Walk at Brinton Brook Sanctuary

Saturday, June 18: Clearance Bird Seed Sale! 25% off, Pruyin Sanctuary

Saturday, June 25: Dutchess County Birding Day Trip

July

Saturday, July 9: Second Saturday Walk at Brinton Brook Sanctuary

Sunday, July 17: Leader’s Choice Field Trip, Location TBD

Friday, July 29: Birders U: Shorebird ID Workshop, see web site for details.

August

Saturday, August 13: Second Saturday Walk at Brinton Brook Sanctuary

Sunday, August 28: Leader’s Choice Field Trip, Location TBD

Help us plan for Sept 2016 through Aug 2017! Visit our online survey at www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/survey. We welcome your input!

To enjoy this newsletter in color, visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/news

President's Message from Valerie Lyle

I'm excited to become board president at a time when SMRA is finding new ways to expand its environmental and conservation mission while providing opportunities for people to learn about and experience nature in our communities.

My own love of the outdoors began early: studying the bird guides my mother kept near the windows that looked out on our feeders, hiking in the woods during

long summer family camping trips, and having free and unsupervised run of the woods and fields that surrounded the small rural town in Ohio where I grew up.

Transplanted to NYC as an adult, I found ways to continue my outdoor activities, despite working in an office and living in a city apartment. Prospect Park became my backyard. It was the place I first saw a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and where a freshly-killed squirrel slid off the branch and landed beside me when I startled a Red-tailed

Hawk. I spent most weekends in the Catskills for many years, feeding birds and other wildlife near my house, hiking, and cross-country skiing.

After my mother retired, I began to accompany her on birding expeditions and field trips in Ohio and elsewhere. It was in Ohio that I was first introduced to the joys of spring warbler watching.

In 2001, I moved to Croton and discovered Saw Mill River Audubon through the second Saturday Brinton Brook Sanctuary hikes. In 2008, shortly after my mother passed away, I was invited to become an SMRA board member. The timing was perfect, as I had just lost my main birding partner. I began going on SMRA field trips, finding a whole new group of passionate and expert birders to learn from.

While SMRA continues to be a vibrant birding group, during Robert McCrillis's 12 years as president, we have increased our engagement with local and regional environmental and habitat issues. The wide-ranging interests

and expertise of our board are reflected in our programs and initiatives: bird walks and field trips both local and far afield; sanctuary work days to remove invasive vines and plant native tree species; partnership with the Hudson to Housatonic Conservation Initiative to engage local landowners with information and resources to protect streams and improve habitat; work with Lower Hudson Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management on early identification and control of invasive species; collaboration with Westchester County Parks to promote and maintain grassland habitat in Croton Point Park; and our own Prun Sanctuary Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden, offering visitors an example of how gardens can support birds, butterflies, and other wildlife.

I look forward to working with our dedicated board members and volunteers, and with our fantastic and knowledgeable Executive Director, Anne Swaim, in the coming years.

Valerie Lyle

Saw Mill River Audubon

275 Millwood Road Chappaqua, NY 10514
(914) 666-6503 | office@sawmillriveraudubon.org
Visit us online: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org

President: Valerie Lyle

Vice President: Thomas Ruth

Treasurer: Thomas McEnerney Secretary: Valerie Heemstra

Editor: Brian Kluepfel Circulation: Jean Sparacin

Executive Director: Anne Swaim

Office Manager: Ellen Heidelberger

Marketing & Fundraising: Barbara Campbell

Educator: Pete Salmansohn

Sanctuary Maintenance: Danny Ferguson

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Sanctuaries



Restoring Native Plants

Thanks to great work by our volunteer team, 15 species of native wild flowers were planted at Brinton Brook Sanctuary on April 29. Cardinal Flower, New England Aster, Swamp and Common Milkweed, Bergamot, Blue Flag Iris, Blue Indigo, and Black-eyed Susan were added to the sanctuary habitats. A total of 15 species were reared from seedlings in 69 containers. Twelve more containers were planted earlier in May.

This coming growing season, 750 native trees and shrubs from the State Tree Nursery in Saratoga Springs will also be planted at Brinton Brook. Among the new plantings will be White Pine, White Spruce, Button Bush, Elderberry, and Nanny Berry.

As the invasive and non-native species are removed from our sanctuaries, we will continue to “go native” to improve our sanctuary habitats. Native plants are better for birds and other wildlife in our

sanctuaries, and on your property too!

Learn more about why native plants are better from Dr. Doug Tallamy at this web site: www.bringingnaturehome.net

Future planting plans include evergreens to replace hemlocks lost to woolly adelgid and even more wild flowers.

If you'd like to volunteer in these plantings, please call our office for more details, 914-666-6503 or office@sawmillriveraudubon.org.

Local Issue Concern: Sunshine Home

Below is an overview of one local issue we are tracking with a suggested action for you.

The Town of New Castle is considering an application for expansion of the Sunshine Home, a for-profit nursing home on Spring Valley Road in the Indian Brook watershed basin, part of the Hudson River Estuary system. The proposed facility would be 147,367 square feet and represent an expansion of over 700% from their current footprint.

Neighbors, the Town of Ossining, Clearwater and the West End Advisory Board of New Castle are among those demanding a full environmental

impact study in adherence with New York SEQR (State Environmental Quality Review.)

Potential environmental impacts include:

- Removing over 576 trees as calculated by Steve Coleman, Environmental Coordinator, Town of New Castle;
- Significant and ongoing water demand in a watershed basin that supports neighbors' wells and Ossining drinking water, and drains to the Hudson River;
- Damage of former and current wetlands;
- Blasting, as well as potential truckloads of fill dirt, and traffic.

The above items are just some of the potential issues. There are still many unknowns, including the status of endangered species and questions regarding water quality.

Just recently, the Sunshine Home was cited by the Westchester County Department of Health for radium levels in the Home's drinking water above legal limits.

We encourage you to email the Town at building@mynewcastle.org to express concern about this expansion being proposed in an environmentally sensitive area and to urge a full impact study. A project of this scale can and should be located elsewhere with fewer impacts.

Karen Wells

Advocacy



Birding Notes: May Migration



Black-throated Green Warbler, Croton Point. Photo: Kyle Bardwell

Having been stalled by a week of incessant rain and north winds, May migration turned around in a big way just in time for Mother's Day. First, on Saturday, May 7, was a SMRA "pop-up" trip to Basha Kill Wildlife Management Area in Sullivan County, the largest freshwater wetlands in Southeastern New York.

It was a cold and damp morning but seven intrepid souls had great birding at the "Bash."

Basha Kill highlights were 13 warbler species, including Cerulean and Nashville, along with terrific looks at an American Bittern and Common Gallinule. In all, the group saw 71 bird species but the highlight, I think, was a quite visible porcupine hanging out in a tree.

On Saturday night I got a text from Kyle Bardwell: "radar is hopping; birds are coming, get out Sunday morning." And what a morning!

Despite the early rains and almost certainly because of them, birds started dropping in at Croton Point, although we could see larger numbers over the river moving through to the north. Kyle, John Grant, Charlie Roberto and I were treated to a spectacular morning of birding.

Our Croton Point group total on Mother's Day was 97 species, including 17 warblers.

Among these, were 20 Black-throated Blue Warblers and Croton Point rarities like Hooded, Wilson's, Blackburnian, and Canada Warblers.

We had fantastic views of six Rose-breasted Grosbeaks together on the ground, multiples of Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore and Orchard Oriole, and Indigo Bunting.

Once things cleared, raptors were also up, including Broad-winged and Red-shouldered Hawks, Bald Eagle, and Peregrine Falcon and, to boot, nice views of a Great Horned Owl.

We also found four species of shorebirds, four of vireo, three of flycatch-

er—particularly uncommon was an Olive-sided Flycatcher—and numerous sparrow species including the less-common White-



Blackburnian Warbler, Croton Point. Photo: Kyle Bardwell

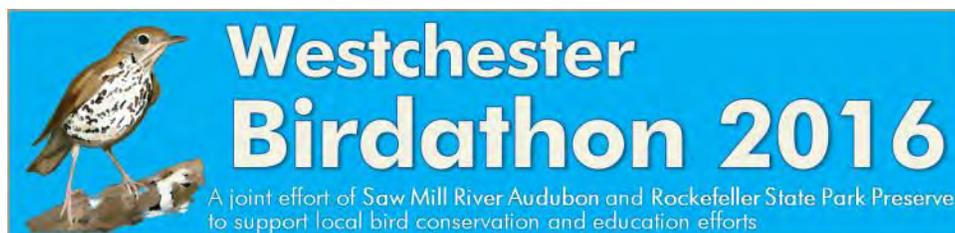
crowned and Lincoln's.

Even after this birding bonanza, I still enjoyed a wonderful Mother's Day afternoon/evening with my wife Patricia, and our kids and grandkids.

Croton Point is a special place. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Executive Director Anne Swaim and board members Karalyn Lamb and John Phillips, we hope it will stay that way in perpetuity (however long perpetuity is in a crazy world.)

More of Kyle's photos and a full list of the Mother's Day birds are available on SMRA's Facebook page here: www.facebook.com/SMRAudubon

Larry Trachtenberg



Saw Mill River Audubon's first joint Birdathon with Rockefeller State Park Preserve was held May 13-14. The combined teams' total was 119 species including 22 warblers! As of May 16, over \$1400 was raised to support the ongoing nesting study at Rockefeller SPP as well as SMRA's bird education outreach. **Thanks to all of our donors and also to the birders who participated:** Cary Andrews, John & Mary Cavallero, Elijah Goodwin (Birdathon idea man!), Charlotte Localio, Christine McCluskey, Connie McKeige, Barbara Strobino, Anne Swaim, Larry Trachtenberg, and Debbie Van Zyl. There's still time to donate! Help support local bird conservation and education. Visit: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/birdathon-donation.

Just Birding

Sometimes the simplest solution is the best. I like birding (or bird watching), and, of late, I had become a bit disenchanted with it: birding burnout.

Today, I walked the three miles from Ossining to Croton along Route 9. Part of my northern peregrination incorporated a hiking trail, some of which is unspectacularly flanked by whizzing traffic and concrete barriers. But the river side of the trail held some magic.

As I looked down into the river, where the Route 9 bridge crosses the Croton River, I spotted what I thought was a kingfisher (Belted Kingfisher) out on a craggy limb, exactly where you'd expect to see one, and the same as I'd seen it during many unemployed visits to my local pond in Pleasantville. Just a wonderful bird, and very territorial. So I made a half-hearted call, and sure enough, it stirred and did a showy territorial circuitous flight and squawking call. I had guessed right; kingfisher it was.

Above me on the trail was the constant *chip chip chip* of a cardinal (Northern Cardinal, to be precise). It took me a while to locate, but finally, outlined by the fading sunlight, was the familiar crimson of a very com-



mon, but a most beautiful bird, black mask and all. On the way back north, and home, after finding the local gym closed, I spied yet another, and apparently dozens of others vocalizing, getting ready to build and defend their spring nests, perhaps.

Then, a small flotilla of Bufflehead ducks just across the inlet from the kingfisher's perch. Again, a lovely bird, black headed with a white eye patch, and that peculiar wing flap at takeoff as they took off for another spot in the river, again framed by the fading sun across the Hudson.

I peered into the massive reed forest between my paved trailway and the mighty estuary, scanning for a Great Blue Heron, perhaps, but saw nothing. I did hear the familiar referee-whistle alarm of our vigilant Red-winged Blackbirds, another territorial avian, small in size but mighty in aspect. I guess I'll see them another day, because as I reached the frontier of Ossining, it was dark again.

I didn't get a great workout today—although a six-mile round trip walk isn't too shabby—but I did get a taste of what made birding so magical to begin with: the wonder of the unexpected, and even the expected, as we walk along the everyday paths of life.

Brian Kluepfel



SMRA Honors Robert McCrillis

Outgoing SMRA President Robert McCrillis was recognized for his 12 years at the helm of our organization at our annual dinner on April 3 at Table 9, Cortlandt Manor. Robert was presented with a special framed photograph of an Eastern Bluebird, our state bird, with a Meritorious Service Award from National Audubon. During his tenure, our board has grown into a team community engaged in diverse interests and activities. Thank you, Robert! He passes the reins of leadership to Valerie Lyle, a longtime board member herself. See Valerie's introductory message on page 2. (Photo: Bill Kellner)



SMRA Staff

SMRA Office Manager Ellen Heidelberger is the first contact many people have with Saw Mill River Audubon when they call our office. Here's a face to go with that friendly voice.

Ellen Heidelberger is pictured here at our recent Annual Dinner. More Annual Dinner pictures, also courtesy of Bill Kellner, are on page 6.



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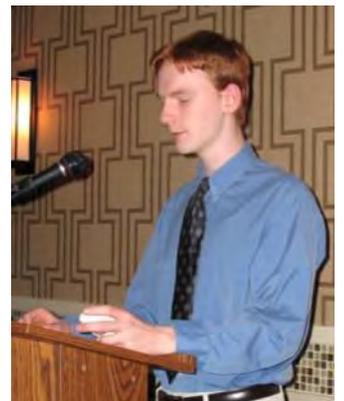
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Wood Thrush in song at Brinton Brook Sanctuary.
Photo: Edward Mertz

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SMRA Celebrates Spring!



Images from our 2016 Welcome to Spring Annual Dinner (April 3, 2016.) Clockwise from top left: Jan Bass, Sue O'Rourke, Joanne McAnley, Mike Bass; Caroline & Robert McCrillis, Audubon New York's Laura McCarthy, and Barbara Saraway; 2015 Larry Light Scholarship recipient Josiah Wiedenheft; SMRA Sanctuary Staff Danny Ferguson with David & Patricia Watson; Christine McCluskey presenting "Cuba Birding". Photos: Bill Kellner.