



# SMRA

SAW MILL RIVER AUDUBON™

## Summer 2020



*Peregrine Falcon at Croton Point. We are reprinting this extraordinary photo by Jeffrey Seneca as a tribute and with heartfelt condolences to his family and friends. Jeff died from covid-19 this spring. We will all deeply miss Jeff's passion for bird photography.*



*SMRA volunteers improving the entrance and main trail at Choate Sanctuary early this spring. Photo: David Watson*



*SMRA volunteers installing a puncheon boardwalk over the very muddy but heavily-used white trail at Pruyn Sanctuary. Photo: Anne Swaim*



*Upgrading the parking area at Brinton Brook Sanctuary to better accommodate the greatly-increased visitation this spring. See page 3 for more about the projects pictured above. Photo: Anne Swaim*

## Upcoming Events

Like everybody in these uncertain times, SMRA cannot be certain of any plans in the coming months! So we are modifying our event calendar to adapt to changing conditions.

As we go to print with this summer newsletter, we do not know what access, if any, will be possible to our usual birding spots. So we are first planning small group bird walks in our own sanctuaries. See below.

We will also continue to offer online events to connect our community in the coming months. See those listed below as well.

**Our Monday walks are cancelled through the summer because we cannot ensure participant safety with large group birding. We have also cancelled all weekend birding trips this summer.**

## Online Events

**Monday nights in June, Tuesday nights in July & August**

**Join us for Bird Chat, 7:00 pm.** Gather online with the local birding community to hear about local sightings, see pictures, learn where to do solo birding and what birds to expect. All details and registration are here: [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/chat](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/chat)

**Third Thursdays, 8:00 pm: Nature Skills Workshops**

**Thu June 18, Thu July 16, Thu August 20.** For topics, registration and more details, visit [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register/skills](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register/skills)

## Small Group Birding

Pending changes in NY Pause regulations for our region, we hope to offer guided summer bird walks for groups of six people, by registration only, with all participants wearing masks and socially distanced, and with no sharing of scopes or binoculars. In June, we hope to offer these at SMRA's Brinton Brook and Pruyn Sanctuaries. We may add more locations in July & August, when allowed by county and state park guidelines. For dates and locations, and required registration, visit [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register/walks](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register/walks)

## SMRA Annual Dinner on Sunday, Aug 23

We will update you about this event by July 1st. Details and reservations are online here: [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner)



# President's Message

its field marks and behavior; allowing myself to stay in one spot for as long as I want; enjoying sorting out the songs and calls that I hear, and then (maybe) looking for the birds themselves. Whether soaking up the entire experience or getting absorbed in the details of a single bird, spending time alone with nature is a mindful, meditative activity that shifts my perspective away from daily concerns and self-absorption.

Solo walks are not always solitary walks, though. Our local birding community is large, and we are blessed with many parks and preserves in our area. Our changed daily routines allow many to spend even more time birding than before, so a solo expedition often includes several conversations with people one meets along the way. These unplanned meetings sometimes turn into an impromptu small-group walk as birders converge on hot spots, birding at a safe distance from each other and with masks.

Like so many others spending more time at home, I'm also

observing more closely the bird activity at my feeders, in my yard, and in my neighborhood, noticing details about the common birds and their interactions that I don't usually take the time to search out. For instance, hearing more than the usual Red-bellied Woodpecker and starling ruckus in my yard, I found a pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers and a pair of starlings vying for the same nest hole. Over the course of several days, I was able to watch them not only repeatedly chasing each other away from the hole, but alternately throwing each others' nesting materials out of the hole and then bringing their own new material into it, all with occasional interference from a flicker. I'm not sure who won, though, as I now don't see any birds going into and out of the hole!

Another unexpected benefit of the social restrictions is our discovery of online alternatives to in-person gatherings. SMRA's weekly Bird Chats, several online workshops, and Nature Book Club discussions online have continued and have

even in some ways enhanced our sense of community and sharing. What these online gatherings may lose in intimacy is often made up for by inclusiveness. Thirty people in an online workshop or 60 people in a Zoom Bird Chat can actually see and hear each other better than when they are all gathered in the same room.

As we emerge from quarantine in the coming months, I look forward to seeing many of you once again at small-group, socially distanced walks and even, eventually, at programs. I hope we will continue to offer some online gatherings as well, as they are a different kind of experience that can expand our community and connections to each other and to nature.

In the meantime, stay well, stay safe, and be assured that SMRA's work continues, with our volunteers and employees hard at work advocating for the environment, conserving and improving habitat in our sanctuaries and gardens, and finding safe ways to connect people with nature. If you would like to join with us in our work, please contact our office by phone or email. *Valerie Lyle*

As we continue to deal with covid-19, nature marches on, spring turning into summer as always. While our own lives have been turned upside down and we have no way to know what changes lie ahead, the cycle of nature continues to ground us, providing relief and solace in uncertain times. Spring migration and the return of birdsong and nesting birds, trees leafing out, flowers blooming—all this allows me to feel hopeful and somehow even "normal," whatever that is, in the face of the incredible strangeness of our continued social restrictions.

Although I miss birding with our SMRA community, I've been reminded once again of the pleasures and benefits of watching birds alone: challenging myself to stay focused on one bird for as long as it takes to note

## Saw Mill River Audubon

275 Millwood Road, Chappaqua, New York 10514  
914.666.6503 | office@sawmillriveraudubon.org  
Visit us online: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org

President: Valerie Lyle Vice President: Thomas Ruth  
Treasurer: Thomas McEnerney Secretary: William Kellner  
Editor: Brian Kluepfel Circulation: Jean Sparacin  
Executive Director: Anne Swaim  
Office Manager: Ellen Heidelberger  
Educators: Pete Salmansohn, Patricia Mutolo  
Education Partner: Rewilding School  
Sanctuary Maintenance: Danny Ferguson

ON THE WING, Saw Mill River Audubon's newsletter, is published four (4) times a year (Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer) for \$7.50 a year by Saw Mill River Audubon, 275 Millwood Road, Chappaqua, NY 10514. Periodical Postage #013281 at Chappaqua, NY 10514. ISSN: 1545-5254 at Chappaqua, NY and additional mailing offices.

## Purple Martins Back at Croton Point!



Photo: Steve Konalczyc

For the third spring, Purple Martins have returned to the nesting structure at Croton Point Park. (Don't be fooled by the decoy martin on the right added to entice more martins to visit.) The martin nest gourds are by the entrance booth to the park.



## New SMRA Board Member Suzanne Kavic

I was fortunate to grow up on a Pennsylvania farm surrounded by mountains and large expanses of wilderness. I spent the majority of my free time outside, on our farm or sailing on Lake Erie. Although my family didn't farm for a living, all of our neighbors did, so an awareness of the seasons and respect for nature was part of our daily life.

My husband and I have lived in Westchester County since 2001, but it wasn't until I retired in 2016 that I found the time to learn more about birds and birding.

I'll never forget watching a gorgeous golden-brown bird walk down our driveway one morning. It reminded me of a woodpecker, but I didn't think they walked on the ground and its color didn't seem right. More hours of research than I'd like to admit introduced me to the Northern Flicker—and more hours were required to convince my husband

that this was what I had actually seen! Thankfully, neighbors pointed me in the direction of SMRA's weekly bird walks and a new obsession was born.

As a physician, I have served on multiple professional boards, including medical societies at the county, state and national level with the AMA. I am also currently president of the New Castle League of Women Voters.

I am delighted to join the Board of SMRA and excited to help further its mission. SMRA is truly impressive in its commitment to both conservation and community education. I look forward to birding with you in the years ahead!

*Suzanne Kavic*



*Brinton Brook neighbor Mitch helped our parking lot project with his backhoe.*



*Photos: Anne Snaim*

*The Prvyn Sanctuary work crew constructing the puncheon walkway.*

## SMRA Sanctuary Improvements

SMRA received an Audubon collaborative grant to hold sanctuary workdays and a sanctuary trail maintenance workshop to train new and existing volunteers this spring. All these plans had to be adjusted, of course, with the pandemic. We held three workdays to address problems relating to sanctuary access and muddy trails that were becoming more urgent

due to the significantly increased usage this spring. The first one was in early spring just before masks became the norm, but all were performed in small groups with distancing precautions. We shifted the workshop online and recorded it for you to view as well. Watch the workshop here: [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/trail-maintenance](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/trail-maintenance).

Contact our office if you'd like to help us protect and maintain our sanctuaries. *Phil Heidelberger*

## Blog Excerpt: The Secret Life of Croton's Carrion Crows

You don't have to be a birder to notice the huge flocks—sometimes numbering 100 or more—of big, dark birds looming over downtown Croton-on-Hudson in fall and winter. Or to know what they are: vultures (often nicknamed “carrion crows” or “buzzards”), those notorious scavengers of road kill and other carcasses that seem to be increasing in number every year around these parts.

Their growing presence is all a glance will tell you about the local vultures, and for many people, that's all they need to know. But—as with so much in the natural world—if you take a moment to look closer, you'll see that the story of these big birds is far more complicated, full of surprising twists and turns.

First of all, Croton doesn't simply have “vultures;” it has two different kinds, Turkey and Black.



*Turkey Vulture portrait.*  
*US Fish & Wildlife Service*

They're actually pretty easy to tell apart. The more common TVs, brown-black in plumage, have long wings that slant upwards, forming a V, as they tilt buoyantly in even a slight breeze...

*Joe Wallace*

*Read the rest of this piece online at the SMRA blog and enjoy even more writing by Joe Wallace. Visit [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/blog](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/blog)*

**SMRA thanks Westchester Tree Life for wood chips delivered to Choate Sanctuary in March.**



275 Millwood Road  
 Chappaqua, New York 10514  
**Return Service Requested**

**PERIODICAL POSTAGE**

**PAID**

**at Chappaqua, NY  
 and additional offices**



*Young Red-tailed Hawk tries its wings at its nest at Croton Point in late May. Photo: LouAnn O'Hora*

**Connecting People and Nature since 1953**

## Explore Nature with Saw Mill River Audubon this Summer!

We have moved some events online and we may offer small group birding walks this summer. See details inside. Join us online for our weekly Bird Chats or our new Nature Skills workshops. Come explore our sanctuaries and give yourself the gift of nature in these uncertain times.

### When Baby Birds Really Don't Need Your Help...

Did you know that many birds leave the nest before they fly well OR before they know to hide from predators and humans? If you find a fledgling bird on the ground, just shoo it into shrubs (or move it with a towel.) Keep cats and dogs and kids away and then the parent birds will keep feeding the fledgling as it learns to hide and fly. Their best hope is to stay wild and outside.



*Fledgling American Robin just out of the nest. Photo: US Fish & Wildlife Service*

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

I wish to donate. Enclosed is:

\$500  \$250  \$100

\$50  \$35  \$\_\_\_\_\_

My employer will match my gift.

I'd like to join Saw Mill River Audubon

Basic Chapter Membership:

Enclosed is \$35

Please list my gift anonymously

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City / State / Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to:**  
 Saw Mill River Audubon  
 and mail to our office address  
 listed inside this newsletter.

**OR join/renew/donate online**  
[www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/join](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/join)  
[www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/renew](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/renew)  
[www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/donate](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/donate)