



*Common Redpoll
in flight at
Croton Point.
Photo:
Dawn Hannay*



Our pandemic-safe small group bird walks continued through the winter! Photo: Anne Swaim



Like everyone else these days, the SMRA board of directors has been staying connected through Zoom and staying busy guiding the many activities and interests of our organization. Photo: Anne Swaim



SMRA offered a special small group guided walk through Brinton Brook this winter for our neighbors from the Valeria community. Photo: Anne Swaim

Upcoming Events

COVID-19 SAFETY: Through spring, we will be offering our public programs online via Zoom and limiting our guided bird walks to small groups of 10 people maximum, masked and socially distanced, by registration only. We may cancel walks if pandemic conditions change. Our COVID guidelines are available at www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/covid. **Register for Zoom links and reminder emails and details for any of the public programs below at www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register**

Spring Public Programs—See Page 3 for Bird Walks.

Thursday, March 11, 7:00 pm via Zoom

Learning Bird Songs with Tom Stephenson

Tom Stephenson will give us an overview of the different kinds of vocalizations that birds make, how they are acquired, and how the song-learning process unfolds. Tom will then explore some strategies we can use when we hear a song we don't recognize and see why traditional field guides aren't much help. He will also discuss general memorization theory and outline a simple and very effective technique for memorizing many bird songs. Co-sponsored by all five Westchester County Audubon chapters: Central Westchester Audubon, Hudson River Audubon of Westchester, Bronx-River Sound Shore Audubon, Bedford Audubon and Saw Mill River Audubon.

Wednesday, March 24, 7:00 pm via Zoom

A Visit with Carl Safina

An extraordinary opportunity to hear from Carl Safina on his most recent book, *Becoming Wild*. (Join our Nature Book Club on March 16 as we discuss this book in advance of our visit with Carl. See more about our Nature Book Club on page 4.)

Thursday, April 15, 7:00 pm via Zoom

Western Tales of an Eastern Birder

SMRA Board alum David McIntyre will present this exciting tour of California birding spots including: rangelands where Mountain Plover, Ferruginous Hawk, Sage Grouse and pronghorn roam; salt ponds and marshes of San Francisco Bay: home to a tremendous variety of shorebirds, wintering waterfowl, and threatened species; and the Pacific Coast with coastal specialties and offshore pelagics. David's presentation will also touch on Audubon efforts in the Bay Area for birds and their habitats.

Wednesday, May 26, 7:00 pm via Zoom

The Beauty & Diversity of Birds — with Ilana Block

Come delight in Ilana Block's bird photography from birding habitats across North America and enjoy this Zoom presentation of the beauty and diversity of our continent's bird life. To preview her work and for purchase visit: www.ilanablockphotography.ca.

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

President's Message

Watching my birdfeeders in the snow after the biggest area snowstorm in years, it's difficult to think ahead to spring, but there's so much reason for optimism this year after the devastating year we've just experienced. First and foremost, of course, is the hope for a more normal life made possible by the COVID vaccines. Then there's the usual sense of renewal in the spring, especially exciting for birders as we anticipate each migratory wave of returning birds.

And also this year, Audubon finds hope in a number of the new administration's executive orders directing federal agencies to reverse, review or revoke any environmental policies that are "harmful to public health, damaging to the environment, unsupported by the best available science, or otherwise not in the national interest." Among them are:

- Rejoining the Paris Climate Accord and reviewing climate policy with an environmental justice lens;
- A decision to delay the prior administration's rollback of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act;
- The administration's new 30 X 30 plan to conserve and restore 30 percent of the nation's lands and waters by 2030;
- The creation of a National Climate Task Force to coordinate climate efforts across the federal government;
- A pause on the leasing of public lands for oil and gas drilling. This includes a temporary halt to oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, one of America's most important bird nurseries.

Saw Mill River Audubon

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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. POSTMASTER: Address changes sent to Saw Mill River Audubon, 275 Millwood Road, Chappaqua, NY 10514

You can find out more about Audubon's priorities, and how to help advocate for the environment on National Audubon's website: www.audubon.org.



Valerie Lyle, SMRA President

Turning to our local area and considering the larger numbers of local birders out birding in the pandemic, we've had some exciting birding and may expect more in the spring. In December, a LeConte's Sparrow was seen by many birders in Croton Point Park. This is a mid-western species rarely seen in NY, and the first record in Westchester County. In January was the Brown Pelican seen by many in Yonkers and point north along the Hudson River up to the Tappan Zee. This pelican then made its way to Connecticut where it was rescued, taken to a rehabber for treatment and then actually flown to a Florida wildlife refuge. Then a Ferruginous Hawk showed up in Orange County this winter and drew birders from many states because this is another western species rarely seen east of the Mississippi. This was the first-ever sighting in New York. (See pictures of other local bird sightings on page 4.)

Be part of our eyes in the field this spring by getting outside on your own and/or joining one of our small-group bird walks. And don't forget our twice-monthly Bird Chats, our monthly public programs, or our Nature Book Club, all on Zoom. If you're not sure about a walk focused only on birds but would enjoy walking with a few other nature-lovers, try our second Saturday walks at Brinton Brook Sanctuary. These are led by SMRA Board Member Michael Madias, Jr. who knows Brinton Brook better than anyone – from the very interesting history of the property to where and when to find many of the native wildflowers that grow there. These walks are a great way to discover our largest sanctuary with no registration required. For all our events, see details and registration links in the calendar listings in this newsletter and on our website.

Valerie Lyle



Today, we do what we do and protect the lands in our sanctuaries because of the decisions of past generations to support our work to protect birds and their habitats, and connect people with nature. Please help make sure Saw Mill River Audubon is here for future generations by remembering us in your will or other estate plans.

Thank you.

Spring 2021 Events

COVID Precautions

Because of the ongoing pandemic, our spring public programs are on Zoom. For Zoom links and emailed reminders, visit: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register/

Our small-group birding field trips are by advance registration only also at: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register/

Our small-group field trips will have a max of 10 participants, masked and physically distanced, with an option of using one of our provided audio headsets to hear the walk leader and maintain distance. Sorry, no walk-ins.

If your preferred walk is full, be sure to register for the wait list for that walk since people's plans change & we have new openings each week.

We will follow the COVID safety guidelines found here: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/docs/SMRA-COVID-19-Trip-Guidelines.pdf

We may reduce walk size OR cancel walks depending on NYS COVID guidelines.

Second Saturday Walks Sat, 3/13, 4/10, 5/8

We are safely offering Second Saturday walks at Brinton Brook, starting 9:00 am and limited to the first 9 people. Wear masks and physically distance. Meet in main lot. If walk is full, enjoy a hike on your own. Walks typically last two hours. Rain or shine.

MARCH Public Programs

Tue 3/9 & 23, 7:00 pm
Bird Chat. See page 4.

Thu 3/11, 7:00 pm
Program: Learning Bird Song with Ted Stephenson
How do birds learn their songs and how can we learn bird songs? Program co-sponsored by all Westchester Audubon chapters.

Sat 3/13, 9:00 am
Second Saturday Walk
See details left.

Tue 3/16, 7:00 pm
Nature Book Club
We will be discussing Carl Safina's *Becoming Wild: How Animal Cultures Raise Families, Create Beauty, and Achieve Peace*. Email us for Zoom link: office@sawmillriveraudubon.org

Sat 3/20, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm
Third Sat Seed Pickup
Visit our website for details.

Wed 3/24, 7:00 pm
Program: A Visit with Carl Safina
The advantage of Zoom allows us this extraordinary opportunity to host renowned scientist/writer Carl Safina for a conversation! Join us.

MARCH Small-Group Birding *Meeting places shared with registered participants*

Mon 3/1, 8:00 am
Croton Point Park

Tue 3/9, 8:00 am
Rockefeller State Park Preserve

Mon 3/15, 8:00 am
Muscoot Farm

Sat 3/20, 8:00 am
Croton Point Park

Tue 3/30, 8:00 am
Edith Read Sanctuary

APRIL Public Programs

Sat 4/10, 9:00 am
Second Saturday Walk
See details left.

Tue 4/13 & 27, 7:00 pm
Bird Chat. See page 4.

Thu 4/15, 7:00 pm
Western Tales from an Eastern Birder
California transplant and SMRA board alum David McIntyre highlights CA birding hotspots & issues.

Sat 4/17, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm
Third Sat Seed Pickup
Visit our website for details.

APRIL Small-Group Birding *Meeting places shared with registered participants*

Mon 4/5, 8:00 am
Croton Point Park

Tue 4/13, 8:00 am
Rockefeller State Park Preserve

Mon 4/19, 8:00 am
Muscoot Farm

Sat 4/24, 8:00 am
Croton Point Park

Tue 4/27, 8:00 am
Marshlands Conservancy

Come on "Pop Up" Field Trips This Spring!

We hope to offer additional field trips this spring to regional hotspots without registration and little advance notice. No carpooling will be done. Masks and social distance mandatory.

We'll pick a meeting place and time and then send a notice on our "Pop Up Trips" email list, and simply meet there.

Be sure to subscribe to our "Pop Up Trips" list here: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/list/

MAY Public Programs

NOTE BIRD CHAT 1st and 3rd TUESDAYS THIS MONTH ONLY
Tue 5/4 & 18, 7:00 pm
Bird Chat. See page 4.

Sat 5/8, 9:00 am
Second Saturday Walk
See details left.

Tue 5/11, 7:00 pm
Nature Book Club
Discussing Nancy Ross Hugo's book *Seeing Trees*. Email office for link.

Wed 5/26, 7:00 pm
Program: Beauty and Diversity of Birds
See page 1.

MAY Small-Group Birding

Mon 5/3, 7:30 am
Croton Point Park

Thu 5/6, 7:30 am
Marshlands Conservancy

Sat 5/8, 7:03 am
Rockefeller St Pk Preserve

Tue 5/11, 7:30 am
Croton Point Park

Wed 5/19, 7:30 am
Muscoot Farm

Sun 5/23, 7:30 am
Croton Point Park

Thu 5/27, 7:30 am
Marshlands Conservancy

Birding 101 Zooms

Saw Mill River Audubon's Executive Director Anne Swaim is offering our Birding 101 program via Zoom this spring for area libraries. Visit the websites of libraries below for details and Zoom info.

Tue Mar 16, Yonkers Public Library
Thu Mar 25, Lewisboro Library, Bedford Library, Ruth Keeler Memorial Library
Thu Apr 8, Larchmont Public Library
Tue Apr 20, Avon Public Library (CT)
Wed Apr 28, Mount Kisco Library
Tue May 4, Harrison Public Library

Want to schedule one of our Zoom programs on various birding topics? Contact our office!

Winter Birds: Sightings & Pictures

As was predicted, winter birding in our area featured northern finches like Pine Siskins, Purple Finches and Evening Grosbeaks early in the season, and good numbers of Common Redpolls mid-winter with a few Hoary Redpolls mixed in. Usual winter visitors at Croton Point Park included Horned Larks, Snow Buntings, and Rough-legged Hawks, and the usual influx of over-wintering Bald Eagles. Photos from local birders shown below as submitted to www.eBird.org. To view in color, visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/news/.



Common Redpoll, first seen Jan 21 Croton Point Park. Photo: Karalyn Lamb



Spotted Sandpiper, Jan 4 Georges Island. Ginger Bernardin



Rusty Blackbird, Feb 4 Pruyv Sanctuary. Steve Rappaport



Eastern Meadowlark, Feb 10 Croton Point Park. Barbara Strobino



Merlin, Feb 8 Georges Island. Ginger Bernardin



Snow Bunting, Feb 11 Croton Point Park. Paul Clarke



Hooded Merganser eating crayfish Feb 10 Croton Reservoir. Karalyn Lamb



Bird Chat

2nd & 4th Tuesdays, 7:00 pm

Join local birders and photographers on Zoom for an informal gathering to share sightings and pictures, and discuss local birds and birding places. Stop by to listen and watch or join in the discussion. All welcome!

Our twice monthly Bird Chat will continue on 2nd and 4th Tuesday nights, 7:00 to 8:00 pm (except for May when we'll be on 1st and 3rd Tuesdays). The same Zoom link will work through August 2021. Visit our Bird Chat web page to learn more and register to get the Zoom link and emailed reminders of upcoming Chats: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/chat/

Over 70 local birders and bird photographers have been sharing sightings and photographs on Bird Chat and enjoying birding conversation with invited Chat guests.

People who attend the Bird Chat have a wide range of birding experience from very beginners to some of the leading birders in New York State. Come Bird Chat with us! All are welcome.



Nature Book Club
Tuesday, March 16
7:00 pm via Zoom
 come join in the discussion or come just to listen

email us in advance for Zoom link www.sawmillriveraudubon.org



Nature Book Club
Tuesday, May 11
7:00 pm via Zoom
 come join in the discussion or come just to listen

email us in advance for Zoom link www.sawmillriveraudubon.org

Nature Book Club

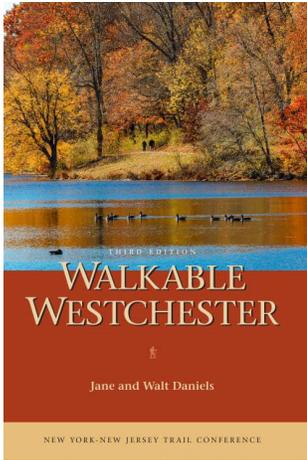
Email office@sawmillriveraudubon.org for Zoom info. Stop in just to listen or join in the discussions.



2021 Birding Quilt

We are delighted to present our 2021 Birding Quilt, "Owl de Lune," designed and quilted by SMRA Board Member Jean Sparacin.

This year's quilt measures 60 inches by 85 inches. See detailed views at our quilt web page where raffle tickets are now on sale: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/quilt/



Third Edition of *Walkable Westchester* Available

Congratulations to Jane and Walt Daniels on the early February release of the third edition of their excellent and detailed guidebook of places to explore in Westchester County. If you missed our Zoom talk with the Daniels in November describing their work on this third edition and all the updates, catch the video on our YouTube channel:

bit.ly/SMRA-YouTube

To order this book and support the work of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, visit www.nynjtc.org/books/walkable-westchester-walking-guide-westchester-county-ny

Or visit www.nynjtc.org and click on Support | Shop



Buy Bird Seed!

Our bird seed sale supports our local work to connect people with nature. Order online for contact free pick-up: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/seed/

Pruyn Gardens Through the Seasons

Once past the winter solstice on December 21, when our northern winter days begin getting longer, my thoughts immediately turn to spring. I begin reviewing my Pruy garden notes from last summer and planning garden improvements for the coming year. The plants are dormant but my gardener's mind is eagerly anticipating what some of my favorite native plants will be offering this coming growing season for birds, pollinators and other wildlife.

Spring: Common Blue Violet begins blooming by early spring between the still dormant meadow grasses, providing nectar for early bees and other pollinators. Its fresh green leaves offer early food for caterpillars of Great Spangled Fritillary.



Common Blue Violet. Photo: Donna Lassiter

(They have been overwintering among violet roots all winter.)

Dutchman's Breeches are in bloom too. Later they will make seeds with large fatty appendages called *elaiosomes* that ants will feed upon and disperse.

Summer: Time for everything that loves the high summer sun to bloom,

and time for warmth-loving butterflies to fly. Some of their favorite plants at Pruy are Spotted Joe Pye Weed, Garden Phlox, Orange Coneflower, Purple Coneflower and Mist Flower.



Purple Coneflower. Photo: Donna Lassiter

Bees are all over the flowering Mistflower and Mountain Mint. Hummingbirds are flying directly to the Coral Honeysuckle vine, their favorite nectar plant. May Apples in shady areas have made late summer apple-shaped fruit attracting Box Turtles who eat the fruit and spread the seeds. Various caterpillars are feeding among the leaves of many plants as they grow into butterflies and moths.

Fall: Native meadow grasses, including Big Bluestem, Panic Grass and Northern Sea Oats, have grown thick and tall and are packed with seeds for birds.



Northern Sea Oats. Photo: Donna Lassiter

Purple Cone Flowers have developed their dark seedheads where Goldfinches often perch and feed. The late season blooming Smooth Aster and Woodland Aster are in bloom and are the process of developing seeds, good for fall migrating birds.

Winter: Plants are dormant again but Rough-stemmed Goldenrod, Anise Hyssop and other hollow and pithy stemmed perennials are housing a new generation of bees. Seeds dropped to the ground are feeding many birds.



Anise Hyssop. Photo: www.garden.org

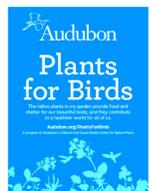
Can you help?

If you love our gardens, please volunteer. We meet weekly for gardening work sessions (properly masked and distanced). Contact the SMRA office if you can help at 914-666-6503 or email us at office@sawmillriveraudubon.org.

Donna Lassiter

Visit sawmillriveraudubon.org/gardens/ to learn more about wildlife benefits of native plants.

Discover additional plants that benefit birds at audubon.org/plantsforbirds





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Listen and look for pairs of Northern Cardinals singing where you live — among the earliest songbirds to sing. Photo with permission: tomwarrenphoto.wordpress.com

Connecting People and Nature since 1953

Explore Nature with Saw Mill River Audubon this Spring!

We have more than 20 events scheduled between March and May to connect you with local habitats, birds and other wildlife. Small group bird walks. Online public programs. Walks in our sanctuaries.

We connect people with nature!

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

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