



On the Wing

Fall 2008
Issue 310

News from Saw Mill River Audubon

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Support Audubon

Enjoy nature this Fall!

Audubon makes it easy with our great lineup of free nature events. See page 3 for details

Got Seed? We do!

Information on our annual Bird Seed Sale is at the right and in the enclosed flyer.



White-breasted nuthatches come to bird feeders in our area.
PGC Photo/Joe Kosack

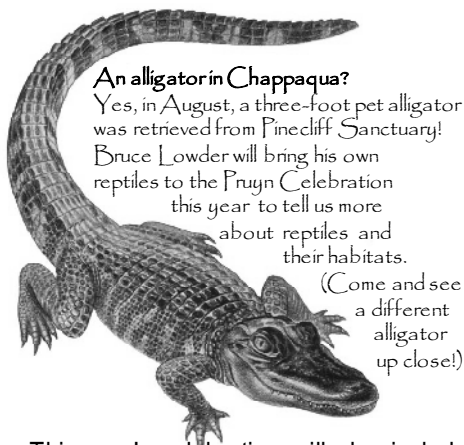
FALL EVENTS

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

2008 Pruyn Celebration

Sunday, October 19 ♦ 1:30 pm to 5:00 pm ♦ Pruyn Sanctuary, Chappaqua

Featuring Bruce Lowder and "Amazing Reptiles" live animal program



An alligator in Chappaqua?

Yes, in August, a three-foot pet alligator was retrieved from Pinecliff Sanctuary! Bruce Lowder will bring his own reptiles to the Pruyn Celebration this year to tell us more about reptiles and their habitats.

(Come and see a different alligator up close!)

Enjoy the colors of fall and join friends and neighbors for a fun afternoon outdoors at Saw Mill River Audubon's beautiful Pruyn Sanctuary in Chappaqua. The Pruyn Celebration is free and open to the public. Meet naturalist Bruce Lowder and his entourage of lizards, snakes, turtles, and a baby alligator, and learn how these fascinating reptiles have adapted to survive in their respective habitats.

Bruce will also offer animal safety tips and helpful information on caring for pets.

This year's celebration will also include garden and arboretum tours, guided walks, geocaching, a scavenger hunt for kids, and free refreshments and music. Visit our web site for more details and parking directions. **The raindate, including the reptile program, will be Sunday, October 26.**

42nd Annual BIRD SEED SALE

Saturday & Sunday, October 4 & 5
9:00 am–2:00 pm
New Castle Town Hall

Our annual bird seed sale offers you high-quality bird seed at bulk prices and supports our work to protect local habitats and wildlife. We renew our inventory each fall and offer convenient pickup at the parking lot behind New Castle Town Hall in Chappaqua on our October seed sale weekend.

Please see the blue seed sale flyer enclosed with this issue OR visit our web site for more information and to order online. Seed sales continue through the year from our office at Pruyn Sanctuary.

Little-Known Owls: Saw-whets

Friday, November 21 ♦ 7:30 pm
Rockefeller State Park Preserve



Photo: Trudy Battaly

Trudy Battaly and Drew Panko have been capturing and banding Saw-whet owls in our area for the past four years. These are the smallest owls found in New York state. Come and hear results of this study and how you can help. *Seating limited.* See listing on page 3 for more details and advance registration information.

Volunteers Needed

SMRA's annual Bird Seed Sale provides important support for our work protecting local habitats and wildlife. We invite you to join us as a volunteer for the sale on the weekend of October 4 and 5. It's always a fun time working together for a great cause with jobs for every energy and skill level.

Interested? Call Ellen in the Audubon office, 914.666.6503.

Lend a hand and support SMRA!



Photo: Michael Madias, Jr

Thank You Garden Volunteers!

The **Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden and Native Plant Arboretum** at **Pruyn Sanctuary** looked better than ever this summer. Participants on our August butterfly walk, led by Trudy Battaly and Drew Panko, identified many different butterflies. Without the hard work and dedication of our garden volunteers, this special place would not exist. So, to our garden crew of **Midge** and **Bill Arnold**, **Monica Doherty**, **Joanne McAuley**, **Tom McEnerney**, and **Pat Reber**, we extend our heartfelt thanks.

Welcome Members

Ardasley Susan Zeiger

Briarcliff Manor Mr. and Mrs. John A. Koenig

Chappaqua Mary Goldstein, Katherine Kehoe, Lawrence Laporta, Lawrence and Kathleen Lenihan, Allan and Carol Mayefsky, Diana Pillsbury, Guerrino Savio, Michael and Laura Strober

Cortlandt Manor Patricia Igthaler

Croton-on-Hudson Jeffrey Abrandt, Susan Calise, Andrew Fitch, Cynthia Fritz, Roy and Ann Lindau, Kathy Mohrman, Stanley Perlo, Gray Smith, Robert Stack

Dobbs Ferry Jean Desrosiers

Hartsdale Viola Tamoshunas

Millwood Kai and Inta Mortensen

Mohegan Lake Marge Schollmann

Montrose Elliot and Anne Sumers

Mount Kisco Arthur W. Green, Mr. and Mrs. Edward T. Melvin

Ossining Gail Cavanaugh, Benjamin Lichtenwalner, Faith Mazzarella

Peekskill Dawn Lawson, Jocelyn Rowan

Pelham Stephen May and Pamela Sloan

Pleasantville Dimitrios and Lana Flokas, Margaret Frey, Linda Leighton, James Santucci

Sleepy Hollow Mona Weiss

Tarrytown Frederic Mauhs

Thornwood Alex Lieberman

Valhalla Edward P. Griffiths, Terrance and Kerry Ann Sullivan

Yorktown Heights Patricia Peckham

A New Addition at Brinton Brook

On one of their walks through Brinton Brook Sanctuary, two local residents noticed that the pond-side bench had fallen into disrepair. They contacted our office and offered to fund its replacement. Our thanks to them for being such good neighbors. Their generous donation allows visitors to relax in comfort and enjoy this particularly beautiful spot in the sanctuary. Stop by and sit a spell to enjoy the view of Brinton Pond. They asked that their gift remain anonymous.



**Join us for
COSTA RICA BIRDING
IN MARCH!**

Sat March 14 to Sat March 21, 2009

Space limited to 10

Support sustainable ecotourism with this one week trip to key birding spots in Costa Rica. Led by experienced, local guides.

Support grassroots environmental work in Costa Rica and here in Westchester with this ConserVacation. Cost, including airfare, less than you expect! Find out how to reserve your spot by calling our office at 914.666.6503 or visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/CostaRica

We note with sadness the passing of **Peter Burckmyer** on January 25, 2008. Peter was a past president of Saw Mill River Audubon. He served on our board of directors from 1982 to 1991. Peter was passionate about open space preservation. In recent years he was actively involved with the Somers Land Trust. We extend our deepest sympathies to his family and friends.

For more details: 914.666.6503 or www.sawmillriveraudubon.org

SEPTEMBER

**Saturday, September 13 ♦ 9:00 am
Field Trip:**

**Pruyn Sanctuary
Through the Seasons**

Our second Saturday walks in the fall will focus on Pruyn Sanctuary. Join us for a monthly 1.5 hour walk. Dress for the weather. Rain or shine. Suitable for ages 4 and up. No pre-registration necessary. Free and open to the general public. Meet at the office and garden entrance at 275 Millwood Road, Chappaqua.

OCTOBER

**Saturday & Sunday, October 4 & 5
9:00 am to 2:00 pm each day
42nd Annual Bird Seed Sale**
See details in enclosed flyer.

EVENING WORKSHOP

Friday, October 10 ♦ 7:00 pm–8:30 pm

Raptors for Rookies

**Community Bible Church of
Northern Westchester**

This lively multimedia workshop will help you identify New York birds of prey such as hawks, eagles, falcons and owls. Good for beginners or for those wanting to brush up on their skills before our Hook Mountain field trip. (See October 13.) **Free but space will be limited. Pre-register by calling 914.666.6503 or send email to office@sawmillriveraudubon.org with number of persons registering and a contact phone or email.** Suitable for ages 10 and up.

Try out your hawk watching skills!

Attend our free raptors workshop (see above) and follow that up with our free field trip to a hawk migration counting station at Hook Mountain in Nyack held the following Monday, October 13.

OCTOBER

**Saturday, October 11 ♦ 9:00 am
Field Trip:**

**Pruyn Sanctuary
Through the Seasons**

See listing for September 13.



Red-tailed hawk

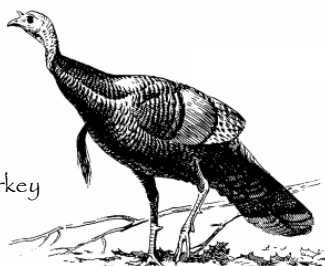
**Monday, October 13 ♦ 10:00 am
Columbus Day Holiday**

Field Trip: Hook Mtn. Hawks

Hook Mountain just north of Nyack offers eye-level views of migrating hawks and falcons and a spectacular 360° view of the lower Hudson Valley. Meet 10:00 am at Rockland Lake State Park, Nyack. Moderate thirty minute hike to the hawk watching station at the summit. Wear sturdy shoes and bring binoculars and water. You may also wish to bring lunch and stay longer. Please DO call our office, 914.666.6503, for free pre-registration so that we know whether to wait for you at the trail head OR meet you up top.

Sunday, October 19

**1:30 pm to 5:00 pm
Pruyn Sanctuary Celebration**
See details on page 1.



Wild Turkey

NOVEMBER

**Saturday, November 8 ♦ 9:00 am
Field Trip:**

**Pruyn Sanctuary
Through the Seasons**

See listing for September 13.

EVENING PROGRAM

Little-Known Owls: Saw-whets

**Friday, November 21 ♦ 7:30 pm
Rockefeller State Park Preserve**

For four years, Trudy Battaly and Drew Panko have been studying saw-whet owls though night capture and banding in Westchester County. Their banding data and more about their work may be viewed online at: www.battaly.com.

Seating will be limited and is by advance reservation only. FREE for members of Saw Mill River Audubon. Other adults and children 12 & up: \$5 each. Suggested for ages 12 & up. Register for this program through RSPP by calling 914-631-1470 ext 0.

This program will be held at the Rockefeller State Park Preserve visitor center on Route 117 between Pleasantville and Sleepy Hollow.

**Friday, November 28 ♦ 10:00 am
Field Trip: Turkey Mtn. Hike**

Come walk off your Thanksgiving feast with a moderate 1.5 hr hike on the trails atop Turkey Mountain in Yorktown. Bring binoculars and water. Call or email our office for free, pre-registration.

TAKE A WALK ON MONDAYS!

Explore a local nature site
each Monday morning
(weather permitting).

Call Joan Coffey: 914.747.4763

Why Invasive Plants Are a Problem

Anyone who has driven on the Saw Mill River Parkway—or on many other local roads—is familiar with the sight of roadside trees, shrubs, and other objects—living or not—completely smothered by exuberant vines. You feel that, if you slow down just a bit on the road, you too might be quickly swallowed up under waves of rampant growth. It's not just vines—sweeps of 10-foot-high Japanese knotweed, *Polygonum cuspidatum*, and of the common reed, *Phragmites australis*, an aggressive wetland species now advancing into dry ground as well, spring up along the roadside and through the smallest cracks in the pavement. These are impressive and sometimes frightening sights of plant vigor. But the relentless advance of invasive plants is a problem beyond aesthetics. Their spread pushes out native plants and animals, transforms whole habitats, and costs the nation millions of dollars annually in economic losses to the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries industries, and in the management of waterways.

Most people are aware of this growing problem, which is accelerating along with the spread of human development of the land. Many invasive plants are those that thrive in disturbed conditions: plants that can colonize roadsides, cleared land, and other byproducts of sprawl.

A number of invasive plants have also been shown to thrive in environments of increased carbon dioxide and are thus positioned to become increasingly robust in a warming climate. Lewis Ziska, a weed ecologist with the Agriculture Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), has shown that, in an atmosphere of enhanced carbon dioxide and heat, such as that in most urban settings, the result is domination by invasive weed trees of the most troublesome sort: ailanthus, Norway maples, and mulberries.

The definition of “invasive plant,” just as the definition of “weed,” is a subjective one. The term is often used casually for an aggressive plant growing where we would rather it not. However, the increased dominance of invasive plants through our fields, forests, and other landscapes, poses extreme challenges for conservation, for agriculture, and the health of our entire ecosystem.

Other than deploring the situation, what's one to do?

One step is to support local efforts to preserve open space, such as Saw Mill River Audubon does in its eight sanctuaries. These reserves limit land disturbance, allow native plants to survive and to re-establish themselves, and permit some parcels of land to maintain their vital ecosystem functions of cleaning our air and water. Another step is to not purchase invasive species for your



Photo: William Kelnner

Here, there and everywhere: *Phragmites australis* colonizes the shoreline of the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir in Manhattan's Central Park.

garden. A number of invasives found in local woodlands are escapees from home gardens, such as barberry. Better understanding the problem is another good step. A number of organizations offer further information and suggestions for what individuals can do. Here are some resources to consider:

☞ National Audubon Society's Audubon at Home program is an excellent place to start. See www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/InvasivePests.html for a useful explanation of the extent of the problem of what Audubon at Home prefers to call “exotic plant pests,” as well as for useful tips on what a backyard gardener can do and links to other related sites.

☞ The USDA has good information on invasive species, both plants and animals. Go to the National Invasive Species Information center at www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov

☞ The Natural Resources Conservation Service of the USDA has an excellent plant database with photographs, which can help you identify invasives: plants.usda.gov

☞ In New York State, the Invasive Plant Council of New York is a good resource. Among other things, it identifies target species of concern in our state. Visit www.ipcnys.org

☞ Another useful resource is Cornell University's Department of Natural Resources' Invasive Plants Program at invasiveplants.net

☞ The Cornell Cooperative Extension Program is also very helpful on the topic: www.cce.cornell.edu

Continues on page 5

Continued from page 4

☞ The U.S. Forest Service publishes a list of native alternatives to use in place of invasives: www.fs.fed.us/

☞ *Wildflower* magazine, published quarterly by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, provides information about the conservation and use of native plants. Visit www.wildflower.org/magazine/

☞ Closer to home, the Native Plant Center at Westchester Community College in Valhalla offers lectures, courses, and a demonstration garden of native plants. And the Saw Mill River Coalition, with which SMRA has partnered in the past, schedules periodic volunteer vine-cutting days along the Saw Mill River Parkway, see www.sawmillrivercoalition.org

Learning to identify plants, whether native or exotic, invasive or well-behaved, is another good step. *Wildflowers in the Field and Forest*, a recent book co-authored by Carol Gracie, a Board member of our neighboring Bedford Audubon Society and a research associate at The New York Botanical Garden, is an excellent pictorial guide—one that you can easily take with you into the field. It's available from *Amazon.com* and in many local bookstores.

Ironically, invasive plants' ability to thrive amid disturbance and stress in the environment may well be one of the qualities we need to breed into desirable plants. "Can Weeds Help Solve the Climate Crisis?", a recent article by Tom Christopher in *The New York Times Magazine* of June 29, 2008, addressed that very question. Invasive plants are a complex issue and may hold useful keys to managing a changing environment—if we learn quickly!



Photo: William Kellner

Closeup of Black swallow-wort showing seed pod.

Of course, not all invasive species are plants. Many are insects and other animals. Some are introduced exotics that run rampant once they are out of reach of their natural predators, but not all invasive species are exotics. Some are native species, such as White-tailed deer, whose population has exploded by taking advantage of habitat disturbances caused by humans. In turn, excessive deer browsing is depressing regeneration of native plants in our forests, impoverishing habitat for songbirds and other wildlife, and enabling invasive species to predominate.

Managing invasive plants requires taking a larger view than just looking at plants. We need to understand the interactions of all components of our ecosystem, including the actions of the ultimate invasive species, *Homo sapiens*. --George Shakespear



Mapping the Past

What did Manhattan Island look like when Henry Hudson sailed into New York Harbor and up the Hudson River in 1609? What trees, shrubs and flowers thrived before the colonists brought their European plants? What animals roamed the forests and wetlands? Where were the creeks, hills and ponds? Where did the Native Americans live and what were their environmental impacts? An innovative project at the Wildlife Conservation Society aims to answer these questions by making a detailed map of Manhattan Island on the eve of European settlement. Using the latest technologies in digital cartography and computer imaging, the goal of the *Mannahatta Project* is to create a virtual representation of the heart of New York City as it appeared 300 years ago. When complete, viewers of the map will be able to zoom in to any point on Manhattan and see a rendering of the scene in 1609. The Mannahatta Project gives us a thought-provoking look at the impacts of humans on the environment. For more information, go to www.wcs.org/sw-high_tech_tools/landscapeecology/mannahatta



Photo: William Kellner

Black swallow-wort, an invasive plant native to Europe, is spreading rapidly in our area. This stand is near the Cortlandt-Yorktown border

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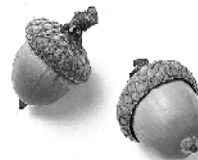
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PLANT THE SEED!

"The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn." Emerson

Your gift to Saw Mill River Audubon helps us encourage more people to enjoy the natural world and care about its protection.



When you give to our annual appeal, you can be confident that 100% of your donation supports our local education and conservation efforts.

I WISH TO DONATE

Enclosed is:

☐ \$500 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$100

☐ \$50 ☐ \$25 ☐ \$_____

☐ **My employer will match my gift.**

I'D LIKE TO JOIN Saw Mill River Audubon!

Basic Chapter Membership:

☐ **Enclosed is \$20**

☐ **Please send me information about
planned giving opportunities**

Name(s)

Address

City/State/Zip

Phone/Email

You can also join or donate at our web site!

Please make checks payable to
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Deadline for Next Newsletter: November 1

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