



SMRA

SAW MILL RIVER AUDUBON

Winter 2014-15



Blue Jay carrying acorn. Photo: Jeff Seneca



Jan Bass captured this image of a Savannah Sparrow at Croton Point in October.



Our October bird seed sale weekend was a great success thanks to our friendly and hard-working volunteers and our loyal customers! Photo: SMRA



Monday morning birders explore Marshlands Conservancy in October. Photo: William Kellner

Upcoming Events

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: Tarrytown Lakes OR Kingsland Point (check our Google calendar), 4th Mon: Croton Point 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 local winter birds & help count.

December

Friday, December 5: Birders U Workshop: Winter Waterfowl ID

Saturday, December 6: Birders U Field Trip

Thursday, December 11: Holiday Gathering & Members Best Photography

Saturday, December 13: Second Saturday Walk at Brinton Brook, Croton

Saturday, December 20: Peekskill Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 20: Third Saturday Seed Sale, Pruyn Sanctuary

Sunday, December 28: Bronx-Westchester Christmas Bird Count

January

Thursday, January 1: Rockwood Hall New Year's Day Walk

Saturday, January 3: Putnam Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, January 10: Croton Point Eagle Walk

Saturday, January 10: Second Saturday Walk at Brinton Brook, Croton

Saturday, January 10: Soup Lunch Gathering at Croton Point Nature Center

Saturday, January 17: Third Saturday Seed Sale, Pruyn Sanctuary

Saturday, January 17: Westchester County Waterfowl Count.

SAVE THE DATE: Saturday, February 7: Hudson River EagleFest!

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

Birding Notes

A Croton Point of View

Saturday, October 4.

Today is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, so I headed to my house of worship, Croton Point Park.

It was one of those magical mornings—overcast, windy, misty, spitting rain—not raining hard, but enough to wash off the stench of the work week (not sure about the sins of the year). It was also

damp enough to give one that needed alone-time -- no dog walkers or joggers.

The landfill at CPP is a hub for autumnal migrating sparrows, and why not? It looks like a giant sparrow; just that right camouflage of yellows and browns with a green-grey mixture thrown in, making it quite difficult to identify these LBJs (little brown jobs). I was able to pick out Field, Lincoln's, an immature

White-crowned, and a Swamp Sparrow. Beautiful Savannah Sparrows were also in abundance. Raptors also put on a good showing: Sharp-shinned and Red-tailed Hawks; an American Kestrel and Peregrine in the same field of view, making it easy to distinguish these two falcons; a few Osprey not yet migrated south; and several harriers scouring the landfill. It is a beautiful place for a fall walk (not to mention spring, summer or winter).

It started to rain much harder; cleansed, I headed home. *Larry Trachtenberg*

Book Review: The Art of Bird Finding

I've recently started going on Saw Mill River Audubon's Monday morning bird walks. This has opened up a whole new world for me. As a beginning birder, I've learned more than how to distinguish between different species (like the White-throated Sparrows and White-crowned Sparrows we spotted one day).

What the more experienced birders who participate in these walks are teaching me is how to find birds—any birds—in the first place. Birds that eluded me on solitary walks on these same trails have been there to be seen (or heard) on Monday mornings.

The tips and tricks my fellow walkers seem to innately know are summarized in *The Art of Bird Finding* by Pete Dunne.

Saw Mill River Audubon

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Barred Owl, Croton Point.

Photo: Jim Bourdon

continued on page 4

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Look for Hooded Mergansers in local ponds & lakes.



Education

Scholarships Available

Saw Mill River Audubon offers scholarships for youth age 14-17 to attend a summer camp focused on the environment. Awards are based on interest shown in the environment through school work or volunteer work. Start planning for next summer! Applications: sawmillriveraudubon.org.

Birders U

Our next seasonal birding workshop is Friday, December 5, 7:00-8:00pm at the Croton Point County Park Nature Center. The topic is identification of winter waterfowl. The cost is \$20 for members of any Audubon group and includes an illustrated field guide to eastern waterfowl.

For nonmembers, the cost is \$30/person which includes a new membership in Saw Mill River Audubon. We will follow up the evening workshop with an exclusive morning field trip to try out your new ID skills. Space limited. Call us at 914-666-6503 or email us at the SMRA office to reserve your space.



Sanctuaries

New Bridge At Pruyn

Thanks to a grant from the Camp Fire Conservation Fund, we have a new bridge at Pruyn Sanctuary on the Seven Bridges Trail. This bridge provides a better access across an intermittent stream for our neighbors on Seven Bridges Road.

Trees for Tribes Report

Over 40 new native trees and shrubs were planted in the understory of Brinton Brook Sanctuary on October 18. Our thanks to all our volunteers who came out to help. Our volunteers are continuing to remove invasive vines and shrubs to improve wildlife habitat.

Tree Removal Thanks

Our thanks to Westchester Tree Life for their generous donation of the cost of a necessary tree removal at Pruyn Sanctuary. We appreciate this company's reputation for tree work that is ecologically sound and sensitive to wildlife.



Advocacy

Advocacy Committee

Saw Mill River Audubon's Advocacy Committee met this past month to consider how we can best add our support and help publicize the wide range of environmental issues facing our region. **Please see Richard Saravay's article on page 5** to learn how New York Audubon

chapters and our state office work together. We welcome your comments and involvement as we work to prioritize our advocacy efforts for 2015. Do you have connections with local government that would help us in our local advocacy work? We welcome your input on how we can better serve our communities.

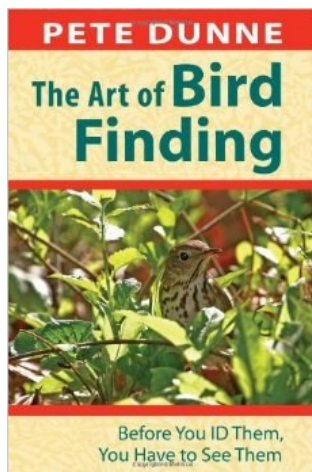
Get Connected!

We encourage all readers of this newsletter to get connected with Audubon New York and National Audubon through the Audubon Action online center. Visit <http://policy.audubon.org/take-action> to get the latest issue updates and to add your voice with ours.

Birding Notes

Book Review: **The Art of Bird Finding** *Continued from page 2*

This fine little book is not a field guide. It is, rather, a guide to using your eyes and ears in the field in new ways—to see and hear what you missed before—to, as Dunne says, open your heart to the experience of finding birds.



The Art of Bird Finding,
Peter Dunne.
Stackpole Books, 2012

The Art of Bird Finding explains, for example: the meteorological conditions that concentrate birds; what constitutes bird-friendly habitat; and how to use flocking behavior to increase your species count. There are brief sections on seeing more on hawk watches and pelagic (ocean) birding trips.

Sharply written, *The Art of Bird Finding* is an enjoyable, often humorous, read. Dunne, an accomplished birder with more than 50 years' experience, engages

the reader in an informal conversation that will help any birder, especially a beginner like me, "to become more attuned to the natural world and develop a level of intimacy" with it.

So, join us on our Monday morning bird walks and read *The Art of Bird Finding*. Both will open up new worlds for you.

Reviewed by William Kellner

Hawking On Hook *First time at a hawk watch*

Two Broad-winged Hawks soared along the eastern side of the mountain, then around to the south. They reached such a height that we had to shield our eyes from the mid-morning sun.

Sixteen of us stood on the bare rocks, scanning with binoculars and scopes. The sky was mostly clear, an intangible blue. Small clouds took shape all around us; a weak haze grayed the towns beneath. Due south, the Tappan-Zee Bridge spanned the Hudson River.

About half-an-hour later, we noticed a string of broad-wings soaring to the south-east. Some went in twos or threes; others flew individually. How I wished I owned a scope! The broad-wings were practically dots; against the blue, they vanished. Then they reappeared, in full silhouette, as they flew in front of the clouds, a relief for everyone.

To our excitement, to the right of the cumulus clouds, the broad-wings formed a kettle. It took the form of a broad tornado filled with scattered, methodically floating leaves, with each raptor soaring at its own pace. I didn't bother counting how many there were myself – I'd never seen such a high concentration in one spot, and they kept *moving*.

I had to look away for my neck's sake. I can't remember exactly how long the kettle lasted, or when it finally dispersed.

No more kettles after that, but our hawk watching wasn't any less enjoyable. A few more broad-wings flew by in twos or threes. Also passing were Red-tailed Hawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, several Ospreys, one Cooper's Hawk, and a couple of young Bald Eagles (whose plumage was mostly brown with white patches).

One of the birders with a scope spotted a Peregrine Falcon. I scanned for it carefully. Blue. Still blue sky. I heard everyone else exclaiming, "Found it!" Frustrated, I lightly cursed at the peregrine.

Turkey and Black Vultures glided around the side of the mountain. Imposing, darkly elegant, their wingspans are nearly that of Bald Eagles. Never had we seen them so closely. During the lulls, I sometimes kept my eye on the



Photo of a Broad-winged Hawk,
courtesy of Steve Sachs.
www.facebook.com/pages/Steve-Sachs-Photography/117329904967633

owl decoy placed near the rocks on which we stood. Finally, after half of our group had departed, a sharpie – an accipiter smaller than a crow and certainly smaller than that owl – went for the attack. But, in a flash, it realized its enemy was a fake and it flew away.

A moment later, the owl attracted two red-tails. They circled less than twenty-feet above our heads. I could see individual feathers on their breasts, dark streaks on soft white.

After two-and-a-half hours, I had to leave. Before I reached the trail that took me into the woods, I caught a glimpse of a Turkey Vulture soaring down the mountain. It swiftly disappeared behind the trees. *Sarah Hansen*

Excerpted from
sarahsbirding.wordpress.com/



SMRA is part of a wider Audubon family. The 27-New York chapters meet biannually at the New York Audubon Council to help local chapters consider current science and pending legislation and develop strategies to educate, advocate and conserve our shared natural resources.

This fall the Council met at the Jamestown chapter in the beautiful Allegheny Plateau in the far reaches of western New York. While we enjoyed good birding with fall migrants like ducks, gulls, grebes and loons, we

Advocacy: Audubon's Broader Reach

also had important indoor workshops on advocacy and habitat conservation.

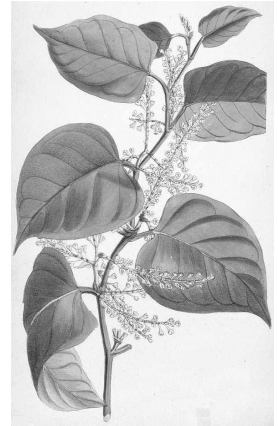
Of the 21 Policy Resolutions for 2015, three focused on key priorities:

- Actions on climate change based on Audubon's recently-published *Birds and Climate Change* report;
- Conservation of the Hudson Highlands, Sterling Forest and the Great Swamp in Putnam County; and
- Promotion of responsibly sited wind power and biofuel programs.

One workshop was about effective strategies for eradication and mitigation of invasive plants and animals in New York.

Invasive plant species considered included Japanese Knotweed, rampant in our area, and Asian Water Chestnut, which is a scourge in ponds and wetlands in western New York.

SMRA board member Karalyn Lamb and John Phillips, Naturalist at Croton Point, will be experimenting on knotweed control techniques at Croton Point Park over the next few years.



Japanese Knotweed is one of several introduced and invasive species targeted for control for healthier habitats.

Look for ongoing updates about how Audubon is an advocate for birds, other wildlife and their habitats in future newsletters and on our website; contact us through the SMRA office if you want to learn more or get involved in our chapter's advocacy work.

Richard Saraway

Learn about Audubon
New York's Conservation
Policy Resolutions at:
ny.audubon.org



Last month, Saw Mill River Audubon co-sponsored a public program with the Town of New Castle's Coyote Awareness and Safety Advisory Committee. New Castle is the town where Saw Mill River Audubon has

Education: Being Wily About Coyotes

five of our eight protected wildlife sanctuaries so we have been closely monitoring the comments and actions of town officials regarding coyotes. This past summer, the Town of New Castle has established not one, but two advisory committees about coyotes.

Although coyotes have been present in our area for decades, new human residents in our area are

less familiar with strategies needed to live alongside the wildlife of wooded northern Westchester.

Residents in the western United States have experiences to share with us. Trapping has been shown to increase human-coyote conflict because new coyotes will move into empty territories to replace the coyotes trapped. These are typically coyotes more likely to take risks and

test human-coyote boundaries. A more sustainable solution is to take simple, effective steps to discourage coyotes from close human contact.

You can learn about these solutions and share them with your neighbors by viewing and sharing the online video from our October public program: new.livestream.com/nccmc/events/3516363



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*Look for Purple Finches visiting area feeders
in larger numbers this fall and winter. Photo: USFWS*

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*Exploring the trails at Muscoot Farm during our 1st Monday bird
walk in October. Photo: SMRA/William Kellner*

What fueled our October seed sale weekend?

Special thanks to **Pizza Station in Chappaqua** for donated pizzas to feed our volunteers. Special thanks also to **Starbucks Coffee in Chappaqua** for donated coffee, much welcomed on a cold and rainy Saturday!

Birding for Fun & Science!

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the birds they see at their feeders from November through early April and send their counts to Project FeederWatch. This data help scientists track broad scale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Learn more and sign up to participate by visiting: feederwatch.org.

Christmas Bird Counts

The 115th Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count will take place Dec 14, 2014 to January 5, 2015. This is the longest-running Citizen Science project in the world. Christmas Bird Counts provide critical data on population trends. Tens of thousands of participants know that it is also a lot of fun. Volunteers count both number of species and individual numbers of birds in more than 2,300 count circles across the Americas. See our calendar for local counts. Learn more and see data at: birds.audubon.org.