



*Northern Harrier
at Croton Point.
Photo: Jeffery Seneca*



Small-group guided bird walk at Rockefeller State Park Preserve in November. Photo: Anne Swaim

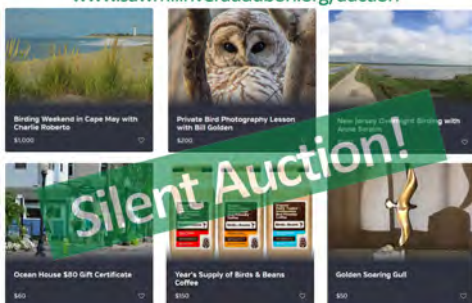
Upcoming Events

COVID SAFETY: Through this winter we will still be offering our public programs online via Zoom. Most of our bird walks will be limited to 10 or 20 people by registration and with vaccinations required to attend. We will also offer some open walks with no registration required as we did pre-pandemic and to see how that goes. Our field trip details and registration are online at www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips

Winter Public Programs—See Page 3 for Bird Walks.

For more detail and Zoom registration for any of the public programs below, visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs

www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/auction



Our first-ever Silent Auction is continuing online until our December 16 program. Jump online to see the special birding experiences and items donated to raise funds for our local conservation work: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/auction



Kevin McGrath and Louisa Gagliardi seen chasing birds for our 2021 Fall Birdathon. See story page 5. Photo: Ginger Bernardin

Thursday, December 16, 7:00 pm via Zoom

Best Nature Photography by Members and Friends

We are holding our annual Members Best program online this year again. (We'll miss our usual sharing of holiday desserts and, especially, seeing everyone in person.) Come enjoy a program of nature photography and stories about the pictures. We invite members and friends of Saw Mill River Audubon to share 3–6 photos—taken in the past year—of birds, other wildlife, or habitats. Visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/members-best for details and to submit photographs to be reviewed for program display. Deadline to add photos is December 14.

Thursday, January 27, 7:00 pm via Zoom

Migration from a Bird's Eye View: Benjamin Van Doren

Benjamin Van Doren studies global bird migration across scales, from individuals to continents, and his work spans ecology, evolution, behavior and conservation. In this talk, he will explore how migratory birds respond to changing environments—including the influences of light pollution, bird feeding, and warming temperatures. Benjamin began birding as a teen among the Audubon chapters of Westchester County, and is currently a Postdoctoral Associate at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This program is co-sponsored by all five Westchester County Audubon chapters: Bedford, Bronx River-Sound Shore, Central Westchester, Hudson River Audubon, and Saw Mill River Audubon.

Thursday, February 24, 7:00 pm via Zoom

The Challenges Birds Face and How Our Yards Can Help: Becca Rodomsky-Bish, Cornell Lab of Ornithology

What differences can we make in our yards or on any property in our communities that we might influence to help birds? We have invited Becca Rodomsky-Bish, a Project Leader for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, to visit us via Zoom to share images and ideas on this topic.

Thursday, March 10, 7:00 pm via Zoom

A Tale of Many Penguins: Ardith Bondi

Dr. Bondi's presentation will show and discuss the different species of penguins, how they live, and her experiences observing and photographing them in the wild. She will describe efforts being made to conserve them.

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

President's Message

Saw Mill River Audubon's board members met in an August retreat to plan 2022 projects and activities. The result was an exciting and ambitious mix of ongoing work and new ideas for the coming year, all volunteer planned and led.

Our **Advocacy Committee** will delve further into the topic of solar siting in 2022, studying native planting plans on solar sites with the thought of a public program on this topic in 2022. See page 4 for our position on solar siting. We will continue to monitor area proposals for solar energy sites, commenting as needed to encourage environmental review with a focus on preventing adverse impacts on birds and other wildlife. We also plan to research sustainable and green practices for corporate campuses including more wildlife-friendly planting. Plastics recycling may also be a program focus. Also see the article on page 4 about the need to ban dangerous neonics pesticides.

Our **Education Committee** plans to expand the youth and family walks that we began in 2021, with a focus on reaching a more diverse group of participants. The committee may also develop new activities and programs especially for local Girl Scout troops. Contact us to learn more.

As in past years, our **Sanctuaries Committee** will hold volunteer workdays to remove invasive plants and plant native species. A new project this year will be reviewing the existing sanctuary forest plans with an eye to climate resiliency and how our sanctuaries might be managed to assist birds, insects, and other wildlife that may move north into our region because of rising temperatures.

Saw Mill River Audubon

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One sanctuary project that came out of the retreat has already received Con Edison grant funding: installing a live feeder-cam at Pruyne Sanctuary! See page 5 for details.



Valerie Lyle, SMRA President

The **Fundraising Committee**—responsible for our Fall Birdathon and our annual bird calendar—plans to add a family-oriented outdoor program this summer. Our third Saturday seed sale, which runs from October through April, continues this year as well. See page 5 for a report on our 2021 Birdathon.

Our **Garden Committee** plans to install improved signage in the Pruyne gardens, improving the educational value of the gardens. Several garden workdays are planned for spring cleanup and for planting annuals to add to the perennials in the Butterfly & Hummingbird Garden. The Garden Committee members also meet regularly during the growing season to weed and do other maintenance. See article below about our outgoing Garden Chair Donna Lassiter.

If you would like to join us in any of this work—whether as a member of a committee, contributing your physical labor in a garden or at a sanctuary workday, volunteering at a Saturday seed sale, or helping to research, plan, or coordinate a project—please contact our office or use our online volunteer form here: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/volunteer. We are a friendly and fun community and would love your input and help in bringing new programs to the public as we maintain and improve natural habitats for the benefit of birds, other wildlife and people.

Valerie Lyle

Thank You, Donna Lassiter!

Saw Mill River Audubon's longtime garden coordinator and board member retired from both positions in September. During her 12 years leading our garden volunteers at Pruyne Sanctuary, Donna Lassiter transformed the Butterfly & Hummingbird Garden into a native-plant pollinator magnet and created the beautiful Demonstration Meadow Garden that provides year-round food and shelter for birds and other wildlife. Both gardens have also become places for sanctuary visitors to see and learn about native plants.

Donna also researched and documented the plants in the gardens and the surrounding arboretum, including their cultivation requirements, seasons of bloom, and wildlife and pollinator benefits. This information, with plant photos, can be found on the Pruyne Gardens page of our website: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/gardens

Valerie Lyle

Winter 2021–2022 Events

FOR PROGRAM INFO

sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs

FOR FIELD TRIP INFO

sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips

DECEMBER

Public Programs

Tue 12/14, 7:00 pm
Bird Chat. No chat 12/28.
sawmillriveraudubon.org/chat for details & Zoom link

Thu 12/16, 7:00 pm
Program: Members Best
See more on page 1.

Christmas Bird Counts
SMRA birders participate in the CBCs listed below. The CBC is a 122-year-old tradition of winter bird counts in 14-mile-diameter circles. Contact us to connect with count coordinators and help.

Sat 12/18: Peekskill
Sun 12/19: Greenwich–Stamford
Sun 12/26: Bronx–Westchester
Sun 1/2: Putnam

DECEMBER

Small-group Birding

Sat 12/4, 8:00 am
Rockefeller State Park Preserve (20 max)
Mon 12/6, 8:00 am
Muscoot Farm (20 max)
Sun 12/12, 8:00 am
Croton Point (20 max)

Mon 12/13, 8:00 am
Edith Read (20 max)
Wed 12/29, 8:00 am
Croton Point (No max)
OPEN WALK

No registration is needed for Open Walks and see website calendar for meeting location.

JANUARY

Public Programs

Tue 1/11 & 25, 7:00 pm
Bird Chat. See Tue 12/14.

Tue 1/18, 7:00 pm
Nature Book Club
We will be discussing Jennifer Ackerman’s *Birds by the Shore*. See website for details.

Thu 1/27, 7:00 pm
Program: *Migration from a Bird’s Eye View*
Benjamin Van Doren
See more on page 1.

SPECIAL EVENT

First Day Hike
Sat 1/1, 9:00 am

No walk-ins. Register at sawmillriveraudubon.org/firstday

JANUARY

Small-group Birding

Mon 1/3, 8:00 am
Muscoot Farm (20 max)
Sun 1/9, 8:00 am
Croton Point (20 max)
Wed 1/12, 8:00 am
OPEN WALK
Rockefeller State Park Preserve (No max)
See 12/29 for more info.

Wed 1/19, 8:00 am
Croton Point (10 max)
Mon 1/24, 8:00 am
Edith Read (10 max)
Sun 1/30, 8:00 am
Rockefeller State Park Preserve (20 max)

FEBRUARY

Public Programs

Tue 2/8 & 22, 7:00 pm
Bird Chat. See Tue 12/14.

Thu 2/24, 7:00 pm
Program: *How Our Backyards Can Help Birds*
Becca Rodomsky-Bish
See more on page 1.

FEBRUARY

Small-group Birding

Sat 2/5, 8:00 am
Croton Point (20 max)
Mon 2/7, 8:00 am
Muscoot Farm (20 max)
Fri 2/11, 8:00 am
Croton Point (No max)
OPEN WALK
See website for mtg place.

Sun 2/13, 8:00 am
Rockefeller State Park Preserve (20 max)

Sat 2/19, 8:00 am
Edith Read (20 max)

Wed 2/23, 8:00 am
Rockefeller State Park Preserve (10 max)

Mon 2/28, 8:00 am
Edith Read Sanctuary
*** OPEN WALK*** See 12/29

SPECIAL EVENT

Reception: Joy of Birds
Sun 2/6, 3:00–4:00 pm
Hendrick Hudson Library
Join us we celebrate the “Joy of Birds” photography exhibit on display February 1 to 28, featuring the work of local photographers.

January-February-March Project



Feeder Watch

Every Saturday and Sunday, Jan.–Mar., 9:00–11:00 am at the Croton Point Park office feeders, come watch, ID and count birds. No registration needed. Bring a chair. Dress warmly.

Second Saturday Walks

Sat, 12/11, 1/8, 2/12, 3/12 at Brinton Brook Sanctuary Meet 9:00 am in main lot. Walk typically lasts two hours. Rain, snow, or shine but check website if difficult roads. For adults and youth ages 8 and up.

2022 Bird Quilt!



Our 2022 Quilt is entitled “Birds at the Feeder.” This 47-inch by 63-inch lap quilt, pieced by Patricia Loquet and machine quilted by Missouri Star Quilt Company, has been made in a twist and turn pattern. Charming northeast birds, feeders and bird houses populate the quilt, and the quilting stitches are all plump little birds. Guaranteed to keep you warm in winter with thoughts of spring. This quilt will be raffled off in support of the local conservation work of Saw Mill River Audubon with the winner announced at our April 10th annual dinner.

To see more quilt views and to purchase raffle tickets, visit: sawmillriveraudubon.org/quilt

Support SMRA & Enjoy Birds

1. Invite bird guests with our **bird seed**. Use online ordering and get contact-free pickup on your date of choice at Pruyin Sanctuary: sawmillriveraudubon.org/seed ****PLUS** 3rd Saturday Seed Sales** with volunteers to help load your car on these dates: 12/18, 1/15, 2/19, 3/19 9:30 am–12:30 pm
2. Enjoy New York birds all year with our **bird calendar!** sawmillriveraudubon.org/calendar



Learn About Neonics & Take Action

New York may become the first U.S. state to regulate neonicotinoids

(“neonics”), a pesticide once hailed as agriculture’s best hope but now recognized to pose severe threats to wildlife, especially bees and birds.

Created to mimic the effect of nicotine on insect nervous systems (but be relatively nontoxic to vertebrates), these chemicals are often used in the form of seed coatings, especially of corn and soybean. Some applications are beneficial: they are used to control the hemlock-killing woolly adelgid (through trunk injections) and are extremely effective in orchards.

Neonicotinoids have most notoriously been implicated in honeybee colony collapse but are equally dangerous to native bees.

Recent studies have also strongly implicated neonics in bird population declines. A 2013 literature review by the American Bird Conservancy found ubiquitous neonics “can emaciate the birds, impair reproduction, and disrupt their migratory pathways” by significantly reducing insect food sources. Other studies have found possible direct health problems in birds and mammals who have inadvertently consumed the chemicals.

Highly water soluble, these chemicals spread to all parts of a plant and are now found throughout our environment, distributed through seed spillage, leached into soil and waterways, and blown into the air. They are found in many of our foods (a 2015 study

found them in 90 percent of food samples from Congressional dining halls), and threats to human health are suspected.

Fortunately, public education about the dangers of neonics has had an impact.

As a result of bad publicity, Home Depot and Lowe’s have discontinued their use in almost all plants for sale. Keep reading plant labels to be sure.

The proposed law, called the “Birds and Bees Protection Act,” (A7429/S699B), passed the state Senate this past June but stalled in committee in the Assembly. This bill would

- claim the state’s ability to regulate pesticide seed coatings: planting coated seeds is not now considered “pesticide use.”

- by July 1, 2023, ban the use on outdoor ornamental plants and turf of the five neonics under consideration (unless state authorities determine they are needed to control invasive species);

- by Jan. 1, 2024, ban the sale, distribution, or purchase of corn, soybean, or wheat seeds treated with these chemicals (with exceptions); and

- by Jan. 1, 2023, require the state Department of Environmental Conservation to conduct a study to identify alternatives to the use of these pesticides.

Take action by not buying neonics and by contacting your state Senators and Assembly members: act.audubon.org/a/ban-neonics

Jennifer Stern

SMRA Position on Solar Siting

With the price of solar panels coming down and demand for clean energy climbing, local municipalities are finding themselves challenged by proposals to build solar farms on a variety of Westchester properties. For SMRA, many of these proposed projects pose a difficult choice: between increasing the supply of clean photovoltaic electricity and protecting the small amounts of bird habitat remaining in our densely settled county.

One current proposal of concern is for a solar farm on fifteen acres of mature forest in Croton.

The Hudson National Golf Club is planning to subdivide the land and lease it to a solar farm company. Much of the property is wooded and steeply sloped. Constructing solar arrays on about half of the site would require the removal of 581 trees, including 400 that are more than eight inches in diameter. A project like this should have a full Environmental Impact Statement, but at the time of this newsletter it is uncertain whether the Village Board will require this.

SMRA has drafted a statement on the siting of solar farms. It is based on our knowledge and understanding to date, to be updated or expanded as we learn more about the tradeoffs necessary to increase the supply of clean energy.

We advocate the use of existing infrastructure

rather than allowing loss of existing wildlife habitat and community open spaces.

We are especially concerned about projects proposed for forested areas, given trees’ contributions to carbon sequestration, biodiversity, prevention of heat island effects, and other environmental benefits.

Priorities for solar sites should be:

- existing buildings and impervious surfaces, including flat roofs and canopies over parking lots (the new installation atop the Croton DPW building is an example), and
- previously disturbed areas such as abandoned shopping malls, closed landfills, and contaminated “brownfields.”

In addition, we want to advocate for solar sites to be planted with native perennials and grasses rather than having sterile lawns or gravel substrate. This management approach benefits pollinators, birds, and other wildlife, reduces the need for herbicides, and requires less overall maintenance.

For those interested in learning more about this issue, Scenic Hudson has a 2018 report, “Clean Energy, Clean Communities: A Guide to Siting Renewable Energy in the Hudson Valley,” that weighs many of the considerations involved in siting solar farms. Here is a shortcut link to that Scenic Hudson report: sawmillriveraudubon.org/scenic-hudson-renewable-siting

*Tom Ruth, VP & Chair
SMRA Advocacy Committee*

Live from Pruyn Sanctuary!



Screenshot of FeederCam at Cornell's Sapsucker Woods.

Thanks to a grant funded by Con Edison, SMRA is in the process of assembling a livestream feeder camera at Pruyn Sanctuary!

A high-resolution camera, like the ones Cornell uses for their own streaming feeds, will be installed and pointed at a private feeder area in Pruyn Sanctuary. In addition, an external microphone will be installed so the birds can be heard as well.

The live video feed will be made available on our YouTube channel. Stay tuned to sawmillriveraudubon.org for the link once we go live.

In addition to anyone in the world being able to see which birds are visiting Pruyn Sanctuary, SMRA intends to utilize the livestream in virtual classroom lessons and other educational programs.

Steve Rappaport

Scouts at Work in Pruyn



On October 29, six Boy Scouts from Chappaqua Troop 2 planted some 20 native trees and shrubs and scattered more than 100 varieties of wildflower seeds in SMRA's Pruyn Sanctuary. They focused their efforts inside the sanctuary's "deer enclosure," a fenced area that protects new plants from foraging deer, allowing for a more robust understory to emerge over time.

Among the plantings were anise hyssop, two species of purple coneflower, native grasses, obedient plant, woodland sunflower, cranberry viburnum, and white dogwood and hazelnut trees. In the process, the scouts were excited to uncover a hibernating garter snake and an abundance of large beetle grubs, likely June bug larvae.

The scouts are all in the same 8th grade patrol from Seven Bridges School.

David Watson

The Great Fall Birdathon 2021

The weekend of October 8–10 was an amazing opportunity for a friendly birding competition. The weather was very nice on Friday, but Saturday was quite cloudy and windy most of the day. However, that didn't stop the Third Annual SMRA Fall Birdathon from being a huge success.

Six teams birded in Westchester, Putnam, and Dutchess counties with 125 different species and 7,166 total birds seen for the weekend. There was steep competition in the highest county count, with five teams entered. "Quick 3 Beers"—Kyle Bardwell and Sean Camillieri—birded in Putnam County and came out on top this year with 91 species. The "Big Sit" category had a good team as well. The "Stool Pigeons," comprised of Bonnie Coe, Kara Mason, Hank Weber, Valerie Lyle, and Avril Armstrong, birded from seats by the Croton Point Park office. From this perch, they were able to count 32 species with a total of 333 birds. See all 2021 Birdathon details at our results page with thanks to our compiler Jacques van Zyl: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/birdathon/results

This was another fun Birdathon creating new birding memories with good friends. My thanks to all who donated their time and money. All Birdathon proceeds benefit SMRA. We hope for more friendly competition in 2022!

Louisa Gagliardi, SMRA Birdathon Coordinator

In Memoriam

The Board of Directors of Saw Mill River Audubon is sad to acknowledge two losses from our community. Former Board member Joanne McAuley passed away in August. Chapter member John Salmon died in late October.

Joanne served on our Board for 12 years, helping to organize numerous events and serving as board secretary for a number of years. She enjoyed traveling with Saw Mill River Audubon on our extended trips.

John was an active member of our local birding community and of Saw Mill River Audubon. His wife, Lynn, is a SMRA board member, and they have birded and traveled extensively with our community.

If you wish to do so, memorial donations are welcome: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/memorial.

We will miss both Joanne and John at our events and in our Audubon community. May their memories be a blessing and a comfort to all who join us in honoring their too-short time with us.



275 Millwood Road
Chappaqua, New York 10514
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Portrait of a Red-tailed Hawk by Rebecca Bell.
One of the many New York birds featured in our
2022 New York Birds calendar. See more online:
www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/calendar

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Connecting People and Nature Since 1953

Explore Nature with Saw Mill River Audubon this Winter!

We have more than 30 events scheduled between December and February to connect you with local habitats, birds and other wildlife.

Small-group bird walks. Online programs. Sanctuary walks. **We connect people with nature!**

Save the Date! Sunday, April 10, 2022
We have reserved this date at Crabtree's Kittle House in Chappaqua for our 2022 spring dinner and annual meeting. Save the date. Details to come in early 2022.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Our thanks to Pizza Station in Chappaqua for feeding our seed sale volunteers with a delicious pizza donation. *Molte grazie!*

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

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