



Winter 2022–2023



*Rough-legged Hawk,
Croton Point Park,
January 2014.
In memoriam for
Photographer Jeff Seneca.*

Winter Highlights All events on Page 3



Our free bird walks continue through the winter. Birders seen here at Muscoot Farm on December 6. See page 3 for our winter walks. Photo: Anne Swaim



Birders at the end of a continent! SMRA travelers at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa in November. See story page 5. Photo: Anne Swaim



Saw Mill River Audubon board members have been visiting all of our sanctuary trails this fall. See story on page 6. Pictured here are SMRA board members (L to R in back) Erik Andersen, Phil Heidelberger and Michael Madias Jr. with (L to R in front) Executive Director Anne Swaim and Board President Val Lyle at Brinton Brook in September.

For winter programs, we have a variety of Zoom programs queued up and a very special in-person event planned at the Jacob Burns Film Center in partnership with Films on Purpose. See below and page 3. To register and get Zoom links visit: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs. Local birding field trips continue January through March and are also on page 3. Visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips

Monday, January 9, 7:00 pm
***Wings Over Water* Special 3D Re-Screening**
Jacob Burns Film Center, Pleasantville
Ticket info: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs

Wings Over Water shows epic journeys by three amazing bird species—the Sandhill Crane, the Yellow Warbler and the Mallard—with extraordinary footage of their fascinating behaviors. Audiences will be captivated by the triumphs and challenges of these remarkable creatures that defy all odds and soar across mountains, deserts, cities and forests as they head home to raise their young. Presented in 3D with 45 minutes running time and followed by a discussion with filmmaker Susan Todd and SMRA Executive Director Anne Swaim. Organized by Films on Purpose, www.filmsonpurpose.org. Co-sponsored by all five Westchester Audubon chapters. The film trailer is on YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/4zrxUYEdy44>

Thursday, February 16, 7:00 pm
Zoom Webinar: Does Your House Kill Birds?
Get Zoom link: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs

It is a sad fact that the same homes that are our refuges can be deadly to our feathered friends. Each year, bird-window strikes may kill as many as a billion birds in the United State with half of these occurring at homes or low-rise buildings. Your home may be a culprit even if you do not know it: Often dead birds are carried off by wildlife, and birds that survive a collision usually die from the injuries afterward. Join us for an educational webinar to learn what conditions lead to bird-window collisions and how you can easily reduce them with a variety of readily available materials designed for that purpose. Together, we can make our buildings safer for birds and ourselves.

Special Request: For the above program, we want to hear from anyone who has used bird-protection products to make their windows bird safe. If you are willing to share your experience with us, please contact the SMRA Advocacy Committee via advocacy@sawmillriveraudubon.org

President's Message—Birding for Good

As birders, we know that we feel good when we're in birdy surroundings, but did you know that this seems to be true for most people, whether or not they're interested in birds? And that this improved sense of well-being can last well beyond the actual encounter? And that living in an area with greater bird species richness (diversity) is associated with better life satisfaction?

In one recent study, researchers at Kings College London used a smartphone app to collect study participants' real-time assessments of their surroundings. Some 1,300 participants recruited from around the world reported three times per day on whether they could see or hear birds, whether they could see trees/plants, whether they could see or hear water, as well as how they were feeling at that moment. The researchers found that encounters with birds improved mental well-being above and beyond the already known beneficial effects of exposure to trees, plants, and water, and that this effect could last for as long as eight hours after the encounters. (Here's the link to this study: <https://bit.ly/birding-mental-health>.)

In another study, researchers at the German Centre for Biodiversity Research looked at a 2012 European Quality of Life survey of nearly 44,000 people and correlated it with a measure of bird species diversity created from the European Breeding Bird Atlas. Richness of bird species and access to green space were both positively associated with life satisfaction, but richness of mammal and tree species were not. (Here's another shortcut link we made to this second study: <https://bit.ly/birding-for-good>.)

While I'm not surprised by these findings, it's nice to have confirmation that the benefits of experiencing birds in the wild and where we live likely extend to everyone and that protecting bird habitats specifically may be as important for human well-being as protecting the larger natural environment.

What can we do to bring the joy of birds into the lives of others, and to help ensure that future generations have the opportunities that we do to benefit from birds in their environment?

Share your love of birds with neighbors, friends, co-workers, and especially younger people. Tell them about Saw Mill River Audubon's bird walks, Bird Chats, and other programs. Consider inviting them to share some bird-watching experiences with you, such as enjoying a cup of tea while watching the birds at your feeder or taking a walk in a local park or in one of Saw Mill River Audubon's sanctuaries.

Article continues on Page 4

Saw Mill River Audubon

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Save the Date for our Potluck! Sunday, April 2, 5:00 pm

On alternate years from our restaurant annual dinner, we hold a community potluck gathering. Our annual dinner was just in September—instead of our usual April date—because of a 2-1/2 year pandemic delay.

To get us back on track for April gatherings and to welcome as many of our members and friends as possible, we will be holding our community potluck gathering this spring on Sunday, April 2.

Details to follow!

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and with clickable links,
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Winter 2022–2023 Schedule

Area Christmas Bird Counts

Sat 12/17: Peekskill Count
 Sun 12/18: Greenwich–Stamford Count
 Mon 12/26: Bronx–Westchester Count
 Mon 1/2: Putnam Count
See more about Christmas Bird Counts on Page 4.

Birding Field Trips

8:00 am start unless otherwise listed

December trips at link below.

*Details & registration at: sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips
 Get updates & reminders: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/list*

JANUARY

Wednesday, January 4, Rockefeller SP Preserve
 Sunday, January 8, Croton Point Park **3:00 pm start**
 Monday, January 9, Muscoot Farm
 Monday, January 16, Croton Point
 Saturday, January 21, Rockefeller SP Preserve
 Wednesday, January 25, Edith Read Sanctuary
Other Birding Events — see our Google calendar
 Saturday, January 7, Charlie's Eagle Walk, **9:00 am**
 Sunday, January 15, NYS Waterfowl Count, **6:30 am**
 Sunday, January 29, NYS Young Birders Club Event



FEBRUARY

Wednesday, February 1, Rockefeller SPP
 Sunday, February 5, Croton Point Park, **3:00 pm start**
 Monday, February 6, Muscoot Farm
 Saturday, February 18, Rockefeller SP Preserve
 Monday, February 20, Croton Point Park
 Thursday, February 23, Edith Read Sanctuary
Other Birding Events — see our Google calendar
 Thursday, February 2, Shawangunk Grasslands, **4:00 pm**
 Saturday, February 4, Teatown's EagleFest



MARCH

Wednesday, March 1, Rockefeller SPP
 Sunday, March 5, Croton Point Park, **3:00 pm start**
 Monday, March 6, Muscoot Farm
 Saturday, March 18, Rockefeller SP Preserve
 Monday, March 20, Croton Point Park
 Thursday, March 23, Edith Read Sanctuary
Other Birding Events — see our Google calendar
 Wednesday, March 15, Woodcock Walk, **6:00 pm**



More Winter Events



Sunday, January 1, 9:00 am

First Day Walk at Rockwood Hall State Park
 Register with State Parks. See our Google calendar.

Saturday, January 7, Croton Point Park

Charlie's Eagle Walk & SMRA Soup Gathering!
9:00 am Meet at Croton Boat Ramp for Charlie's Eagle Walk and then carpool into Croton Point Park for rest of walk. (Drop off your soup gathering contributions at Nature Center starting 8:30 am.)

12:00 pm Soup Potluck Gathering open to all at Croton Point Nature Center. Bring soup/chili OR breads and spreads OR beverages OR desserts.

RSVP: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/soup

Second Saturday Walks, Brinton Brook Sanctuary 1/14, 2/11, 3/11, 4/8. Meet at 9:00 am in the main lot. Walk typically lasts two hours. Rain does not cancel but, if extreme weather forecasted, always check our website calendar before traveling. For adults, and youth 8 and up. No registration required.

Nature Book Club, Tuesday, February 7, 7:00 pm

Via Zoom: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/book-club

Zoom Public Programs

www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs

Wednesday, January 25, 7:00 pm

Bird Migration: Fun Facts and Shameless Speculation

Thursday, February 16, 7:00 pm

Does Your House Kill Birds?

Bird Chat, 2nd & 4th Tuesdays, 7:00 pm

www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/chat

Two Ways to Support Our Work

Our **bird seed sale** continues through the winter. Prices, pick-up options and online ordering here: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/seed

Our **2023 New York Birds calendar** features images of New York birds by local photographers and makes a great gift. We can ship with a gift message! Visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/calendar

President's Message—Birding for Good *continued from page 2*

Watch for opportunities to add your voice to efforts to preserve and protect wild spaces in your town and region and across the country by writing letters to local papers, calling legislators, and adding your opinions during public comment periods on proposed developments. Join local organizations that engage on these issues, and consider volunteering to help out with their advocacy efforts.

If you don't already do so, engage in citizen science by reporting your sightings on eBird and also participating in seasonal counts such as Christmas Bird Counts, Winter Waterfowl Counts, and the Breeding Bird Atlas. (See dates for area CBCs elsewhere in this newsletter and check our website for information on the Winter Waterfowl Count and BBA plans in 2023.) These are great ways to stay active and combat winter doldrums, and they help build data that are used to inform public policy such as land-use decisions, funding of environmental protection, and funding protection of natural resources that birds and people depend on.

Don't be afraid to get out there to be with the birds when it's cold. Join one of our walks, where you will find a welcoming and surprisingly large group of birders, from novices or just "bird-curious" to experts. Dress for the weather and let yourself be awed by the amazing activities of our winter birds.

Valerie Lyle, President, Saw Mill River Audubon



'Tis the season...to count birds!

For those who have always dreamed of bundling up on a December day and spending hours shivering in the cold with some equally fanatical bird lovers, the Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) are for you.

Ongoing since 1900, the CBCs were first created as an alternative to the then-traditional Christmas "side hunt," in which the team that shot the most birds won. Each year, thousands of birds were killed in the name of holiday fun.

The CBCs have since evolved and have generated a priceless 122-year longitudinal data set—available to the public online at <https://netapp.audubon.org/cbcobservation>—allowing bird researchers to track population trends and assess the health and status of bird populations across North America.

Christmas Bird Counts are done within 15-mile-wide circles during a 24-hour period. (For a map of all the circles and information on the count details for each, including compiler contact information, visit this link <https://bit.ly/CBC-circles>.)

All birds seen and heard are counted within a count circle. Last year in New York State, there were 74 Christmas Bird Counts. The counts each have a leader,

known as a compiler, who is responsible for splitting up the count circle into smaller areas, allocating groups of birders to those areas, and then collating all the count information before sending it to National Audubon. Counts in our area can be challenging due to inclement weather, but this doesn't take away from the enjoyment of the day. Going out to count birds in a defined area with a group of like-minded birders is wonderful, especially since most of the counts finish the day with a potluck dinner where the counts are tallied and birding stories shared.

As Roger Tory Peterson said of the CBCs: "...even though there are many nuggets that ornithologists can mine from this rich lode of bird information, to me and to my friends it is our way of celebrating the holidays, an ornithological ritual that has come to represent Yuletide more than Santa Claus or the Christmas tree."

If you want to join one of the local counts listed below, you can contact the SMRA office by email office@sawmillriveraudubon.org or call us at 914-666-6503 to be connected with the count compiler:

Sat 12/17: Peekskill CBC, incl. northwestern Westchester

Sun 12/18: Greenwich–Stamford CBC

includes southeastern parts of Westchester County

Mon 12/26: Bronx–Westchester CBC

Mon 1/2: Putnam CBC

Jenni Stern

Saw Mill River Audubon Travels to South Africa!

After three years of delays, the SMRA trip to South Africa (SA) planned by Executive Director Anne Swaim and myself happened in November. It seemed far to travel for 15 days, but we had a great itinerary and great guides to make the most of our time away. Fifteen of us traveled from the States to begin this adventure.

Upon our arrival in Johannesburg, the Birding Eco-tours guides whisked us to a local hotel to recover from the 14-hour flight. An early start the first morning to a local pan (a seasonally dry lake bed) delivered lots of lifers and photo opportunities for the group. Waterfowl, raptors and other birds were just a hint of what was to come as we dashed from bird to bird.

Our next overnight was in the high-altitude region of Dullstroom, well-known for special species. Conditions were cold and misty throughout our stay, but the birds were worth it as we explored the Dullstroom Nature Reserve.

Kruger National Park was exceptional and put on both the avian and mammal show for us. One of our first mammal sightings was a male lion, and things just picked up from there. We saw almost 200 species of birds in five days and were surrounded by a pride of more than 20 sleepy lions during a night drive. After a few wild days, we settled for some quiet at Zenzele River Lodge just outside Pretoria for two nights.

We flew from Johannesburg to Cape Town and traveled down to Simonstown for the next week. Views from our guest house decks over False Bay were a



Lynn Salmon, Ginger Bernardin and Cary Andrews enjoying a tea and coffee break whilst birding. Photo: Debbie van Zyl

wonderful way to start the day while sipping on delicious coffee and tea.

Our Cape adventure began with a trip to Boulders Beach and several hours in the company of African Penguins—a trip highlight. Most were molting after the breeding season, so we were enthralled as they milled around “braying” (hence their



A view of African Penguins at Cape Point

old name: Jackass Penguin.) At Cape Point Nature Reserve, we finally found some Common Ostriches, foraging near the beach.

Next day we set off on a pelagic boat trip from Hout Bay. Others can expound on the joys of being on a tiny boat in a choppy ocean for hours that never seem to end. (Editor’s note: “pelagic” means “ocean-going” and there are pelagic bird species only seen far off-shore.)

[Note from Anne Swaim: We traveled more than 40 miles south off the tip of Africa, following fishing trawlers as they hauled up their nets and attracted hundreds of feeding birds and sea mammals. One highlight was seeing four species of albatross, among many other special pelagic birds. For many of us, Scopolamine patches for motion sickness saved the day but, alas, they did not work for everyone!]

Continued on Page 6

Saw Mill River Audubon Travels to South Africa! *Continued from Page 5*

Visiting the Harold Porter Botanical Garden in Betty's Bay the next day was much more my style. We failed to find the Cape Rockjumper but between the rugged mountains, the wild coast, the peaceful gardens, and a great lunch, it was a fabulous day. We made the requisite visit to the Strandfontein Sewage Works and saw hundreds of Greater and Lesser Flamingos spread across several pans. A day trip to the West Coast National Park brought us the SA national bird: the Blue Crane. We had timed our visit to catch the blooming of the proteas, SA's national flower, and were treated to incredible sights and colors for a week.



SMRA trip organizers at Zenzele River Lodge: Debbie van Zyl and Anne Swaim. Photo: Barbara Mansell



Our excellent guides from Birding Ecotours (L to R) Dylan Vasapolli and Junior Gabela. Photo: Debbie van Zyl

Back in Johannesburg, we bid farewell to our wonderful guides, Dylan and Junior.

This was the trip of a lifetime, even for me, who grew up in South Africa. The company was great, along with the fauna and flora of such a lovely country. We saw birds, animals, reptiles, insects, landscapes, flowers, grasslands, mountains, seas and more flowers. Being able to go on yet another incredible trip with SMRA confirms I joined the right bird club when I first moved to the U.S. A huge thank you to Anne for making this trip a reality. *Debbie van Zyl*

More South Africa Photos and Stories We plan to offer a full-length presentation on our South Africa trip as one of our 2023 monthly programs and feature photos of birds and wildlife from several participants. Some of our travelers will be sharing photos at our December 15 Best Photos Zoom—recording will be at www.youtube.com/sawmillriveraudubon—and we may have a further sneak peak at a winter Bird Chat.

SMRA Board Surveys Sanctuary Trails

This fall, Saw Mill River Audubon board members have visited all six of our sanctuaries with marked trails. The purpose of these visits was to assess our trails for potential impacts from climate change, especially the more intense rainfall events that the northeast U.S. is now experiencing and which are expected to continue, if not worsen. For hiking trails, intense rain events can be a problem on slopes, causing gully formation, long-term soil erosion, and difficult footing. We found a few locations where we may need to add stone water diverters and one trail segment that may need to be relocated. If you want to help with this work, please sign up as a trail volunteer: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/volunteer *Anne Swaim*



SMRA Board Members visiting Pinecliff Sanctuary in November (L to R) Tom Rutth, Ginger Bernardin, Lynn Salmon, Michael Madias, Jr., Cary Andrews, Suzanne Kavic and Bill Kellner. Photo: Anne Swaim

Please help make sure Saw Mill River Audubon is here for future generations by also remembering us in your will or other estate plans.

2022 Birdathon Results

October 14th through the 16th was a beautiful fall weekend for many reasons. The leaves were glorious colors, the weather was warm with minor wind, and best of all, there were outstanding numbers of birds.

The fourth annual SMRA Birdathon had seven teams compete this year in two categories. The county category competition was very close with only seven species separating first and fifth place and only three species separating first and third place. **Quick 3 Beers** (Kyle Bardwell and Sean Camillieri) spent the weekend birding in Putnam County, taking first place again this year with a total of 87 species and a total bird count of 1,076. **Hawkward Conversations**



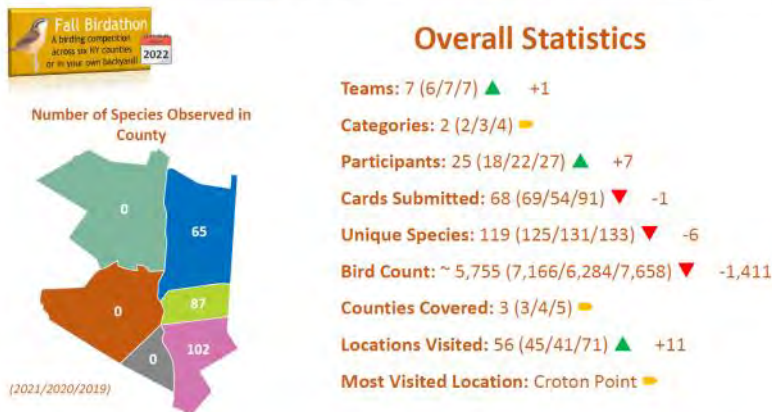
Birders on the Hawkward Conversations team searching the Muscoot Reservoir for one more Birdathon species. Photo: Anne Swaim

Croton Point Park. This ten-member team placed first with 38 species and total bird count of 270. Second place went to the **Lazy Larks** (Christopher Eliot and Beatrix Eliot) who birded at their home in Pleasantville. They spotted 30 species and a total bird count of 131. Beatrix, 7 years old, is our youngest participant and already astounding at bird identification.

I thank all the participants again for another great Birdathon weekend! We raised over \$900 this year in team donations, which helps SMRA continue our mission to connect people with nature.

Louisa Gagliardi

PS Thanks to Jacques van Zyl for judging and compilation! See his reporting: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/birdathon-results



More results at www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/birdathon-results (Anne Swaim, Lynn Salmon, Chris Kennelly, Joe Wallace, and Liz Decolvenaere) spent their time birding in Westchester County, placing second place with 86 species and a total bird count of 1,257. **Wrenagades** (Suzanne Kavic, Steve Rappaport, and Larry Trachtenberg), who birded in Westchester County, took third place with 84 species and a total bird count of 623. **Baygulls** (Louisa Gagliardi, Ginger Bernardin, and Kevin McGrath) birded in Westchester County and placed fourth with 80 species and a total bird count of 822. **Dutchess Dames** (Debbie van Zyl and Carena Pooth) birded in Dutchess County and came in fifth with 65 species and a total bird count of 1,659 (highest of any team).

The Big Sit category had two teams participate this year. **The Stool Pigeons** (Ada Barr, Avril Armstrong, Brian Kluepfel, Earl Ikeda, Ponie Sheehan, Randy Schutz, Roger Muzii, Rose DePalma, Sandra Wright, and Valerie Lyle) spent their time at

ConEd Grant for Trailside Greeters!

Saw Mill River Audubon has received a grant from ConEd to support our Trailside Greeter outreach. Look for our greeters at some of our sanctuaries, sitting by our new trailside banners. We plan for SMRA board members or staff



to be part of each greeter team but we welcome your help. This could be a good birding opportunity too!

Is this something you might want to do?

To find out more about this and other SMRA volunteer opportunities, visit our volunteer web page: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/volunteer

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*Horned Lark Croton Point Park. February 2022.
Photo: Brendan Fogarty*

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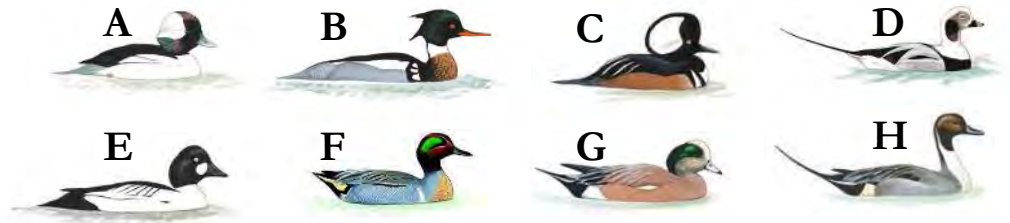
Explore Nature with Saw Mill River Audubon this Winter!

We have more than 40 events scheduled between **January and March** to connect you with local habitats, birds and other wildlife. Small-group bird walks. Online and in-person programs. Sanctuary walks.

We connect people with nature!

Get Your Ducks in a Row. Can you match these?

All are found in the lower Hudson Valley in winter. Do you know their names?



A: Bufflehead B: Red-breasted Merganser C: Hooded Merganser D: Long-tailed Duck
E: Common Goldeneye F: Green-winged Teal G: American Wigeon H: Northern Pintail

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

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