



SMRA

SAW MILL RIVER AUDUBON™

Winter 2023–2024



*Bald Eagles (subadults)
at Croton Bay,
January 2022.
Photo: Karalyn Lamb*



Croton Point Park field trip at the 2023 New York Birders Conference led by Larry Trachtenberg with Kyle Bardwell and Joe Wallace. One of 16 field trips organized by SMRA for the conference weekend. See page 5 for more conference pictures



Students from Ossining's Roosevelt School in October visiting Rockefeller State Park Preserve for field trips led by SMRA Educator Pete Salmansohn under the NYS Connect Kids to Parks grant program. Photo courtesy of Ossining Union Free School District.



Lunchtime research paper session drew a crowd at the 2023 New York Birders Conference sponsored by SMRA in September. See more on page 5.

Winter Highlights *See more events on Page 3*

Special winter events highlighted below. Listed on page 3 are our free birding field trips continuing through the winter along with more winter events.

For Zoom events below: sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs

Thursday, December 21, 7:00 pm—Members and Friends Best Photos along with Holiday Desserts. Join us for this special, in-person program at the Croton Free Library. Come enjoy beautiful nature photography and holiday treats. To share photos, send by December 15 at link above. Bring treats to share, if you wish. You are welcome to come and enjoy photos and treats created by others. No registration needed. Open to the public.

Wednesday, January 31, 7:00 pm—Zoom: The Spark Bird Project. Central Westchester Audubon and Saw Mill River Audubon are delighted to introduce you to “The Spark Bird Project” by hosting Jennifer Lodi-Smith, Ph.D. Psychology, to tell us more about this project, what its data tells us about our experiences with the birds we encounter.

Saturday, February 3, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm—Teatown's EagleFest. Teatown's 20th Annual Hudson River EagleFest returns to Croton Point for an all-day celebration including live bird of prey shows, bird walks to view eagles through spotting scopes, heated tents with displays, crafts and games for children, food trucks, and more. Snow date is Sunday, February 4. Saw Mill River Audubon will be at the Croton River boat ramp and at Georges Island to help you spot eagles and will offer our “Raptors for Rookies” workshop and other free guided bird walks. Our volunteers will also be at our table inside the heated tent at Croton Point Park. Contact us to join our volunteer team. Don't miss this special day! Visit www.teatown.org/eaglefest for all details.

Thursday, February 8, 7:00 pm—Zoom: Merlin Bird ID Trivia, the Great Backyard Bird Count Edition. Join us for this bird ID trivia game, focused on birds you might find during the 2024 Great Backyard Bird Count! The Merlin Bird ID app, developed by the Cornell Lab and powered by machine learning, will be put to the test. Can the app outperform local expert birders and, you, our live audience? Using photos and sounds, we'll determine who can accurately identify the most bird species. This is an interactive game, so come ready to play, if you wish! Throughout the game, we'll also explore how Merlin “decides” on an ID and share advice on how to identify tricky birds based on calls and appearance. (Visit <https://www.birdcount.org> to learn about the Great Backyard Bird Count held on February 16-19.)

Save the Date: Sunday, March 24: Annual Dinner
Visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner for details.

President's Message

Our focus for the past several months was hosting the 2023 New York Birders Conference in Tarrytown in September. Over 30 volunteers and all five of our partner Audubon chapters in Westchester and Putnam came together to make this event a tremendous success. We had a record-setting attendance of 327 people with 36 vendors, 16 field trips, and 8 workshops. David Allen Sibley as keynote was a big draw, as was *Warbler Guide* author Tom Stephenson as workshop keynote Saturday afternoon. The New York State Young Birders Club challenged us Friday night with a rigorous bird quiz that stumped some of New York's most expert birders. Thank you to all who made this event happen and who came to the conference. See our photo spread on page 5 of images from this event.



Erik Andersen, SMRA President

We especially want to recognize our many event sponsors and donors. Zeiss Optics was our lead sponsor, donating more than \$5,000 in optics for our raffle. Please also see page 5 where we thank all our sponsors and donors for the 2023 New York Birders Conference.

Looking ahead, we are offering you an array of events this winter including both in-person and Zoom programs, and free guided field trips here in Westchester and further afield.

And, we are glad to say that our school field trips outreach is rebuilding well after the pandemic pause. More than 500 students from Ossining's Roosevelt School are visiting Rockefeller State Park Preserve this fall on field trips led by Saw Mill River Audubon educators, and we are now booking spring trips for other schools.

We are also continuing our advocacy work overseeing the Croton Point Park grasslands, joining coalitions working on horseshoe crab recovery and on better management of Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, and advocating against the dangerous use of neonicotinoid pesticides, among other issues.

All our volunteers' hard work this summer to install rock-lined water bars was just in time to protect our sanctuary trails from the very heavy rains our region experienced this past summer and fall. With a rapidly

changing climate, we will need additional work to protect our sanctuaries from the intense weather events expected in the years ahead.

Education for adults and youth, advocacy on environmental issues, and sanctuary stewardship are our three focus areas. Are you interested in getting more involved with Saw Mill River Audubon in 2024? Visit our website to learn more and consider sending us a volunteer inquiry here: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/volunteer

For the birds,

Erik Andersen, President, Saw Mill River Audubon

Saw Mill River Audubon

275 Millwood Road Chappaqua, New York 10514

914.666.6503 | office@sawmillriveraudubon.org

Visit us online: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org

OFFICE HOURS

Mon/Wed/Fri 11:00 am to 4:00 pm
except major/school holidays.

President: Erik Andersen

Vice President: Suzanne Kavic

Treasurer: Lynn Salmon Secretary: William Kellner

Editor: Jennifer Stern Circulation: Jean Sparacin

Executive Director: Anne Swaim

Office Manager: Barbara Daniel

Sanctuary Maintenance: Danny Ferguson

Educators: Pete Salmansohn and Cathy Hildenbrand

Education Partner: The Rewilding School

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*For a full-color view of this newsletter with clickable links:
visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/news*

Youth Environmental Scholarships

Saw Mill River Audubon's Larry Light Youth Scholarship Fund can fund all or part of the cost of attending a summer class, workshop or camp that is focused on environmental study including American Birding Association and National Audubon youth birding camps. Awarded for youth age 13 to 17. Scholarships are not based on financial need but are awarded based on the student's demonstrated interest in the environment and nature based on classwork and/or extracurricular and volunteer activities. We have ongoing application and award dates and most camps close early so apply soon! Visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/scholarships

Winter 2023-2024 Schedule

Birding Field Trips

8:00 am start | arrive earlier to park & meet
www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips

DECEMBER

Sat, Dec 2, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve
 Mon, Dec 4, 8:00 am, Muscoot Farm
 Sat, Dec 9, 8:00 am, Lyndhurst Mansion
 Wed, Dec 13, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park
 Wed, Dec 20, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve
 Wed, Dec 27, 8:00 am, Edith Read Sanctuary
 Sat, Dec 30, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park



Eastern Screech-Owl

Special December Birding

Christmas Bird Counts, details on page 4.

JANUARY

Thu, Jan 4, 8:00 am, Edith Read Sanctuary
 Mon, Jan 8, 8:00 am, Muscoot Farm
 Tue, Jan 16, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park
 Fri, Jan 19, 8:00 am, Edith Read Sanctuary
 Mon, Jan 22, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve
 Sat, Jan 27, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve



Red-breasted Merganser

Special January Birding

Mon, Jan 1, 9:00 am, First Day Hike: Rockwood Hall
Sat, Jan 6, 9:00 am, Eagle Walk with Charlie Roberto
 Followed by Soup Potluck at Croton Point Park!
Thu, Jan 25, 4:00 pm, Shawangunk Grasslands Trip

FEBRUARY

Mon, Feb 5, 8:00 am, Muscoot Farm
 Mon Feb 12, 8:00 am Rockefeller SP Preserve
 Fri, Feb 23, 8:00 am, Edith Read Sanctuary
 Sat, Feb 24, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve
 Tue, Feb 27, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park



Snow Bunting

Special February Birding

Sat, Feb 3, All Day, Teatown's EagleFest Walks/Talks
Sat, Feb 10, 1:00 pm, EagleWatch at Lyndhurst

MARCH

Fri, Mar 1, 8:00 am, Edith Read Sanctuary
 Sat, Mar 2, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park
 Mon, Mar 4, 8:00 am, Muscoot Farm
 Mon, Mar 18, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve
 Tue, Mar 26, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park
 Sat, Mar 30, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve



American Woodcock

Special March Birding

Sat, Mar 9, 8:00 am, Long Island Birding Hotspots
Tue, Mar 19, 6:30 pm, Woodcock Walk at Croton Point

Common Redpoll
 Joshua Covill / Macaulay Library

Merlin®
Bird ID Trivia:
 Great Backyard
 Bird Count Edition

February 8th, 2024
 7 pm EST

Visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs

Saw Mill River Audubon Potluck Dinner Sunday, March 24, 5:00 pm

The Center at Mariandale, Ossining

Come celebrate spring with Audubon!

RSVP www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner



Still More Winter Events

Nature Book Club, Tue, Dec 5, 7:00 pm via Zoom

Details and link: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/book-club

Second Saturday Walks, Brinton Brook Sanctuary

12/9, 1/13, 2/10, 3/9. Meet at 9:00 am in the main lot. Happens rain, snow or shine but always check our website calendar before traveling. No registration required.

Winter Bird Chats on Zoom. Note 1st&4th Tue in March

Tue, 12/12, 1/9, 1/23, 2/13, 2/27, 3/5, 3/26, 7:00 pm

Details and link: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/chat

This Newsletter Is Going Green!

Beginning with our next issue, Spring 2024, this newsletter will mostly be published online.

Along with savings in paper and postage, digital newsletters use less resources.

IMPORTANT NOTE

We will be printing a small quantity of paper newsletters in our office to distribute at events and to libraries and other contacts. **We will still mail paper copies but only to current members of SMRA and only if requested.**

Contact us today to keep receiving newsletters on paper through the US mail. Contact our office at 914-666-6503 or email office@sawmillriveraudubon.org
 OR link below to our online request form:
www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/paper

'Tis the Season...to Count Birds!

“Four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge...” This year’s Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will not likely include these species (maybe some swans a-swimming?), but will, as it has for the past 123 years, provide invaluable data for those concerned with the viability of our feathered friends.

A National Audubon institution 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 longitudinal data set available to the public at <https://netapp.audubon.org/cbcobservation>. This allows researchers to track populations and assess the health 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 plan for each one, including contact information, visit <https://tinyurl.com/CBC-maps>.) All birds seen and heard are counted within that circle. This year in New York State, there will be 79 Christmas Bird Counts. The counts each have a leader, the count compiler, who is responsible for splitting up their circle into smaller areas, allocating groups of birders to those areas, and then collating all the count information before sending it in to Audubon. Counts in our area can be challenging due to inclement weather, but many find them wonderful, especially since most of the counts finish the day with a potluck dinner where the counts are tallied.

Geoff LeBaron, the Audubon CBC Director, noted that these counts are, “increasingly accepted by ornithologists and conservationists alike as the best, if not only, tool available for assessing the long-term trends in the early winter bird populations of North America.” Join us in doing the birding that makes a difference for the birds.

If you are interested in joining up with one of the local counts (see below), please contact us at the SMRA office before mid-December and we can put you in touch with the compiler for each count.

Local Christmas Bird Counts

Sat Dec. 16: Peekskill CBC

Sun Dec. 17: Greenwich–Stamford CBC

Sun, Dec. 17: Rockland CBC

Sat Dec. 23: Bronx–Westchester CBC

Tue Jan. 2: Putnam CBC

Whoooo Wants to Attract Owls?

- Create the habitat for the foods owls prey upon: rodents such as mice, chipmunks and voles. Screech Owls also eat insects.
- Leave your yard a bit messy. Make brush piles of leaves, branches, even old Christmas trees in the woods near your house. Convert a patch of lawn into a cozy patch of habitat. Little critters need hiding places.
- Leave the leaves! Rake them under trees and into beds, and scatter some on your lawn. Insects, mollusks and other critters overwinter under decaying leaf matter. In spring their eggs are hatched there. This biodiversity benefits all species up and down the food chain.
- Mow less! A manicured lawn looks absolutely terrible to every single animal! There is nothing to eat and nowhere to hide in a yard of sanitized grass. Reduce the size of your lawn. Bonus: It’s cheaper and less time consuming.
- Absolutely don’t use pesticides! Dying mice are easy prey for owls and will poison them. Use herbicides sparingly. Weeds are food and shelter for fireflies, butterflies, pollinator bees and birds.
- Plant beneficial and native shrubs, flowers and trees. These are more and more being carried by local nurseries. Read the tags and ask questions. The more natives we buy, the more our stores will supply! For example, ornamental boxwoods and Japanese maples do not support any insects. spicebush, sweet pepperbush, and many hydrangeas do.
- Bird feeders! Birds feel safe in numbers. A heated bird bath during winter is a big draw. Any stream, pond, or puddle attracts wildlife. Follow guidelines at www.feederwatch.org for healthier feeding stations.
- Owls like big trees. Don’t cut them down! Leave dead trees standing unless they pose a safety hazard. Imagine all those great owl nesting holes up there.
- Turn off outside lights! Use motion sensors or timers instead of leaving on all night. Owls need darkness.
- Learn owl calls. One or two species may already be in your yard. Hint: they don’t always hoot. Don’t play recordings though since they can chase owls away.
- Be patient and persistent. If an owl doesn’t show up, at least give yourself a huge pat on the back for all the other birds and wildlife you have helped!

Kara Mason, SMRA Board Member

Explore more at www.rodalorganiclif.com/garden/attracting-owls

SMRA Hosts New York State Ornithological Association Conference

SMRA hosted birders from across the state the weekend of September 22–24 at the Sleepy Hollow Conference Center. Attendees from the New York State Ornithological Association, the New York State Young Birders Club, and various regional groups enjoyed excellent speakers, visited local birding sites, competed for raffle and other prizes, and ate, drank, and were merry. Photos: Kara Mason & SMRA.



Renowned bird artist and field guide author David Sibley retraced the evolution of his birding career and drawing styles in the keynote address on Saturday night. In his talk, he applauded the work of the New York State Young Birders Club.



The New York State Young Birders Club had a strong attendance at the conference and, on Friday night, stumped the audience including many experienced New York birders, with their merciless photo quiz.



SMRA President Erik Andersen and conference volunteers Ada Bar and John Cavallero at the conference welcome table. Special thanks to all 37 of our conference volunteers who made this event possible!

Thank you to Our Generous Donors!

We thank the 327 people who came together in community for this event. **We are also grateful to individual supporters** who underwrote David Allen Sibley's keynote: Central Westchester Audubon, Eva & Erik Andersen, John Cavallero, Suzanne Kavic & Zaid Alrawi, Ginny & John Loughlin, Farooq Maroof, Janet & Michael Pietsch, Elizabeth Poyet, Laura Rice & Richard Leonard, Nancy Ruffner, Richard Saravay with additional gifts in memory of Randy Schutz from Ellis Gitlin, Valerie Lyle, and Anne Swaim. **This event was also made possible with additional support** from American Bird Conservancy, Bedford Audubon, PepsiCo, Princeton University Press, and Vortex Optics.



Michael Bochnik of Hudson River Audubon led birders through Yonkers' Lenoir Preserve: one of 16 conference field trips.



Zeiss was a major sponsor of the conference and also donated four high-quality binoculars for our silent auction and offered discount sales at their vendor booth. See left for additional sponsor thanks.



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American Kestrel, Croton Point Park
February 2022. Photo: Mitchell Goldfarb

Connecting People and Nature Since 1953

Explore Nature with Saw Mill River Audubon this Winter!

Inside are more than 50 events
between December and March to
connect you with birds, other
wildlife, and local habitats.

Small-group bird walks. Online and
in-person programs. Sanctuary walks.

We have been connecting people
with nature for 70 years!

Saw Mill River Audubon Potluck Dinner

Sunday, March 24, 2024

The Center at Mariandale, Ossining

Come celebrate spring with Audubon!

RSVP www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner



Save the Date for our 2024 Annual Spring Dinner with keynote speaker
Heather Wolf, author of *Find More Birds: 111 Surprising Ways to Spot Birds
Wherever You Go*. Make your reservations soon because we always sell out!

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

I wish to donate. Enclosed is:

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