



SMRA

SAW MILL RIVER AUDUBON™

Spring 2024



*American Oystercatchers
at Edith Read Sanctuary
May 2021.*

Photo: Steve Rappaport

Spring Highlights See more events on Page 3

Three special events are highlighted below. Listed on page 3 are our free birding field trips along with even more spring events.



Birding Rockefeller State Park Preserve on a warm and foggy December morning. Photo: Anne Swaim



*Participants on SMRA's November trip to Trinidad dining al fresco in the rainforest.
Photo: Gillian Corfield*



*Patricia Loquet with her beautiful "Forest Friends" lap quilt created for Saw Mill River Audubon.
Visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/quilt*

Sunday, March 24, 5:00 pm—Welcome to Spring Annual Dinner

SMRA's annual dinner will be a potluck at the Mariandale Conference Center on Sunday, March 24, from 5:00 to 8:00 pm. Our keynote speaker will be Heather Wolf, author of *Find More Birds: 111 Surprising Ways to Spot Birds Wherever You Are*. A Brooklyn-based birder and photographer, she leads bird walks for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and other organizations and will share her birding tips. The evening will open with a casual reception at 5:00. The arrival deadline for food and beverages is 5:45 when the buffet opens. The dinner program begins at 6:15 with chapter news and a short presentation by our 2023 youth scholarship student followed by our speaker. Our finale will feature images from our past year of connecting people with nature. Will you be in our pictures? Previous dinners have sold out so be sure to reserve today: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner.

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



Tuesday, April 23, 7:00 pm—Zoom: Birds of Shakespeare

Learn more and get Zoom link: <https://brssaudubon.org/programs>
Co-sponsored by all five Audubon chapters in Westchester County.

Saturday, June 15, 3:00–5:30 pm—Birding Tea

The annual Birding Tea, hosted by board member Cary Andrews, will take place at her Croton home on Saturday, June 15, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. Come enjoy high tea and treats and discuss ways to create bird-friendly habitat in one's backyard and other ways to help our feathered friends. RSVP by calling 914-271-4138 or emailing oomis@aol.com. Space is limited, and a donation of \$20 is requested to support the work of Saw Mill River Audubon.



Birding Tea!
Saturday, June 15
3:00 to 5:30 pm
Hosted by Cary Andrews
Croton-on-Hudson
RSVP & Space limited
Benefits Saw Mill River Audubon | \$20 person donation

President's Message

Spring is a good time to reconnect with the outdoors. Come gardening with us at Pruyn Sanctuary—see Mark's article on page 4—or come birding with us on one of our many field trips or take a walk on your own through our sanctuaries.

We will be busy this spring and summer with still more sanctuary projects. We will be focusing on the increase in wet and muddy areas in the lower parts of our trails due to intensifying rain storms.

Last year we addressed the effects of more rain erosion by adding water bars on several steep slopes. Now we will likely need to add more puncheon walkways or, in some cases, construct stone crossings.

Want to work with us on these projects? Drop us a note with our online volunteer form: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/volunteer

We will continue our bird seed sale through the first half of spring since the birds still appreciate the benefit of feeders until insects are fully out and about. If you buy bird seed, consider purchasing from us to help support our local conservation and education work. Details are here: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/seed

As you receive this newsletter in early spring, if you are still considering new plantings for your property, don't forget to focus on native plants. Native plants support pollinators and other insects. Our birds need insects to feed their young. Audubon New York has a helpful "Beginners Guide to Native Plants for Birds" online here: <https://ny.audubon.org/news/beginners-guide-native-plants-birds>

Working together, we can make a difference for birds, for healthy habitats and for our own enjoyment of nature this spring. **For the birds,** *Erik Andersen, President, Saw Mill River Audubon*



Erik Andersen, SMRA President

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

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Editor: Jennifer Stern Circulation: Jean Sparacin

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Saw Mill River Audubon, 275 Millwood Road, Chappaqua, NY 10514



New York State Young Birders Club birding at Croton Point Park this past January with Saw Mill River Audubon.

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 youth camps](#), [Audubon youth birding camps](#) and [New York Department of Environmental Conservation Camps](#). Scholarships are for youth 13 to 17 and are based on the student's demonstrated interest in the environment shown in classwork and/or extra-curricular and volunteer activities. We have rolling application and award dates. Visit www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/scholarships for more information and to apply online.

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

Spring 2024 Schedule

Birding Field Trips

8:00 am start in March & April

7:00 am start in May through September

(arrive earlier to park and meet group)

www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips

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 State Park Preserve
Tue, Mar 26, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park
Sat, Mar 30, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SPP

Special March Birding

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

APRIL

Mon, Apr 1, 8:00 am, Muscoot Farm
Wed, Apr 10, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park
Sat, Apr 13, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park
Sun, Apr 14, 7:00 am, Lyndhurst
Mon, Apr 15, 8:00 am, Marshlands Conservancy
Sat, Apr 20, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SPP
Mon, Apr 22, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SPP

Special April Birding

Fri, Apr 26, 7:00 am, Celery Farm, NJ Birding

MAY

Sat, May 4, 7:00 am, Croton Point Park
Mon, May 6, 7:00 am, Muscoot Farm
Sun, May 12, 7:00 am, Lyndhurst
Mon May 13, 7:00 am Rockefeller SPP
Thu, May 23, 7:00 am, Marshlands Conservancy
Sat, May 25, 7:00 am, Rockefeller SPP
Mon, May 27, 7:00 am, Croton Point Park

Special May Birding

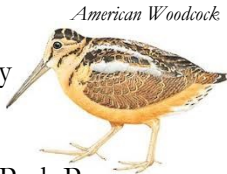
Sun, May 5, 6:00 am, Basha Kill Birding
Sat, May 11, 5:30 am, Doodletown Birding
Wed, May 29, 5:30 am, Rockefeller SPP Dawn Chorus

JUNE

Mon, June 3, 7:00 am, Muscoot Farm
Mon, June 10, 7:00 am, Croton Point Park
Sun, June 16, 7:00 am, Lyndhurst
Sat, June 22, 7:00 am, Croton Point Park
Mon, June 24, 7:00 am, Rockefeller SPP
Wed, June 26, 7:00 am, Marshlands Conservancy
Sat, June 29, 7:00 am, Rockefeller SPP

Special June Birding

Sat Jun 1, 6:00 am, Sterling Forest Birding
Sun, June 23, 5:00 am, Nickerson Beach Dawn Birding



American Woodcock



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher



Magnolia Warbler



American Oystercatcher

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



2024 Audubon Quilt Raffle

View online & buy tix: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/quilt

Quilt raffle drawing will be held at our March 24 annual dinner
See closeup images of quilt here: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/quilt

Still More Spring Events

Nature Book Club, Tue, Apr 2, 7:00 pm via Zoom

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

Second Saturday Walks, Brinton Brook Sanctuary

3/9, 4/13, 5/11, 6/8. Meet at 9:00 am in the main lot. Walk happens with rain or snow but check our website calendar before traveling, just in case. No registration required.

Spring Bird Chats on Zoom. Note 1st & 4th Tue in March
Tue, 3/5, 3/26, 4/9, 4/30, 5/14, 5/28, 6/11, 6/25, 7:00 pm

Details and link: www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/chat

This Newsletter Has Gone Green!

Starting with this issue, Spring 2024, this newsletter will mostly be published digitally.

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

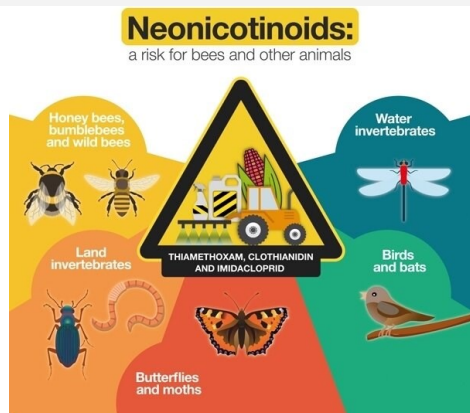
IMPORTANT NOTE

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 if requested and ONLY to current SMRA members.

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

Nix the Neonics! (At Your Own Home) It's Spring but Not Time for Cleanup!



In December, after [the governor's signature](#), New York State passed the [Birds and Bees Act](#), placing strict limitations on the use of neonicotinoid pesticides. **Now it's time for SMRA members to make sure these chemicals are not used at your home or any property around you such as residences, schools or businesses.**

Neonicotinoids, or “neonics,” impair and kill insects by acting on their nervous systems in a way similar to nicotine. Yet far from limiting their damage to insect pests, neonics also kill pollinators, and their application, even in the seed coatings addressed in the new law, suffuses the entire plant and environment. This toxicity can linger for years. [The US EPA recently concluded](#) that neonics will likely make more vulnerable some 200 already threatened and endangered species; environmental scientists have tied their use to [declines of birds, aquatic systems, and even human health](#).

Although the Birds and Bees Act outlaws the application to ornamental plants and to turf of specific neonics—clothianidin or dinotefuran by January 2025 and imidacloprid, thiamethoxam or acetamiprid by January 2027—these chemicals, which have been abundantly available in garden products with names such as “Fruit, Citrus & Vegetable Insect Control” and “Knockout Ready-to-Use Grub Killer Granules,” [may be in our own garden sheds and garages](#).

SMRA advises our members and all who care about healthy habitats, to examine their supply of garden chemicals and to ask lawn care companies and property managers to get rid of any products containing the above-named active ingredients.

A list of these products is available here:

https://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/files/bee_toxic_fact_sheet_73518.pdf

Do not discard these in the regular trash! Instead, use the County's [Household Recycling Days](#), typically once a month at various county locations, or make an appointment at the Household Materials Recovery Facility in Valhalla: environment.westchestergov.com/facilities/h-mrf

Spring cleanup is a delightful task in the garden, spending the day outside enjoying the warm spring breezes, bird-song and sunshine. We wait all winter to start pruning and clearing out the dead stems and fallen leaves to create a clean and hospitable environment for plants to emerge and begin the pageant of blooms. But for many bees and wasps, dragonflies, ladybugs and other beneficial overwintering insects and eggs, the winter garden provides protection and habitat well into the spring. So, when is the right time to clean up in your garden, or for lawn care companies and property managers to clean up around your residence, school or company?



Most overwintering insects nestle in decaying plant material, as will many butterflies and moths who spend the winter in chrysalides mixed in with the leaves. Many insect eggs are laid inside the stalks of perennials. Under the insulation of surface leaf litter, many wasps and bees—including the queen of many species of bumblebees—burrow in the soil to hibernate. These all wait for warmer days.

Aesthetics and the human desire to be outdoors in the garden prompts springtime action, usually after that first warm breeze. But be patient. A good indicator to begin your cleanup is when daytime temperatures remain above 50 degrees for five consecutive days. In Westchester, this is usually around the beginning of April. Lower visibility areas can wait until late April or even May for maximum benefit to overwintering insects.

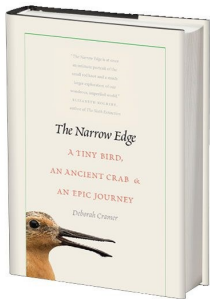
High-visibility areas may require an earlier cleanup. For these areas, it is best to lightly rake the leaves and prune down last year's stems transported on a tarp to small piles in another area. This allows air flow and the life cycle to continue. Try to leave a few old stems at a height of 10 inches or more, if possible, which can be pruned later.

“Dead” winter garden debris is teaming with beneficial insect life, and it helps to respect that thought as we finally head back into the garden.

Mark Magel, SMRA Garden Coordinator

A Mighty Migrator Threatened

When Deborah Cramer decided to research the Red Knot and follow its annual migration from the southern tip of South America to the Arctic, she may not have known the journey would be so arduous. With no wings of her own, she followed their flyway by bush plane, boat, helicopter, snowmobile, and long stretches on foot through mudflats and tundra. She may not have realized that her study of this tiny shorebird, no bigger than a Robin, would draw her into the history of one of the oldest beings on earth. After I read her beautifully written, richly detailed book *The Narrow Edge: A Tiny Bird, an Ancient Crab & an Epic Journey* (Yale University Press), I'm certainly glad she took that journey and brought us along on it.



Her story begins in Tierra del Fuego where she follows the Red Knots with the naturalists who will do everything they can to help preserve them – from persuading local governments to protect the sea from factory waste to dressing up like Red Knots and leading flash mob dances on the beach. She writes most intimately about the Delaware Bay and the importance of the eggs of the horseshoe crab to fuel the birds on their epic migration. We learn that the horseshoe crab is indeed not a crab at all, but a creature more closely related to the spider, a creature that's been around for almost half a billion years and survived all of Earth's five extinctions. They've also survived what we've thrown at them for the last one hundred: feeding them to pigs and harvesting them for fertilizer. Now we bleed them for their precious blue blood, which helps with medical testing.

Before she joins a group of scientists in the Arctic, she must learn how to shoot a 12-gauge shotgun in case she encounters a wayward polar bear and has to don special mosquito wear as she joins a group of intrepid amateur birders on the shores of James Bay.

Cramer's book is a deep dive, and she effortlessly weaves in science, history, and geography. She doesn't shy away from writing candidly of the staggering decline of the Red Knot population but refuses to give up on them. Hopefully her work, along with the countless people who care about these extraordinary long-distance flyers, will keep them from extinction.

Kathleen Williamson, SMRA Board Member



Red Knot group. Photo: M.J. Kilpatrick

A Coalition for Horseshoe Crabs

Saw Mill River Audubon has signed on as a supporter of the Horseshoe Crab Recovery Coalition (HCRC), a national organization dedicated to the preservation of the horseshoe crab, both for its own sake and for the vital nourishment horseshoe crabs provide for migrating birds that reach the shores of the eastern US each spring and early summer just as horseshoe crabs come ashore to lay billions of eggs in the sand. The Coalition goals are to:

- End the harvesting of female horseshoe crabs to ensure the continuation of the species;
- Reform the practice of extracting their blood for biomedical testing to reduce the creature's mortality;
- Accelerate the approval of synthetic alternatives to their blood in testing medical equipment for toxins; and
- Build support for rebuilding horseshoe crab populations.

If you are able, encourage other organizations to join the Coalition. **For more information, visit the HCR Coalition online at <https://hscrabrecovery.org/>**

SPECIAL NOTE: We will be hosting Deborah Cramer on a special Zoom program on Thursday, February 29, 7:00 pm. For Zoom link and reminder: <https://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs>.

Birds and Bees Law Passes

Good news: The Birds and Bees Act, limiting the use of neonicotinoid pesticides ("neonics"), has finally passed and become law in New York State. The SMRA Board thanks our many members who reached out to the Governor and encouraged her to sign the bill, which she [finally did on December 22](#).

Some compromises were made on the bill to ensure the Governor's signature. Limits on the use of neonic seed coverings were pushed back from 2027 to 2029. Limits on their use on ornamental plants and turf take effect in 2025 or 2027 (depending on the chemical). And there will be a new system, administered by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, by which farmers can apply for waivers from the law.

Despite these changes, [environmental activists in the state](#) consider it a great victory. It makes New York the first state to address seed coverings, and according to a statement by the Natural Resources Defense Council, the law "when fully implemented, would eliminate up to 80-90% of the neonics entering New York's environment annually."



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and additional offices



Wood Thrush, Pinecliff Sanctuary
May 2023. Photo: Mitchell Goldfarb

Connecting People and Nature Since 1953

Explore Nature with Saw Mill River Audubon this Spring!

Inside are more than 50 events
between April and June 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



Don't miss our 2024 Annual Spring Dinner with keynote speaker
Heather Wolf, author of *Find More Birds: 111 Surprising Ways to Spot Birds
Wherever You Go*. Space limited. Reserve your spaces soon!

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

I wish to donate. Enclosed is:

☐ \$1000 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$250

☐ \$100 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$35 ☐ \$_____

☐ My employer will match my gift.

I'd like to join Saw Mill River Audubon

Basic Chapter Membership:

☐ Enclosed is \$35

☐ Please list my gift anonymously

Name(s)

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