

  
**On the Wing**  
**Winter 2024–2025**

Vol. 71 No. 2 | Issue #384



*Sharp-shinned Hawk  
migrating south over  
Hook Mountain in  
September. Photo:  
Richard Leonard*



*Our live birds of prey program offered in October at the Ossining Public Library drew a good crowd, a portion shown here. Veterinarian and falconer Dr. Laura Jaworski gave close-up looks at her birds. Photo: Anne Swaim*



*Birders on our September Muscote Farm walk saw a nice diversity of birds. See our eBird list here: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S193699571> Photo: Anne Swaim*



*Saw Mill River Audubon was at Girl Scout Day at Rockefeller State Park Preserve this fall, introducing scouts to birding as Board Member Val Lyle is doing here. Photo: Rose DePalma*

## Winter Highlights *See more events on Page 3*

We are highlighting several events below. See page 3 for field trips and more. Visit [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs) and [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips) for the latest information.

### **Thursday, December 19, 7:00 pm | Best Photos & Holiday Desserts**

Join us at the Chappaqua Library as friends of Saw Mill River Audubon share their favorite photos of birds, other wildlife and habitats and we enjoy a holiday dessert buffet. All are welcome to attend, and you don't need to bring desserts or submit photos to be part of this fun and casual evening. Come enjoy images and desserts provided by others. Free and open to the public.

**Want to be part of our Best Photos program?** Entries will close Wednesday, December 11 at 9:00 pm. For details and to enter your photos: <https://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/best-photos-2024>

### **Thursday, January 9, 7:00 pm | Intro/Review Waterfowl ID via Zoom**

Join us for an online intro/review workshop about identifying winter waterfowl and also learn about the New York State Waterfowl Count on January 17 to 20: <https://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/waterfowl>

### **Saturday, January 11, 9:00 am | Eagle Walk with Charlie Roberto**

Join Charlie Roberto at the Croton boat ramp inside the Croton Train Station beginning at 9:00 am. No registration needed. We will drive into Croton Point Park for more birding. Good for all ages. Join us after the walk at the Nature Center for our Soup Gathering. See details below.

### **Saturday, January 11, 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm | 10th Annual Soup Gathering**

All are welcome to join us at this free and fun community gathering at the Croton Point Nature Center. Bring something to add to our potluck. RSVP and details: <https://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/soup>

### **Saturday February 1, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm | Teatown's EagleFest**

Day-long celebration of the return of the Bald Eagle to the Lower Hudson River coordinated by Teatown Lake Reservation. Supported by Saw Mill River Audubon. Details will be here: <https://www.teatown.org/events/eaglefest/>

### **Thursday, February 27, 7:00 pm | Birder's Guide to Living with Bears**

Come to Croton Free Library to hear from Budd Veverka about regional black bear populations and how to peacefully co-exist with these large mammals.

Do you prefer a paper newsletter? If you have a current membership, request a newsletter via US Mail here: [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/paper](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/paper) OR call/email us at 914-666-6503 or at [office@sawmillriveraudubon.org](mailto:office@sawmillriveraudubon.org)

## President's Message

These days I am often reminded of the 2024 SMRA potluck supper speaker Heather Wolf. In her book *Find More Birds: 111 Surprising Ways to Spot Birds Wherever You Are*, her sage advice in Tip #8 is to “Scan the sky.” With the newish addition of 14-month-old granddaughter Daisy, our immediate family all spend more time looking up! We are all resetting our relationship with nature—in a 112th way?—through the sensations of a first-time viewer.

While bundled and arm-cradled in her parents' Connecticut backyard, Daisy's earliest experiences were watching songbirds scurry from feeders to the safety of lilacs, spruce and giant magnolias while hearing Red-tailed Hawks as they circled above. It was intriguing to watch her alertness and singular focus undiluted by other distractions.

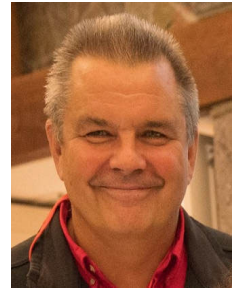
Months later, standing on the couch cushions at Mormor (Danish for mother's mother) and Morfar's (mother's father) house and watching a multitude of songbirds come to feeders prompted verbalization and vigorous hand waving with complicated explanations we'll just have to wait to understand.

The past few months, long visits to the beach offer constant gull, goose, cormorant and migratory bird sightings, which she is decidedly faster and better at spotting than her companions. We use American Sign Language (ASL) to be consistent communicators while she is much more direct with a pointed finger and a shout. This alertness to movement, shadow and differentiating sounds learned with birds lent itself to those nights the aurora borealis was fully visible in our area a few weeks ago. All of which is to remind ourselves to look at nature as if for the first time, with all our senses, including the sense of wonder with which we began this journey.

Above I mentioned the potluck supper. Our 2025 annual dinner will be Sunday, April 6th, at the newly renovated Travelers Rest, with an outstanding program and guest speaker. More details and registration is available at: <https://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner>.

I strongly encourage readers to take advantage of SMRA's outstanding programming, most of it free. Twice-monthly Bird Chat Zooms make one an armchair traveler, and our small group birding trips are a wonderful way to explore our local birding hotspots through all the seasons with knowledgeable Audubon guides.

Yours for the birds, *Erik Andersen, President, Saw Mill River Audubon*



*Erik Andersen, SMRA*

### Saw Mill River Audubon

275 Millwood Road Chappaqua, New York 10514  
914.666.6503 | [office@sawmillriveraudubon.org](mailto:office@sawmillriveraudubon.org)  
Visit us online: [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org)

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Treasurer: Lynn Salmon Secretary: William Kellner  
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ON THE WING (ISSN 1545-5254) (USPS 13281) Saw Mill River Audubon's newsletter, is published four (4) times a year (Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer) for \$7.50 a year by Saw Mill River Audubon, 275 Millwood Road, Chappaqua, NY 10514. Periodicals Postage Paid at White Plains, NY and at additional mailing offices.  
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Saw Mill River Audubon, 275 Millwood Road, Chappaqua, NY 10514.

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### Here's a Great Gift Idea!

With the generous support of local bird photographers, we have produced another *New York Birds* calendar for your 2025 viewing enjoyment with birds correlated with months likely to be seen. Also includes seasonal nature notes and solar/lunar/star events. Cost is \$20 with \$6 for shipping. Gift note option available. View and order at: [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/calendar](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/calendar)

## Winter 2024–2025 Schedule

### Bird Walks & Field Trips

**8:00 am start for most winter walks\***

\* except for any special field trips noted below in boldface

Details and register: [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-trips)

### DECEMBER



Plus Christmas Bird Counts listed on our online calendar

Mon, Dec 2, 8:00 am, Muscoot Farm

Sat, Dec 7, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park

Mon, Dec 9, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park

Fri, Dec 20, 8:00 am Edith Read Sanctuary

Sat, Dec 21, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve

Mon, Dec 23, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve

### JANUARY

\* **First Day Hike, Wed, Jan 1, 9:00 am,**  
Rockwood Hall State Park

Sat, Jan 4, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park

Mon, Jan 6, 8:00 am, Muscoot Farm

Fri, Jan 10, 8:00 am, Edith Read Sanctuary

\* **Eagle Walk, Sat, Jan 11, 9:00 am,** Croton Point Park

Mon, Jan 13, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park

**Fri, Jan 17 to Mon, Jan 20, NYS Waterfowl Count**

Sat, Jan 25, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve

Mon, Jan 27, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve



### FEBRUARY

Mon, Feb 3, 8:00 am, Muscoot Farm

\* **Eagle Watch, Sat, Feb 8, 1:00 pm,** Lyndhurst

\* **Shawangunk Owls, Mon, Feb 10, 4:30 pm**

Sat, Feb 15, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park

Mon, Feb 17, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park

Sat, Feb 22, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve

Mon, Feb 24, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve

Fri, Feb 28, 8:00 am, Edith Read Sanctuary



### MARCH

Mon, Mar 3, 8:00 am, Muscoot Farm

Sat, Mar 8, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park

Mon, Mar 10, 8:00 am, Edith Read Sanctuary

Mon, Mar 17, 8:00 pm Croton Point Park

\* **Long Island Birding, Sat Mar 15, 7:00 am**

Sat, Mar 22, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve

Mon, Mar 24, 8:00 am, Rockefeller SP Preserve

Sat, Mar 29, 8:00 am, Croton Point Park



### Highlighted Winter Programs

More at [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/register-programs)

A Saw Mill River Audubon Presentation | [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org)

# Our Best Photos 2024

Members  
& Friends  
Best Photos  
& Desserts!

Thursday, December 19, 7:00 pm

Co-sponsored by the Chappaqua Public Library



#### Audubon Soup Potluck Gathering

Saturday, January 11, 2025 | 12:00 noon to 2:00 pm

Croton Point Nature Center

RSVP Needed for Soup Gathering: [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/soup](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/soup) or 914-666-6503  
Eagle Walk 9:00 am to 11:30 am starts at Croton boat ramp with no RSVP needed for walk

### Even More Winter Events

**Second Saturday Walks, Brinton Brook Sanctuary**  
12/14, 1/11, 2/8, 3/8. Meet at 9:00 am in the main lot.

Walk typically lasts two hours. Rain or shine but always check our website calendar before traveling. For adults and youth 8 and up. No registration required.

**2nd and 4th Tuesdays, 7:00 pm, Bird Chat on Zoom**

Note 2nd Tue only in December

**Tue, Dec 10, Jan 14 & 28, Feb 11 & 25, Mar 11 & 25**  
See upcoming topics/speakers & register for Zoom link:

[www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/chat](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/chat)

### Project FeederWatch at Croton Point

Gather with us inside the Croton Point Nature Center to count the birds visiting the feeder. No registration needed. See article on page 7.

**Sunday, December 1 through Sunday, April 25**

**10:00 am to 12 noon each Sunday**

For background, visit [www.feederwatch.org](http://www.feederwatch.org)

For questions about Croton Point Nature Center FeederWatch, contact [office@sawmillriveraudubon.org](mailto:office@sawmillriveraudubon.org) or call 914-666-6503

## Sunday April 6, 2025: SMRA Annual Dinner & Program

Mark your calendars now for our 2025 Annual Dinner, this year at the newly renovated Travelers Rest, 25 Route 100 in Ossining. View the beautiful new look of Travelers Rest at <https://www.travelersrestrestaurant.com>

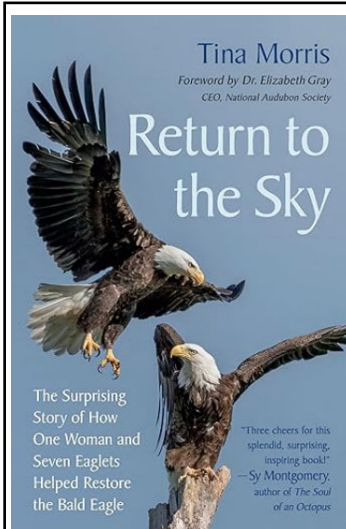
Feel comfortable to come alone or with family and friends with our open seating and welcoming tables of eight. The price per person is \$150, which includes an open bar and your choice at the table among several entrees including vegetarian and gluten-free options plus reception appetizers and choice of desserts.

At 5:00 pm, while enjoying our opening reception and open bar, visit with our speaker for book purchases and signing (see details to right) and enjoy a curated display of local bird photography by our members and friends with an option to purchase matted photos. We expect to have some special silent auction items too.

Dinner seating is at 6:00 pm, and the dinner program will begin at 6:30 pm with greetings and brief remarks from our board president and treasurer.

Before our keynote speaker, our dinner program will also include a short presentation from our 2024 Larry Light Youth Scholarship recipient, as well as acknowledgment of any special guests. We will conclude with our usual “Faces and Places” image show from our past year of connecting people with nature. Maybe you will be in our 2024 pictures?

All details and online reservations for our 2025 dinner are at [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/dinner), or you may call our office at 914-666-6503.



Our 2025 keynote dinner speaker is Tina Morris, who will discuss her new book, *Return to the Sky: The Surprising Story of How One Woman and Seven Eaglets Helped Restore the Bald Eagle*.

Her book details Tina's two-year experience, as a young ornithology student in upstate New York when she fostered eaglets that began the re-population of Bald Eagles in New York

State. Before this, in 1976, there was only one eagle nest left in New York State. DDT weakened eggshells, and eggs were crushed under the mother eagles' weight during incubation.

The results of New York's successful Bald Eagle reintroduction project is all around us today with Bald Eagles regularly seen year-round in our area and more than a dozen healthy Bald Eagle nests in the Lower Hudson.

## Preview of our 2025 Birding Quilt!

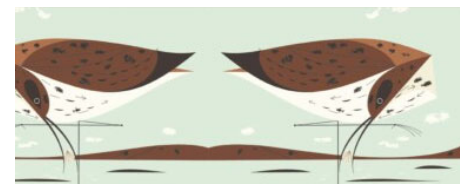


Now an annual SMRA tradition, we are thrilled to have another beautiful, one-of-a-kind bird quilt to raffle! The winning ticket will be selected at our April 6 annual dinner. You need not be present to win but we hope you will be there. (See article above!)

This year's 46" x 62" quilt was designed and assembled by SMRA Board Member Jean Sparacin who has gathered wonderful bird images from famed artist Charley Harper. (Visit <https://www.charleyharper.com> if you'd like to learn more about his work.)

Tickets are \$10/each or \$25/for three with all proceeds benefitting the local education and conservation work of Saw Mill River Audubon. See quilt details and get tickets at [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/quilt](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/quilt)

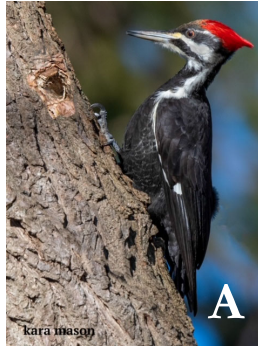
Thank you, Jean!



## Attracting Woodpeckers to Your Yard\*

\* Do you know these six birds? Answers at bottom

Woodpeckers are so cool and incredibly fun to watch! In Westchester we are very lucky to have seven beautiful species. Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied, Pileated, Red-headed, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Northern Flicker can all be seen here. So how do you attract them to your yard?



### 1) **Provide foods they love to eat**

**Suet** refers to the fat around the kidney and loins from pigs and cows. Woodpeckers enjoy eating this fat because it provides them with essential energy and nutrition. Suet usually comes in cakes and almost always has peanuts, sunflower, dried fruit, nuts, and/or corn mixed in.



**Peanuts**, shelled or unshelled, but not salted, provide a significant amount of fat and protein, especially important during cold winter months.

**Sunflower seeds** attract the widest variety of birds. Woodpeckers, cardinals, jays, nuthatches, titmice, chickadees, grosbeaks, finches, juncos, sparrows, blackbirds, doves, and grackles will also eat them.

### **Mealworms, live or dried.**

Eating them comes naturally to woodpeckers since they love eating insects. You can mix the dried ones in with your seed as a treat.

Saw Mill River Audubon is a great place to buy your seed and suet. You will be helping woodpeckers and supporting us!



### 2) **Buy the right feeders**

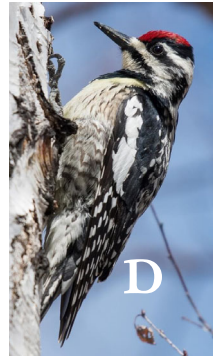
Metal cage suet feeders are the gold standard. Suet cakes slip right inside.

Mesh tube feeders are versatile because many types of foods can be placed inside. Woodpeckers have no problem hanging off the side. Many other birds can't grasp onto the sides since there is no perch.

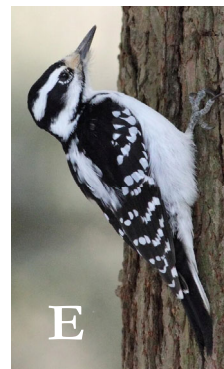
Hoppers, tube feeders, and trays can also be used.

### 3) **Provide trees, trees, and more trees!**

Woodpeckers use trees for shelter, nesting, display, and food: they are essential. Suddenly creating a mature forest of trees is not possible, but it's never too late start. The best time to plant a tree was 30 years ago. The second best time is today! Remember to choose native ones that support other creatures and promote biodiversity.



### 4) **Try not to cut down dead trees**



Dead trees are an incredible food source for woodpeckers, filled with beetle larvae and other insects on which they feast. Dead trees are easier to bore into, so woodpeckers who are cavity nesters use them almost exclusively. In addition, many other birds are cavity nesters but cannot make their own. Bluebirds, for example, rely upon old woodpecker holes for their nests. Next time you have a dead tree in your yard, think twice

before cutting it down if it is not a hazard.

### 5) **Install nest boxes**

If you don't have dead trees, install nest boxes. Pay attention to the diameter of the entrance hole as this dictates what species can use the nest box. If you are handy, try making your own. You can visit <https://www.nestwatch.org> to find box plans and specs for different species including woodpeckers.



### 6) **Provide water**

Birds need a safe, clean water source. Unless you are lucky enough to have a stream or pond nearby, the best way to offer water is a bird bath. Remember to clean it regularly.

Now sit back and enjoy these amusing, wonderful birds! Kara Mason, SMRA Board Member

**Woodpecker Answers**  
 A: Pileated Woodpecker, Kara Mason B: Red-bellied Woodpecker, Kara Mason  
 C: Northern Flicker, Kara Mason D: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Simon Boivin  
 E: Hairy Woodpecker, Matthew Plante F: Downy Woodpecker, Kara Mason

## A Native Alternative in New Foundation Plantings at Pruyn



*Volunteers left to right, front row: Patricia Watson, Erica Babad, Valerie Lyle; back row: Cheyne Little, Christopher John, Ginger Bernardin, Robin Paul, Mark Magel. (Also Tom McEnerney, not pictured.)*

With the help of a hard-working group of volunteers and beautiful planting weather, the Pruyn House and SMRA office at Pruyn Sanctuary received a horticultural improvement this fall for both people and wildlife to enjoy. The goal was to plant an attractive foundation bed using only native species and specifically those which benefit birds and pollinators. Goal achieved!

Native plants blend easily into the landscape away from the house; the majority are deciduous and drop their leaves in the fall. But for plantings which surround the foundation of a house, many homeowners opt for the year-round aesthetic value of evergreens. In most cases this means boxwood, *Taxus*, *Pieris*, Japanese holly and similar non-natives, which are attractive to people but offer little if any nutritive value to wildlife.

Away from Pruyn House, in the gardens at Pruyn Sanctuary, much of the primary focus is on insects. Birds benefit as well because the moths and butterflies that feed on these plants emerge as caterpillars. These larva are a key component of the spring and summer diet of 96 percent of terrestrial birds.

For the foundation beds, however, the shrubs we chose were primarily berry-producing shrubs which provide an abundance of food for birds in the late summer, fall and through the winter (but do also provide spring pollen and nectar). Many birds rely upon the energy from fall berries for long migrations.

The evergreen “backbone” elements we chose include two forms of inkberry and fragrant bayberry. Another native evergreen, compact leucothoe, is a pollinator favorite and turns a beautiful crimson color in autumn. To broaden the benefits of the planting, we selected a diverse

palette of shrubs. This includes black haw and American cranberry viburnums, witch hazel, *Fothergilla*, cut-leaf staghorn sumac, serviceberry, chokeberry, and oakleaf hydrangea, all of which provide spectacular fall color. For color and nectar, native deciduous azaleas and native honeysuckle were added.

Thanks to the volunteer crew, the planting took just one day.

A fall shrub planting has several advantages. While soil temperatures remain above 42°, fall-planted shrubs put nearly all their energy into rooting rather than growing new shoots and leaves. This allows for a stronger shrub in spring. Another benefit: to reduce overwintering costs and potential losses now, many nurseries offer trees and shrubs at 50-percent cost.

With this, SMRA was able to double its buying power to both improve the property value and create an attractive demonstration planting. But most importantly, the plantings added significantly to the bird health and activity at Pruyn Sanctuary. Please visit to be inspired!

*Mark Magel, SMRA Garden Coordinator*



*Shrub volunteers at work at Pruyn Sanctuary on October 23.*



**Before**



**After**, with new screen  
for propane tank  
also being installed

## Eagle Scout Project Benefits Pruyn

My name is Alden Hou. I am a Life Scout from Troop 28 in Croton. My Eagle Scout project took place on October 12th at Pruyn Sanctuary in Chappaqua, where we built two puncheon walkways to improve accessibility during rainy conditions. The first walkway, located at the Woodmill Road entrance, is 300 feet long and made of pressure-treated wood to ensure durability and safety for visitors. At the Seven Bridges Road entrance, we constructed a 30-foot walkway reusing planks from the old walkway at the Woodmill Road entrance.

The project brought together 11 volunteers, and it was incredible to see the project come to life and the team learning new skills and working together to complete the walkways efficiently. It was a rewarding experience to see our progress, knowing these walkways will make a difference for visitors and for the preservation of the sanctuary's natural habitat.

A big thank you to Jane and Walt Daniels for their patience and mentorship throughout the project and thanks to Lakeland Lumber for the discounted lumber!

*Alden Hou*



*Scouts and mentors at work on a new puncheon walkway at Pruyn Sanctuary's Woodmill Road entrance. Another puncheon walkway was built at the Seven Bridges Road entrance. Puncheon walkways were added because of more intense, longer duration rainstorms affecting our trails.*

*Photos: Alden Hou*



## FeederWatch Returns to Croton Point Nature Center!



After an absence of a year, Project FeederWatch is re-turning to Croton Point Park this winter! SMRA volunteers and friends will meet Sundays, 10:00 am to noon, from December 1 through April 25, to count feeder birds from the comfort of the Croton Point Nature Center. Drop by and visit with us there!

FeederWatch is a cooperative research project of Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada that enlists people at thousands

of sites across North America to count and record the birds they see during the winter at feeders in their backyards, parks, and other areas. Data gathered is used by scientists to analyze winter bird abundance and distribution. To learn more about FeederWatch and how the data helps birds, visit <https://feederwatch.org>.

If you want to help with Saw Mill River Audubon's FeederWatch at the Croton Point Nature Center call us in the SMRA office at 914-666-6503 or email us at [office@sawmillriveraudubon.org](mailto:office@sawmillriveraudubon.org). We are seeking volunteers to commit to specific dates, but you are also welcome just to drop in any Sunday morning, 10:00 am to noon from December 1 through April 13 to see what it's all about. You do not need register with SMRA before coming and you also don't need to be a member of FeederWatch. (FeederWatch does welcome donations to support their work.) Participating in FeederWatch is a great way to learn how about our local winter birds. We also welcome photographers.

And, as with all our events, be sure to check our event calendar at [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org) before travel-ing if the weather is uncertain in case we cancel FeederWatch. *Valerie Lyle, SMRA FeederWatch Coordinator*





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Red-tailed Hawk with a snake meal.  
Photo: Bob Yankou

Connecting People and Nature Since 1953

## Explore Nature with Saw Mill River Audubon this Winter!

We have more than 50 events scheduled between December 1 and March 31 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!**



American Kestrels are our smallest daytime bird of prey. These robin-sized falcons hunt grasslands in our area including the native grassland established at Croton Point Park over the landfill cap. Depending on snow cover, we may see kestrels through the winter. When they spy a sparrow, mouse, or grasshopper below, they will hover their wings to stay in one place in the air. Special birds are all around us! Come birding with us to see kestrels and more.  
Photo: Michelle Brigman

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