



# The BIRD CALL

Newsletter of the Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society, Inc.

## Weather Affects Bluebird Nesting Season

By Sandy Morrissey

Weather always seems to be in the news lately and now it seems to have made a dent in our bluebird population this year.

This was our 6<sup>th</sup> year of banding bluebirds and keeping close track of their nesting activity. Although we made a quantum leap in the number of nest attempts (going from a previous high of 115 to a whopping 137 nest attempts), our success rate crashed, going from an average in previous years of 80% success to a dismal 60%. This means we banded and fledged fewer bluebird babies. One good statistic that shows this is the average number of babies banded per nest attempt. For all previous years, the average was 3.3. The average in 2016 was 2.4.



*Male bluebird fluffs up its feathers to keep warm in April.*

Here's what I think happened (though I have no scientific proof). We had an extremely mild winter. I don't think the bluebirds ever migrated. They were fat and ready to lay eggs by early April. By the end of April, we had 56 nests with eggs (as opposed to an average of 34 in previous years).

However, if you recall, April turned extremely cold, with several days of snow and wind chills of 10 degrees. At the time I wondered how the eggs would survive this, and as time went on I learned. Many of those nests failed. The eggs were abandoned.



*Bluebird eggs surrounded by snow.*

After we removed the failed nests, the bluebirds built again and laid more eggs. Most of these nests succeeded at the usual 80% rate.

But we missed out again when it was time for the second broods. In the cases where the first clutch of eggs failed because of cold weather, the females were then actually laying their third batch of eggs. For many of our bluebirds, this was too much to ask, and they didn't lay the third clutch of eggs.

Additionally, we had many nests

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## Our Summer Campers

BRSS Audubon once again sponsored students this year at Westchester County's Ecology Camp.

Dear Everyone at Audubon,

Thanks for sponsoring me to attend the Rye Marshlands Ecology Camp. This was my fourth year attending the camp. We played Deer Track, Blind Old Owl, and Camouflage. My counselor was Robbie and what I liked about him was that he was so comedic and outdoorsy. My favorite thing all week was whittling.

Thank you so much for sponsoring me. I had so much fun!  
Julien

Dear Everyone at the Audubon Society,

Thank you for sponsoring me. Ecology camp was a ton of fun. My counselors taught me about the kinds of wildlife there. We played games like Deer Track where we had to lay down arrows and hide. My favorite part of camp was when we found a dock float and had to carry it to the lodge.

The counselors brought us hiking so we could find different kinds of wildlife. We also went seining.

This year was lots of fun and I hope I can go next year.

With great thanks,  
Fabien

*Julien and Fabien ready for camp.*



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serving the communities of  
Bronxville, Eastchester, Edgemont, Hartsdale,  
Larchmont, Mamaroneck, Mount Vernon, New  
Rochelle, Pelham, Scarsdale, and Tuckahoe*

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with abandoned eggs at the end of the season. I surmise the females laid the eggs with normal instincts, but by then it was late in the season and they lost interest along the way.

As I said, I'm making this all up, but it seems to me the best explanation of our unusual bluebird season. If I am in the least bit right, then we can expect Climate Change to wreak havoc on all our nesting birds. Food supply has to be in sync with the nesting cycle. Almost all baby birds mainly eat insects and there are very few insects around when the temperature dips below freezing. Extreme heat presents other problems. While one fluky-weather nesting season doesn't constitute Climate Change, it sure shows how unusual weather can affect a whole nesting cycle. Scary.

## Other Unusual Happenings on the Bluebird Trails this Year

### Too many eggs in the basket

Regretfully, only 1 baby hatched and survived from this batch of 9 eggs. There were originally 5 eggs, which turned out to be sterile. Before I gave up on these eggs and removed the nest, another female came along and added an additional 4 eggs. She then tried to incubate all 9 of them, without success. In hindsight, I should have removed 3 of the eggs to give all the remaining eggs a better chance, as bluebirds can successfully have clutches of 6 eggs.



### Incest

I managed to recapture both the male and female in a nestbox at St. Andrews Golf Club and was startled to find that Dad and Mom were also Brother and Sister. Both came from the same brood in another box at St. Andrews in the previous year. This brother/sister pair had two broods and all the nestlings looked perfectly healthy – with no extra eyes or toes. I'll be most interested to recapture any of their offspring next year to see if they can breed successfully.

*Male  
Dad/  
Brother*



*Female  
Mom/  
Sister*



### Bluebirds Usurp House Sparrows

At our Historic Hudson Valley location, the bluebirds were having it out with the house sparrows. Our monitor, Iris Cohen, had to throw out the sparrows daily. Stone Barns is across the street and the farm habitat creates lots of sparrows. To her amazement, Iris returned from a weekend away and opened the box to see a welcomed bluebird egg in the middle of a sparrow nest. Momma bluebird proceeded to lay 4 more eggs and fix up the nest as much she could to make the neat cup that bluebirds prefer.

*Sandy Morrissey is president of BRSS Audubon and founder of its Eastern Bluebird Project.*

## BRSS Annual Meeting

Over 40 people attended our BRSS Annual Meeting in June. Hank Weber, our honoree, received many deserved tributes for passing along his love and knowledge of birds to hundreds of people, inspiring many to become active environmentalists. We elected the following officers for two-year terms: Sandy Morrissey, President; Doug Bloom, Vice President; Diane Morrison, Secretary; and Jeff Zuckerman, Treasurer. We also elected the following Board Members for the Class of 2019: Bernie Conway, Cece Fabbro, John Flores, Henry May and Bill O'Connell.



Honoree Hank Weber, second from left, with BRSS President Sandy Morrissey, Laura McCarthy from Audubon NY, and New York State Senator George Latimer.



Youth were well represented at our Annual Meeting. Students from Mr. McGrath's class in our Mt. Vernon bird school program came to enjoy the bird walk and presented BRSS members with thank you letters for helping them learn about birds.



**PLEASE SUPPORT OUR SEED SALE. THE TWO SEED SALES ARE OUR ONLY FUNDRAISERS. THE SALES ALLOW US TO OFFER PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS FOR FREE AS WELL AS SPONSORING STUDENTS TO GO TO ECOLOGY CAMPS AND PRODUCTION OF THIS NEWSLETTER.** Details for the sale are on the enclosed flyer. Please call Doug Bloom if you if have any questions regarding pickup of the seed or anything else.

## What Color Feathers do Tree Swallows Prefer?

Two students from the French-American School of NY (FASNY) found out the answer when they did their eighth grade science project. The girls, Chloe Gagnon and Kenza Squali, were interested in a project involving the outdoors and birds. They asked BRSS members for help.

After brain-storming, they settled on testing the hypothesis that Tree Swallows prefer to line their nests with white or light-colored feathers. How to prove this?

They first got a lot of mostly chicken feathers from craft stores and sorted them into colors. They marked the tips of the feathers with colored markers so they would know for sure if the feathers used were the ones they provided.

BRSS provided them with 10 nestboxes, which they set up on the grounds of the former Ridgeway Country Club (now FASNY property). The boxes were placed about 50 yards apart. The girls then hung their bags of colored feathers on nearby poles.



Sorting and marking the feathers.



Chloe & Kenza discover their white feathers used in a TS nest.

Soon the Tree Swallows arrived and nest-building began. What a thrill it was to see the girls' feathers lining the nests.

They monitored the nests weekly and observed the color of feathers preferred. They also asked other bluebird monitors to send them pictures of their Tree Swallow nests. Yes, the Tree Swallows liked the white and lightly-colored ones the most.

An additional bonus was that a bluebird couple didn't get the memo and nested in one of the boxes. The girls got to learn all about our bluebird project and help band the babies.

One thing we're confident of – we have two new birders for life! The girls loved it. And they got "most creative" for the school project.

## PROGRAMS 2016

PLEASE JOIN US! PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

Evening programs will begin with refreshments at 7:15 pm and the program begins at 7:30 pm unless otherwise stated.



**October 27 - "Owls, Snakes and Spiders, Oh My!" Meet the creepy, crawly Halloween animals. Presented by the Greenburgh Nature Center at the Scarsdale Library. Refreshments at 7:15 pm and program at 7:30 pm.**



## Restoration of a Forgotten Park

By Diane Morrison

For years, it sat as a neglected piece of property filled with invasive plants, garbage and debris. An impassible jungle set between the Scarsdale Library and Scarsdale High School, running along Brewster Road. Used presumably as a meeting place for teens, if the proliferation of empty beer cans and snack wrappers were an indication, it certainly was not what it was originally set out to be. The 11 acre parcel was originally part of the 369 acre former Butler Estate which had over the years been sold and divided into building lots. The Village of Scarsdale began to purchase parcels to set aside as parkland, and the 11 acre parcel was purchased by the Village in 1928 and named Harwood Park, in honor of George A Harwood, the first chairman of the Planning Commission whose mission was to develop a plan for parkland.

Harwood Park contains a fresh water tributary stream of the Bronx River Watershed, which empties into the Long Island Sound, an Estuary of National Significance as designated by the federal government. Watersheds and wetlands need to be protected and maintained as they recharge groundwater and surface waters, maintain stream flows needed by plants and animals to survive, stabilize stream banks by protecting against erosion, provide unique and essential habitats for diverse fish and wildlife species, support unique plants specifically adapted for survival in low-oxygen environments, provide areas of high plant productivity which support wildlife diversity and abundance, as well as serve as outdoor laboratories and living classrooms for the study and application of biological, natural and physical sciences.

Now...how to get this property restored so that it can do what it was meant to do? The concept of restoring Harwood Park was first brought up in 1979 when it was suggested that an arboretum be created on the site with identifying labels on trees. In 1987, Jane Bedicheck herself, a lifelong resident of Scarsdale and member of Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon and Friends of Scarsdale Parks, commissioned a study by landscape architects to determine which open space in the Village was most deserving of conservation. The Library-Harwood Park area, including the Library Pond and gardens was chosen. It was not until 2014, however, that Friends of Scarsdale Parks, a volunteer group dedicated to restoring and maintaining green space in Scarsdale, received a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Trees for Tribes program grant. This grant provided 285 native shrubs and trees from the Saratoga Nursery to be planted in the Harwood Park Wetland.



A Community Planting Day program was held in May 2015 in collaboration with the Scarsdale Department of Parks and Recreation and Department of Public Works to restore the habitat of the wetland with the assistance of community volunteers. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation statewide program coordinator delivered and supervised the planting herself on planting day and the Parks Department made up banners, issued flyers, sent emails and assisted with registration at the event as well as supplied music and tools and helped with planting. Approximately 180 volunteers came out to help at this festive, all day event, including families, young children, high school volunteers, and adults.

The next challenge was keeping the new plants watered until they were established...not an easy task! After getting permission from the DEC, Dan Hochvert, of Friends of Scarsdale Parks, placed a battery operated sump pump at the edge of the stream and made a small dam so that water would be available for the sump pump...he then set up hoses, and volunteers watered each plant by hand as needed. Of the plants that were planted on planting day, 95% survived the first year. A bird survey by Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon was done in the park as part of the Christmas Bird Count of 2015 and

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## FIELD TRIPS 2016/2017



Please Contact Doug Bloom at (914) 834-5203 for info or to register. Meet at Scarsdale Village Hall unless otherwise specified

### September 17, Saturday-Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge, New Jersey

Meet at 6:30 am at Village Hall. Looking for fall migrants and shorebirds.

### September 25, Sunday-Larchmont Reservoir/HRAS

Meet at 8 am Larchmont Reservoir upper lot. Looking for fall migrants.

### October 2, Sunday- Fire Island Hawk Watch/HRAS

Meet at 7 am at Village Hall. Looking for Hawks and other fall migrants.

### October 16, Sunday- Marshlands/Read/HRAS/Bedford

Meet at 8 am at Read Sanctuary. We will be looking for late migrants.

### November 6, Sunday- Connecticut Coast

Meet at 7 am at Village Hall. Will be looking for late migrants and early waterfowl.

### December 26, Monday- Christmas Bird Count

Contact Doug Bloom to Volunteer for this important Bird Survey even for a couple of hours or all day.

### January 14, Saturday- Montauk

Meet at 6:30 am at Village Hall. Looking for winter waterfowl and other wintering birds.

### February 11, Saturday-Eagle Fest

Meet at Croton Point Park at 9 AM.

### February 19, Sunday- Jones Beach

Meet at 7 am at Village Hall. Looking for wintering birds, possibly Snowy Owls.

### March 4, Saturday - Greenwich Point, CT

Meet at 8:00 AM at Greenwich Point. Looking for late winter migrants.

### April 9, Sunday - Larchmont Reservoir

Meet at 8:00 am at Larchmont Reservoir. We will be looking for early migrants. Warblers and other songbirds that are migrating.

### April 29, Saturday- Rye Nature Center/Bedford

Meet at 8 am at Rye Nature Center. Looking for spring migrants.

### May 7, Sunday- Central Park

Meet at 7:30 am at 77<sup>th</sup> street at statue across from Museum of Natural History. Will be looking for spring migrants, such as warblers, orioles and others.

### May 20, Saturday- Doodletown Road

Meet at 8:00 am at Doodletown Road. Best place to see Cerulean Warblers nesting and other migrants.

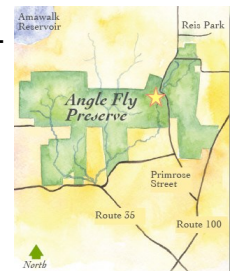
### May 28, Sunday - Sterling Forest

Meet at 7:00 am at the village hall. We will be looking for early migrants - warblers and other songbirds that are migrating.

### June 10, Saturday- Angle Fly Preserve - Somers

Meet 8 am at Angle Fly. Directions at <http://somerslandtrust.org/angle-fly-preserve/directions>.

SMRA- Saw Mill River Audubon  
Bedford- Bedford Audubon  
HRAS- Hudson River Audubon



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18 species of birds were seen that day including a Ruby Crowned Kinglet, Woodpeckers, Goldfinches, Nuthatches and a Red Tailed Hawk.

In May 2016, a second Community Planting Day program was held at Harwood Park where another 300 native plants and trees were planted along the north end of the park bordering Brewster Road. A pathway was cut through the middle of the park, connecting it to the Library Pond. Since the second planting, birds have been seen nesting in the area, including Plovers and a pair of Red Winged Blackbirds raised a family in a sapling tree still in its protective cone! People have discovered the park and are seen walking on the path at all times and stop to ask the volunteers of Friends of Scarsdale Parks about the project. Students from the high school science classes have been seen going into the restored area to observe and study the plants and animals and test the water in the stream.

The park is a great spot now for observing nature as the native plants have attracted many species of birds and animals. The long road it took to reach its potential....from the beginnings in 1928....have finally been realized. Mr. Harwood would be proud.

\*\*The information in this article was gained from an interview with former president and current secretary of Friends of Scarsdale Parks, Madelaine Eppenstein, and from the Friends of Scarsdale Parks, Inc. Wetland Restoration Project Report.

**Bronx River-Sound Shore  
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