



EST. 1947

The BIRD CALL

Fall 2021

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

For Bluebirds: It Was All or Nothing

By Sandy Morrissey

The bluebird season was very successful but unusual this year in that where we had bluebirds, we had lots of bluebirds. But they were missing in several locations.

St. Andrews, Old Oaks and Kensico each got five nesting pairs of bluebirds, and several second broods, while the surrounding locations got none.

We had 99 nest attempts, which is a good amount, but down from our extraordinary 125 of last year.

Golf courses had an exceptionally good year. While making up 42% of our boxes, they had 48% of our nest attempts. And best news for golfing bluebirds, they had a very high rate of success. The success rate for nest attempts on golf courses was 87%, compared to non-golf, where the success rate was 74%.

Overall, the success rate was a healthy 80%, which is as good as we can hope for and an indication that the mysterious disease killing some songbirds doesn't seem to be affecting the bluebird population. That said, we did have a period in the middle of the season

when I thought we had more than average number of nests that failed because all the nestlings died in the box.



New youth monitor Joe DeMartino and his brother, Hudson, help me band at Maple Moor.

We never know what really happened, but we contribute it to both parents being missing (and assume died). Sadly, and ironically, many of these nests were monitored by our youth. Of our 7 youth monitors, 4 experienced the sad sight of dead nestlings. I do always warn that there is a lot of heartbreak on the Bluebird of Happiness trail.

Interestingly, the number of bands we did (424) was one of my highest, and more than last year, though we had fewer nests. We banded 396 nestlings and 28 adults. Last year we had a severely cold, rainy spring and clutch sizes were smaller than normal, maybe explaining the fewer bands we did last year.

Highlights included recapturing two 7-year birds (our oldest ever), a success-



Knollwood CC bluebird one of two 7-yr bluebirds we recaptured this year. Bird Banding Lab's oldest banded bird is 10 yr, 8 mo. We are going for that record.

ful adoption of one chick, and a female who broke our dispersal record (5.45 mi.) by traveling 6.6 miles from where she was born at St. Andrews to Maple Moor Golf Course. The average dispersal distance is just one mile for all our birds. The golf course bluebirds average a longer distance (about 1.5 miles). I think the landscape of a golf course "imprints" on the birds, and they travel until they find a similar layout.

As always, we couldn't accomplish all this without the dedication of our

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Fall Seed Sale

We debated having our seed sale this fall because, as most of you know, there has been a mysterious disease killing songbirds, mainly reported in the mid-Atlantic states. While it was never confirmed in NY State, we originally decided to err on the side of caution.

However, recently several organizations, including Audubons from states most affected, Pennsylvania and Maryland, have put out notices that it is thought safe to feed the birds now. Connecticut Audubon also lifted their caution about feeding. Both the NY DEC and Cornell Lab of Ornithology never advised to stop feeding the birds.

We also considered the joy and connection to nature that feeding the birds brings to many of us. In this difficult time of Covid, often isolating us in our homes, watching the birds outside our windows provides a much-needed lift.

Thanks so much for your continued support of our seed sale – our only fundraiser.



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*Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society, Inc.
is a chapter of the National Audubon Society
serving the communities of
Bronxville, Eastchester, Edgemont, Hartsdale,
Larchmont, Mamaroneck, Mount Vernon, New
Rochelle, Pelham, Scarsdale, and Tuckahoe*

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many adult and youth monitors who check the boxes at least once a week and many others involved in our bluebird project. Without you, we couldn't monitor and maintain over 300 boxes on our many bluebird trails. A giant thank you!



Harlow Whitney and brother Hayes band at St. Augustine Cemetery. Involving youth is one of the most important things we do.



Penelope Franklin holds a lucky strike extra bluebird – a first time ever nest at St. Augustine Church discovered late in the season.

The Wren

By Vern Schramm

Female choices determine the fate of future generations. Nowhere are female fate-choices more important than in the life of House Wren families.

Early in the spring, Mr. Wren selects a half-dozen or so nest sites. He builds the rough frame of a nest in each and sings loudly at each location to stake his territorial claim. Bird-watchers will know early in the spring if their wren houses are on the market. The potential Mrs. Wren goes house-hunting. She inspects each site, considers location, location, location, and the skill of the builder. Does this neighborhood suit her? Does a different builder, in a new neighborhood, have more promise to be a family provider? Are there grocery stores nearby? Will the children be safe from predators? Is there a perch near the house entrance? Can we prevent the House Sparrows and Cowbirds from getting in? When her concerns are met, Mrs. Wren chooses the site that best suits her. She is the house decorator, finishing the site by filling the entry with enough sticks to prevent anyone larger than a wren from entering. She fills the box with twigs and lines the nest behind the entry sticks with soft feathers or spider silk.



The wren parents are territorial, chattering incessantly at any nearby intruder, avian or human, even as the twigs are being carried into the new home. Insects provide the nutrition for the brood and the parents are diligent gleaners of insects from nearby trees and shrubs. A perched wren near the entrance with an insect in its beak provides a sure sign of a growing family. By early July, the brood is grown and off to feed on its own. But that is not the end of the summer wren activity. The process repeats in July and August. House Wren-lovers are advised to have more than one nest site on the property. Once a location is claimed in the spring, the wren family will be encouraged to raise a second brood in their territory, but always choosing a second nest site, a move that leaves behind any nest parasites.

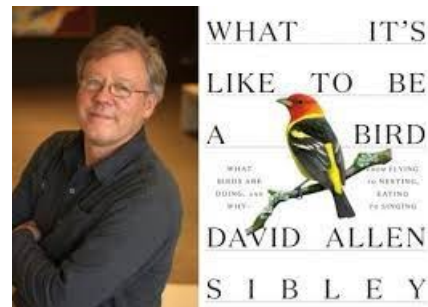
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PROGRAMS

October 12th @ 7PM, via Zoom - David Sibley: What It's Like to Be a Bird

David Allen Sibley is the author and illustrator of the series of successful guides to nature that bear his name, including *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. He has contributed to *Smithsonian*, *Science*, *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*, *Birding*, *BirdWatching*, and *North American Birds*, and to *The New York Times*. He is the recipient of the Roger Tory Peterson Award for Lifetime Achievement from the American Birding Association and the Linnaean Society of New York's Eisenmann Medal. He lives and birds in Massachusetts.

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/215722/what-its-like-to-be-a-bird-by-david-allen-sibley/>



This event is sponsored by: Hendrick Hudson Free Library, Somers Library, Scarsdale Public Library, Irvington Public Library, Dobbs Ferry Public Library, Chappaqua Public Library, Tuckahoe Public Library, White Plains, Public Library, Ossining Public Library, Yonkers Public Library and John C. Hart Library and the following local Audubon chapters: Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon, Central Westchester Audubon, Hudson River Audubon and Saw Mill River Audubon.

REGISTRATION REQUIRED: [HTTPS://WWW.EVENTBRITE.COM/E/DAVID-SIBLEY-WHAT-ITS-LIKE-TO-BE-A-BIRD-TICKETS-164516694863](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/david-sibley-what-its-like-to-be-a-bird-tickets-164516694863)

Time to Go Electric

By Sandy Morrissey

After the hottest July on record for the entire Earth, the message is clear. Global warming is real and here and happening. We must reduce carbon emissions and do it fast. Otherwise, my grandchildren – and yours – could inherit 120-degree days as a norm. Ugh!

I've had a plugin Prius for 9 years, my latest getting 30 miles on a charge before switching to gas. But I often go more than 30 miles in a day, especially during my busy bluebird nesting season. I've felt guilty helping the bluebirds but spewing emissions into the air while doing this. I vowed to go all electric (EV), and that just happened.

We are down to one car in our family, so it had to do it all. The Tesla Y model (one of their less expensive ones) has enormous space, including in the front (called the frunk), because no engine there. You are really riding in a large golf cart. I put a roof rack on it to hold my kayaks. The birdhouse poles fit. It does it all. I got the long-range model which goes 325 miles on a charge. No "range anxiety" for me.

Now to convince the rest of you to get an EV.

Price is one of the major reasons people don't go electric. They do cost more than a comparable car, but you



Charging into the future for my grandchildren!

will get back at least some of the extra cost, as electricity is cheaper than gas. I looked at a Nissan Leaf and could get a 2-year lease for \$100 a month (not sure how much down). So there might be an EV in your budget. You can also think of the extra cost as making a "charity donation," but in this case to Mother Earth and its inhabitants. Actually, the government has deductions for some models.

The second and I think biggest reason people are afraid of going EV is "range anxiety." I just asked my husband (who can't drive now) if he would get an electric he if he were still driving – after experiencing riding in my car, which I know he likes. He said no because he didn't want to worry about running out of charge. This is the guy who never stopped for gas till the light came on. He also didn't want to sit at a charging station for an hour while charging.

Let's debunk these reasons. It takes 15 seconds to plug or unplug your car to an outlet in your home. Much faster than a stop at a gas station. You make plugging in a habit, like brushing your teeth. You do it without thinking. Unless your daily driving takes you more than 200 miles (the minimum range of most EVs), you ride with plenty of charge and spend no time getting gas.

But what about long trips? Yes, you will need to spend time at a charging station. There are plenty around and at super charging stations, you will "fill up the tank" in 45 minutes – while you get a snack and use the restroom (or in

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FIELD TRIPS



Please Contact **Doug Bloom** at (914) 834-5203 for info or to register. Meet at Scarsdale Village Hall unless otherwise specified. **LIMITED TO 20 PEOPLE.**

September 18, Saturday - Larchmont Reservoir

Meet at 8:00AM at upper parking area at the Reservoir. Looking for fall migrants

October 2 Saturday - Hawk Watch Lenoir Preserve, Yonkers

Meet at 9AM at Lenoir Preserve. Park at the mansion. Looking for Hawks and other fall migrants

October 17, Sunday - Marshlands/Read

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

November 6, Saturday - Jamaica Bay

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

December 26, Sunday - Christmas Bird Count

Contact Doug Bloom to volunteer for this important Bird Survey. Can do a few hours or all day

January 1, Saturday - Greenwich Point

Meet at 9:30AM at Greenwich Point near bathrooms in main parking lot

January 8, Saturday - Montauk

Meet at 6:30AM at Village Hall in Scarsdale. Looking for Alcids and other Wintering birds possibly Snowy Owls

January 23, Sunday - Jones Beach

Meet at Village Hall at 7AM. Looking for wintering birds including possible Snowy Owls

February 12, Saturday - Eagle Fest - Rain date Sunday 13. (Note, date subject to change)

March 13 - Sunday Connecticut Coast

Meet at 7AM at Village Hall. Looking for late winter migrants.

April 9 Saturday - Anglefly Preserve Somers

Meet at 8AM at Anglefly Preserve. We will be looking for early migrants. Warblers and other songbirds that are passing thru.

May 1, Sunday - Central Park

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

May 7, Saturday - Rockefeller Preserve

Meet at Rockefeller parking lot at 8AM. Looking for spring migrants

May 14, Saturday - Doodletown Road

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

May 22, Sunday - White Memorial Park, Connecticut

Meet at 7AM at the village hall. We will be looking for early migrants. Warblers and other songbirds that are passing thru.

May 28, Saturday - Larchmont Reservoir/Hommocks

Meet at 8AM at upper parking area at the reservoir. Looking for spring migrants.

The Wren - Continued from Page 2

House Wrens make lively viewing for bird watchers. But wrens are not good neighbors for other birds. Eggs of competing species in the wren territory can be punctured by wrens, thus saving the neighborhood insects for the wren brood.

Finally, when the broods have all been raised, the families depart for warmer climates in the winter, leaving us to look forward to their return in the

spring. The lively, cheery, and yet mischievous nature of the wren makes it a favorite in the yard, and a literary model for similar human characteristics, as in Resat Nuri Guntekin's 'The Wren'. Careful choices of the wren family have led to a strong



population and have earned it a status of least concern for the future of the species. Good news for fans of the perky, scolding, sometimes malicious, but loveable House Wren.



Nest of sticks

Go Electric - Continued from Page 3

some cars like mine, play the video games that come with the car – as is my granddaughter's favorite thing to do). With a 200 mile range, you can drive almost 3 hours and with my 325 long-range, you can drive over 4 hours without stopping to charge.

What about all of you living in apart-

ments and condos with no charging station? Time to ask your building to provide that. But in the meantime, how far do you really drive in a week? Is it under 200 miles? Once a week make a trip to a charging station. Catch up on your email and text while waiting or find one near where you shop and dine.

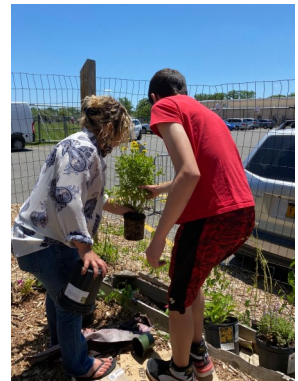
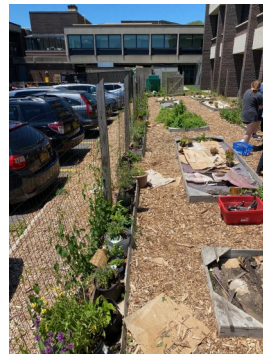
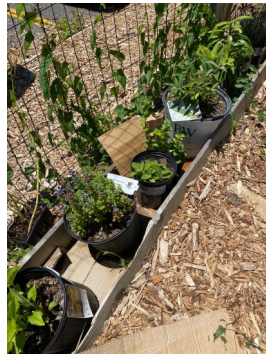
While all EVs can charge in a regular

outlet (at a very slow pace), I did install a charging station in the garage. It was an expense larger than I anticipated, but I think of it as a home improvement and a good investment for when we sell.

You adapted to using a computer and cell phone. You can do this!

New Pollinator Garden

Thanks to the support and generosity of the Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon and the Mamaroneck Schools SEPTA (Special Education Parent Teacher Association), planting began this past June for a much anticipated pollinator garden at the Hommocks Middle School in Larchmont. Two grants were awarded to teachers whose goal was to obtain the tools needed to create a pollinator garden adjacent to an already existing vegetable garden, as well as the funding to purchase the plants. This garden will be maintained by a group of students who receive special education support at the Hommocks Middle School, giving them an ongoing opportunity to engage in authentic and hands-on experiences planting and caring for a garden. Maintaining the garden will allow students to gain new skills as they observe the changes in the garden. In addition to learning new skills, the teachers are hoping that gardening can increase students' ability to attend, help reduce stress, and provide students a sense of accomplishment. The most important benefit of the addition of a pollinator garden will be the opportunity to educate the entire school community about the benefits created by planting flowers that provide nectar and pollen. Hommocks staff and students are looking forward to seeing pollinating insects such as butterflies as soon as planting is done, and are very grateful to the support from the BRSS Audubon!



Youth Field Trips

October 10, Sunday, 9AM – Hook Mountain Hawk Watch, Nyack.

Rigorous .5 mile hike up Hook Mountain to hawk watch station, with spectacular views of Hudson. Then continue walk along ridge to several great viewing locations. Signup required for meeting location and further details. Use email below.

November 14, Sunday, 9AM – Crestwood Lake.

Meet in Crestwood Lake train station parking lot on parkway side of train station, accessed from exit 8 off Bronx River Parkway).

Please let us know if you plan to attend. Send email to brssaudubon@gmail.com. For more information contact Sandy at 914-391-3695.




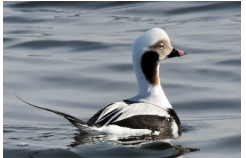




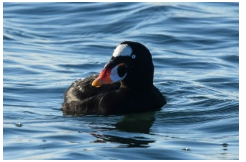
Duck-Duck-Goose – Our Overwintering Waterfowl

By Ted Kavanagh

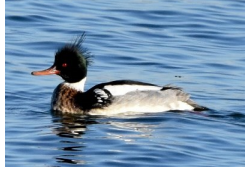


As temperatures fall and the days shorten, we can look forward to seeing, once again, the waterfowl that overwinter in our area. Joining the Mallards and Canada Geese that are here year-round will be species that have been breeding farther north – some as far as Hudson’s Bay and the Canadian Arctic.

Three birding “hot spots” – one in the Bronx River–Sound Shore region and two others very close by, are good places to spot these birds. Edith G. Read Wildlife Sanctuary in Rye (on the pond and off the beach); Greenwich Point Park in Connecticut; and Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx (off Orchard Beach and off Hunter Island) – all typically host all of the species described in the table below. All are open to non-residents during the fall, winter and early spring; entry and parking are free of charge. While binoculars or a spotting scope will give you the best chance to see the most birds, many are close enough to shore to be seen without “optics”.

Organized by size – smallest to largest – these are the most reliably seen “winter waterfowl” in our area:

<p>Bufflehead – 12.5” to 15.5” long The smallest of the diving ducks, and typically one of the first to arrive (in mid-October) and last to leave (in early May), Buffleheads will be seen in groups, diving briefly out of sight before popping back up to surface. Males have their prominent white spot and otherwise iridescent coloring. Buffleheads breed in northern Ontario and Quebec (and across Canada).</p>	
<p>Long-tailed Duck – 14” to 23” long Typically in our area from Nov/Dec through April, Long-tailed Ducks are typically seen farther offshore, and are capable of diving as deep as 200’. Males are distinctive for the exaggerated length of their tail feathers and for a pinkish band around the bill. They breed around Hudson’s Bay and in the Canadian Arctic.</p>	
<p>Greater Scaup – 15” to 22” long Normally with us from November until May, Scaup congregate in “rafts” of as many as 100 individuals. Females are brown with a semi-circular brown spot behind the bill. Greater Scaup are difficult to distinguish from Lesser Scaup (which are less common in our area). Scaup breed in very far northern Canada.</p>	
<p>Common Goldeneye – 15.5” to 20” long Reliably seen from December through March, Common Goldeneye’s (like the Long-tailed Duck) are typically seen swimming farther offshore, in groups of less than 10 at a time. Males feature a bright white spot aft of the bill, in an otherwise iridescent green head. They breed across northern Canada, though mainly south of the territories.</p>	
<p>American Wigeon – 17.5” to 23” long Seen closer to shore and mingling with other ducks, Wigeons are normally with us from November through April. Males have a cream-colored forehead and sort of a “yin-yang” shaped green and gray display on the sides of their head. Wigeons breed as far south as upstate-New York and in the upper Midwest, and otherwise across Canada.</p>	
<p>Gadwall – 18” to 22” long The Gadwall is a “dabbler” – normally seen in shallower water and consorting with other ducks. They’re with us from November through March, and are perhaps best identified from behind owing to their distinctive black rear end. They are a more southerly breeding bird than the other ducks – mainly in the Midwest and Canadian prairie provinces, but also in more southern parts of Ontario and Quebec.</p>	
<p>Surf Scoter – 19” to 23.5” long Not as common but by no means a rarity, Surf Scoters are distinguished by their prominent candy-corn-colored, “Romanesque” bill, and by the white patches on the back of the male’s neck and forehead. Commonly seen in groups of two or three off Orchard Beach in Pelham Bay Park from December through March, they breed in a band across Canada roughly either side of the border separating the provinces from the territories.</p>	
	<p><i>Continued on Page 7</i></p>

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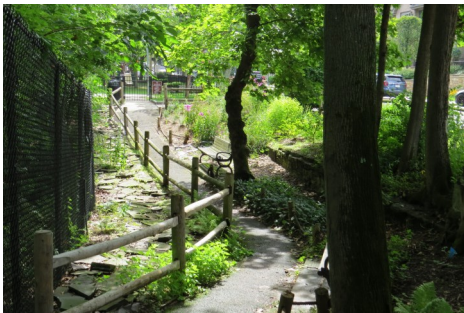
<p>Red-breasted Merganser – 20” to 25” long The male Red-Breasted is distinguished by his white collar, frizzy hair-style, long “Bob Hope” type bill and red eyes. They have a long season with us, from November until early May. They typically are seen in groups of 5-10 individuals, mainly in shallow water. They breed as far south as the upper Midwest, but mainly across northern Canada.</p>	
<p>American Black Duck – 21” to 23” long Perhaps the most common of the winter species and with us the longest, the ABD doesn’t get a lot of respect. It looks like a drab Mallard (with which it interbreeds), with its only notable coloration its violet wing patches that are seen in flight. It occurs in groups of up to perhaps a dozen birds, scrabbling around near the shore. It breeds in northern Ontario and Quebec/Labrador.</p>	
<p>Brant – 22” to 26” long The Brant is the only “winter” goose that is <u>commonly</u> seen in our area, typically seen in large flocks of up to hundreds of individuals, close to shore. In the area from October through mid-May, it is an elegant-looking goose with its white chin-strap, less annoying than its Canadian cousin. It breeds on the shore of Hudson’s Bay and across the arctic region.</p>	

Sharp-eyed, diligent observers will see other waterfowl in the area during the winter – Northern Shovelers, Teals, Mergansers, Scoters, Canvasbacks and Redheads, as well as Snow Geese (not to mention Loons and Grebes). The ten species noted in the table are simply the most reliably observed. When the woods are quiet, it can be rewarding to put on the long-johns, mittens and wooly toque, and head to the shore to see what ducks and geese find southern Westchester a pleasant place to spend the winter.

BRSS Audubon/ Community Native Plant Gardens

Working with the Village of Tuckahoe we helped to create two beautiful native plant gardens. One is located near the quarry on Fisher Ave. and the other is at the Tuckahoe Public Library. Both beautiful spots to enjoy nature.

Audubon Garden at Quarry Park



Native Garden at Tuckahoe Public Library



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Audubon Society, Inc.**

(formerly Scarsdale Audubon Society)
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