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The BIRD CALL

Winter 2020

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

The Escaped Monarch: Life on the Run

By Sandy Morrissey

This fall I did a Monarch butterfly program for senior residents at King Street Rehab in Rye Brook. While it was a PowerPoint presentation, explaining the amazing life cycle of Monarch butterflies, I also brought along, for show and tell, a live caterpillar and a chrysalis.

I must say, while some residents were noticeably dozing during the presentation, all of them perked up when I went around to each one, showing the caterpillar munching on some milkweed leaves.



Releasing a newly emerged Monarch butterfly at a follow-up program at King Street Rehab.

I was rearing this caterpillar at home, and it essentially lived on a bouquet of milkweed leaves, stuck in a bottle of water. I had transported it in my car by placing the bottle in my cup holder, the caterpillar munching as I drove.

When it was time to leave, I put the bottle with caterpillar back in my cup holder and then loaded my other equipment into the car.

Before I headed home, I checked on the caterpillar. To my great dismay, it was nowhere to be found. I examined every leaf of the milkweed. I searched my car, looking around the seats, under the floor mats and shining my cellphone flashlight under the seats to see if the caterpillar had crawled off there.

I also retraced my steps back into the building, but no caterpillar was in sight. When I got home, I did another thorough search of the car, but to no avail.

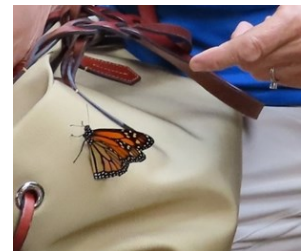
Oh my! I felt terrible. It would surely die if it crawled off within the building or even on the grounds. It would have no milkweed, which is the only thing a Monarch caterpillar can eat. My only consolation was that I knew that the caterpillar had served a useful purpose in its short life, bringing bright smiles to all the residents who got a close look at it.

Fast forward 11 days later. I arrived at my golf club with a friend to attend a benefit golf outing. My friend had gotten out of the passenger side, and I opened my car door, then pulled out my purse, which was riding on the floor beneath me.

To my shock a Monarch butterfly was on my purse. By the time it registered in my mind what I was seeing, plus called to my friend to come and look, the butterfly flew off.

The only explanation for this is that after I placed the caterpillar back in the car after the program, it crawled off to some secret place in my car and went into its chrysalis stage. It would have first spun a silk button and then attached itself, hanging in the "J" stage for about 24 hours, before shedding its outer skin and forming a chrysalis.

All this means my Monarch was riding around with me as a chrysalis for 11 days – which is the normal time spent in this stage. It went to the grocery store, the dry cleaner, the post office, the grandson's football game and the granddaughter's swim meet. It sat in untold parking lots, while I shopped, did errands, played golf, and dined out – all with the car windows up. Fortunately, we didn't have a heat wave during this early September time, or it would have cooked.



A replica of what I saw when I pulled out my purse. I was too shocked to take a picture before it flew off.

I knew Monarchs had mystical powers – the last generation of the summer instinctively knows they must fly 3000 miles to a tiny spot in Mexico. But the toughness and will to live of this traveling monarch serves to add to the wonder and awe of one of nature's most astonishing creations.

BRSS Audubon has an initiative to promote the planting of milkweed and other native plants to help our butterflies, which in turn are a critical part of the food supply of birds. We are happy to do butterfly programs for other facilities.



The escaped Monarch went through all these stages during its car ride.

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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*

Monitors Celebrate the Bluebird of Happiness

Despite the low number of bluebird nesting attempts this year, we had the highest number ever of bluebird monitors celebrating the happiness the bluebird brings to our lives. Best of all was the increased number of youths involved in our bluebird project. Thanks so much to all the monitors. We couldn't do it without you.

Fall Bird Seed Sale Results

Thank you to all our customers who bought birdseed through our Fall seed sale. The seed sales are our main fundraisers during the year. Our profit on the sale was \$4102. We had \$1901 in donations. Therefore, the total of profits and donations was \$6003. The proceeds from our seed sales go to: newsletter publication, scholarships to Westchester Environmental camps given to local children, bluebird project, and more. Your continued support is greatly appreciated.



**Order your Bird Seed for the
rest of the Winter and Spring -
Seed Sale form included in this
newsletter!**

Climate Change Bootcamp Inspirational

By Sandy Morrissey

This fall BRSS join other local Audubon chapters and FCWC in sponsoring a two-part program on climate change. The theme was what various levels of government were doing despite the lack of any action and leadership from the Federal government.

The first session was a viewing of the film, *Paris to Pittsburgh*. It was created after the US withdrew from the Paris Agreement (It's available free on various digital formats. Find it and view it!). The second was a morning session at the County Center with state, local and community speakers presenting what they were doing about the climate change crisis, preceded by the keynote speaker, Chandu Visweswariah, who was riveting.

The attendance at both sessions was above our expectations, with over 300 viewing the film and approximately 115 at the County Center.

I attended both sessions and was inspired to make a bigger commitment to taking actions to reduce my carbon footprint.

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Ward Acres Park in New Rochelle

By Bernie Conway

When you are in the need for a place to go to relax that is close by, full of trees and trails, with a place to let your dog run loose in a fenced-in area, or a place to grow vegetables at a community garden, then I suggest check out Ward Acres Park in New Rochelle. This is a large park of about two-hundred acres, surrounded by residential neighborhoods and two schools. This park used to be a farm for racehorses. A falling-apart barn remains. This property was given to the City of New Rochelle in the 1960s, with meadows mowed, and the rest left to grow into mature forested areas connecting to the old-growth forest in the lower part of the park.

As time moved forward, people who garden in the park and visit the park have noticed that the meadows and forests within have become overgrown with invasive vines, trees, and herbaceous weeds, outcompeting the native vegetation and limiting the amount of plant and bird life that can and should be within this park. Because of this, a new and exciting set of events have been set in motion.



Invasive vines swallowed this tree, but hopes are high for a major restoration of the park.

Eleven years ago, a small group of people approached the City of New Rochelle about starting a vegetable garden. The city bulldozed an acre of space, and thus the community garden sprang from where invasive brambles once grew.

About two years ago the members of the steering committee began seeing the garden as part of the whole park and started asking questions, to first the gardeners and then to those who visit the park. Basically, the question was, "What can be done to improve this park?" Everyone agreed that inva-

sive plants need to be removed, new pollinator gardens need to be added to the park, an inventory of the visiting birds and animals needs to be accessed through bird and nature walks, and the history of the park needs to be addressed.

The city really did not know what to do with the park except to maintain it as it is. But this was not good enough anymore for those who cared about the park.

This is where Ward Acres Park Conservancy was born. As you read this in the Winter 2020 newsletter, the conservancy is in its infancy. However, things are now happening. The first Saturdays of every month are the vine cutting volunteer days in the park. All should come out and attend. The park has reached out to other nonprofits like the Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society to help secure a grant to go toward the implementation of a new native plant pollinator garden, and the installation of bluebird boxes to attract the State Bird of New York to nest in the park. There are more plans for designing larger native habitat areas of the park, once invasive plants are removed. There is the possibility of having more agriculture in the park, perhaps a small-scale farm, or an orchard, more food to grow to give to a food bank, and perhaps more vegetable plots for people to grow their own food.

There are a lot of new and exciting possibilities for Ward Acres Park. I encourage everyone to come visit the park. Please start counting the birds, mammals, insects, amphibians, and all the native plants you can for citizen science. Let the conservancy know who is in the park with us and to help us make this jewel a wonderful place for everyone to enjoy for many years to come, from one generation to the next.



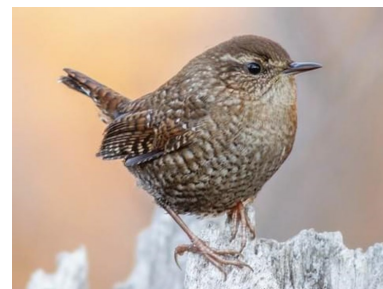
Winter Wren

By Bernie Conway

In this Winter season while you are out looking for birds, one small bird that you should be on the lookout for is the one with the namesake of the season, the Winter Wren. This bird is a tiny ball of energy with a song that is ten times more powerful than a crowing Rooster (when looked at per weight of this bird). The Winter Wren scampers around among fallen logs and piles of branches; more mouse-like than a bird. This bird is a weak flier so this is why you find it in these areas.

At this time of year Winter Wrens are widespread in open and young deciduous wooded forest areas as well as being found in gardens, brushy fields, and brambles, calling from time to time with a barking call that is said to be similar to a Song Sparrow. If you are looking for this bird in the breeding season of April into July they are found near streams in ever green forests of Spruce, Fir, and Hemlock, also around fallen logs and under dense understory plant vegetation.

Winter Wrens will eat a variety of insects and arachnids such as ants, beetles, flies, mites, caterpillars, millipedes, and spiders, many of these creatures found in and among the logs, and also in your garden compost pile. They will build several



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PROGRAMS 2020

Wednesday, January 22 @7PM

Eastchester Public Library

Jessica Schuler--Connecting Urban Youth to Nature through Citizen Science and Ecological Restoration.

Jessica A. Schuler, former Director of the Thain Family Forest at The New York Botanical Garden, was responsible for the management of the 50 acre, old growth urban Forest including ecological restoration and the development of education and research programs.



She teaches about urban forest restoration, invasive species, and native plants. Jessica earned a BS in plant science with distinction in research from Cornell University, is an ISA-certified arborist and Certified Ecological Restoration Practitioner with the Society for Ecological Restoration. Jessica is an advocate for native plant conservation and ecological restoration.

Over the past 10 years, many youth programs have engaged in ecological restoration and monitoring work within the Forest. We find that the programs that include both a citizen science monitoring and hands-on restoration component are the most successful. Providing middle school and high school students with an authentic fieldwork

experience, engaging them in data collection and allowing them to draw their own conclusions. This program model empowers students with the knowledge and ability to become environmental stewards. With more than 50% of the world's population living in urban areas, the stakes are now at their highest to engage urban youth in nature and environmental stewardship. This talk will discuss the curriculum that NYBG has developed to monitor invasive plant species, water quality, and phenology to teach ecology and the importance of ecological restoration as a conservation practice to urban youth in New York City.

**April 2020 – Earth Day Program
50 Year Celebration!**

Date & Location: TBD

**Save The Sound—Long Island Sound
Report Card**



<https://www.ctenvironment.org/report-card>

Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound is the preeminent regionally-focused nonprofit leading the way on effective environmental programs throughout Connecticut and the greater Long Island Sound region. Come learn about this important estuary and the conservation efforts in place to save it. Our health depends on its health. What steps can we take today to ensure a strong and thriving Long Island Sound? (please check our website for updated program information)

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dummy nests in the same type of locations you will find them feeding; around fallen logs, near streams under roots, in moss or in dead trees.

A nest is built out of moss, bark, twigs and other plant materials. Both the males and females line the nest with the hair and feathers of their neighboring inhabitants. Nests the size of an American football have been seen. These Wrens usually have from one to eight eggs, and up to two broods in a breeding season. The egg incubation takes fourteen to seventeen days, while time in the nest is from fifteen to seventeen days. Eggs are white with reddish to brown spots on the larger end of the egg.



Winter Wrens tend to fly short distances, they scurry and hop around fallen logs and cling to trees similar to Brown Creepers. They are very energetic and will often bob their bodies, as if doing squats.

As far as we know, the oldest living Winter Wren is a female of six years and six months old, recaptured and released during a banding operation in California in 2009. This bird was banded in the same state in 2003.

Go out this winter and keep a lookout near fallen logs, dense thickets, and brush piles near any stream and you may find a namesake of the winter season. Go out and have good birding ahead.

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Here's what I did or am doing. Most will save me money in the long run.

- * ***In process of changing all light bulbs to LED.***
- * ***Signed up with Con Ed for a plan to use only renewable electric power.***
- * ***Signed up with a Community Solar program. Am now part of a solar installation on Staten Island.***
- * ***Installed "smart thermostats" upstairs and down.***
- * ***Reducing plastic by remembering better to bring reusable bags into all stores – not just the grocery store.***
If I do forget, I just say no to the bag and carry out the items in my hands with the receipt showing when possible.
- * ***My next car will be all-electric for sure.***

It's New Year's resolution time. Make some good ones for the Earth!



FIELD TRIPS 2020



Please Contact Doug Bloom at (914) 834-5203 for info or to register.

January 19, Sunday- Jones Beach

Meet at Scarsdale Village Hall at 7:00 AM. Looking for wintering Birds including possible Snowy Owls

February 8, Saturday-Eagle Fest Rain date Sunday

Meet at Croton Point Park at 9AM. Looking for Eagles.

March 15, Sunday - Connecticut Coast

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

April 11, Saturday - Larchmont Reservoir/Hommocks

Meet at 8AM at Larchmont Reservoir. We will be looking for early migrants. Warblers and other songbirds that are passing through.

May 3, 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 9, Saturday - Rockefeller Preserve

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

May 16, Saturday- Doodletown Road

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

May 24, Sunday - White Memorial Park, Connecticut

Meet at 7AM at Scarsdale Village Hall. We will be looking for early migrants. Warblers and other songbirds that are passing through.

June 5 - June 7, Friday-Sunday- Delmarva Peninsula

Looking for spring migrants.

Northern Mockingbird

By Ted Kavanagh

One of the most distinctive and entertaining members of the Family Mimidae is the Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*). Cousins include the catbirds and thrashers; these birds are known for their beautiful and varied song repertoire, and their ability to mimic other birds and, indeed, many other sounds. The Northern Mockingbird's scientific species name – “polyglottos” – means “many tongues” and is well-deserved. Males are able to sing as many as 200 different song types, many mimicking other birds.



Typical tree-top perch

“What is the point?” one might ask. One theory is that the variety of voices helps the mockingbird claim and hold territory. Another is that a wide-ranging repertoire impresses the ladies. Mockingbirds are considered to be “open-ended learners,” which can learn new songs at any age, versus many birds that have a “sensitive period” (typically the first year or even the first month of life) during which they learn their songs and calls. With quite a long lifespan (up to 20 years) they have a lot of time to learn!

Northern Mockingbirds have a quintessential US distribution, with a range just penetrating into southern Canada and into Mexico and the Caribbean. They are year-round residents of New York, but most noticeable in the spring when their loud, melodious songs are a welcome addition to the dawn chorus. Look for mockingbirds singing lustily from their favorite perches at the very tops of trees or on rooftops.

About the same size as robins, mockingbirds are a fairly drab gray and white until they take flight, when bright white patches on their upper wings are distinctive. They will sometimes “flash” their white patches when on the ground. Their amber yellow eyes are also a classic feature. Mockingbirds are omnivorous, eating berries, fruit and insects, and sometimes dropping in for birdseed and suet at feeders.

As Miss Maudie explained to Scout in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, “Mockingbirds don't do one thing except make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corn cribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.” It's hard to argue with that sentiment.



Yellow-eyed Mockingbird at feeder



Flashing white wing patches

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Audubon Society, Inc.**

(formerly Scarsdale Audubon Society)
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