



EST. 1947

The BIRD CALL

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

Purple Martin Tower Rises in Larchmont

By Sandy Morrissey

BRSS is always looking for good environmental projects to further help our diminishing bird species and other wildlife. While Purple Martins are not currently declining in the Northeast, their population is totally dependent on human housing. Like the bluebirds, if we stopped supplying nestboxes for them, their population would decline dramatically.

What sounded like a simple project turned into a major undertaking. We ordered the Purple Martin tower in April, with high hopes of getting it up during the martin nesting season, hoping at least they might check it out for next year. We had permission from the Village of Larchmont (and great cooperation from DPW's Rick Vetere) to locate it in Willow Park, a small quiet park bordering the Premium Marsh. Like the bluebirds, martins need lots of open space and a good supply of flying insects. The marsh would supply both. (Learn more about Purple Martins in Ted Kavanagh's article below.)

The tower soon arrived at the Feed the Birds store in Croton, and the owners graciously said they would store it until we got our act together to install it. This involved digging a 3-foot hole, adding cement, assembling all the parts and getting the 16-foot pole in the hole – perfectly straight up. The

instructions were clear as mud. All of it not an easy task for volunteers who didn't have it in their skill set.

Soon it was May and the height of the bluebird nesting season. No time to deal with it till that's over in August. Then vacation time, then back to work time. Meanwhile, I had contacted former board member Elizabeth Poyet, who was active in the Larchmont environmental community. In discussing our project, she said she had a fellow volunteer who was a retired carpenter. Just what we needed!

Into our lives came Kevin Crowe. Without him, the martin tower would still be sitting at the Feed the Bird store. Yes, he knows how to deal with cement. Yes, he knows how to make a pole perfectly straight. Yes, he has all the tools we need. By now it's mid-November and we need to get this done before the ground freezes.



Continued on Page 2

The Purple Martin

By Ted Kavanagh

The birds we are hoping to attract with our new martin tower are the largest of the +/- 90 species of swallows and martins around the world in family Hirundinidae. The Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) is 7½" to 8" long with a wingspan of up to 15". It feeds on the wing, hunting flying insects that it catches with its incredible aerobatic agility, often diving at high speed with its wings tucked in like a falcon.

As shown in the photo, the male Purple Martin is a dark iridescent indigo blue. The female has a lighter breast but also has a blue back and wings. Like the females, juvenile males also have a lighter breast, but with blotchy patches



of the darker feathers that characterize the mature bird; final mature plumage is achieved only after two years.

Typical of the family, Purple Martin tails are forked, though not in as pronounced a fashion as, say, the Barn

Swallow.

Purple Martins begin to arrive in our area in early April, and will have pretty much headed back south by mid-September, some traveling as far south as Argentina. Males arrive first in the Spring to establish their territory; females follow and, with the male, will select from amongst several potential nest sites. The typical single annual clutch size is four to six eggs per nest. The female is the main incubator, but both sexes will contribute to rearing the young. Chicks will fledge in about one month, and the parents will continue to support their chicks for another month after that.

Continued on Page 2

BRSS AUDUBON

**P. O. Box 1108
Scarsdale, NY 10583
www.brssaudubon.org**

**Board of Directors
and Committee Members**

*Officers**PRESIDENT*

Sandra Morrissey 391-3695
sandym10530@gmail.com

VICE PRESIDENT

Doug Bloom 834-5203

TREASURER

Jeff Zuckerman 395-3083
jeffzuckerman2000@yahoo.com

SECRETARY

Diane Morrison 725-7351

*Committees**MEMBERSHIP*

Clare Gorman 395-3083
claregorman@yahoo.com

FIELD TRIPS

Doug Bloom 834-5203
Neil Powell 437- 8348

CONSERVATION

Maria Albano 420-8521
Miriam Beveridge 725-8608
Leslie Brill 400-9136
Bernie Conway 413-210-0041
Johnny Flores 917-345-8698
Ted Kavanagh 646-334-1775
Tim Mack 917-208-5507
Henry May 667-6144
Erin Provenzano 845-531-8109
Vern Schramm 576-2578
Susan Williams 917-385-9727

HOSPITALITY

Diane Morrison 725-7351

PROGRAMS

Doug Bloom 834-5203
Leslie Brill 400-9136
Bernie Conway 413-210-0041
Erin Provenzano 845-531-8109

NEWSLETTER

Clare Gorman, Editor
claregorman@yahoo.com

WEBSITE

Erin Provenzano 845-531-8109

*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*

Continued from Page 1 - Tower

We make 2 dates - one to dig the hole and set the base in cement, and a 2nd to assemble and install the pole.

Day 1. Robert from Feed the Birds delivers at the appointed time, and Kevin and I commence digging. Since location was a previous “dump,” it was dicey, but despite rocks and hitting a buried 2x4, we succeeded in getting the 3-foot depth we needed. Kevin amazed me with how he knew to make a sleeve for the cement, make a brace to hold the base pole, check all with a level, and then add the cement keeping the pole perfectly straight.

Day 2. Realizing we need more help, I had put the word out and board member Diane Morrison volunteered. We expected to finish the job on Day 2, but by the time the sun was setting over Premium Marsh, the tower was up but the gourds not assembled or attached. Plus, we realized the poor instructions led us astray and we’d have to take down the tower to fix.

Day 3. Another call for more help brought board member Maria Albano and her son, Carl, who will actually be the monitor for the tower. The job was first take the tower down, redo the cables, rise up again, then assemble and install the gourds. We thought the gourds would be simple, but they turned into a nightmare, as it was very difficult to attach the screws to the nuts, working blindly with one hand inside the gourd and the other out. I couldn’t do it, but fortunately Diane and Kevin had the fine motor skills and could. I had the fun of hanging the gourds. Kevin and Carl then attached the predator guard and, whew! We finished just as the sun was setting again on Premium Marsh.

Kevin and Carl returned to attach a “decoy” martin which, hopefully, will attract the real deal. Rick from DPW checked it out, and we are grateful he installed a lock on the gear, making it tamper-proof.

A big thanks to BRSS members who helped, and giant THANKS to local resident Kevin Crowe who donated lots of time, skills and know-how to get this big project accomplished. Hopefully, next spring we will hear the melodic, cheerful song of a Purple Martin colony and all will be worth it!

Continued from Page 1 - Purple Martin

Human-supplied Martin housing has a long history, dating back to pre-Colonial times when Native American tribes were known to have hung hollowed-out gourds around their villages and fields. The benefits to farming communities are clear, of having flocks of Martins consuming insect pests all summer long. While Martin colonies in ages past would have been in caves and cavities in trees, the birds are reliant now – at least in eastern North America – entirely on artificial nest boxes.

The Purple Martin’s genus “Progne” is named for the daughter of King Pandion of Athens who, legend has it, was transformed into a swallow. “Subis”, the species name, is Latin for a bird mentioned in Roman times that reputedly could break eagles’ eggs – presumably reflecting the aggressiveness with which the Purple Martin allegedly defends its territory and nest site from other birds. In reality, House Sparrows and Starlings are constant threats to take over Purple Martin condos, something our nest box monitor will be on guard against.

Fall Seed Sale Results

Thank you to all the customers who bought birdseed through our Fall seed sale. The seed sales are our only fundraisers during the year so your support is so important. The sales fund our newsletter, Bluebird project, classroom programs, and more. Our profit on the sale was \$4525 and there were \$2508 in donations, bringing our total to \$7033.

The Winter Seed Sale form is included in this newsletter. Please buy our seed.

A Purple Martin Tower Rises



Our rock star—Kevin Crowe





FIELD TRIPS



Please Contact Doug Bloom at (914) 834-5203 for info or to register. **LIMITED TO 20 PEOPLE.**

January 8, Sunday - Jones Beach

Meet at 8 AM Parking lot at Coast Guard Station West End. Looking for Alcids and other Wintering birds, possibly Snowy Owls.

January 21, Saturday - Montauk

Meet at 8 AM Parking lot at Lighthouse at Montauk. Looking for wintering Birds including possible Snowy Owls.

February 4, Saturday - Eagle Fest - 9 AM - 4 PM at

Croton Point Park. For more information go to <https://www.teatown.org/events/eaglefest/>

February 11, Saturday - Eagle Walk

Meet at 8:30 AM at Croton Point Park parking lot.

March 11, Saturday - Shawangunk Grasslands NWR

Meet at Shawangunk Wildlife Refuge at 2:30 PM. Looking for late winter migrants, including Short-eared Owls and Rough-legged Hawks.

April 23, Sunday - Oil City Road

Meet at 8 AM at Liberty Loop Trail parking lot. We will be looking for early migrants.

May 7, Sunday - Central Park

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

May 13, Saturday - Rockefeller Preserve

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

May 20, Saturday - Doodletown Road

Meet at 8 AM at Doodletown Road. It is a great place to see Cerulean Warblers nesting and other migrants.

May 27, Saturday - Sterling Forest

Meet at 8 AM in parking lot at Visitors Center lot We will be looking for early migrants.

Winter Friends

By Vern Schramm



A friendly chick-a-de-de call heralds the return of our winter feeder-friends. Black Capped Chickadees are almost always found in mixed flocks with Tufted Titmice and White-breasted Nuthatches. Friends to us and friends to each other, they seem to enjoy each other's company at the feeder. Not shy of humans, and curious to explore, Chickadees will often respond to a handful of black oiler sunflower seeds in the depth of winter by landing on the offering hand, taking one seed and speeding off. The tiny feet are surprisingly warm. One of the reasons other birds hang out with flocks of Chickadees may be to respond to the Chickadee alarm calls warning of predators. The Chickadees you see in your yard this winter are likely the same ones from the past winter. A banded Chickadee was identified almost 12 years later in the same banding location in New York City. Chickadees and their friends at winter feeders also attract predators, one of the most common being the Cooper's Hawk. The hawk is a persistent hunter and will hide under a bush or perch on a low branch to avoid detection while waiting the appearance of prey. Chickadees are expert at knowing the hawk location and sounding the alarm.

As summer approaches, the flocks break up and go their own way for nesting. The Tufted Titmouse family builds a nest lined with soft bark, hair and fur for their two broods each summer. Reports of Tufted Titmice tugging at well-coiffed human hair are common. If successful in removing a tuft, the bird will return for subsequent helpings. Nests are constructed in a tree hollow or any other convenient location, including nesting boxes. The male feeds the female during incubation, as mating pairs are thought to remain together for most or all of their lives. Offspring from the first hatch of the year are reported to participate in feeding the second brood of the year, a true family affair.

The White-breasted Nuthatch is one of nature's 'upside-down' birds, seemingly as comfortable on the bottom of a branch as on the top. It can often be distinguished from all other birds simply by seeing it winding its way, head-first, down the trunk of a tree. Feeding on branch bottoms gives the Nuthatch an advantage over other insect eaters that prefer top or vertical surfaces. In winter it is an eager participant at the backyard feeder, taking one seed at a time and heading for its favorite tree to feed, or, equally likely, to find a crevice to store the seed as insurance for more difficult times ahead. In between feeder excursions, the Nuthatch searches among the cracks on deciduous trees for insects. As summer comes, the Nuthatch too, dissociates from the winter flock and spends most of its time raising a single brood. The chicks are fed entirely on insects, the major summer food of the family.

Winter concentrates the mixed flocks for our viewing pleasure. However, most of these birds remain in the same territory during the summer, but mostly are not as visible as they go about their family business of raising the next generation. Watching them together in winter is another reason to celebrate the season.

Winter/Spring 2023 Audubon Programs

January 25 @ 7 PM, via Zoom

BIRD MIGRATION: FUN FACTS AND SHAMELESS SPECULATIONS

DR. PAMELA HUNT

Why do birds migrate? How do they know where they're going? The phenomenon of bird migration has fascinated people for millennia, and in this program the answers are finally revealed! Pam Hunt will provide an overview of the nuts and bolts of bird migration, including how scientists study it. We'll also discuss examples of migration routes of some familiar (and unfamiliar) species and touch on the conservation issues facing migratory birds.

Pamela Hunt PhD

Dr. Pamela Hunt is NH Audubon's Senior Biologist for Avian Conservation. She has been interested in birds since the tender age of 12, when an uncle took her to Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge in NJ. She went on to earn a B.S. in biology from Cornell University, M.A. in zoology from the University of Montana, and a Ph.D. from Dartmouth College in 1995. Pam came to NH Audubon in 2000 after five years as adjunct faculty at Colby-Sawyer College in New London. In her current position, she works closely with NH Fish and Game to coordinate and prioritize bird research and monitoring in the state, and also authored NH's "State of the Birds" report. Specific areas of interest include habitat use by early successional birds (particularly whip-poor-wills), conservation of aerial insectivores (e.g., swifts and swallows), and the effects of events outside the breeding season on long-distance migrants. Pam also coordinated the "NH Dragonfly Survey," a five-year project that mapped distributions of these insects throughout the state and remains active in the dragonfly field.

"As an academic at heart, I really appreciate the flexibility that my position at NH Audubon offers. I can dabble a little in multiple projects and prioritize them based on what the data tell me. At the same time, I enjoy the opportunities to educate the public on my work, whether in written form or as a presentation."

Pam is a regular presenter of a variety of talks in our webinars. [To hear more from Pam, explore our YouTube channel.](#)

ZOOM INVITATIONS WILL BE REQUESTED BY EMAILING INFO@HRAS.ORG

February 15 @ 7 PM, via Zoom

GONE TO THE BIRDS WITH AL BATT

Co-Sponsored by Hudson River Audubon

What is a spark bird and where do I get one?

What makes us birders? Who do we thank?

Al Batt is a birder and a storyteller. Al has received the Ed Franey Media Award from the Izaak Walton League and the Thomas Sadler Roberts Award from the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union (MOU) for lifetime contributions to birding. He is a trustee for the American Bald Eagle Foundation in Haines, Alaska, and is the former president of the MOU. Al is a columnist for BWD and speaks to anyone who will listen. His mother thinks he's a big deal. To register go to <https://brssaudubon.org/programs>.

March 16 @ 7 PM, via Zoom

EARLY SPRING FORAGING WITH VIOLET BRILL

Despite chilly weather, early spring is a great time of year to start learning how to forage for wild edible plants, many of which are shared by birds and humans. As temps start to thaw, many of these plants are growing well before garden plants are ready, and foraging, along with birding, is also a way to get outside, connect with nature, and enjoy the first days of spring.

Violet Brill, daughter of New York forager "Wildman" Steve Brill, has been co-leading foraging tours since childhood and now leads her own public tours. A freshman Natural Resources Conservation major at UMass Amherst and youth representative for the Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon board, she will show you how to identify and use some of spring's best wild edible and medicinal plants, such as salad greens and shoots, flowers, and mushrooms. She will also discuss some of the native and invasive plants used by birds, and cover the basics of how to forage safely and sustainably.

To register go to <https://brssaudubon.org/programs>.

April 12 @ 7 PM, via Zoom

MIGRANT AND VAGRANT TRAPS OF NORTH AMERICA

PAUL LEHMAN

Join Paul Lehman on a photo tour of North America's migrant hot-spots, from eastern Newfoundland and the Dry Tortugas to the western Aleutians and the California coast--and everywhere in between. Topics covered include what makes for a good migrant trap, when to visit and under what weather conditions, and characteristic and special birds found at many of the sites.

Paul Lehman began birding at the age of 9 in Larchmont. At 18 he moved to Santa Barbara, California, where he remained for 20 years before returning east in 1994 to live in Cape May, New Jersey, for 14 years, and then migrated back west to San Diego in 2008. Given his interests in geography, bird distribution, and working on bird lists in every state and province, he has traveled extensively throughout virtually every nook and cranny of North America. He has written many articles and papers on avian distribution and identification. Formerly a lecturer in physical geography and environmental studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara, and past editor of ABA's Birding magazine for nine years, Paul has given talks on weather, bird distribution, migration, and vagrancy, topics that are of special interest to him. Paul also led bird tours throughout North America for Wings, Inc. He was an associate editor for North American Birds magazine and he has been a principal consultant on several popular field guides, most recently as the chief consultant for the range maps in the *National Geographic Society's Field Guide to the Birds of North America* and *Complete Birds of North America*, *The Sibley Field Guides to Birds of Eastern and Western North America*, and several of Roger Tory Peterson's field guides. To register go to <https://brssaudubon.org/programs>.

**Bronx River-Sound Shore
Audubon Society, Inc.**

(formerly Scarsdale Audubon Society)
P. O. Box 1108
Scarsdale, NY 10583

NON PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
WHITE PLAINS, NY
PERMIT NO. 7033



Stay in touch with BRSS Audubon in the following ways:



Visit our website
brssaudubon.org



Find us on Facebook
Search Bronx River
Sound Shore Audubon
Society

Join!

Support our environmental mission and receive our newsletter with information about all our programs and field trips. Annual dues are **just \$20** and include membership in the National Audubon Society, plus its extraordinary magazine. Please allow 4-6 weeks for processing.

***NEW MEMBERS form only. Please RENEW membership online at www.audubon.org**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please make \$20 check to National Audubon Society and mail to:

BRSS Audubon Society, Inc.
P. O. Box 1108
Scarsdale, NY 10583

C0ZR080Z