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The BIRD CALL

Spring 2019

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

BRSS Annual Meeting June 6

Five Islands Park will be the beautiful setting for our Annual Meeting, thanks again to the very generous hospitality of the New Rochelle Department of Parks and Recreation. The business meeting begins at 6:30 P.M., with an optional guided bird walk at 6:00 P.M. It's a great opportunity to meet and chat with other members. Wine and cheese plus other light refreshments will be served. All BRSS members and friends are encouraged to attend.

Honorees are Michelle Sterling and Ron Schulhof.

BRSS likes to honor individuals making significant environmental efforts at the grass roots level. This year we've chosen two Scarsdale residents, Michelle Sterling and Ron Schulhof, who spearheaded a Food Scrap recycling program which they started in Scarsdale and are now expanding to all of Westchester.

Michelle was volunteering at her children's elementary school lunchroom when she noticed how much trash the lunch period generated. The school had no kitchen facilities, so restaurants were contracted to deliver food. Single serving Styrofoam and plastic containers along with half eaten lunches filled the school trash receptacles. To Michelle, this appeared to be an environmentally unsustainable approach to a school's lunch period.

Ron was another Scarsdale resident interested in finding a sustainable solution to the garbage generated in the school district. Together with Michelle, they visited the Katonah school district to understand what others were doing to combat this problem. This brought them to the model that compostable waste could be collected in the schools in a separate can, carted off by a private company and taken to a composite facility to be processed into planting soil.



Honorees Michelle Sterling and Ron Schulhof

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Making Westchester a Better Place for Insects

By Anusha Vaish

Do you know that the Nine-spotted Ladybug is the State insect of New York? This handy beetle has gone missing in Westchester for decades. The Monarch butterfly is the national insect of the USA. It migrates 3000 miles in the winter. This beautiful insect is at risk of extinction due to habitat loss.

My name is Anusha. I am eight years old and the youngest member of the New York Entomological Society.

Insects come in all shapes and sizes. Some have bright shells while others have soft bodies. Some have wings while others have spots. No matter how different, they are fascinating to me.

Visit my website www.saveinsects.com to see pretty pictures and videos of insects or listen to how insects communicate. Learn some awesome fun facts like cockroaches evolved around the Cretaceous period, yup . . . alongside T-Rex. Honey Bees make 10 million trips to produce one pound of honey, and only female mosquitoes bite.

My Living Greenways campaign aims to engage youth in building habitats to help us co-exist with nature. This April, I am starting a 'Six Legged Critters' club in Eastchester where kids will study fun facts about insects and discuss ideas to make habitats that support local wildlife.

Join me to protect insects at all cost. Connect on Twitter @SaveInsectsA or Instagram @SaveInsects.



BRSS AUDUBON

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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*

Annual Meeting - Continued from Page 1

In 2014, a pilot food scraps collection program began at one of Scarsdale's elementary schools. The first step was to require vendors to use recyclable packaging for their lunch offerings. Next, all food scraps and paper packaging were collected in a single can for the compost carting company to collect. Within three years of the start of the pilot program, all five Scarsdale elementary schools, its middle school and high school were separating food scrapes into unique receptacles and having this collection composted. Soon, neighborhood houses of worship were contacting Michelle and Ron, asking how their organizations could follow suit.

With the success in the Scarsdale school district and local houses of worship, Michelle and Ron worked to have the Village of Scarsdale institute a food scraps collection program. Starting in 2017, the Village of Scarsdale became the first municipality in Westchester to launch such a recycling program. The food scrap recycling program has been incredibly successful and has quickly expanded to 14 additional municipalities in Westchester County and the lower Hudson Valley region.

Since the Scarsdale Village program launched, 586,000 lbs. of food scraps have been recycled into compost. Weekly collections currently exceed four tons and continue to increase as more households register to participate. In addition, the price of carting away one ton of food scrap recyclables is one-fifth the price of disposing of regular garbage. Within the first two years of the program, over 1,100 households have registered (20% of Scarsdale households). The Village also organizes soil give away days for village residents to come and take back soil produced through the program for their personal use.

For Michelle and Ron, their next set of goals are two-fold: exporting the Scarsdale model to other school districts and municipalities to implement, and working toward the creation of a composting facility in Westchester county for all its municipalities to use.

Ron says, "Our job is to create replicable solutions and sustainable models and then give them away." Today, the goals focus on educating neighbors on how to recycle their food scrap waste and become conscious of the amount of waste each of us makes. Tomorrow, the hope is that residents will reduce the amount of food wasted and use reusable items in food service.

Michelle and Ron demonstrate what a tremendous impact individuals working at the grass roots level can achieve. Great going Michelle and Ron! You deserve our highest honor.

Election of Board Members

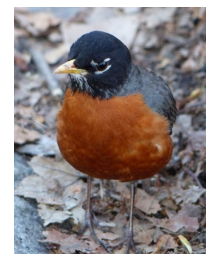
At the Annual Meeting, BRSS members will be asked to vote to approve the following slate of Directors for the Class of 2022: Bernie Conway, Cece Fabbro, Johnny Flores, Henry May and Billy O'Connell.

We hope to see all BRSS members and friends at Five Islands Park in New Rochelle on June 1.

Harbingers of Spring

By Vern Schramm

Following a long winter with the backyard feeders populated by House Sparrows, House Finches, European Starlings and Mourning Doves, the return of the American Robin is a welcome sight. Arriving in a timely fashion in February and March by following the just-above-freezing weather from the south to the north, robins arrive with the spring rains that force earthworms to the surface. Some of the February arrivals are often



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Freshwater Heart of New York: The Bronx River

By Erin Provenzano

My family has lived nestled on a hill alongside a swift and quiet river for over a century. Growing up and visiting Tuckahoe to see my grandparents was always a treat because it involved walking down to the park around the corner from the house. There were waterfowl galore, mainly Canadian Geese and Mallards, and the little dam with water gushing over it made you feel as though you had been transported to a fairyland. Though people drive, walk, and commute along this river's banks, not many people really stop to admire its magnificence.

The Bronx River is New York City's only freshwater river. It runs from its headwaters, the present-day Kensico Reservoir, 22-miles south before reaching Hunts Point in the Bronx and flowing into the East River.



Just a few years ago, I had the enlightening opportunity of working on a section of the river in the Bronx as part of a restoration program run by NYC Parks. A few of the duties I performed included water quality testing and the monitoring of wildlife within the river (namely American Eel and River Herring). I also worked with and educated Bronx teens helping to expose them to nature and get involved with an essential aspect of their community. Not many things can come close to the magical feeling you have when you're holding an American Eel. It is almost a comfort to know that this alien-looking creature is a native of the river, trying to reclaim its home.



For decades, the Bronx River served as a dumping ground for industrial and personal waste. Littered with garbage and tainted by toxic chemicals, the river presented hazardous conditions to any animals, fish and humans who came into contact with the water. The industrial uses on and along the river began to accumulate and by the early part of the 20th-century, the Bronx River had become polluted. These sources of pollution came from restaurants, farms, manufacturers, and railroads. Only recently, did the Bronx River begin to receive the attention it has needed and deserved.

Both the Bronx and Westchester have amazing organizations doing important work advocating for the Bronx River. Though the river flows through both counties, there is no true border separating the Westchester portion from the Bronx portion. In fact, rivers know no boundaries. The more connections we make with each other, the more opportunities will flourish, including learning/supporting/inspiring each other, which in turn does provide the same for the wellbeing of the river.

During the last week of March, the Bronx River Alliance came to the Tuckahoe Community Center to deliver a program on the migratory fish species of the Bronx River and highlighted volunteer engagement opportunities the community can get involved in. And in less than a month, I will be leading a *Riverkeeper* Sweep of the Bronx River in Tuckahoe. We are casting our nets out into the Bronx River community and we are working together to admire, protect, learn, and grow along these banks.

Please join me on **Saturday, May 4th, at Parkway Oval Park in Tuckahoe from 10am - 1pm**. Bags and gloves will be provided by the Tuckahoe DPW. Volunteers will meet below the soccer field, by the "Call Box." Please wear sturdy shoes or boots, clothing that you can get dirty, and bring a hat, sunscreen, a reusable water bottle, and snacks. I hope to see you on the 4th!

Seed Sale

By Doug Bloom

Thank you to all the customers who bought birdseed through our February seed sale. Since this is our main fundraiser during the year, we appreciate your continued support. Our profit on the second seed sale was \$3312. The proceeds from our seed sales is used to print our newsletter, support the Bluebird Project, send kids to the nature camps in the county parks, and more. The total profit for the two seed sales this year was \$10462. The donations for the year were \$3233.

We would like to acknowledge the people who gave donations for the seed sale this year:

Mary Alice Becker, Doug Bloom, Sheryl Breuninger, Leslie Brill, Robert Canora, Suzanne Celphane, Ernestine Colombo, Cathy Corbin, Julia De Carlo, Warren Douglas, Angela Eaves, Cece Fabbro, Clare Gorman, Elizabeth Harriss, Kathryn Heintz, Emita Hill, Tina Hoerenz, Phil Horner, David Kaufman, Ted Kavanagh, Kelly MacPherson, David Margulis, Valerie Marini, Scott Mellis, Harriet Miller, Sandy Morrissey, Diane Morrison, Linda Murphy, Wendy Murphy, Suzi Oppenheimer, Dorothy Patterson, Donald Pinals, Neil Powell, Erin Provenzano, Karen Raggins, Barbara Roca, Charles Ruebens, Anthony Santelia, Vern Schramm, Jean Stephenson, George Vaida, Ellen Valle, Jan Von Mehren, Lisa Wagner, Joan Weissman, Robert Wirsneck, Sidney Wittner, Phyllis Wittner, Josette Zichello.

Westchester Woodpeckers

By Ted Kavanagh

Among the more readily identifiable of our avian neighbors in Westchester are seven members of the Picidae (woodpecker) family, which includes flickers and sapsuckers. As shown in the figure below, showing data from Rockefeller State Park (as representative of the Bronx River-Sound Shore area) five of the seven are quite common and are pretty much year-round residents. The other two, the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and the Red-headed Woodpecker, are more elusive, typically seen in Westchester only during the “non-breeding” part of the year.

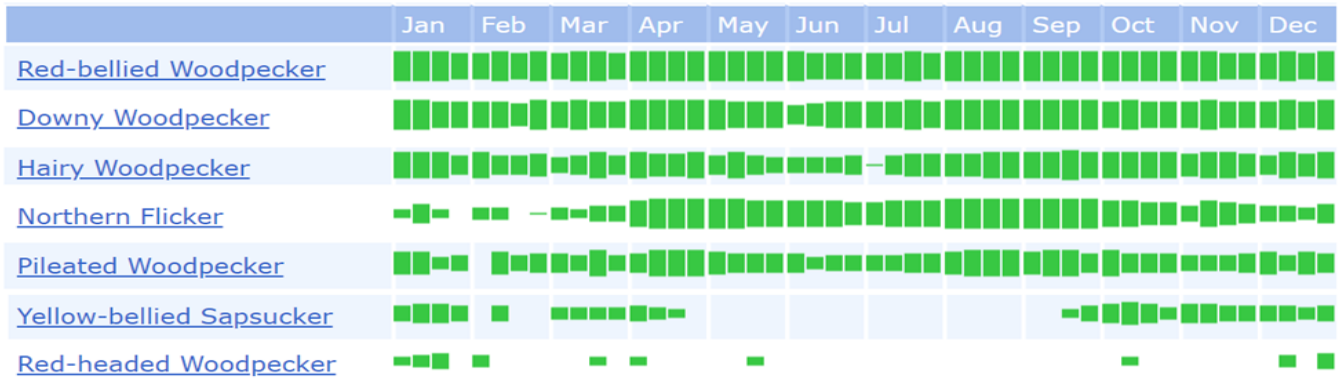


Figure 1 -- Frequency of woodpecker sightings at Rockefeller State Park, 1989 to 2019 -- (from Cornell eBird.org site)



Figure 2 -- Northern Flicker showing zygodactyl toes

A defining feature of the woodpecker family is the “zygodactyl” arrangement of their toes (two facing frontwards and two facing backwards), which helps the birds grip tree-trunks as they forage for insects and excavate their nests. Fun fact: zygodactyl toes are also seen in parrots, cuckoos (including the Roadrunner) and the Osprey. Except for the Flicker, our woodpeckers show the typical black-and-white “camouflage” coloring, with the only notable dimorphism being the presence or absence of red in the crown (in Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers), or variations in the extent of the red coloration (in Red-Bellied, Sapsuckers and Pileated Woodpeckers).

The Downy is the smallest of the group at a little over 6” from head to tail. The Pileated is the largest – three times that size, at 18” – and looks positively prehistoric.

Woodpeckers are particularly noticeable in the springtime, when they are often heard drumming on gutters and downspouts – whatever makes a lot of noise – for the birds to establish their territories. The birds have minute air pockets in their skulls, and strengthened bone tissue, that allow them to hammer so hard without injuring themselves.

Pileated Woodpeckers are regularly seen (and heard) at Marshlands Conservancy in Rye, and at Rockefeller State Park. A bird took up residence last year at Hunter Island in the Bronx, just adjoining our area, and has been observed again this spring.



Figure 4 -- Downy Woodpecker at suet feeder

Woodpeckers eat a variety of foods – insects and grubs, fruit, nuts and seeds. Sapsuckers bore holes in trees to drink sap. Flickers feed mainly on ants during the breeding season, and are often seen on the ground, around fallen logs and in open fields foraging for insects. During the winter, it is easy to attract woodpeckers to feeders where they particularly like suet, peanuts and peanut butter.



Figure 5 -- Red-headed Woodpecker at nest

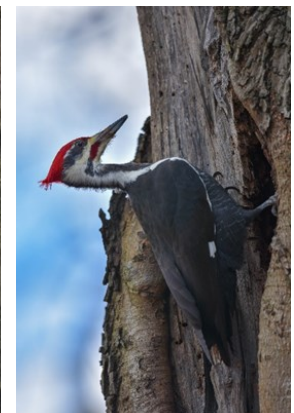


Figure 3 -- Pileated Woodpecker



FIELD TRIPS 2019



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



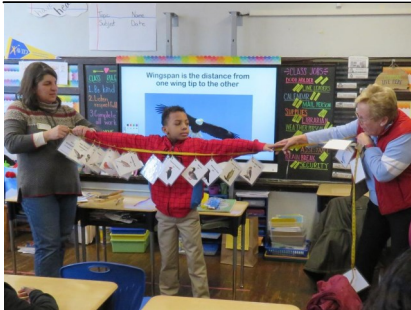
May 5, Sunday- Central Park
Meet at 7:30am at 77th street at statue across from Museum of Natural History. We will be looking for spring migrants such as warblers, orioles and others.

May 18, Saturday- Doodletown Road
Meet at 8:00am at Doodletown Road. Best place to see Cerulean Warblers nesting and other migrants.

May 25, Saturday - White Memorial Park, CT
Meet at 7:00am at the Scarsdale Village Hall. We will be looking for early migrants; warblers and other songbirds that are passing through.

May 11, Saturday- Rockefeller Preserve
Meet at Rockefeller parking lot at 8:00am. Looking for Spring migrants.

May 31 - June 2, Friday - Sunday - Delmarva Peninsula
looking for spring migrants.



**Our 8th Year
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Excited about
Birds**



Robins - Continued from Page 2

surprised by one or more snows and hard freezes to set back their habitat. Eventually, the abundant springtime nutrition allows robins to begin nesting by mid-April. Why are robins so common, so successful? We are all familiar with the hazards faced by newly hatched robins. Crows actively seek out nesting sites to raid the new hatchlings. Fledged, but flightless robins leave the nest to become prey for ground predators, especially feral or roaming house cats. To compensate, Mr. and Mrs. Robin are dedicated to raise two broods a season. Each brood is usually four light bluish-green eggs incubated by Mrs. Robin alone after she has built a nest of grass and dried mud. Mr. Robin is the main food-provider during the incubation and shares in feeding for the growth of the chicks in the nest. Watch the robin cock its head as it feeds. It can hear earthworms moving through the soil. Both parents are needed to provide worms, insects and fruit for the always-voracious appetites of the young. Finally Mr. Robin helps the fledged chicks to become independent, giving freedom to Mrs. Robin to start another hatch. The first nest of the season is often placed in an evergreen, as the deciduous trees do not provide sufficient cover for the early nest. By the time of the second nest, deciduous trees are fully leaved and are a common site for the second brood.



If perfectly successful, eight chicks can be raised each season. However, banding studies reveal that only one in four fledglings survive the first year. Nevertheless, the efficiency of the two-brood system has made the American Robin the second most common bird in North America, after another harbinger of spring, the Red-winged Blackbird. In both species, the males arrive first to establish territories followed days to weeks later by the females who can begin immediately to build nests in their newly-established neighborhoods. The winning ways of the American Robin has made it a favorite of our neighborhoods and the state bird of Connecticut, Michigan and Wisconsin.

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(formerly Scarsdale Audubon Society)
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