

The BIRD CALL

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

Wintering Ducks are Here

By Sandy Morrissey

Did you know that there are only two species of ducks here in Westchester during the summer months? If it is May through September, chances are that if you see a duck, you can easily identify it as either a Mallard or a Wood Duck.

Almost everyone knows what a Mallard looks like. While it is our most common duck, sun striking the bright iridescent green head of the male makes it one of our most beautiful water fowl.

The second duck present in the summer is the Wood Duck. It is a rainbow of colors, and most agree it has the most spectacular plumage of all our North American ducks. Regrettably, it is rather secretive and not often visible to the casual observer.

For everything there is a season

So where are all the other 30 species of ducks listed in your bird guide during the summer? They are breeding in northern climates (like most of the shore birds). We only get to see them during the winter months, when they journey south to find open water after theirs freezes.

While I'm always sorry to see the colorful summer residents, like the Baltimore Oriole, head south, I am cheered at the thought that the "wintering ducks" will soon arrive. I

usually see my first in late October, and the population builds until winter strikes a hard blow and freezes over our own ponds and lakes. The ducks will then head further south.

You'll be receiving this newsletter in January, so if we're already frozen, save this article till a winter thaw – or next year. Like the warblers, the "wintering ducks" will return for their season.

If you can find open water, here are some ducks to look for. The males (described below) are generally distinctly patterned, while most of the females are some degree of brown. It is easiest to ID the males and then just hope the female swimming beside it is the female of that species.

The Mergansers



Red-breasted Mergansers. Good place to see them is at Read Wildlife Sanctuary. It straddles Playland Lake and the Long Island Sound. Thus, good place to see both sea ducks and lake ducks.

If you see ducks with punk hairdos,

chances are they are one of our Mergansers. There are 3 of them: Hooded is smallest, with a smooth fan-shaped crested hood. The Red-breasted has been described as having "bed-head" – you know, how your hair looks when you wake up in the morning before combing. It sticks out. The Common strikes you as very white, with a green head.



Hooded Mergansers. How about these punk hairdos?

The Tail tells the tale

Three ducks have distinctive tails. The Ruddy Duck is very small and quite common. It often cocks its tail straight up. Look for a white patch that covers the lower half of the head. The Pintail duck is one of our largest ducks, with a long, pointed tail, plus a unique white vertical line on its long neck. The Long-tailed Duck will be found in salt water and, as the name states, has a long tail and a striking black and white pattern on its head and back.

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Another Record-breaking Year for the Eastern Bluebird Project

By Sandy Morrissey

Bluebirds made 115 nest attempts this year, increasing their numbers again, as they've done since we started the Eastern Bluebird Project in 1998. Indeed, when my sister was

here from Florida birding with me in November, we saw bluebirds in 3 of our 4 locations we visited – making it one of the most frequent species observed. When I think back to reporting my first sighting in 1999 to John Moyle, ex-BRSS president and ex-

pert birder in our area, he said he hadn't seen one for over 25 years. We've made a big contribution to the bluebird's recovery, and we couldn't do it without the help of many volunteers.

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serving the communities of
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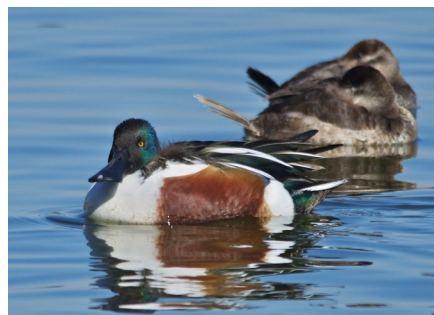
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Pintail. Note pointed tail and vertical stripe on neck.

The Beaks speak

A few ducks can be ID'd by their beak. Northern Shoveler and Canvasback both have long, shovel-shaped beaks. The Northern Shoveler's head is green and the Canvasback's is red – easy-peasy. The Ring-necked Duck's beak is blue with a white ring. This duck looks very similar to the Scaup (there is a Lesser and Greater Scaup), which don't have a ring on their beak. I don't think even God can separate the Lesser from Greater Scaup, so I certainly don't try.



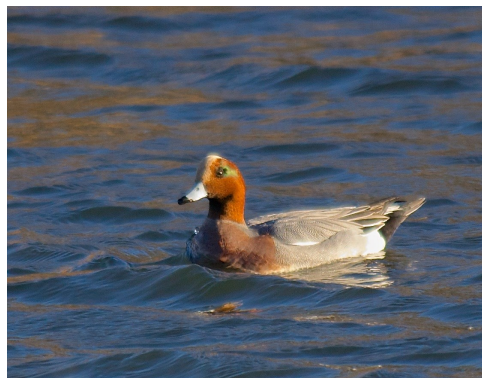
Northern Shoveler with large, flat beak. In background, two Ruddy ducks with cocked tails.



Ring-necked Ducks. Note white ring on beak.

Sorting them all out

I just touched on some of the 30+ species that are out there on our local water bodies. Hopefully, you have a bird guide. It has a lot more ID tips. Note the habitat – fresh or salt water. Note the behavior, dabbling or diving. Note that we have several field trips during the year that are specifically looking for wintering ducks. Note that wintering ducks are fun. Just saying some of the names is a chuckle – Bufflehead, Wigeon, Gadwall.



Eurasian Wigeon. A rarity that showed up at Hommocks Conservation Area in December. Birders live for finding "lifers" like this.

Brighten your winter doldrums with wintering ducks!

Sandy Morrissey is President of BRSS Audubon and loves to dabble in IDing the wintering ducks.

Photo Credit: All duck photos by Jim Sutherland. Thanks Jim.

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Thanks to the over 30 dedicated bluebird monitors who make weekly visits to the nestboxes. Pictured here are those who were able to attend our annual Bluebird Celebration Party.



Thanks to Cece Fabbro and Bonnie Gould, who helped me with banding a record 416 bluebirds this year (up from 365 the previous year). Our number of recaptures (from which we gather the scientific data) were 52 unique birds. That's up from 31 the previous year.



Thanks to Mike Vaughn who made a batch of 40 nestbox kits (for the second time). Each kit is 6 pieces, with at least 4 cuts a piece. That's over a 1000 cuts. Greatly appreciated, Mike!



Thanks to the youth who help monitor and help with the banding.



Thanks to the many Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts who made nestboxes for our bluebirds. We couldn't do it without your help.



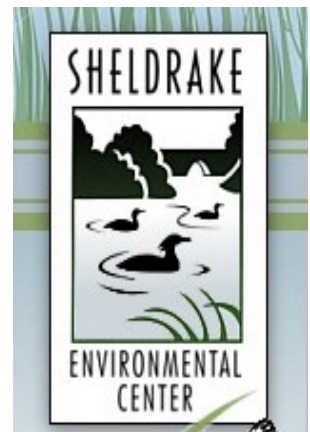
Thanks to our Bluebirds of Happiness!

Sheldrake's Fall Festival October 19th, 2014

By Catie Beveridge

It was a windy, brisk day for Sheldrake's Annual Fall Festival. The Nature Center had many displays out from pond exploration to learning about insects. Catie Beveridge and her mom, Miriam, set up a table in the middle of the exhibits. Using the Audubon's posters, they invited kids to build a nest for toy birds using tweezers. But since a strong breeze did not let up during the festival, Catie switched to teaching kids about beaks and used toothpicks to replicate digging for worms – except here in the graham cracker “sand” hid gummy candies for the kids to find. Kids played “pick a bird” from a pile of

plush toys and were told facts about the bird they chose. Then walking around the fair with a tape measure, Catie and her mom called out to the crowd, “Which bird would you be?” and then measuring any visitor who stopped to see how their “wingspan” compared to those of a bird. Overall, the festival had a wonderful turnout and the Audubon table had many visitors.



PROGRAMS 2015

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

All programs are co-sponsored by Central Westchester Audubon .

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

Wednesday, January 21, 7 PM - **Film – *Birders: The Central Park Effect***

The Central Park Effect reveals the extraordinary array of wild birds who grace Manhattan's celebrated patch of green and the equally colorful, full-of-attitude New Yorkers who schedule their lives around the rhythms of migration.

Location: Scarsdale Library, 54 Olmstead Rd., Scarsdale

Thursday, February 19, 7 PM - **New Jersey Pine Barrens**

The Pine Barrens is a heavily forested area of coastal plain stretching across more than seven counties of southern New Jersey. The unique ecology of the Pine Barrens supports a diverse spectrum of plant life, including orchids, carnivorous plants and pygmy Pitch Pines.

Presenter Wayne Cahilly grew up on the edge of the southern New Jersey Pine Barrens. He graduated from the School of Professional Horticulture at the New York Botanical Garden, and has had a diverse career working at the Garden, including Arboretum and Grounds Manager, Manager of Institutional Mapping and Gardens Site Historian. He also runs a consulting business in Forensic Arboriculture, the science of determining how and why a tree or tree part structurally failed. Wayne has led more than one hundred tours through the Pine Barrens, focusing on field biology and local history.

Location: Presbyterian Church, 39 North Broadway, White Plains, NY (**Entrance to parking lot on Barker Ave.**)

Wednesday, March 18, 4:30 PM -5:30 PM - **Meet the Animals at the Trove– A Live Animal Program**

Presented by the Greenburgh Nature Center

Join us with your children to see and learn about some of the wild animals who make the Greenburgh Nature Center their home.

Location: White Plains Library, 100 Martine Ave., White Plains

Wednesday, April 22, 7:00 PM – 8 PM - **Sustainable Wildlife: Creating Pollinator Habitat**

Presenters: Chrissy Word, Ursula Chanse, and Sara Katz

Chrissy Word is an environmental science educator and co-founder of Butterfly Project NYC. She teaches students and adults, writes educational curricula and has helped to distribute and restore thousands of native plants in gardens throughout NYC. She works for City Parks Foundation where she manages the Learning Gardens, Green Girls and Coastal Classroom programs.

Ursula Chanse is the Director of Bronx Green-Up and Community Horticulture at The New York Botanical Garden. Bronx Green-Up provides horticultural advice, technical assistance and training to community and school gardeners and urban farmers in the Bronx.

Sara Katz is the Community Horticulturist for Bronx Green-Up, the community garden outreach program of The New York Botanical Garden. She is also a Bronx beekeeper.

Location: TBA

Report on Fall Bird Seed Sale

Thank you everyone who bought seed this fall. There were \$1621.00 in donations and \$2922.50 in profit, for a total of \$4543.50. This is the best we have ever done. Some of the proceeds from the seed sales go toward sending children to the nature camps in the county parks. If anyone knows of a child who might want to attend one of these camps please contact a Board Member.

Another Opportunity to Purchase Seed and Support BRSS Audubon 15th Annual Winter Bird Seed Sale



The BRSS Bird Seed Sale is your opportunity to buy premium quality bird seed and help us raise funds for our BRSS Audubon educational and environmental programs. **This is the BRSS Audubon's major fundraiser.** Our mixes contain only the seeds that local birds prefer, without any "filler" seeds often found in cheaper mixes sold at grocery and hardware stores.

A study by the US Fish and Wildlife Service showed that the favorite foods for birds in our area are sunflower seed, peanuts and millet. They are all available during our seed sale.



FIELD TRIPS 2015



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

January 11, Sunday- Montauk/SMRA

Meet at 6:30 am at village hall. Wintering Ducks and other birds. Possibly Snowy Owls

February 7, Saturday- Eagle Walk Eagle Fest

Meet at Wild Bird Center at 8:00 am for our annual Eagle walk or at Croton Point Park at 8:40 in big parking lot near Gazebo

February 13-16, New Hampshire Coast

Looking for wintering waterfowl. Call by January 19 to register.

April 19-Sunday, Sterling Forest

Meet at 7:00 am at the village hall. We will be look-

ing for early migrants. Warblers and other songbirds that are passing thru.

May 3, Sunday- Central Park

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

May 17, Sunday- Doodletown Road

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

SMRA - Saw Mill River Audubon

Field Trip Report

By Doug Bloom

Meadowlands 9/18

There were 6 participants and 48 species of birds on a sunny fall day. Some highlights of the trip were 5 species of sandpipers, an American Avocet, a few Merlins and a Peregrine Falcon that flew right over our heads about 10 feet away.

Greenwich Audubon Center 10/9

There were 8 participants and 36 species of birds on a very sunny day with no clouds in the sky. Some highlights were Wilson's Warblers, Pine Siskins and 4 species of hawks including American Kestrel and Cooper's hawk.

Jamaica Bay 11/13

23 participants saw 33 species of birds. It was a beautiful fall day with little wind. Some of the highlights were 5 Northern Harriers; An American Bittern flew right towards us before veering off. They are a very elusive bird usually heard but not seen. Brant by the Hundreds, and 3 species of Grebe; Horned, Red-necked and Eared.

Read Sanctuary 12/7

11 participants saw 38 species. It was a beautiful day. Some of the highlights were a Red-throated Loon and Long-tailed Duck, purple Sandpiper

Youth (and Adult Beginner) Field Trips 2014/2015

All field trips are on Saturdays and begin at 9:00 a.m. PLEASE email Dave Kaufman dkaufman43@gmail.com if you plan to attend.

March 14, Saturday - Read Wildlife Sanctuary – feeder birds, ducks and shore birds.

April 18, Saturday - Crestwood Lake – water, parkland birds and early migrants (meet in Crestwood Train Station parking lot on the parkway side of the train station).

May 9, Saturday - Rye Nature Center – woodland birds and spring warblers.

June 6, Saturday - Kensico Cemetery – band nesting bluebirds (meet at cemetery office, 273 Lakeview Ave., Valhalla).

Welcome New Members

Bronxville

Anthony Anagnos
Julie Horn
Carol McNulty
Laura Schneider

Larchmont

Susan Amlicke
Michele Hoffmann
Anne Mengden

Mount Vernon

Frances Citrin
Kathryn Heintz
Robin Hill

Lynn Gross

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Dorothy Matathia
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Peter Soans

Mamaroneck

Nicole Butterfield
Eric Dehais
Lawrence Grewell
Mamaroneck Public Library

New Rochelle

Paul Abraham
Cathy Bean
Nancy Early
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Scarsdale

Laura Bolotsky
Claire Bossung

Tuckahoe

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White Plains

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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 magazine. Please allow 4-6 weeks for processing.

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**Please be sure to read
National Audubon's Climate Change Report at
<http://climate.audubon.org/>**



There are currently 314 species on the brink. *How can you help?*

One way is to spread the word by sending ecards to family and friends. It is so easy to do. Just go to <http://climate.audubon.org/>

Click on **Take Action**

Burrowing Owl

By 2080, this diurnal owl species could lose 77 percent of its breeding range.



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