



## NEW YORK CITY AUDUBON NEWSLETTER

# THE URBAN AUDUBON

November-December 2009  
Volume XXX, No. 6

### NYC AUDUBON NEWSLETTER

71 West 23rd Street,  
Room 1523  
New York, NY 10010  
TEL: 212-691-7483  
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WWW.NYCAUDUBON.ORG

5 FALL ROOST

6-7 EVENTS AND  
ADVENTURES

10 BOOK REVIEWS

*THE LEGEND OF PALE MALE*  
WITH FREDERIC LILIEN  
FILM SCREENING TO  
BENEFIT NYC AUDUBON  
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 7PM  
SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS  
THEATER, 333 W. 23<sup>RD</sup> STREET  
\$25

JOIN US FOR THE NEW YORK  
CITY PREMIERE OF *The Legend  
of Pale Male*. THIS INSPIRING  
DOCUMENTARY TELLS THE  
STORIES OF PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES  
WERE CHANGED BY MODERN  
MANHATTAN'S FIRST RESIDENT  
RED-TAILED HAWKS. FOLLOWING  
THE SCREENING, ENJOY  
REFRESHMENTS  
AT A RECEPTION TO MEET DIRECTOR  
FREDERIC LILIEN.

THIS SPECIAL EVENT WILL RAISE  
FUNDS FOR NYC AUDUBON'S  
CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION  
PROGRAMS. BUY A TICKET FOR  
A FRIEND AND HE OR SHE WILL  
ALSO RECEIVE A COMPLIMENTARY  
MEMBERSHIP IN NYC AUDUBON!  
FOR TICKETS, PLEASE VISIT WWW.

## GETTING TO KNOW NEW YORK CITY RAPTORS: WILD AMERICA IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK!

*Tod Winston*

For most New Yorkers, the sight of pigeons waddling after a discarded hot dog bun must serve as their most thrilling daily encounter with wild America's struggle for survival. Little do they know, however, that truly breathtaking examples of avian predator-prey drama are going on right under their noses—or rather, high over their heads! While many non-birders did indeed get to know Fifth Avenue sweethearts Pale Male and Lola back in 2004, red-tailed hawks are just one of a surprising nine bird-of-prey species known to breed in the city's five boroughs. Life in the big city is not always easy for our home-grown raptors, however; heavy traffic, poisons, and human intrusion all present threats. To address these dangers NYC Audubon and the New York City Parks & Recreation have various projects underway.

Perhaps the city's most unexpected raptor resident, the red-tailed hawk has experienced a dramatic resurgence since Pale Male's first successful nesting here in 1995. In 2007, NYC Audubon's raptor census found a total of 32 red-tail pairs in the city. In 2009, the city's red-tails—unusual in their selection of man-made structures for nest sites—chose such unlikely spots as the RFK Bridge and Flushing Meadows Corona Park's Unisphere sculpture, in addition to several of Manhattan's smaller parks. Manhattan is also home to numerous American kestrels (most often nesting on ledges or in downspouts), peregrine falcons (skyscraper ledges and bridges), and eastern screech-owls (reintroduced to Central Park). The city's other boroughs provide breeding habitat for barn and great horned owls, osprey, northern harriers, and an occasional Cooper's



*Immature Great Horned Owl*

hawk, in addition to the four species found in Manhattan.

While our raptors have adapted surprisingly well to their urban environment, they do face numerous hazards. Parents and fledglings may blunder into traffic, feed on poisoned rats and pigeons, or contract frounce, a disease carried by pigeons. Curious humans may also get too close to nesting birds or interfere with stray fledglings. To mitigate some of these dangers, NYC Audubon and the New York City Parks have been working together.

To create a standardized protocol for aiding eyases (nestling hawks) in distress, NYC Audubon created Eyas Watch. The city's Urban Park Rangers serve as first responders when birds are in trouble, and train volunteers in proper handling of "grounded" raptors. Thanks to the program, this year numerous nestling kestrels and several fledgling red-tails were delivered to Long Island wildlife rehabilitators Bobby and Cathy Horvath, while a peregrine falcon ended up with New Jersey's Raptor Trust. Likelihood

*Continued on page 4*

## NYC AUDUBON MISSION & VISION

MISSION: NYC Audubon is a grass-roots community that works for the protection of wild birds and habitat in the five boroughs, improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers.

VISION: NYC Audubon envisions a day when birds and people in the five boroughs enjoy a healthy, livable habitat.

### THE URBAN AUDUBON

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### NYC AUDUBON

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SMALL PHOTOGRAPHS Susan Elbin, Steve Nanz, and Don



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Oakes Ames



Few things inspire me more than the sight of thousands of shorebirds lining the beaches of Jamaica Bay with the Manhattan skyline hazy in the distance. As I watch these birds search the waterline for a suitable meal, strut about and jostle for position, I wonder how much longer they will be around for us to enjoy.

Dozens of bird species, including some of these shorebirds, may go extinct during our lifetime. We've all heard about the alarming decline of the red knot. NYC Audubon and our thousands of members, like you, are able to make a big difference for these distinctive sandpipers.

Each spring while stopping over in our region, these birds fuel their epic journey from South America to their Arctic breeding grounds by eating horseshoe crab eggs. Horseshoe crabs require clean, sandy beaches to lay their eggs during spawning season. This spring, NYC Audubon volunteers, like you, cleaned up four beaches along New York City's shores.

In the summer, NYC Audubon researchers documented how other

shorebirds use Jamaica Bay. For the first time in over a decade, we obtained data on breeding, nesting, and foraging behavior. The information gathered will help us determine the effectiveness of our conservation efforts.

Near the end of summer, hundreds of New Yorkers learned about the behavior and biology of these birds at the Third Annual Shorebird Festival, a partnership event held by NYC Audubon, the American Littoral Society, and the National Park Service.

By supporting NYC Audubon's conservation and education programs, you and our other members show your commitment to ensuring that our children and grandchildren's world will include red knots. You demonstrate your belief that every backyard and park in our city can be made safe for all species of birds, from songbirds to raptors, from shorebirds to waterfowl.

Please use the envelope enclosed in this newsletter to contribute to NYC Audubon, so we can carry on our critical conservation efforts throughout the five boroughs. Or visit [www.nycaudubon.org](http://www.nycaudubon.org) to make your donation online. With your help we will continue to protect the birds in New York City for their well-being and ours.



Green Heron Nestlings

# CONSERVATION NOTES

Susan Elbin



Summer 2009 brought NYC Audubon the opportunity to expand its pool of Harbor Herons data (now more than 25 years deep), and to begin new research on shorebirds and horseshoe crabs.

Throughout the month of May, NYC Audubon research assistant Liz Craig led a team of volunteers in conducting the Harbor Herons Nesting Survey. More than 1,700 nesting pairs were counted, including black-crowned night-heron, great egret, snowy egret, glossy ibis, yellow-crowned night-heron, little blue heron, tricolored heron, cattle egret, and green heron.

The survey produced some surprising results. Snowy egrets, declining across the northeast, are doing well in New York Harbor, and on one island even outnumbered the night-herons (typically the most common species). Also surprising, herons nested in the middle of a previously exclusive cormorant colony. And a new colony of yellow-crowned night-herons was discovered on Staten Island.

As part of the IWASH project (Improving Wetland Accessibility for Shorebirds and Horseshoe crabs), 30 volunteers

took part in collecting data on horseshoe crabs and shorebirds in Jamaica Bay. An amazing total of 2,091 horseshoe crabs were counted on Plum Beach, Brooklyn. Sampling occurred at high tide around new and full moons from early May through early July. A total of 28,942 shorebirds of 19 different species were counted at four Jamaica Bay beaches, including Plum Beach, during 35 visits (often arriving before dawn) between mid-April and mid-June.

The IWASH project included public education and beach cleanups as well as wildlife monitoring. NYC Audubon's focus on shorebirds was supported by a grant from TogetherGreen, a joint initiative by Toyota and National Audubon.

NYC Audubon's monitoring work is vital to understanding how well our urban habitat is supporting

different species, and what effects conservation efforts are having. Our monitoring programs have been going on for many years. We can interpret this year's data for wading birds and shorebirds in a broad context of long-term trends.

# VOLUNTEER!



## OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

Help answer phones, perform administrative tasks, and keep us organized. Working in our busy and friendly office, you will know you are making a difference for New York City's wildlife! Volunteer shifts are available during our regular office hours, Monday through Friday from 9:30am to 5:30pm. If you would like to volunteer, please call

Erik Karff at 212-691-7483 or email [volunteer@nycaudubon.org](mailto:volunteer@nycaudubon.org).

**KEEP IDLEWILD WILD  
TOGETHERGREEN VOLUNTEER DAYS  
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 10AM-3PM  
IDLEWILD PARK, QUEENS**

NYC Audubon is holding a series of volunteer events this year throughout the city that are supported by TogetherGreen,

an alliance between Audubon and Toyota. Our next TogetherGreen Volunteer Days event will be Saturday, November 7 at Idlewild Park in Queens, near JFK airport and Jamaica Bay. We will be removing invasive species and caring for newly planted trees. For more information or to sign up, contact Leslie Chase at [lchase@nycaudubon.org](mailto:lchase@nycaudubon.org) or call 212-691-7483.

of poisoning is being reduced by minimizing rodenticide use near nesting sites and switching to less noxious poisons. Equally important, city businesses must be encouraged to minimize uncovered waste and educated that “litter kills hawks.” They should also be aware that unsecured trash increases poison use to kill rodent populations.

Birders themselves can provide a final benefit to city raptors: While we understandably thrill at the chance to see a noble red-tail or fierce peregrine falcon feeding its nestlings up-close, it is

important to keep a proper distance from nest sites and interfere as little as possible with parents and young.

ABA Birding guidelines may be reviewed at [www.abasales.com/about/ethics.html](http://www.abasales.com/about/ethics.html).

NYC Audubon thanks local hawk-watcher Bruce Yolton and author Marie Winn for their help with this article. Their informative blogs may be found at [www.urbanhawks.blogspot.com](http://www.urbanhawks.blogspot.com) and [www.mariewinn.com/marieblog](http://www.mariewinn.com/marieblog), respectively.

For more information on the New York City Parks' hawk-related programs, including Raptor Watch, visit [www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks).

## A SUSTAINABLE CITY—PLANYC 2030

*Gloria Kubn*



*NYC Mayor  
Michael Bloomberg*

The room was electric as hundreds of us listened to Mayor Michael Bloomberg roll out the ambitious, multi-faceted PlaNYC 2030 on Earth Day 2007. It brought hopeful relief to those looking for a rational governmental response to the threats of climate change, and put our dreams for a sustainable city into an organized, yet evolving, framework. The plan is divided broadly into Land Use, Transportation, Energy, and Air and Water Quality. (For the complete PlaNYC and updates check [www.planyc.gov](http://www.planyc.gov).)

Data cited by the NYC Panel on Climate Change shows “conservative estimates for an end of century sea level rise of 20 to 50 inches,” with NYC likely to experience 2.5 to 4.5 times the current heat wave (90°+) days per year, more frequent and intense rainstorms, current 1-in-10 year floods occurring once every 1 to 3 years and 1-in-100 year floods (which could put JFK Airport under 20 feet of water) occurring once every 15 to 35 years. These problems can be decreased, but not avoided, by reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). Adapting to climate change is also necessary.

The Plan proceeds to work on both GHG reduction and adaptation with a Task Force developing site-specific and citywide planning. To date the Plan has extensive accomplishments, including:

- Several hundred thousand trees planted (of a million planned), including increased plantings for Greenstreets and playgrounds.
- Land for parks and land to protect upstate water supply acquired.
- Bike lanes designated and bike racks installed.
- Rapid transit bus routes piloted.

- Renewable energy projects and energy-efficiency projects on government buildings in progress.
- Yellow taxi fleet and police vehicles converting to hybrid.
- GHG reductions initiated (Federal money will help move from heating oil to reduce particulates, smog, and soot, which is now implicated in global warming).
- DEP methane and ferry NO<sub>x</sub> emissions reduced.
- Storm water retention projects launched.

On improving wetland legal protection, Mayor Bloomberg stated: “Wetlands play an important role in maintaining and improving water quality, providing flood protection, wildlife habitats, and sequestering carbon dioxide. However, we have lost 86 percent of our wetlands in the last century due to environmental change and development.”

Great intentions cannot always overcome financial or political constraints, which is apparent from the strong opposition to a fully funded MTA and congestion pricing. And some PlaNYC proposals may even be environmentally questionable. Does waterfront development make sense if we expect stronger storms and sea level rise? Why permit loud and highly polluting leaf blowers? Some things seem missing. While interior building codes are being greened, why not also mandate white or “green” roofs? Why not fast-track permeable surfaces and not just study them? Why not adopt bird-safe building codes, such as those in Toronto and Chicago?

Overall, PlaNYC is to be commended. It has opened people’s minds to the reality of climate change. It has inspired thousands of volunteers in the planning process and in the planting of trees. With citizens involved and voicing their concerns, politicians will strengthen their efforts for a sustainable New York City.



# THE FALL ROOST: A GREAT PARTY WITH AN EVEN GREATER PURPOSE

Tod Winston



On Tuesday, September 29, 175 night-time revelers enjoyed a rich and varied evening at the lovely Central Park Boathouse: a sumptuous buffet with Silent Auction offerings that included exquisite artwork, international eco-tours, and more and, to top it all off, an impromptu flamenco performance! What one event could sport such a diverse array of entertainments? Why, NYC Audubon's Fall Roost, of course, held this year in honor of devoted conservationists Joseph H. Ellis and Don Riepe.

Honoree and NYC Audubon board member Don Riepe has devoted over 30 years to safeguarding the vital Jamaica Bay ecosystem, where he grew up, both as a National Parks employee and as a member of JFK Airport's Bird Hazard Task Force, the board of the Rockaway Waterfront Alliance, and the American Littoral Society. In accepting NYC Audubon's recognition, Don recalled his mother's role in introducing him to the wonders of what was then open countryside surrounding Jamaica Bay—and got the biggest laugh of the night when he sheepishly admitted that having done some bird hunting early on in life, he had spent the intervening years “trying to make up for my bad behavior.”

Joseph H. Ellis serves on NYC Audubon's Advisory Council and is a long-time birder and philanthropist. Since his retirement from Goldman, Sachs & Co. he has served as vice chairman of the board for the New York State Nature Conservancy, where he played a vital role in developing their international program, and currently serves on the National Council of the World Wildlife Fund and the board of Rare Conservation. In his comments, Joe avowed it was “hard to overstate how much I love...the extraordinary little creatures” we call birds, a sentiment clearly shared by many present.

Following the evening's award presentation and Sandra Koponen's film on NYC Audubon's work in Jamaica Bay, guests' attention turned in earnest to the night's Silent Auction. Both honorees had themselves donated creative works: Joe Ellis, the author of two books, donated his recently published *Wood and Paint: American Miniature Bird Carvings and Their Carvers, 1900-1970* (see page 10 for a review), accompanied by a table of exquisite miniature bird carvings, while Don

*Continued on page 8*



*L to R: NYC Audubon President Oakes Ames with honorees Joseph H. Ellis and Don Riepe, and Executive Director Glenn Phillips.*



*Guests took a break from mingling and enjoying the buffet to listen to the honorees' brief remarks.*



*Board member David Speiser plotting conservation strategies with Director of Conservation Susan Elbin and Gateway National Recreation Area Chief of Natural and Cultural Resources Dave Avrin.*



*Don Riepe kicking up his heels in an impromptu flamenco performance.*

All photos © Jeff Kollbrunner.

# EVENTS AND ADVENTURES

- NYC AUDUBON EVENTS
- PARTNERSHIP EVENTS

## • NOVEMBER MEMBER WALK: CENTRAL PARK

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 7:30-9AM

GUIDE: OAKES AMES

Meet at the Central Park Boat-house. Join NYC Audubon president Oakes Ames and your fellow members for a late-fall migration bird walk in Central Park. Monthly member walks are open to NYC Audubon members at the Student/Senior level and up. Advance registration is requested but not required. Limited to 20. Free

## • WINTER WILDLIFE PREPARATION AT ALLEY POND PARK, QUEENS

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 11AM-12:30PM

GUIDE: URBAN PARK RANGERS WITH CITY OF NEW YORK, DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION, URBAN PARK RANGERS

Meet at Alley Pond Park Adventure Center off Winchester Blvd (not to be confused with Alley Pond Environmental Center on Northern Blvd). As the weather gets colder, some animals go into hibernation while others tough it out. Learn about the amazing adaptations of wildlife in winter. Limited to 20. Free

## • SNOW GEESE AND TUNDRA SWANS OF BRIGANTINE, NJ

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 9:30AM-4:30PM

GUIDE: JOE GIUNTA, HAPPY WARBLERS LLC

Brigantine, part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, is one of the east coast's premier sites for waterbirds, offering species diversity and panoramic views. Limited to 12. Bring lunch, water,

and binoculars. \$55

## • WINTER WATERFOWL WORKSHOP, QUEENS SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 10AM-1PM

GUIDE: DON RIEPE WITH GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Meet at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center for a slide ID program and walk to look for wintering waterfowl. Learn about their behavior and biology, and how to identify them in the field. To register, contact Don Riepe at 718-318-9344 or [driepe@nyc.rr.com](mailto:driepe@nyc.rr.com). Limited to 25. Free

## • WAVE HILL BIRDING, THE BRONX SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 9:30-11:30AM

GUIDE: GABRIEL WILLOW WITH WAVE HILL

Meet at the Perkins Visitor Center and learn about bird species found in the area and their interconnectedness with the natural world on these captivating yet peaceful walks. Wave Hill's garden setting overlooking the Hudson River flyway provides the perfect habitat for native and migrating birds. Ages 8 and up welcome with an adult. Registration not required. Inclement weather cancels; call 718-549-3200 x245 by 8am the day of the session to confirm. \$10

## • WINTER WILDLIFE WORKSHOP, QUEENS SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 10AM-NOON

GUIDE: DON RIEPE WITH GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Meet at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center for an easy hike around the West Pond, gardens and upland woods. Learn how plants and animals adapt to winter, and look for waterfowl, owls and wintering birds. To

register, contact Don Riepe at 718-318-9344 or [driepe@nyc.rr.com](mailto:driepe@nyc.rr.com). Limited to 25. Free

## • DECEMBER MEMBER WALK: FORT TILDEN, QUEENS SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 8:30-11AM

GUIDE: STEVE NANZ

Meet at the Fort Tilden Visitors Center. Join NYC Audubon board member Steve Nanz and your fellow members for a walk along the beaches and dunes of Fort Tilden. See wintering raptors and waterfowl, such as bufflehead, northern gannet, and perhaps long-tailed duck. Monthly member walks are open to NYC Audubon members at the Student/Senior level and up. Advance registration is requested but not required. Limited to 20. Free

## • NEW YEAR'S DAY BEACH WALK, QUEENS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1, 11AM-1PM

GUIDES: MICKEY COHEN, DON RIEPE WITH THE AMERICAN LITTORAL SOCIETY

Meet at Building #1 in Fort Tilden, Breezy Point, Queens. Start out the New Year with a brisk hike on the beach. Visit the dunes, woods, and hawk watch platform. Afterwards, enjoy cookies, cake,

coffee, tea and champagne. To register, contact Don Riepe at 718-318-9344 or [driepe@nyc.rr.com](mailto:driepe@nyc.rr.com). Limited to 50. Free

## • MONTAUK WINTER WEEKEND, LI

FRIDAY, JANUARY 8-

SUNDAY, JANUARY 10

GUIDES: MICKEY COHEN, DON RIEPE

Visit Montauk during peak winter birding season and stay at the luxurious Manor House. Look for sea ducks, loons, and seals. Includes double-occupancy lodging, most meals, guided hikes, and evening programs. To register, contact Don Riepe at 718-318-9344 or [driepe@nyc.rr.com](mailto:driepe@nyc.rr.com). Limited to 60. \$345 (\$120 single supplement; no member discount)

## • JANUARY MEMBER WALK: WINTER RESIDENTS OF PELHAM BAY PARK, THE BRONX

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 9AM-3PM

GUIDE: RON BOURQUE

Look for hawks, passerines, and waterfowl in one of the city's largest parks. With luck, the group may encounter owls. Dress warmly and bring binoculars and water. Limited to 15. Free for NYC Audubon members at the Student/Senior level and up

## • HONDURAS: BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES, RUINS SATURDAY, JANUARY 16- SUNDAY, JANUARY 24

GUIDES: DON RIEPE, ROBERT GALLARDO WITH THE AMERICAN LITTORAL SOCIETY

Enjoy birding and natural history exploration in Central America's largest wilderness rainforest. Stay at Pico Bonito and other upscale lodges. See quetzals, cotingas, and other exotic bird species as well as morpho butterflies, tropical wildflowers, and Mayan ruins. Night hike and visit to



*Snow Goose*



all transportation in Florida. For more information, visit [www.nycaudubon.org](http://www.nycaudubon.org).

## 400 YEARS AND BEYOND: 2009-2010 LECTURE SERIES

THE 2009-2010 LECTURE SERIES CELEBRATES THE  
HUDSON-CHAMPLAIN QUADRICENTENNIAL

THE ARSENAL  
CENTRAL PARK  
64TH STREET AT 5TH AVENUE  
6PM

THE HUDSON IN 2400 A.D. AND BEYOND  
WITH TONY HISS  
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

Tony Hiss, author of *The Experience of Place* and the forthcoming *In Motion*, is a visiting scholar at New York University. Hiss's vision for the future of the Hudson Basin uses his unique place-based perspective. People, he says, have two addresses: a street address and a place in the larger landscape. Connecting to this "larger here and longer now" will protect our wonderful landscape for next 400 years—and beyond. It can be done!

UPCOMING LECTURES:  
JANUARY LECTURE TBD  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2010

AMERICAN KESTRELS AT HAWK MOUNTAIN  
WITH KEITH L. BILDSTEIN, PH.D  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2010

As the most common raptor in New York City (and the emblem of NYC Audubon), American kestrels are thriving in the five boroughs. But they are facing serious population threats elsewhere in the U.S. Learn about Hawk Mountain Sanctuary's efforts to protect North America's smallest falcon in the face of recent declines. Dr. Bildstein is the Sarkis Acopian Director of Conservation Science at Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania.

ANNUAL MEETING AND LECTURE  
WITH FELICITY ARENGO, PH.D, CENTER FOR BIODIVERSITY  
AND CONSERVATION AT THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF  
NATURAL HISTORY  
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9, 2010

All lectures are free and open to the public. The series has been made possible by the support of the Corcoran Group and Dr. Claude Bloch.

©David Speiser



*Bald Eagle*

waterfalls. Includes double-occupancy lodging, airfare, meals, transportation in country, and guides. Limited to 12. \$2,665 (\$400 single supplement; no member discount)

• **SOARING RAPTORS: EAGLES AND OWLS OF THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY, NY**  
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6, NOON-7PM  
GUIDE: JOE GIUNTA, HAPPY WARBLERS LLC

You don't have to travel to Alaska to see our country's emblem, the American bald eagle. As a result of one of the most successful reintroduction programs on record, many eagles now soar over the beautiful Hudson Valley. Travel with us to view this spectacular raptor, as well as possibly spot the shy and secretive short-eared owl. Part of the Hudson River EagleFest at Croton Point. Bring lunch, water, and binoculars. Limited to 35. \$60

• **MIGRATE TO TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**  
SATURDAY, MARCH 20-  
SUNDAY, MARCH 28, 2010  
GUIDE: GABRIEL WILLOW

Trinidad is the home to many beautiful birds, making this the perfect destination for birdwatchers. Visit the Asa Wright Nature Center in Arima and Arena Forest Reserve in

the central lowlands. To the north we'll visit Wallerfield, then head east to the Manzarilla and Nariva Swamps. Other excellent areas for birdwatching include Blanchisseuse on the Caribbean Sea, Aripo Valley, Caroni Swamp and Trincity Sewer Ponds. Includes double-occupancy lodging, transportation in country, some meals, and guide/instructor; does not include airfare. Limited to 9. \$1,950 member (\$400 single supplement; no discount)

• **MERRITT ISLAND AND NORTHERN FLORIDA**  
SATURDAY, APRIL 17- SATURDAY  
APRIL 24, 2010

GUIDES: CAROL BORNEMAN,  
DON RIEPE  
WITH THE AMERICAN LITTORAL  
SOCIETY

Visit Merritt Island Refuge, Viera Wetlands, and Fort De Soto Park during peak spring migration. See Florida scrub jay, swallowtail kite, whooping and sandhill cranes, caracara plus gators, and manatees. Includes airfare, double-occupancy lodging, most meals, guides and park fees, and

• **TO REGISTER FOR ALL NYC AUDUBON EVENTS AND FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [WWW.NYCAUDUBON.ORG](http://WWW.NYCAUDUBON.ORG) OR CALL 212-691-7483, UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED. CLASSES MEET AT 71 WEST 23<sup>RD</sup> ST. ROOM 1523. NYC AUDUBON MEMBERS AT THE STUDENT/SENIOR LEVEL AND ABOVE RECEIVE A 10% DISCOUNT (EXCEPT AS NOTED). SEE MEMBERSHIP FORM ON PAGE 11.**

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR TRIPS WHERE TRANSPORTATION IS PROVIDED:

- THE MEETING LOCATION IS IN FRONT OF 71 WEST 23<sup>RD</sup> ST. IN MANHATTAN UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED.
- WE DEPART PROMPTLY AT THE

Riepe, a skilled photographer, contributed a lovely shot of a great egret. (Don also contributed the evening's impassioned flamenco dance performance, to the surprise and delight of guests—but inexplicably did not include it on the auction block. Maybe next year, Don?)

When the auction came to a close, a 10-day cruise of the Galapagos Islands (donated by Lindblad Expeditions) turned out to be

the auction's biggest fund-raiser, while a dinner for two at the lower East Side's stylish Grotto provoked the most frenzied bidding war. A particularly generous independent contribution came in the form of an anonymous "challenge grant" of \$15,000, which was met by the evening's attendees. In the end, the Fall Roost raised \$110,000 for NYC Audubon's conservation and education programs: a fitting tribute to the lifetime devotion demonstrated by the evening's two honorees.

## THE JOYS OF CHRISTMAS ... BIRD COUNT

*Ned Boyajian*

©Abby McBride



*In the twelfth hour of Christmas Count  
my true love showed to me...*

*Twelve shots of brandy,  
eleven long-tailed ducks,  
ten wrens a-laughing,  
nine siskins sisking,  
eight owls a-booting,  
seven swans a-swimming,  
six brants a-clacking,  
fiiiiiiiive cups of cocoa ...  
four calling birds,  
three sweat-ers,  
two knocking knees,  
and a bobwhite in a pear tree!*

For New York-area birders, the Christmas Bird Count is as much (or more) part of the holiday tradition than midnight mass or going out for Chinese food and a movie. Certainly it's more interesting than anything going on at Rockefeller Center.

Here's how it works: First someone important in the birding world draws a really big circle, equivalent to 15 miles in diameter, on a map, and declares the area inside the circle to be "a Count." Manhattan is in the Lower Hudson Count, which includes parts of

New Jersey. Separate Counts occur in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, The Bronx, and many other parts of the world. You can see local contact information on right. Each big Count circle usually is divided into smaller territories. Next, participants are assigned to each territory; sometimes territories are further sub-divided. Then off everyone goes, to count all the birds he or she sees in her or his assigned area. Simple. Experience is not essential; the organizers will pair less seasoned birders with those who are more practiced.

And after the counting comes the eating! The birders gather to thaw out together over delicious food and drink. There each team reports its observations. These Count gatherings are not to be missed! There's no holiday cheer like that earned by folks who've spent the day out in the weather. And such drama! Which team saw the most? Which saw the rarest species? Who has the best "we locked our keys inside the car in a Meadowlands parking lot" story?

Now let's get something straight. Of course, in our area, it's cold on Count days, usually. (Though global warming should take care of that soon enough.) But the cold is what leads to the holiday magic. You're out in Central Park or on the Palisades, freezing, when suddenly you see it. Maybe it's a life bird, a species you're seeing for the first time. Maybe it's an odd vagrant like a calliope hummingbird, which has no business being there. Maybe it's just the eye-striking way the sun flashes on crimson cardinal feathers, fiery against the snow.

In that moment, you forget the cold, you forget the wind. It's you, the bird, and all the majesty of creation. Truly, a holiday miracle.

The data from last year's 109th CBC is available at [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/). The 110th CBC will run from December 14, 2009 through January 5, 2010. Join in the fun and learn about birds in your neighborhood! Contact one of the compilers below to get schedule details.

### BRONX-WESTCHESTER

Compiler: Mike Bochnik, Yonkers Audubon, 914-237-9331 or [bochnik@cs.com](mailto:bochnik@cs.com)  
Sunday, December 27

### BROOKLYN

Compiler: Rick Cech, Brooklyn Bird Club, [rcech@nyc.rr.com](mailto:rcech@nyc.rr.com)  
Saturday, December 19

### MANHATTAN

Compiler: Susan Elbin, NYC Audubon, 212-691-7483 or [selbin@nycaudubon.org](mailto:selbin@nycaudubon.org)  
Sunday, December 14

### QUEENS

Compiler: Ian Resnick, Queens County Bird Club, [ariegilbert@optonline.net](mailto:ariegilbert@optonline.net)  
Sunday, December 21

### STATEN ISLAND

Compiler: Ed Johnson, Staten Island Museum, 718-727-1135, ext. 110 or [ejohnson@statenislandmuseum.org](mailto:ejohnson@statenislandmuseum.org)  
Saturday, December 19

For additional information about how to join a NYC Audubon group for this year's count, call NYC Audubon at 212-691-7483.



# AN ACCIDENTAL WILDERNESS

Suzanne Charlé

Ridgewood Reservoir is, as noted last spring in an op-ed in the *New York Times*, an accidental wilderness, tucked alongside the Jackie Robinson Parkway on the Brooklyn-Queens border. Built in 1858 to provide drinking water to Brooklyn, the reservoir (comprised of three basins) was abandoned in 1989.

In the 20 years since, the 50 acres have reverted to wetlands, meadows, and forests, offering what one naturalist sees as a “unique opportunity to study the process of forest succession in an urban environment.” One of the wildest places in all of New York City, it is home to a broad diversity of plants (over 180 species), insects, reptiles, and animals, including 148 species of birds, according to the latest count on eBird, eight of which are on the National Audubon WatchList of species in decline or at risk.

In recent years, Ridgewood Reservoir has also become the site of considerable contention. In PlaNYC 2030 (see article page 4), the New York City Parks & Recreation offered up a plan to “renovate” the reservoir that would fill in the largest basin (20 acres) to make way for athletic fields and facilities.

Local Community Boards in Brooklyn and in Queens, along with other groups, protested. “We’re on record as wanting to keep the reservoir basins and the reservoir as natural habitat,” said Gary Giordano, district manager of the Queens Community Board. “Rather than filling in Ridgewood Reservoir for ball fields, the city could reconstruct and reconfigure Highland Park to accommodate sports needs.” Highland Park, which is adjacent to Ridgewood Reservoir, has a half-dozen poorly kept ballfields that many teams don’t use because of the poor condition.

The non-profit Riverkeeper also came out against the plan: “Ridgewood Reservoir absorbs storm water,” the group wrote. “Replacing woodlands with recreational fields will exacerbate flooding and the urban heat island effect, and destroy an important habitat for many bird and plant species.... Past

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*Ridgewood Reservoir*

efforts to fill in wetlands and turn them into ball fields, such as Strack Pond in Queens, have failed.”

After taking a tour of the reservoir, New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson Jr. stepped in, requiring the Parks Department to offer three distinct plans. Once those plans have been completed by a design consultant and reviewed by Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe, they will be presented to Community Boards in Brooklyn and Queens. Debby Kuha, Highland Park administrator, guesses that this might happen by the end of the year, although she notes, “In an election year, everything is up for grabs.” Due to the economy, the original budget of \$50 million has been scaled back by about half.

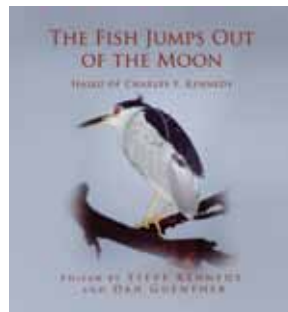
Rob Jett, conservation chair of the Highland Park/Ridgewood Reservoir Alliance, hopes this will give his group time to garner more support to protect the wild nature of the basins. “The wetlands are very important,” he stressed, citing an evaluation by the American Littoral Society. The remaining

funds, community leaders suggest, could be used to convert an old pump house into a nature center, where school classes could meet. Some would like to see part of the park made into a protected reserve, like the Hallett Nature Sanctuary in Central Park.

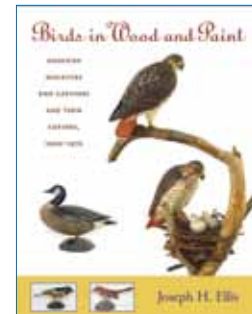
Meanwhile, the first phase is proceeding apace: budgeted at \$7.7 million, it includes lighting, the restoration of running and bike paths to make them ADA-accessible, and the replacement of a perimeter fence. Kuha said that the proposed iron fence—similar to the one surrounding the Central Park Reservoir—is considerably lower than the old chain-link fence, but it is also stronger. “It’s meant to dissuade a few residents who come out with fence-cutters every day, break in, and let their dogs run,” explained Kuha. The drop into the fenced-off reservoir area is steep, she said, and dangerous. “We’re concerned about trees, we’re concerned about conservation and nature. But our first concern is safety and security.”



*Pale Male and Family:  
Essays and Photos of  
Charles Kennedy*  
Edited by Steve Kennedy  
Xlibris, 2009



*The Fish Jumps Out of the Moon:  
Haiku of Charles Kennedy*  
Edited by Steve Kennedy and  
Dan Guenther  
Xlibris, 2009



*Birds in Wood and Paint:  
American Miniature Bird Carvings  
and Their Carvers, 1900-1970*  
Joseph H. Ellis  
University Press of New England,  
2009

The human star of Frederic Lilien's documentary *Pale Male* was Charles Kennedy, who passed away in 2004. If you saw that film, you know that Charles was kind, funny, romantic, and obsessed with *Pale Male*. Nephew Steve Kennedy edited *Pale Male and Family*, a collection of Charles' unpublished photos of *Pale Male*, his mates, and his progeny.

Charles was an attentive naturalist, an unabashed sensualist, a talented self-taught photographer, a natural philosopher, a trickster, and a generous teacher. All of these modes come across in the work. What is especially striking is the intimacy of the photos and the writing—how close he came to the birds both physically and imaginatively. Whereas much nature writing concentrates on description, Charles' writing is very concerned with relationship: his relationship with the hawks, the fledglings with their parents, predator with their prey. "Stuffed Crop" is my favorite meditation: the photo is of a fledgling shot from below, its yellow-tinged crop bulging with what we find out is a rat. Although the rat has been consumed, Charles opens this chapter saying: "This is a photograph of not one animal but two." It is the "living" presence of the dead rat in the hawk that is so spooky and wonderful—and rare to find in other authors' nature writing. *EJM*

After all of that praise, I would still say the better of these two wonderful books is *The Fish Jumps Out of the Moon*.

The reason is that haiku is the perfect literary form to capture the moment. Charles is very accomplished in haiku and brings an unusual mix of western and eastern tendencies, especially in the series "Cicada," as if he were channeling Basho, the master haiku poet, and Ovid, the ultimate poet of metamorphosis.

If haiku are typically thought of as cool and objective, Charles returns the warmth and longing (and sexuality) back to haiku:

*great sex life  
plus a mushroom diet  
ob to be a slug*

Because his subjects vary from slugs to spiders to owls and of course hawks, Charles has the chance to introduce other interests like jazz, food, and books. The suite "Spider Songs" goes to great lengths to capture the "music" he hears in his moments alone with the orb weavers.

It is important to note that I am not at all unbiased in this review. I am one of the ones who was under the spell of Charles Kennedy. It is a spell that made every moment charged with significance and wonder. Thanks to Steve Kennedy, a wide audience of readers now has a chance to fall under that spell, too. *EJM*

Joe Ellis, a long-time friend of NYC Audubon, has written a fascinating book about his passion. *Birds in Wood and Paint* tells the history of ornamental bird carving from its beginning in 1900 to 1970, a time when major changes in the art took place. The book is a must-read for collectors and a compelling introduction to the craft of miniature bird carving. Ellis recounts the evolution of the early carvers of decoys into creators of smaller, purely decorative representations of birds of all sorts. The earliest miniatures were made as gifts or as an afterthought to the business of providing life-sized likenesses essential for bringing waterfowl and shorebirds within shooting range.

As market hunting ended and hunting became more controlled, demand for decoys lessened and carvers turned to miniatures. Sporting specialists such as Abercrombie and Fitch (the old one), Orvis, Brooks Brothers, and even Macy's sold them and generated substantial demand. The extent of the carvings' popularity is expressed by Wendell Gilley, "One day I received an order from them [probably Abercrombie and Fitch] for a thousand pheasants and I quit. I didn't feel like a carving machine."

*Birds in Wood and Paint*, the product of prodigious research, features a rich array of photographs illustrating comparisons, critical features and the breadth of work of the artisans. *PRM*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Fall Roost is NYC Audubon's biggest event of the year, and a vital source of funding for our operations. This year's benefit brought in more than \$110,000 for our conservation and education

programs. (Please see page 5 for a recap of the festivities.) Our work would not be possible without the generous support of the following people and organizations:

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Visit [www.nyc Audubon.org](http://www.nyc Audubon.org) or call the office at 212-691-7483 to order any of these gifts.

*Happy Holidays!*

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