



# THE URBAN AUDUBON

**Cooper's Call: A Black Birder's Personal Perspective**

**#BlackBirdersWeek:  
Listen, Learn, and Act**

**Remembering Harry Maas  
and David Burg**

**Purple Martin**

**Birding during  
the Pandemic**



## NYC AUDUBON MISSION & VISION

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

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

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Karen Benfield



Perhaps you have seen the mural yourself, one of many thought-provoking pieces of art on Soho's boarded-up storefronts. BIRDWATCHING IS NOT A CRIME, it proclaims.

It surely is not. If you are reading this, you know that birding is a pastime of limitless pleasure. But we were shaken as an organization and community at the end of May, when board member and birder extraordinaire Chris Cooper went looking for migrating warblers—and instead found himself navigating a dangerous racist confrontation that provoked widespread outrage.

The past few months have underscored for us that we must speak up and become actively anti-racist, both as individuals and as an organization. It is imperative that all New Yorkers feel at home in nature. We understand that there are barriers to feeling safe in green spaces that can feel as real as fences.

At this moment NYC Audubon reaffirms its commitment, as expressed in our new *Strategic Plan*, to make our organization more representative of our city, and to expand walks, programming, and partnerships to be more welcoming of Black birders and all birders of color. We are working to expand our reach by partnering with organizations like Latino Outdoors - NYC and Outdoor Afro - NYC. We embrace this moment as an opportunity to do more. Preserving our environment is only possible if we all feel connected to it.

June brought an inspiring response to what happened to Chris—a weeklong, and continuing, online conversation organized by members of the group BlackAFinSTEM to highlight Black naturalists, scientists, and birders. Learn more about the debut of #BlackBirdersWeek in this issue, including an interview with one of the organizers, NYC Audubon guide Jeffrey Ward. And read Chris's heartfelt essay about "birding while Black."

Birding and spending time in nature restore our strength in difficult times. And, as birds forage, sing, and migrate, they remind us of life beyond the pandemic. There is comfort to be found in beholding the fitting of a warbler, the freedom of a migrating hawk, or the focus and strength of a hunting heron. As we watch birds this fall, may we all find needed healing and inspiration.

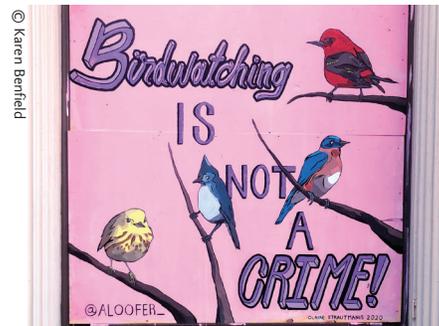
If you can't get out to experience nature in person, our digital team is sharing the birds—and our work—with you in this issue, and on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (@nycaudubon).

I am proud to be your new board president, picking up the honor from Jeff Kimball, whose inspired leadership and vision helped NYC Audubon to grow and look to the future. Under his guidance and that of Kathryn Heintz, our outstanding executive director, we have a bold *Strategic Plan* to set our course by, and important plans to hatch. Fundraising is critical for a small nonprofit like ours. Please join us virtually on October 14 for our first ZOOM fundraiser, *The Fall Roost: Urban Birding in Focus* (see page 24). And of course, we look forward to the moment when we may flock together in person once more, lifted up by the delicate and the colorful—and by each other.

Karen Benfield

Learn more about NYC Audubon's Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility\* goals and initiatives by viewing our *Strategic Plan* at [www.nycaudubon.org/sp](http://www.nycaudubon.org/sp).

\*This past July, the former Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee of the NYC Audubon board of directors was renamed the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA) committee.



Soho mural by Artist Claire Strautmanis  
(See more murals on page 10.)

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# CONSERVATION NOTES

This year's field season has been an unusual one for NYC Audubon's science staff. When the summer *Urban Audubon* went to press, we were monitoring the COVID-19 outbreak in New York City, hoping that it would soon be safe again to venture out into the field. As I write these notes for this fall issue, however, the City is only just beginning the reopening process, and our staff is just starting to return to some of their normal projects.

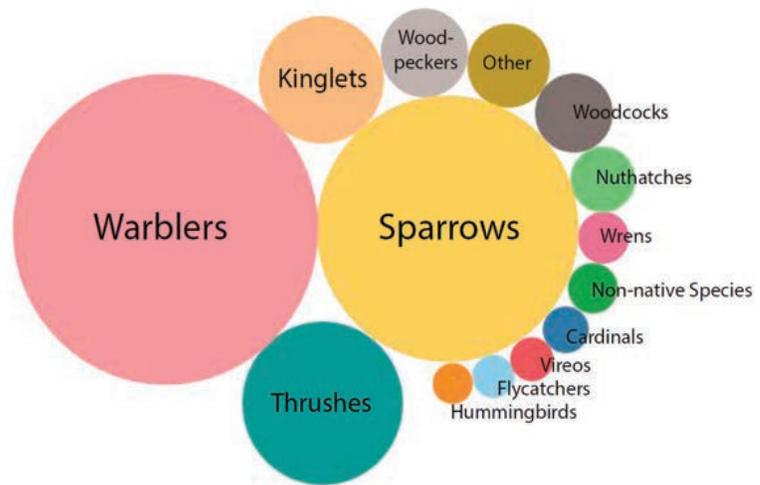
This means that many of our spring and early summer research programs were cancelled or put on hold—including Project Safe Flight collision monitoring, horseshoe crab monitoring, and the Harbor Herons Nesting Survey.

Many researchers are going to have gaps in their data from 2020. We at NYC Audubon benefit from conducting several long-term projects with large data sets: While there is the possibility of missing some important data in 2020, “blips” like this year aren't a complete loss. Having solid data from previous years and continuing to collect data in the future will allow us to extrapolate and continue to follow long-term trends.

## PROJECT SAFE FLIGHT

Despite the cancellation of formal collision monitoring on our usual routes, submissions of incidental collisions to [www.d-bird.org](http://www.d-bird.org), our crowd-shared data collection tool, have increased compared to the same time last year. We've now received 4,509 collision reports

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*Migrating songbirds like warblers and sparrows have been the most commonly found collision victims in New York City over the past 23 years, according to our Project Safe Flight monitoring data.*

since D-Bird launched in 2014. Though the majority of the reports have come from New York City and the surrounding region, more than 1,200 have come from across the U.S., as well as Canada, China, India, Turkey, and Norway.

Over the past 23 years, our formal collision monitoring has documented 7,359 bird collisions of 113 species (and nine bat collisions!). The most commonly found taxonomic group is the warblers, which are represented by 32 of 35 species regularly observed in our area. The most commonly found bird species, the White-throated Sparrow, makes up 14 percent of all collisions and has been documented nearly twice as frequently as the next most common bird, the Common Yellowthroat.

Thanks to virtual meetings, our science and advocacy staff have met recently with the architects, designers, and owners of several buildings known to kill large numbers of birds, as well as with stakeholders of buildings still in the design stage, to advise on what can be done to prevent collisions.

## GREEN ROOFS

One site we *were* able to access this season was the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center Green Roof. Nesting Herring Gulls returned, including banded bird “310” and her mate, “317.” Banded as nesting adults on the roof last year, this year the pair had a nest with three eggs.

We count other bird species that use the Javits Center Green Roof via visual surveys and camera traps focused on perches. In 2019 we observed three new species on the roof—Chipping Sparrow, Gray Catbird, and Purple Finch—and early in the 2020 survey season, a 33rd bird species was spotted: a Cooper's Hawk enjoying a meal. We'll continue to survey birds, bats, and arthropods on the Javits Center Green Roof for the rest of 2020, our seventh year of monitoring.

The Green Roof Researchers Alliance will not be holding its annual conference in person this fall owing to the pandemic, but a series of virtual workshops may be offered



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Our D-Bird database includes bird-collision data from across the U.S. and as far as India and China.



Large photo: © NYC Audubon; inset photo: © Gabriel Willow

Large photo: banded Herring Gull pair “310 and 317” keep guard over their nest area on the Javits Center Green Roof. Inset: a visiting Cooper’s Hawk preys upon a Rock Pigeon.

for green roof researchers and industry professionals, as well as for the general public. Check [www.greenroofsny.com](http://www.greenroofsny.com) for updates.

**WATERBIRDS OF NEW YORK HARBOR**

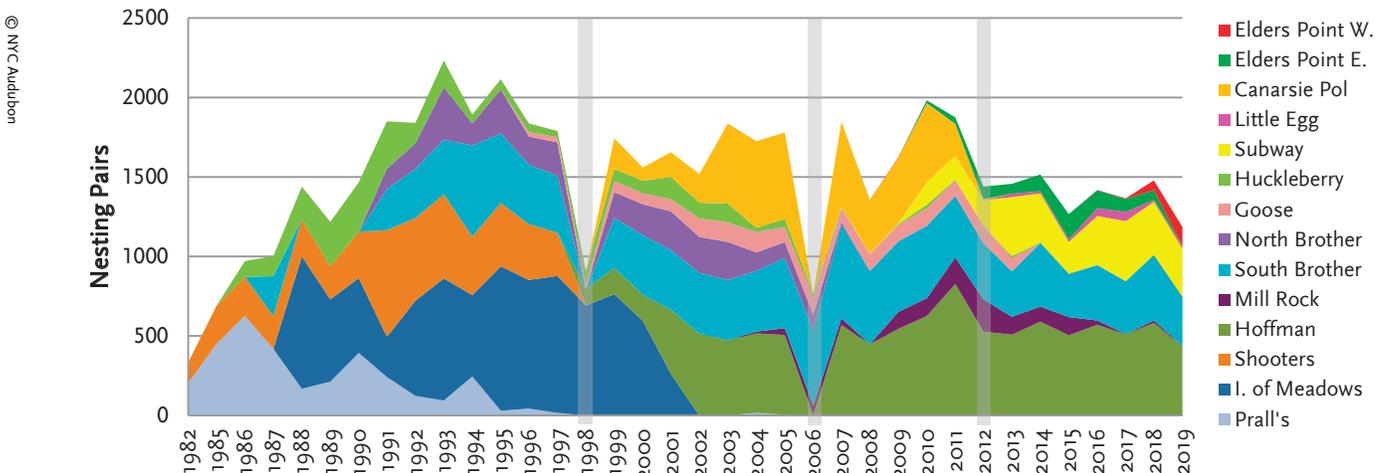
NYC Audubon’s longest-term data set is from the Harbor Herons Nesting Survey, conducted every year since 1985. Sadly the New York City survey was canceled this year. Our New Jersey Audubon colleagues were able to survey the Harmon Cove, Secaucus, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron colony. (At 12 nests,

it’s slightly down from last year’s total of 15). We also received the intriguing report of an immature *White Ibis* flying towards Hoffman Island, in the lower harbor. White Ibis has recently expanded its nesting range up the East Coast, but so far has not been confirmed breeding north of Southern New Jersey. We’ll see what we find next year!

Wading birds are very adaptable, as can be seen in the graph below. Since our first nesting survey in 1982, waders have

shifted across the harbor. We have theories as to why some of these shifts occurred: Birds moved from the pioneer colonies (Shooters and Prall’s Islands, and Isle of Meadows) in the decade following the Exxon oil pipeline spill in the Arthur Kill, in 1990. Other colonies were abandoned (such as Canarsie Pol in Jamaica Bay and Goose Island in the Bronx) following the documented arrival of predators. The continuous shifting of birds underscores the importance of protecting the current nesting islands, and of maintaining additional wild islands where the birds can move when disturbed.

While we haven’t been able to band any birds this season, eager observers out in the field have reported sightings of banded waterbirds. American Oystercatcher “YAX,” banded by the NYC Audubon team in 2014, was spotted feeding its chick in the Rockaways in early July. A banded Double-crested Cormorant was seen in Brooklyn on July 14. This bird, “3C4,” was banded on Swinburne Island in 2010. Another banded Double-crested Cormorant, “3A9,” was photographed in Great Kills Harbor on July 12. That bird was banded on Swinburne a year earlier than “3C4,” in 2009—meaning that it just celebrated its 11th birthday! Double-crested Cormorants can live up to 20 years, but their average lifespan is around 6 years.



Nesting island trends, all wader species (1982-2019): the island colonies are arranged, in both the area chart and its legend, from the earliest colonies established, at the bottom, to the most recent, at the top. Gray bars indicate years with incomplete data (1998, 2006, 2012).

# AVIAN ADVOCATE UPDATES

Molly Adams

We hope that you all are continuing to be safe and well. Below are some updates on our recent advocacy work. Make sure to sign up to be an Avian Advocate at [www.nycaudubon.org/avian-advocates](http://www.nycaudubon.org/avian-advocates).

© NYC Audubon



*This summer, Share the Shore volunteers drew chalk messages in English, Spanish, and Russian: “Shorebirds chicks are on the sand! They fear few beasts except your dog. So keep it leashed and off the beach.”*

## #SHARETHESHORE AND OFF-LEASH DOGS IN PARKS

This summer, we were unfortunately limited in our ability to facilitate in-person advocacy and outreach as part of our #SharetheShore campaign. This campaign seeks to help people learn more about beach-nesting birds such as Piping Plovers, Common Terns, and American Oystercatchers, which are extremely sensitive to human disturbance. NYC Audubon teamed up with the NYC Parks Wildlife Unit to install chalk-art messaging on the Rockaway Beach boardwalk to help prevent beachgoers from unintentionally disturbing beach-nesting birds. The educational messaging highlighted how the birds’ eggs and chicks can be harmed by dogs on the beach, fireworks, and litter, such as fishing line and other plastic. Learn more at [www.bit.ly/33jccoo](http://www.bit.ly/33jccoo).

NYC Audubon has been working with community organizations to call on the New York City Parks Commissioner to apply resources and assign Urban Park Rangers and Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) officers strategically, as stewards to remind park-goers with pets of the rules regarding off-leash dogs—and to issue citations and fines when necessary. Attention is needed in natural areas such as Central Park, Prospect Park, Pelham Bay Park, the Rockaway beaches, and in many other places in the five boroughs that host ground-foraging and ground-nesting species.

## THE BIRD-SAFE BUILDINGS ACT PASSES IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

On July 1, The House of Representatives passed H.R. 9191, the Bird-Safe Buildings Act, as a part of H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act. Since 2008, more than 20 cities, states, and counties have passed bird-friendly legislation, but if this passes in the Senate, it will be the first National bill of its kind and set an example for the rest of the world.

Please help continue the momentum behind this bill by thanking Illinois Congressman Mike Quigley for introducing the bill, at [www.bit.ly/3oHppoC](http://www.bit.ly/3oHppoC), and by writing your own U.S. Senators to ask them to support the bill, at [www.abcbirds.org/action/petition-bird-safe-buildings](http://www.abcbirds.org/action/petition-bird-safe-buildings).

## #SAVETHESEABIRDS VIRTUAL FLY-IN

During the week of July 20, we participated in the National Audubon Society’s Virtual “Seabird Fly-In” to call on Congress to protect seabirds and forage fish. We joined Audubon New York, Audubon Connecticut, and members of other affiliated Audubon chapters in a virtual meeting to ask New York City Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez to support seabirds by strengthening the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and by funding important federal conservation programs.

© Matthew Paulson



*In recent years, Black Skimmers have nested on several beaches on the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens. Skimmers may abandon their nesting colonies if disturbed by human activity or off-leash dogs.*

## BECOME AN AVIAN ADVOCATE!

Enroll in our Avian Advocates email list and join our core group of volunteer conservation policy advocates. You’ll receive periodic updates on what’s happening and what you can do to help. Learn more and get involved at [www.nycaudubon.org/avian-advocates](http://www.nycaudubon.org/avian-advocates).

# VOLUNTEER!

Scheduling of in-person volunteer orientations and events has been delayed this fall because of the pandemic. Some events and orientations are being held in virtual formats. For up-to-date information on fall conservation projects such as Project Safe Flight collision

6 [www.nycaudubon.org](http://www.nycaudubon.org)

monitoring, the Tribute in Light, and the International Coastal Clean-Up, visit [www.nycaudubon.org/volunteer](http://www.nycaudubon.org/volunteer). To learn what actions you can take from home to protect the New York City’s birds, see the Avian Advocate Updates section, above.



# COOPER'S CALL: A BLACK BIRDER'S PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Christian Cooper

*Chris Cooper has served on NYC Audubon's board of directors since 2016 and also founded our Feathered Friends after-school program. Outside of his NYC Audubon roles, Chris is a writer and editor (and a passionate birder renowned for his birding-by-ear skills).*

Long before the incident in the Ramble this past Memorial Day, when a confrontation between a white woman and me over her unleashed dog spiraled into a now-notorious case of racial injustice, I was aware that my brown skin could make me a target while in the field: “birding while Black,” the well-known African American wildlife biologist J. Drew Lanham terms it.

With that in mind, there are parts of our country I consider “no-fly zones,” areas that I deem too risky for me as a Black person to visit, despite their reputation as birding hotspots. No, I won't be visiting the sanctuary at High Island, Texas—a stone's throw from where James Byrd was chained to the back of a pickup truck by white supremacists and dragged to his death—any time soon. Wherever Confederate flags wave in the breeze or proliferate as bumper stickers next to gun racks, that place is off limits, no matter what bird rarity may show up there.

Even on my home turf, the perils of birding while Black have always scratched at the back of my mind. If anyone were to get shot by a cop in Central Park for being an “imminent threat” because they were skulking silently in the bushes with a black metal object in their hands—binoculars mistaken for a gun—it would be me. Never mind that a dozen other birders could be doing the exact same thing on a dozen different days; those dozen other birders would be white, and so the assumptions made would be completely different. My Blackness changes the perception of the activity in the minds of too many people.

We have to fix this. People of color have to be able to enjoy public spaces, to thrive in the great outdoors, to grab their binoculars and bird like anyone else. We have to fix it



*Chris leads a group of students in the Feathered Friends after-school program.*

not just because it's the right thing to do (though that's reason enough). We *must* get more of us birding because the demographics of our country have changed, and if Black and Brown folks haven't had the chance to cultivate a love of nature, then soon there will be little constituency for conservation. Laws and regulations to protect birds and their habitat will be met with a big shrug by an increasing number of voters. And that will spell the doom of our beloved birds.

Undoing centuries of racial bias is a daunting task. Yet the simplest acts, things that any of us can do as individuals, can make a vast difference.

I'm reminded of when I started birding, as a little kid growing up on Long Island. When I showed up with my dad at my first South Shore Audubon birdwalk, the walk leader, a Jewish guy named Elliott Kutner, took one look at this geeky, gawky Black kid and made it his mission to nurture the interest in birds he saw burgeoning there. He took me under his wing until I was ready to fly on my own. (At Elliott's funeral, a mockingbird happened to perch graveside and sang a beautiful requiem for him.)

Later, as a young man fresh out of college and new to the City, I didn't know any birders here. “Excuse me,” a stooped white guy with a cabbage-patch face said, in the thickest Brooklyn accent I'd ever heard, as he shuffled

over to me, an African American man who was a stranger to him. “Don't you bird Central Park?” Mind you, this was in the middle of the Union Square subway station, far from any birder's natural habitat! But he had recognized me from the park and made a point of introducing himself. That was how I met my first New York City birder, the late Marty Sohmer, one of the greats of both Prospect and Central Parks. (His memorial plaque sits on a bench in the Ramble, opposite the bird feeders.) Marty made sure everybody knew they were welcome in our little birding community, and thanks to him, that little community got a lot bigger—and to this day maintains a friendly vibe that's the envy of many other birding spots.

As individuals, we may not be able to erase the injuries and harmful legacies of a couple of hundred years. But we can reach out, purposefully and mindfully, to others who may be just beginning to see the wonders that we ourselves see in the wild world. We can take them under our wing and make sure they know they're welcome. That way, instead of “birding while Black,” I and others like me will be birding, knowing our fellow birders have our back.

*Learn about the inaugural Black Birders Week on page 8. Read more about the issue of off-leash dogs in the Avian Advocate Updates section on page 6.*

# #BLACKBIRDERSWEEK: LISTEN, LEARN, AND ACT

While many like to think that outdoor spaces offer a respite and haven for all people, we have much work to do to ensure that everyone feels welcome and safe while enjoying nature. NYC Audubon Board Member Chris Cooper's encounter with racism in Central Park last spring raised international attention and concern. On the heels of that incident and in the context of our nation's current reckoning with both historical and ongoing racism, a group of Black birders, scientists, and conservationists, BlackAFinSTEM, organized Black Birders Week. This new annual consciousness-raising event is dedicated to making birding a safe, inclusive, and accessible activity for all, and to celebrating Black birders everywhere.

In a series of online events that spanned the week of May 31 to June 5, 2020, Black Birders Week was launched to connect Black birders around the world and educate our community about the injustices that Black people face while participating in outdoor activities. Using the hashtag

#BlackBirdersWeek, more than 30 organizers met through an online chat, hosted webinars, livestreamed conversations, and shared posts on social media.

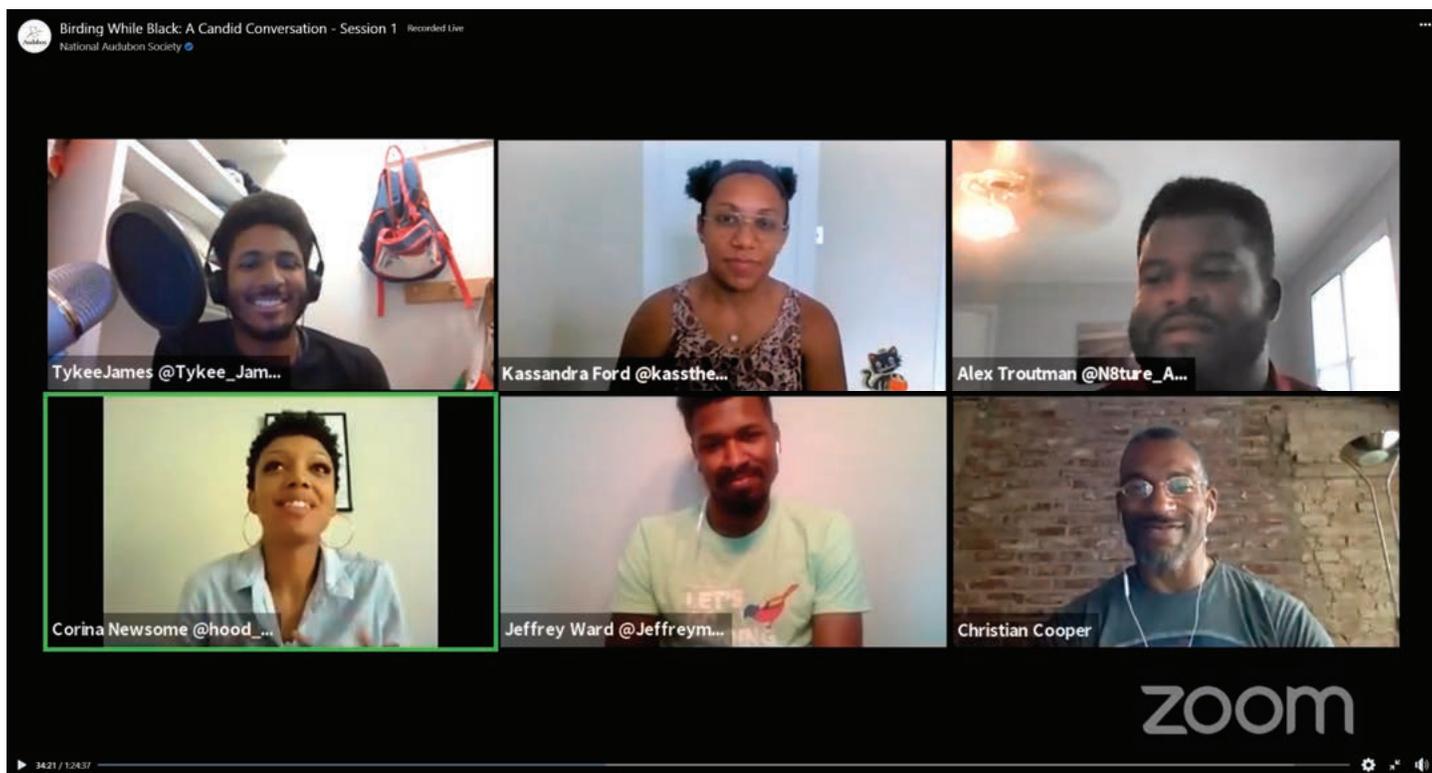
The events sparked both private and public discussions ranging from uncomfortable and painful to inspiring—including stories filled with great joy about what it means to be Black while birding, despite the fear and insults to personal dignity that are often endured. From feeling unwelcome and under suspicion to being physically threatened and in fear for one's life, the details of these personal accounts are a stirring call to action. White birders and their allies must be actively anti-racist by speaking out against racist aggressions large and small, and by supporting Black members of the birding and conservation community. Ornithologist Corina Newsome, one of the organizers of Black Birders Week, writes, "The birding community must show that it is not neutral. Neutrality is dangerous."

Thanks to Black Birders Week, new networks are being formed—both among Black

birders and nature lovers, and *with* allies of all backgrounds, around the world. And Black birders, naturalists, scientists, conservationists, and outdoor enthusiasts are being recognized and celebrated.

If you missed the Black Birders Week events, fear not: archives of "Birding While Black: A Candid Conversation" are available online at [www.bit.ly/3ftTpbO](http://www.bit.ly/3ftTpbO) (session 1) and [www.bit.ly/3icvKyC](http://www.bit.ly/3icvKyC) (session 2). Led by National Audubon Government Affairs Coordinator Tykee James, the conversations feature guests including Chris Cooper; NYC Audubon birding guide and science communicator Jeffrey Ward; Jeffrey's brother, birder and activist Jason Ward; renowned author and biologist J. Drew Lanham, PhD; and ornithologist and biology graduate student Corina Newsome (quoted above; don't miss the painting of Corina on page 11).

Follow #BlackBirdersWeek on Twitter and Instagram. And join NYC Audubon in proudly sharing in this important effort and striving to ensure that its impact continues far into the future.



"Birding While Black: A Candid Conversation" (session 1)

## INTERVIEW WITH BLACK BIRDERS WEEK ORGANIZER JEFFREY WARD

Jeffrey Ward is a birder, naturalist, and science communicator, and a birding guide for NYC Audubon. I had the great opportunity to interview him soon after the inaugural Black Birders Week came to a very successful close. Jeffrey shares what Black Birders Week means to him, and suggests how readers can keep the momentum going.



*Jeff leads a birding group in the Central Park Ramble.*

HO'T: What did Black Birders Week mean to you both personally and professionally?

**JW: Black Birders Week meant change. It meant visibility. It showed how fed up we were with the narrative that the outdoors isn't for us because in reality, it is. We wanted to show the world that we exist.**

HO'T: What surprised you most about Black Birders Week?

**JW: Well for one, we all worked together to organize this whole week in less than 48 hours. I'm also surprised at the outcome. The feedback was amazing! So many of us felt like we opened the eyes of people who didn't know the discrimination we have to deal with in our fields of work—but in the same breath, I'm also surprised that so many people were oblivious to the discrimination we have to deal with in our fields of work.**

HO'T: Black Birders Week created a strong, vital, and exciting virtual community. How do you think we can support building this community in person?

**JW: Companies, organizations, and groups can make a conscious effort to reach out to underrepresented minorities and create a sense of community among all. Representation is rooted in an expression of diversity, and not only does it show support for the cause, it shows that an entity cares enough to be well-rounded.**

HO'T: What steps would you recommend readers of *The Urban Audubon* take to help advance the aims of Black Birders Week?

**JW: Acknowledge the Black scientists in your community or field of work. Support is important for us to achieve our goals.**

HO'T: Are there any organizations that you think we can look to as role models, that are currently doing excellent work in terms of addressing inequities and access to nature?

**JW: The Feminist Bird Club. They provide a safe space for any person who is interested in the natural world. Proceeds from the shirts and patches they sell get split and donated to different social justice organizations.**

HO'T: Who are some Black scientists/naturalists/birders you recommend that readers check out?

**JW: Every single one! I recommend that readers check out every Black person in STEM! Follow @BlackAFinSTEM on Twitter and Instagram.**

*Follow Jeff on Twitter @JeffreyMWard and Instagram @\_JeffreyMWard.*

## NYC AUDUBON'S STATEMENT ON EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

NYC Audubon believes all people have the right to a close connection to the natural world and the right to a healthy environment. Preserving our environment is only possible if we all feel that connection.

We recognize that inequities in our society are widespread and hinder access to nature. Only by embracing equity, diversity, and inclusion as values and striving for them in practice will we begin to foster a love of nature in all people and inspire them to be active stewards of the environment.

We further believe that to thrive as an organization and effectively advance our mission and vision, the diversity of New York City's people must be represented in, and welcomed into, our leadership, staff, and membership. The expertise, values, and perspectives of a diverse and inclusive organization are fundamental to expanding the reach and impact of our conservation, advocacy, and educational efforts.

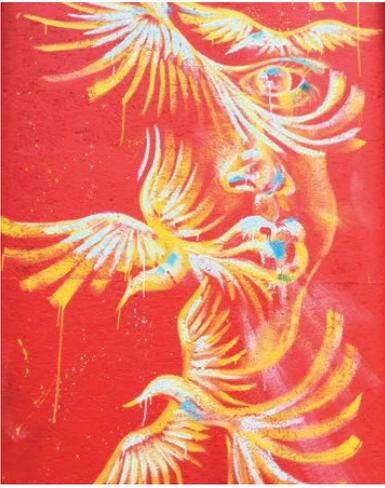
We commit to building an equitable, diverse, and inclusive NYC Audubon, dedicated to protecting nature for all of New York City's people and its wild birds.

# PHOTO ESSAY: BIRDS OF CHANGE FLOCK TO SOHO

This past summer, Soho resident Rozanna Radakovich photographed street art that she noticed popping up on boarded-up storefronts and building walls in her neighborhood. Many of the works reflected themes of the Black Lives Matter movement, and many included birds—perhaps inspired by Chris Cooper’s encounter with racism in the Central Park Ramble. Many of the murals appear to be spontaneous street art, some are collaborations by various artists, and some are works commissioned by local businesses. (We have done our best to attribute them correctly, below.) We thank Rozanna for documenting and sharing this dazzling display of creativity and call for positive change.

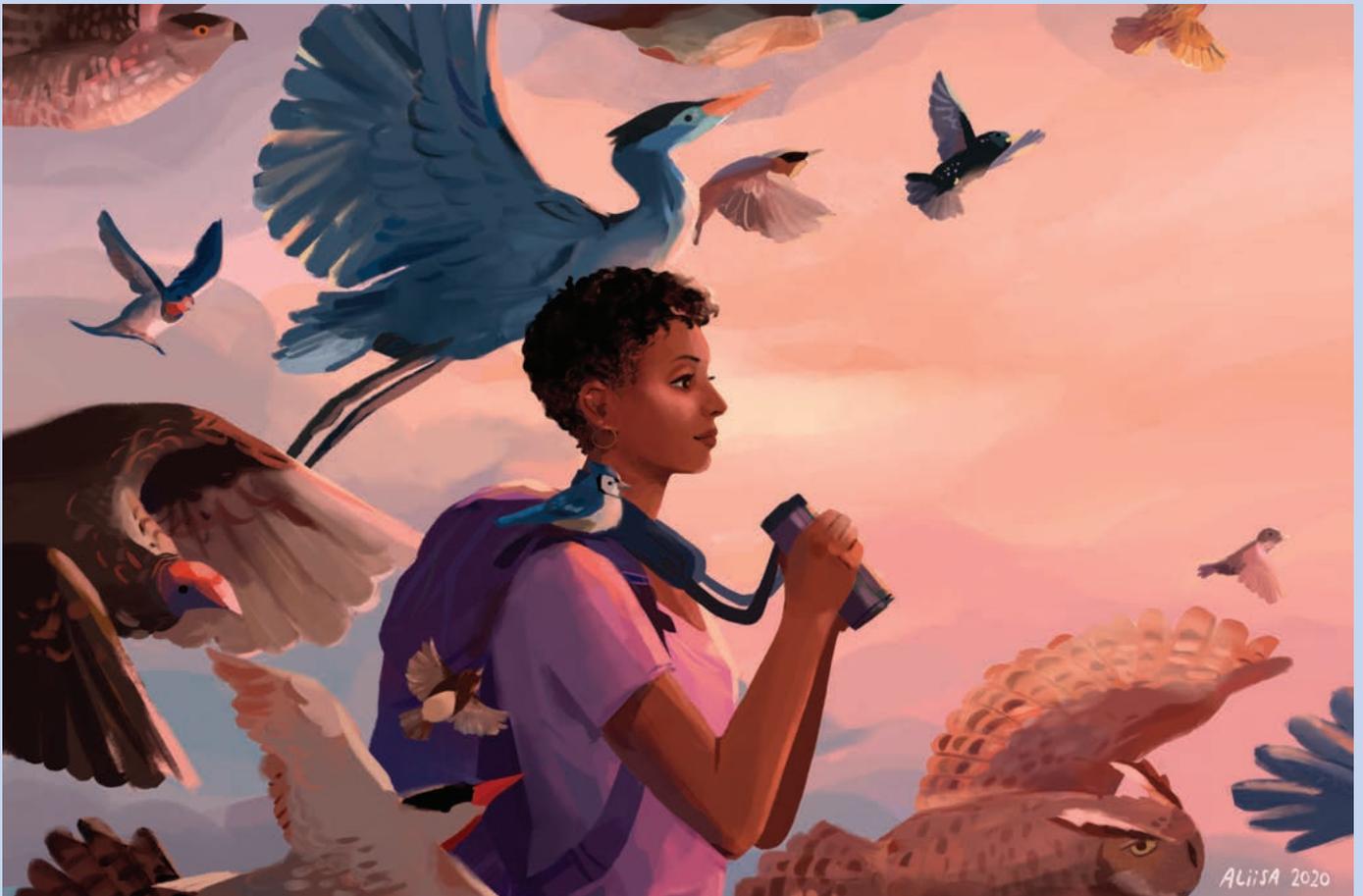


**Page 10 Soho mural artists, clockwise from upper left:** “Marciago Rhonierika”; @downtowndavinci/Christopher Winter Pugliese; @brendantmcnally/Brendan T McNally; @togo\_art\_nyc/Giorgi Togonidze; unknown artist (cockatoos) and @colindebain/Colin Joseph Wolfgang Mahar (flowers); @alicemizrachi/Alice Mizrachi; @optimonyc and @distoart/Distoart or Distort. **Page 11 Soho mural artists, left to right:** @av\_artist (A V); @oscarlett.artist (Oscar Lett); @laputavida88 (Shannon Orcutt). **Photos of Soho murals** © Rozanna Radakovich.



## PORTRAIT OF ORNITHOLOGIST CORINA NEWSOME

Though it is not one of the Soho street art pieces, this stunning new painting of ornithologist and Black Birders Week organizer Corina Newsome caught our attention, and we wanted to share it. Illustrator Aliisa Lee ([www.aliisalee.com](http://www.aliisalee.com)) was inspired to create this "celebratory piece" and urges viewers to follow #blackwomenwhobird on Instagram. Learn more about Corina Newsome at [www.corinanewsomewixsite.com/hoodnaturalist](http://www.corinanewsomewixsite.com/hoodnaturalist).



# BIRDING DURING THE PANDEMIC: NEW YORKERS TAKE UP BIRDWATCHING

One of Aliesha Bryan's most vivid memories of birds in New York City is from her teen years, when a hummingbird hovered outside her family's kitchen window in Brooklyn. But her initial fascination with birds started in elementary school, when her third-grade teacher introduced Bryan to John James Audubon's watercolors. The variety of birds led to hours poring over encyclopedia pages, but she never considered herself a birder. Bryan now lives in Spuyten Duyvil in the Bronx, and has started noticing hummingbirds again.

As a Black woman who birds, the past few months have been especially straining. "I can't read the news, look at social media, or have conversations about current events without my blood pressure rising," Bryan confides.

"Lately, many people are finally waking up to the reality of racism. But it's been a long time since that reality was news to me. I've had to navigate this my entire life, constantly making calculations about how to look, behave, and where to go. Birding has been a way for me to stop hiding and tiptoeing," Bryan says. "It's a bit ironic because you have to approach birds with a gentle spirit, but I've felt like I need to be bold to go into spaces to observe nature because I—and my way of being—defy expectations and possibly preferences."

During the pandemic, Bryan has felt that birds have been more frequent visitors in her neighborhood and are matching her bold spirit. She's regularly visited by Mourning Doves, American Robins, Blue Jays, Northern Cardinals, Scarlet Tanagers, and more: "I just feel at home watching birds. It brings me back to myself, like I'm truly seeing."

This ability to "truly see" is a transformative skill that many New Yorkers are developing during the pandemic. When Jennifer Cieluch was out to lunch right before the crisis hit, she and several other good Samaritans forged into Broadway traffic to rescue an injured American Woodcock in the middle of Times Square. A fellow rescuer taxied that bird to the Wild Bird Fund—but Cieluch and good friend Alex Brooks soon "became hooked on finding American Woodcocks in the City." The next thing they knew, they were in the heart of spring migration. "Birding became our respite during a dark and troubling time, and we are now 'all in' for making it a lifetime hobby. It's been absolutely incredible to discover the diversity of wildlife in the City," Cieluch says.

Miguel Medrano's new passion was sparked by a combination of getting his first digital camera and noticing robins searching for worms at his local baseball field. Birding mostly in Manhattan's Inwood Hill Park and the Bronx's Van Cortlandt Park, his "love for wildlife grew rapidly thanks to birding. Photographing birds provides an immersive escape. I rarely look at my phone. It's rewarding to capture a bird I've just seen for the first time, come home and study the photo, along with facts about its behavior, so I have better chances of finding it and getting a good shot later on."

12 [www.nyc Audubon.org](http://www.nyc Audubon.org)

© Miguel Medrano



*A Double-crested Cormorant in Yonkers' Tibbetts Brook Park*

Similarly, Gloria Hong became interested in birds after watching a Black-crowned Night-Heron catch and eat a rat in Central Park; soon after, she got a camera to help identify the birds she saw. Hong has lived in the City for over a decade, but only recently has she started noticing the City's cast of birds. Now she takes every opportunity to take pictures and share them on social media.

Social media has created spaces for new birders to connect with each other and with the larger community. NYC Audubon's social media following, for example, increased 17 percent during the early months of the pandemic. And new personal bird accounts are created every day. Jackie Yantachka started an Instagram account to share the antics of the House Sparrows and Mourning Doves on her Queens patio (@me\_so\_orni), while @hawks.of.hollis has been documenting a Red-tailed Hawk nest on a fire escape in Hollis, Queens.

Back in Manhattan, Tompkins Square Park's well-known nesting pair of red-tails has also been providing entertainment and hope for new birders. Bonnie Nabors happened to be in the park when this year's three nestlings were hatching—and later watched them fledge. The com-

© Bonnie Nabors



*A Red-tailed Hawk nestling by Tompkins Square Park*

munity that formed around the charismatic raptors grew precious to Nabors: “I started meeting local hawk watchers, and it was so nice to be able to talk to people during such an isolating time. I was craving interaction. It felt really good to watch those animals grow and feel a sense of community around them.” Nabors hopes birding will become a staple in her post-pandemic life. “It keeps me grounded,” she says.

Speaking for myself, hearing about the East Village hawk family from new birders interviewed for this article has been bittersweet. At the start of March I had just moved into an apartment a few blocks from Tompkins Square Park, with hopes of watching the red-tails. But the pandemic had other plans: I ended up temporarily moving back home to Ohio, where I grew up. One way I’ve stayed connected has been through updates from my East Village housemate on the Mourning Doves that sunbathe outside his window. If the pandemic were to have a bird associated with it, my vote would be for the reliable and affectionate Mourning Dove, for the hope it brings to those who notice it.

For Barbara Sulkowski, noticing a pair of Mourning Doves on her windowsill on Valentine’s Day this year set her birding into motion. While Sulkowski has always had an eye for natural history, the pandemic has given her the time to pay more attention to the birds in her neighborhood. “I find I’ve gotten in the habit of being more observant of local things,” she notes.



*Mourning Doves have been a soothing balm to many self-isolating birders.*

The stresses of the pandemic have been felt acutely by New Yorkers with children, and isolation has challenged many parents to get creative—and to turn to birdwatching. After noticing cardinals in Central Park, Melissa Kasper Shapiro and her two daughters turned to an Audubon birding guide that a daughter had gotten in school. Soon her family was spending their daily walks in the park, where they were quickly adopted by regular birders who helped them see warblers during spring migration and showed them a Baltimore Oriole nest. “The birding community and Central Park were truly a highlight (if there can be one) of COVID-19,” Shapiro says. Helen Wei and her son have also joined the Central Park birding community and appreciate experienced birders’ kindness and generosity in sharing their knowledge.



*Melissa Kasper Shapiro’s daughters identify birds in Central Park.*

While Krissa Corbett Cavouras was “bird curious” before the pandemic, being restricted to a fourth-floor apartment with her toddler inspired a more active turn towards birds. She ordered a plexiglass bird feeder for their window, and her family was quickly rewarded by a pair of cardinals, a pair of House Finches, and a Mourning Dove. Now her son has gotten so familiar with the birds’ little greeting sounds that he runs to the kitchen window when he hears the doves’ distinctive wing whistles, or the “Pik! Pik!” of the cardinal. (The cardinal is his favorite.)

Whether it’s a Baltimore Oriole family in Central Park, a hummingbird at a kitchen window, canoodling Mourning Doves on a fire escape, or an American Woodcock with an unfortunate flight delay, the paths that people take to enter the birding community are as varied as the birds themselves. But in this time of self-isolation, all these paths lead to a new appreciation of the City’s common green spaces and their wildlife—and one hopes, a will to protect them.



*Helen Wei’s son surveys the Central Park Reservoir.*

Before my now two-year-old son, Rhone, was born, I would spend hours in the same spot in the forest with my binoculars, searching for birds. As he became more mobile, I could no longer keep fixed and rooted. My game plan had to evolve; I had to be honest with myself and change my expectations. Birdwatching with a companion under the age of four requires a change of pace. Sometimes that pace is rapid-fire, and sometimes it's slow. When Jen Kepler, manager of volunteers & visitor engagement at Brooklyn's New York Aquarium, birds with her infant daughter, Kestrel, this inconsistent pace is the new normal. She has learned that birding by ear saves a lot of starts and stops, which helps her daughter stay happy. And I've learned to follow my son's lead, get on his level, and look through his eyes.

Common species you may have overlooked in the past can be great fun for kids. House Sparrows take ridiculous dust baths, building little bowls in the earth as they fling dirt everywhere. Mallards bob in the water like buoys, bottoms-up and bouncing. Common Grackles strut like royalty, scratching at the ground and looking for a snack. If you remember when you first started birding, these were the species you probably spent a lot of time with. Get to know them again. And as you slow down a bit, you'll be seeing more than just birds. You may follow a squirrel as it works on a discarded piece of pretzel. You may find a lovely patch of native flowers, swarming with every manner of pollinator. Once my son and I saw a Blue Jay get into a tousele with a rat. Rhone thought it was great fun.



Jen and Kestrel Kepler bird in Brooklyn's Marine Park Preserve.

This is all part of unstructured outdoor play, which has been shown to help kids in all sorts of ways, such as improving their cognitive capabilities, honing their patience and observational skills, and allowing their imaginations to blossom. Here's how to promote it: Find a patch of forest, grass, or something in between—preferably with birds, for your sake—plop your kid in it, and then step back. That's it. There are no guidelines or templates you must follow.

Your child will set the pace, and you're more or less along for the ride, stepping in only when safety warrants it. My son and I have spent many a happy afternoon exploring a small patch of forest or a section of a shallow creek—following minnows, spying on Gray Catbirds, overturning logs, and poking things with sticks. If you'd like, you can ask open-ended questions to spark curiosity: "I wonder why the bark of this tree is smooth, but the bark of that tree is really shaggy." Or: "What kinds of things in this forest do you think a bird might want to eat?" You might lift a child up to see something out of reach like an old nest, point out the pinecones hanging high overhead, or call attention to smooth rocks on a pond's edge. You can collect things, create mini scavenger hunts, find patterns in nature, or pretend to be explorers in uncharted territory. But you don't have to do any of that. There aren't any rules.

Through our unstructured adventures together, my hope is that my son grows up to love birds as much as I do. As Jen Kepler has said about birding with a child, "You may have to change how you bird, but isn't that the thrill of birding? A new way of doing the thing you love, sharing it with someone new, and taking the world in through a child's eyes—it's refreshing, exciting, and full of discovery." As parents, we both hope our children inherit a world that still has all our favorite species, and that our kids will grow up to treasure, protect, and delight in our planet.

*This article has been adapted from an article published in the November 2019 issue of Birding magazine.*



Rebecca Minardi's son, Rhone, discovers something new.

# EVENTS & ADVENTURES



As this fall *Urban Audubon* goes to press in early August, NYC Audubon has opted to delay scheduling in-person fall and early winter programs due to continuing uncertainty about when such gatherings will be safe and permitted according to city and state regulations. We are continuing to follow governmental guidance during this dynamic and changing

crisis—and the safety of our members, staff, and guides is our top priority. Visit [www.nycaudubon.org/local-trips-and-classes](http://www.nycaudubon.org/local-trips-and-classes) for updates on possible upcoming programs and all event registration details.

See below for “virtual birding” programs and other suggestions for staying involved with birding and bird conservation efforts. For convenient updates right in your inbox,

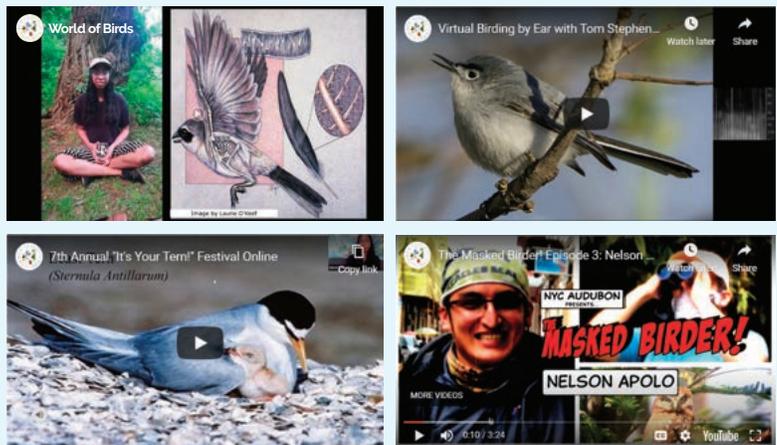
make sure to sign up for *The eCret* eNewsletter, at [www.nycaudubon.org/egret](http://www.nycaudubon.org/egret). And follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (@nycaudubon).

We hope you enjoy all the accounts of birding, both in-person and virtual, throughout the pages of this issue. NYC Audubon’s guides and staff look forward to seeing and birding with you all again, as soon as it is safe again for all concerned.

## NYC AUDUBON GOES VIRTUAL

We’ve created lots of virtual programs to connect you with the City’s birds—from online festivals to vlog series. Explore the programs below, and links to many more options, at [www.nycaudubon.org/digital-resources-and-activities](http://www.nycaudubon.org/digital-resources-and-activities).

- [Jamaica Bay Shorebird Festival](#)
- [It’s Your Tern Festival](#)
- [Jamaica Bay Horseshoe Crab Festival](#)
- [World of Birds](#) by Aurora Crooks
- [The Masked Birder!](#) by Karen Benfield
- [Virtual Birding by Ear](#) by Tom Stephenson
- [Staff picks, birdcams, and more](#)



## BREEDING BIRD ATLAS III SUMMER RECAP

Molly Adams

As this issue of *The Urban Audubon* goes to press at the beginning of August, over 91,000 checklists had been submitted by more than 1,400 people to the third New York State Breeding Bird Atlas. Over 210 species have been confirmed breeding, bringing us to nearly 90 percent of all previously known breeding species in New York. Out of

all five of our boroughs, Queens is in the lead for the most confirmed species with 85, while Manhattan has the least with 42.

Some of the beach-nesting and colonial waterbirds that NYC Audubon was not able to closely monitor this year because of COVID-19 have been recorded in the Atlas. Black Skimmers, Great Egrets, and Double-crested Cormorants all have at least two confirmed breeding records in Queens. Common Terns and American Oystercatchers have at least one confirmed breeding record each on Staten Island. We expect that there will be more confirmation records throughout the season, and we look forward to contributing future monitoring data

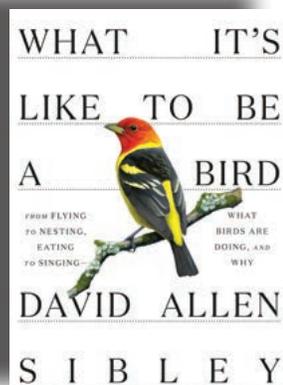


*American Oystercatcher adult with young chick* during the remaining years of the Atlas.

Learn more about the New York State Breeding Bird Atlas, which is being conducted over a period of five years, from 2020 to 2024, at [www.ebird.org/atlasny/home](http://www.ebird.org/atlasny/home). If you have questions about participating in the New York City count, Contact NYC Regional Coordinator (and NYC Audubon Advocacy and Outreach Manager) Molly Adams at [madams@nycaudubon.org](mailto:madams@nycaudubon.org).



*Common Tern adult, with a juvenile in hot pursuit*



*WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A BIRD*  
 FROM FLYING TO NESTING, EATING TO SINGING  
 —WHAT BIRDS ARE DOING, AND WHY  
 By David Allen Sibley  
 Knopf (2020)

Renowned bird field guide author David Sibley has produced a lively new book that will have you hopping around like an American Robin searching for earthworms. (But not like a Common Grackle. It walks, doesn't hop, Sibley tells us.)

Like Sibley's field guides, this volume features enticing illustrations, some of which are life-sized. And just as inviting are the illuminating, amusing facts that Sibley provides for each of the common North American species that are the book's stars, making it the ultimate browsing book. Open it anywhere and you'll find insight into why and how birds do what they do. How geese fly in a V-formation to conserve their energy. How Mallards create their own waterproof feather sealant. Some birds like dust baths (the House Sparrow) as much as water baths. And even small songbirds are adorned with about 2,000 feathers! From why Eastern Phoebes bob their tails to how salmon are connected to Golden-crowned Kinglets—it's all here.

The book's Introduction provides short essays on essential aspects of birds' lives, such as nesting, threats, and coloration. Next comes the Portfolio section, the very heart of *What It's Like to Be a Bird*: vibrant profiles and portraits of waterbirds followed by land birds. The third section, Birds in this Book, offers more information about the same birds in the same order, so that's where you'll do some hopping to get the full picture. (The more seasoned birders among us may be reminded of the separate text and "plate" sections of older field guides). There's no alphabetical index, so if you want to look up the Black-capped Chickadee that you just saw in your backyard, you'll have to leaf through all the pages.

Reading this inspired Sibley compendium has left me with an indelible image: "A six-pound heron can swallow a one-pound fish.

That's like a one-hundred-pound person swallowing a seventeen-pound fish. Whole." I won't remember the details of the person, but I won't forget that Great Blue Heron.

This large-format book, with more than 330 new illustrations by the author, is made for new and longtime birders alike—and offers encouragement whether one is birding from a window or outdoors in a city park. —CPR



*TEN THOUSAND BIRDS/TEN THOUSAND SCREENS*  
 A video adaptation by Alarm Will Sound (2020)  
 of *Ten Thousand Birds*, by composer John Luther Adams (2014)

This past March, Alan Pierson, director and conductor of the chamber orchestra Alarm Will Sound, was sheltering in place at home in Brooklyn. Like many other New Yorkers, he was haunted by the news and was missing friends and colleagues. He was also aware that the constant blare of traffic had been replaced by silence—laced with the songs of birds, in particular the deep hoot of an owl.

"The orchestra had no place to go, no place to play," Pierson recalls. "How to regain the sense of connection and community?" Then he had "a brainstorm": create a shortened, virtual adaptation of Pulitzer Prize-winning composer John Luther Adams' inventive work *Ten Thousand Birds*, right in his own apartment.

In 2014, Alarm Will Sound premiered Adams' full piece. "It's a magical musical experience," said Pierson. Adams' 70-minute score is "a pile of songs, each based on the calls of birds and frogs, the sound of wind," to be performed in a large space (usually outdoors). Alarm Will Sound musicians played their individual songs at their own pace, representing an entire day from morning to night. Audience members, much like birders, could wander among the musicians—some of whom rushed from perch to perch—or just sat, watching and listening, much the way birders do.

Pierson's virtual version wouldn't be as long—down to five-and-a-half minutes from the original hour-plus. Nor would the musicians and audience be in his apartment with him. Instead, the

17 musicians recorded individual videos of themselves playing their parts—each a different nature sound or series of sounds—in their own localities. Then, Pierson arranged the recordings to play in sequence throughout his apartment. View *Ten Thousand Birds/ Ten Thousand Screens* at [www.bit.ly/2XwpJIV](http://www.bit.ly/2XwpJIV).

The piece took time and coordination. “I had loads of time and wanted to invent new ways to make music together,” said Pierson, adding: “I was confident it would be really cool!” Pierson checked with Adams, known for his nature-inspired sonic landscapes (and who has said, “the birds were my teachers”) to make sure he approved. The composer proclaimed, “Go and do it!”

The Alarm Will Sound musicians flew at the chance. Orchestra member Laura Weiner, who enjoys birding in Central Park or New England when she isn’t playing the French horn, was delighted. She created calls of the Blue Jay and Barn Owl.

Clarinetist Beth Stimpert, perched behind greenery in her apartment to make her recording: “Mourning Doves like to hide in the shrubbery,” she says.

For three weeks—“probably 300 hours”—Pierson worked with his boyfriend, Paul Melnikow, installing and synching the videos on 27 computers, iPods, iPads, and a flock of very old cell phones: challenging, to say the least. Finally, on the ninth take, Pierson managed to race through his apartment in one mad dash, successfully capturing each performance on his cell phone.

Following the cycle of the day, the video begins in the bedroom with sound of wind, progresses to the kitchen, where wing whistles swoop past hall doorways, to the dining and living rooms, where Song Sparrows trill, Mourning Doves coo, and Red-winged Blackbirds rattle—and ends with the solemn sounds of an Eastern Screech-Owl, before dissolving into sounds of the night wind on the fire escape. “It’s like the best day ever during spring migration, in five-and-a-half minutes!” said horn player Weiner.

In all, over 20 creatures, including eight bird species plus American Bullfrogs and Green and Western Chorus Frogs, make an appearance. The result is an exhilarating, slightly “cuckoo” bird walk that becomes more intriguing and touching the more you watch it—a celebration of life.

Alarm Will Sound’s creation has been well received by some well-tuned ears. Composer Adams said “This incarnation of *Ten Thousand Birds* touches me deeply. Not only because of the imaginative way my friends in Alarm Will Sound have recreated the music. But because of the intimate glimpse it gives us, in a time of crisis, into the streets of the city I love, and the irrepressible spirits of New Yorkers.” NYC Audubon Advisory Council Member Tom Stephenson, Pierson’s neighbor and author of *The Warbler Guide* and the *Virtual Birding By Ear* video series, is also keen on the piece. For those curious about how Pierson put it together, there’s even a short behind-the-scenes documentary at [www.bit.ly/30ysZlf](http://www.bit.ly/30ysZlf). —SC

The Alarm Will Sound musicians and the sounds they created are listed below. Listen again to see if you can pick them out.

**Erin Lesser (flute and piccolo):** wind gusts, Field Sparrow

**Christa Robinson (oboe):** Eastern Screech-Owl

**Bill Kalinkos (clarinet):** wind, Red-winged Blackbird, Green Frog

**Elisabeth Stimpert (clarinet and bass clarinet):** wind, Red-winged Blackbird, Mourning Dove, Green Frog

**Michael Harley (bassoon):** wind gusts, Blue Jay, Mourning Dove

**Laura Weiner (horn):** Blue Jay, Barn Owl

**Tim Leopold (flugelhorn):** American Bullfrog

**Michael Clayville (trombone):** Blue Jay, other calls

**Matt Smallcomb (percussion):** Veery, Western Chorus Frog

**Chris Thompson (percussion):** Song Sparrow

**Peter Ferry (percussion):** Veery, Western Chorus Frog, Eastern Screech-Owl

**John Orfe (piano):** Eastern Screech-Owl

**Courtney Orlando (violin):** wing whistles

**Jessie Montgomery (violin):** Veery

**Nathan Schram (viola):** Gusts, Veery

**Stefan Freund (cello):** wing whistles

**Miles Brown (bass):** American Bullfrog

## FALL 2020 LECTURE SERIES

Scheduling of in-person lectures has been delayed this fall due to the pandemic. However, we are working to bring you a roster of virtual talks featuring engaging speakers. For up-to-date details, visit [www.nycaudubon.org/lectures](http://www.nycaudubon.org/lectures).

*Unless otherwise noted, all lectures are free and open to the public. Our lecture series is made possible by the support of Claude and Lucienne Bloch.*

# PURPLE MARTIN (*PROGNE SUBIS*)

Don Riepe

Currently, six swallow species nest in New York City: Barn and Tree Swallows are relatively common, while Bank, Cliff, and Northern Rough-winged Swallows breed here in much smaller numbers. Our sixth nesting swallow, the Purple Martin, is so called because of the iridescent blue-black feathers of the male. The female is “purple” just on the top of her head and on her back. (“Martin” is a name given to some Eurasian swallows, as well as to several of the Purple Martin’s South American relatives.)

The largest of North American swallows, the Purple Martin is endemic to the Americas. In New York City, martins have nested for many years on Staten Island in Great Kills Park and are a very recent addition to the nesting birds of Queens: a pair nested both last year and this season in Broad Channel, just south of Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, in an old, man-made, multi-chambered martin house located along the perimeter of the Bay.

While West Coast martins often still nest in tree cavities and other natural sites, martins east of the Rockies nest almost exclusively in man-made houses. Purple Martins are especially common along the southeast coast, where I have seen sizeable colonies in martin houses at gas stations, of all places. Native Americans lured martins



Large photo: a new house at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge (with decoy martins on top). Inset: the “gourd” type of martin house

to their villages by dangling numerous hollowed-out gourds from tree branches near their dwellings. (Some modern-day martin houses are modeled on this ancient idea.) The Native American tradition is probably how the martin became a “synanthropic” bird species—one that has adapted to living in proximity to humans and benefits from the association.

Purple Martins eat insects caught on the wing—and it has been claimed that one bird can consume 2,000 mosquitoes each day. Considering the fact that martins are social breeders, a sizable colony could presumably remove many thousands of mosquitoes from a neighborhood or backyard every night. This theory has been challenged, however: studies have shown that martins actually eat not only mosquitoes, but a diverse diet of flying insects, including dragonflies, damselflies, beetles, bees, wasps, butterflies, and moths. The feeding of young is a time of great activity, as the parents go to and from their nests. Even if martins aren’t exclusively mosquito predators, a colony adds color, excitement, and educational value to any locality.

Like other swallows, Purple Martins are migratory and overwinter in South America, mainly in the Amazon Basin. They usually arrive in our area sometime in April and depart in large numbers by the third week of August, when they can be seen staging in some areas in huge flocks. A good place to view them is along the Maurice River, near Millville, New Jersey, where an annual “Purple Martin Spectacular” is held each year in mid-August. I went one year and was amazed by the sheer number of birds I could see all at once. I estimated the flock as being about 100,000 birds. Noted Cape May birder Pete Dunne, standing near me, said, “Make that 200,000!”

Last year, eBirders reported as many as 750,000 Purple Martins at one time along the Maurice River. While these mind-boggling numbers might seem encouraging, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, the species declined 37 percent between 1966 and 2015. Man-made martin houses have become an important way to maintain the martin population, due to the scarcity of natural nesting cavities. Other conservation strategies to safeguard the species’ future include the protection of large winter roosts in the Amazon Basin and the reduction of pesticide use throughout the Purple Martin’s range.

Visit the Purple Martin Conservation Association at [www.purplemartin.org](http://www.purplemartin.org) to learn more.



A male Purple Martin (left) sings to a seemingly rapt female.

# MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

*Carol Peace Robins*

## STEVEN A. DEAN



Courtesy of NYU School of Law

Twelve-year-old John Dean led his dad, Steven, and mom, Jen, to the world of birds. John's first full phrase was "Birdie up in the sky." He watched birds on trips with his art historian mom to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and on birdwalks with NYC Audubon. Then came John's testimony last year—he prepared his own speech—before the New York City Council, on behalf of bird-safe building legislation.

The legislation passed, a huge victory for the City's birds\*. And *all that* is what brought John's dad to the board of NYC Audubon.

Welcome, Steven Dean, professor of law at Brooklyn Law School. Steven is currently on leave, serving as faculty director at NYU Law School's Graduate Tax Program, and host of the school's popular podcast, *The Tax Maven*. His expertise in law and taxes will be extremely valuable for our planned-giving and bequest programs.

Steven and his family live on the edge of Fort Greene, in downtown Brooklyn. From their 19th-floor apartment, they have been eagerly following the progress of Red-tailed Hawks that are nesting atop the Brooklyn Tech radio tower. In addition to gaining a new interest in birds, this tax expert has also become a compulsive baker—and a generous one, willing to share his favorite recipes. (Watch Steven and John make classic French butter cookies together at [www.bit.ly/33s2IMm](http://www.bit.ly/33s2IMm).)

Though born in Minnesota, Steven spent most of his childhood in the Bahamas, surrounded by nature. He thanks his son for leading him back to wildlife in New York City, and sees his participation on NYC Audubon's board as a way to support the birds that John loves: "I figure it will be at least 10 years before he will be able to do this himself," he says, "so in the meantime I'll fill in for him."

*\*Learn about New York City's new bird-safe building law and read John Dean's testimony at [www.nyc Audubon.org/USpring2020](http://www.nyc Audubon.org/USpring2020).*

## ELIZABETH NORMAN



© El Coll Mohamed

NYC Audubon extends a warm welcome to Elizabeth Norman, who became a birding convert just three years ago. She's been making up for lost time, however: how many birders can claim to have seen the birds of Bangladesh, Tunisia, Ethiopia, and Serbia?

Elizabeth's present job at the International Rescue Committee—senior director of finance & administration, crisis response, recovery and

development—took her to these far-flung locations. On each trip, she's gone out of her way to discover birding opportunities. But most of the time, she enjoys birds closer to the Sunset Park, Brooklyn, brownstone that she shares with her wife and frequent birding companion, Jane McAndrew. Regular haunts of theirs include Greenwood Cemetery and Bush Terminal Piers Park (a waterfront green space and popular birding spot, opened in 2014, that was transformed from a toxic waste site).

Elizabeth's impressive career history includes supervisory positions at the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget and the New York City Department of Youth & Community Development. She is an active member of the LGBTQ+ community, has served on the boards of New York City AIDS Housing Network and Neighbors Helping Neighbors, and has volunteered for such organizations as the Community Food Resource Center and Sylvia's Place, an emergency shelter for homeless LGBTQ+ youth. And naturally, she has volunteered for NYC Audubon—as a horseshoe crab monitor and as an injured bird transporter for Project Safe Flight.

When Elizabeth isn't working, volunteering, or birding, she enjoys Sunset Park's lively and diverse food scene. She's a regular at a local Japanese grocery store and is also a fan of tacos that are "the real thing."

Elizabeth Norman's experience in budgeting and administration will be an enormous asset to the NYC Audubon board of directors—as will her enthusiasm and compassion for birds, wherever they may be.

## NEWS & NOTES

### BOARD, ADVISORY COUNCIL, AND STAFF

NYC Audubon is happy to announce the new board presidency of Karen Benfield; we thank her for her past service as vice president. We are grateful to Immediate Past President Jeff Kimball for his leadership over the past four years. We

thank Alexander Ewing and Richard H. Fried, VMD, for their contributions as Secretary and Vice President; both continue serving as board directors. And thanks to Catherine Schragis Heller for both her service as vice president, and for her

continuing support as a member of the advisory council. We welcome Steven Dean and Elizabeth Norman to the board of directors.

Staff member Aurora Crooks has been promoted to the role of Conservation Associate. Congratulations, Aurora!

# MY FATHER, HARRISON D. MAAS

Andrew Maas

*As reported in the summer Urban Audubon, past NYC Audubon Board President Harrison D. Maas passed away on May 25, 2020. His son Andrew joined the NYC Audubon staff in 2013, and has held the role of communications manager since 2016.*

One muggy summer night in the early 1990s, my father Harry drove my brothers Kevin, Michael, and me, all grade-schoolers, to East Hampton's Fresh Pond Park. An unusual occurrence, as the dad we knew was not one for late night adventures. What was the special occasion? A chance to hear the call of the Eastern Whip-poor-will. My brothers and I had not gone birding with our dad before this night; he most often birded early in the morning, before any of us had any desire to wake up. We arrived and roamed the park grounds for nearly 10 minutes, which felt like an eternity for us kids. Finally, we heard the chant: "WHIP-poor-WILL... WHIP-poor-WILL..." Normally incessantly loquacious, my brothers and I went silent, enraptured. Eventually, we broke out of this Whip-poor-will-induced trance and drove back home—but during the entire ride back, found ourselves chanting in unison, as we tried our best impressions of the bird's call. Our dad had gotten his boys to appreciate the wonders and mysteries of birds.

My father's passion for birding was sparked over 40 years ago, by the mystery of a little yellow bird that came to the bird bath of his newly rented home in East Hampton. He initially thought the bird was a canary, but my mom, Barbara—then his soon-to-be-wife—was skeptical and suggested he buy a guide. One trip to the bookstore later, he confirmed it was a Prairie Warbler. He soon was noting all the birds he saw across Long Island's East End, bringing his binoculars wherever he traveled. His first year-end birding list, typed up in 1980, listed 43 species. Each subsequent edition grew in both length and the extensiveness of its notes.

When my father discovered the spectacular birding scene in Central Park, birding went from being a summer hobby to a year-round obsession. He habitually headed out at the crack of dawn so that he could leisurely



*Harry Maas in Central Park, in a photo taken by friend Lloyd Spitalnik, past member of the NYC Audubon advisory council. (See Harry's favorite bird, the Prairie Warbler, in a cover photo by friend David Speiser, current advisory council member and past executive vice president of the board.)*

bird the park before going to work at his law firm, Hunton & Williams. He saw many new birds in the park, but he also discovered a community of birders that was welcoming, friendly, and sharing—a much needed change of pace from the cut-throat legal scene he would walk into later in the morning.

He got involved with NYC Audubon soon after, joining the board of directors in the early 1980s and leading trips to New Jersey and Long Island. He remained active on the advisory council in the 1990s, championing efforts like the campaign to restore Pale Male's nest. After retiring from Hunton & Williams and seeing his three boys off to college, he rejoined the board in 2009, guiding the organization through the great recession.

My father became board president in 2012, just before Superstorm Sandy devastated the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge and breached its West Pond. NYC Audubon, led by Harry, was instrumental in forming the Birders' Coalition for Gateway, which advocated that the West Pond be returned to its former freshwater state and once again become a haven for birds. The coalition worked closely together to publish pond restoration recommendations, attend

restoration plan meetings, and comment on proposals for the new *Gateway General Management Plan*. Their hard work proved successful: the National Park Service adopted their essential recommendations in 2016, and the West Pond was restored to its freshwater state in 2018.

NYC Audubon honored my father at the 2016 Fall Roost for his efforts to restore Jamaica Bay's West Pond and for his leadership on the board of directors. In board meetings as president, he ran a "famously tight ship," in the words of Vice President Larry Levine—but in the park, his vessel was carried by the breeze, traveling to wherever birds were to be found. In Central Park, he was his most actualized self: an easy-going, patient, and accommodating mentor who relished helping others pursue their birding passions. He loved leading the yearly Central Park Christmas Bird Count's "southeast circle"—even more so when joined by young birders he could shepherd. He was most proud that in later years he co-led the circle with young Ryan Zucker, now 17.

My father had many accomplishments outside the birding world: he was a star pitcher at University of Iowa, finished tops in his class at University of Iowa College of Law, served as first lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps, and made partner at a leading international law firm. But he was most proud of the times he was able to guide or mentor others. Whether it was counseling those like Ryan Zucker, leading NYC Audubon during critical periods, or getting his boys into birds by introducing them to the hypnotic chant of the Whip-poor-will, he lived to share his love of birds and provide counsel and encouragement to anyone who sought or needed it. As NYC Audubon Senior Conservation Biologist Kaitlyn Parkins noted upon his passing, "He was insistent on the younger generation 'taking over' and supporting them" in their pursuit of birding and conservation. In Harry Maas's memory, let us all work to inspire New York City's young people to conserve birds and their habitats.

# IN MEMORIAM

## DAVID BURG (1950-2020)

As this issue of *The Urban Audubon* was being finalized, we were saddened to learn of the passing of David Burg, a deeply committed conservationist, longtime supporter of New York City Audubon, and founder of the organization WildMetro. David died suddenly on Saturday, July 11, while hiking with a friend in Stewart State Forest, New York. David served on NYC Audubon's board of directors for 15 years and was our president from 1993 to 1995. From the start, he was actively involved in our conservation committee, co-authoring *Buffer the Bay Revisited* (1992), initiating the *Jamaica Bay Coastal Habitat Restoration Project* (1994), and protecting unique natural areas on Staten Island. NYC Audubon has lost a persuasive voice for preserving the City's open spaces; a more detailed tribute will be included in the winter *Urban Audubon*. We send our deepest sympathies to his wife Jean, son Noah, daughter-in-law Amber Reed, and grandsons Isaac, Milo, and Oren.

## DONOR ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NYC Audubon's conservation work and public programs are made possible by philanthropic contributions from members, friends, corporations, foundations, and government agencies. We are grateful to all those who have sustained our work over the past six months, including the 1,452 gifts from members and donors in amounts up to \$2,499.99 that collectively provided \$102,532 in support of our mission from January 1 through June 30, 2020.

We additionally thank the 374 people who collectively gave \$21,218 in honor of NYC Audubon Board Member Chris Cooper. Heartfelt gratitude also goes to Chrissy Teigen, who drew attention to Chris's passion for birding, and to @MAllaneous for encouraging donations on our behalf.

### AMERICAN KESTREL CIRCLE

Gina Argento  
Tony Argento  
Robert Bate and Tracy Meade  
Karen Benfield and John Zucker  
Claude and Lucienne Bloch  
Alex Blumberg  
MaryJane Boland and Daniel Picard  
Ronald Bourque  
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Art Sills and Sarah DeBlois  
Althea Duersten  
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Joe and Barbara Ellis  
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Anina Gerchick  
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The NYC Audubon Staff  
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Kellie Quiñones  
Rex and Renee Recker  
Enea Redding  
Loretta Soehngen  
Gabriel Willow  
Joyce Winston

### MEMORIAL GIFTS

Joseph Stenneth Cato  
Charles Kennedy  
Lynn Leonard  
Harry Maas  
Harry Richardson  
Joseph Tobin

# SUPPORT NYC AUDUBON: NOW MORE URGENT THAN EVER

The birds still need us. Last fall, two scientific studies revealed that there are three billion fewer birds in North America than there were in 1970—and that two-thirds of North American birds are at increasing risk of extinction from global temperature rise. Vital work on behalf of the environment cannot wait.

Our hearts go out to those in our community who have lost loved ones during the ongoing pandemic, and to those who have recovered or are recovering from this disease. And we thank the frontline workers who continue to put their own lives at risk to protect our health. Their work has meant that during the crisis, the NYC Audubon staff could continue the work of conservation science, advocacy, and educational outreach from our homes. We are frugal, flexible, and lean, and these qualities are sustaining our organization.

Help us make up the loss of revenue from canceled trips and classes, from donations at festivals, and from the funding that normally underwrites our research, monitoring, and data-gathering. We have applied for emergency relief from every source for which we are eligible, but the loss in traditional revenue puts our organization at a disadvantage just as we are making headway on two critical fronts: diversifying our community through in-person education and outreach, and preventing the needless death of more than 90,000 birds each year from collisions with glass.

You can help NYC Audubon come through this crisis intact and remain a strong and respected voice for birds, people, and nature in all five boroughs. **Every gift, in every amount, is essential.**

© Mike Stuecher



*Warblers like the beautiful Blackburnian are the most commonly found window-collision victims in New York City.*

## GIVE MONTHLY

Provide ongoing monthly support to ensure our birds are protected throughout the year. You can make a huge difference for as little as \$15 per month. See the membership form below or donate online at [www.nycaudubon.org/donate](http://www.nycaudubon.org/donate).

## BECOME A MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN KESTREL CIRCLE

Soar above the rest by making a donation of \$2,500 or more. American Kestrel Circle Patrons enjoy special access and exclusive tours. See the membership form below or donate online at [www.nycaudubon.org/donate](http://www.nycaudubon.org/donate). Contact us to learn more.

## GIVE A MATCHING GIFT

Supporters can double or triple the value of donations through their employers' matching gift programs. Contact your company's personnel office to learn how. Be sure to specify New York City Audubon as the designee.

## REMEMBER THE BIRDS IN YOUR ESTATE PLAN

Make sure that New York City remains a haven for the birds and wildlife you love. A bequest to NYC Audubon is a generous and straightforward way to safeguard birds and their habitat in New York City's five boroughs. This can be expressed in a will as simply as, "I bequeath [a sum of money, a percentage of my estate, or an IRA, life insurance policy, or investment/bank account] to New York City Audubon Society, Inc., a not-for-profit organization with offices at 71 West 23rd Street, Suite 1523, New York, NY 10010." Consult with your attorney to determine what is best for your situation. Visit [www.nycaudubon.org/leave-a-legacy](http://www.nycaudubon.org/leave-a-legacy) or contact us (see below) to learn more about planning a gift for NYC Audubon.

To discuss how you can contribute to NYC Audubon's future, contact Executive Director Kathryn Heintz at [kheintz@nycaudubon.org](mailto:kheintz@nycaudubon.org) and 646-434-0423, or Director of Development Kellye Rosenheim at [krosenheim@nycaudubon.org](mailto:krosenheim@nycaudubon.org) and 646-502-9611.

# NYC AUDUBON'S CAMPAIGN FOR THE FUTURE

**M**ake sure that birds have a home in New York City. NYC Audubon's *Strategic Plan 2020–2025: A Vision for the Future* (view it at [www.nycaudubon.org/sp](http://www.nycaudubon.org/sp)) creates a road map to guide us forward. In celebration of our 40th anniversary, we are committed to raising \$1,040,000 this year. We're a little more than halfway there, with a total of \$694,590 raised.



60% achieved

Our Goals: 10 Gifts of \$40,000



65% achieved

40 Gifts of \$10,000



98% achieved

40 Gifts of \$5,000



45% achieved

1,000 "ADD \$40" Gifts  
(to be matched 1:1)

You can help! **Be sure to ADD \$40 (or \$400, or \$4,000)** when you give, renew your membership, or register for NYC Audubon events throughout the year. **Every "ADD \$40" gift will be matched up to a total of \$40,000.** Donate at [www.nycaudubon.org/donate](http://www.nycaudubon.org/donate).

## NYC AUDUBON MEMBER EVENTS

**W**e regret that we've been unable to provide any free members-only walks over the past months—and at press time, we still do not know when in-person events will be possible. (Be sure to check your email for notifications when walks resume.) Since we miss you all so much, we are pleased to announce that Birding Guide Tod Winston will host an online event just for our members, full of fascinating birds and their beautiful songs!

### VIRTUAL BIRDING ADVENTURE WITH TOD WINSTON

Thursday, October 1, 6:30pm

Join Tod on a whirlwind "trip" to some of his favorite birding spots—from the marshes of southern Spain, to the "sky islands" of southeast Arizona, to the pampas of Uruguay. To learn more and register, visit [www.nycaudubon.org/member-events](http://www.nycaudubon.org/member-events).

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE** Contributions are essential to our work. Help us reach our goal of \$1,040,000 in individual gifts during our 40th Anniversary year.

Count me/us in with my/our support of wild birds in New York City:

**Anniversary Leadership Gifts:** [ ] \$40,000 [ ] \$10,000 [ ] \$5,000

**Anniversary Celebration Gifts:** [ ] \$2,500 [ ] \$1,000 [ ] \$500 [ ] \$100

[ ] Other amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

[ ] **Additionally, I would like to ADD \$40 to my gift above!**

**"ADD \$40" gifts received before October 31, 2020 will be matched.**

TOTAL AMOUNT: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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CARD #: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Security Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form with your payment to:

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**OCTOBER 14, 2020**

**URBAN BIRDING IN FOCUS**

**HABITAT | HEALING | HUMANITY | HEALTH | HOPE**