

# Putnam Highlands Audubon Society Chapter Newsletter

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## Gone Birding

Dear PHAS members and friends,

In January 2010, PHAS treasurer and field trip coordinator Pete Charbonneau begins a tour of duty in Iraq. You see, in addition to being an avid birder and community volunteer, Pete is Major in the US Army and a professor of Math at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Pete has been a tremendous asset to our chapter and I don't think I have ever met a more positive-minded, enthusiastic person. He always seems to be fully engaged with what he is doing and genuinely happy to be wherever he is. If you have been to one of PHAS events or field trips in the past few years, then you know what I mean.

True to form, Pete is looking on the bright side of his current situation. He is willingly serving his country and answering a call of duty in a war zone, but as he says, this will get him home sooner. According to Pete, he would like to be stationed at West Point when he returns from Iraq. I hope you will all join me in hoping for Pete's safe and speedy return.

Pete will be spending a few months in Texas preparing for his deployment. I am sure, that during his readiness training, Pete will find time to go birding and look for some life birds. I am pretty sure he will find time to go birding when he is in Iraq as well. To help him make sense of the hundreds of new bird species he will be seeing, the Putnam Highlands Audubon Society's board of directors is presenting Pete with a copy of "Birds of the Middle East", by Richard Porter and Simon Aspinall.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank Margaret O'Sullivan for agreeing to become PHAS treasurer. Margaret has been on the PHAS board for a number of years and did not hesitate when a volunteer was sought to take over from Pete Charbonneau at the December meeting.

Additionally, I would like to welcome Brian Rubino to our chapter's board of directors. Brian is a lifelong resident of Philipstown and has been studying in the School of Natural Resources at Cornell University. Brian was appointed to fill a board vacancy at the November meeting.

Putnam Highlands Audubon is a volunteer-run organization. We are fortunate to have people like Pete, Margaret and Brian in our community. They keep our chapter running and much, much more. There are a number of opportunities for you take an active role in your Audubon chapter in 2011, so please consider volunteering for PHAS.

I hope that you enjoy the winter months and that Putnam Highlands Audubon Society has something to do with it. As ever, if you have comments or concerns about PHAS, or if you have ideas for field trips or programs, please send me an e-mail, write a letter, call, or visit me at Constitution Marsh.

The very best,

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## A Suggestion for your Garden from Nancy Durr

Callicarpa (Beautyberry) -- specifically *Callicarpa dichotoma*, Early Amethyst

Callicarpa is one of the best fruiting shrubs for mid-fall color; its shiny lavender berries are a great attraction in the landscape at a time when many plants are winding down their display. Plants produce small pink flowers in August, but it's the berries that produce the big show. 'Early Amethyst' sets fruit in early September here in Connecticut, well ahead of the species. Plants are fast growers, spreading about as wide as they are tall.

Fruit production is better if several are planted together. Callicarpa is small enough to fit easily into a perennial or mixed border, perhaps near Ornamental Grasses, Perovskia, and late-blooming Rudbeckias such

'Summer Sun' for a satisfying late-season display. Plants prefer full sun and tolerate partial shade, and average, well-drained soil. Once established, Callicarpa is drought tolerant. No serious pest or disease problems. Seldom requires fertilizer. Because plants flower on the current season's growth, they can be pruned hard (to as low as 4-6 inches) in early spring. Plants will be smaller than if left unpruned, but their stems will be lined from head to toe (rather than just at the tips of the branches) with clusters of berries. (from [www.whiteflowerfarm.com](http://www.whiteflowerfarm.com))

*Comments by Nancy P Durr and Karen Riner:*

White Flower Farm is where I likely purchased mine 5 or 6 years ago. (The one sold by WFF is not *Callicarpa americana*



which is not hardy in our zones according to the USDA.) I have found that bluebirds, robins, mockingbirds and housefinches like the berries. The berries and seeds are considered scrumptious by birds, particularly the northern bobwhite. White tail deer consider the leaves a delicacy which doesn't seem too surprising. An active ingredient callicarpenel derived from the plant is patented by the US

Department of Agriculture as a mosquito repellent!

The minute late summer blossoms are not a noteworthy feature. Its berries add color to the fall/winter garden until the birds (or lashing winds and multiple freezings) finish them; my three shrubs have had only about 1/4 of the berries eaten as of 12/5.

The arching branches and berries are especially beautiful when glazed with ice. Plant it where you can see its fall/winter delights. I think the berries are more purple than lavender. I prune out the oldest stems (about 1/3 of the stems) on my mature shrubs and cut the entire shrub randomly down to about 12-18" in spring (before new growth starts -- but it's remarkably tolerant of a delayed pruning). With this pruning it stays about 3-4' high and maybe 4-5' wide. Also, it is very drought-tolerant -- I didn't water at all last summer, and mine are in full sun. It doesn't spread or reproduce. I call it Easy and Rewarding. A 1 gallon container is ~ \$25, pricey but worth it. There is also a white-berried variety, but I do not have any experience with it. Now is a good time to place order from WFF for spring delivery -- before supply runs out.

## Jaguars are the Subject of Audubon Talk

By Alison Rooney for [www.philipstown.info](http://www.philipstown.info)

Look twice at the man behind you on line at the post office or the bank. If that man is Garrison's Scott Silver, it's possible that he may have recently returned from documenting the jaguar population of Cockscomb Reserve, in Belize. It's never just another day at the office for Silver, who is the Facility Director/Animal Curator at the Queens Zoo, and who commutes even further on occasion, leading field studies researching the third largest species of cat in the world, and the largest in the Western hemisphere: the jaguar.

On Saturday, Jan. 8, Silver gave a talk on the methodologies used in studying jaguar populations in Central and South America. The presentation, hosted by the Putnam Highlands Audubon Society at the Taconic Outdoor Education Center attracted a roomful of wildlife aficionados, many of whom had stayed on after the Audubon Society's bi-annual birdseed pick-up.

Silver's interest in jaguars stems from the time he spent working with Howler monkeys, the subject of his doctorate. Spending his time in Mayan villages, he was introduced to the jaguar. Silver began his Power Point presentation by giving a broad overview of the jaguar's geographic range, which extends from just across the southern Arizona border down to northern Argentina. (The most widespread cat is the Mountain Lion, found from southern Alaska to southern Argentina.) Fossils found indicate that jaguars were once found as far east as Mississippi, and as far north as Kansas. The current range has shrunk about 70 percent from the historic range, although in two thirds of the current range there is healthy population with a strong chance of survival. The jaguars require a supply of large prey in order to survive.

Though jaguars vary in size, color, patterns, and characteristics, the multiple varieties are nonetheless considered a single species. The size of the males

varies from approximately 350 pounds, common in those living in the Pantanal region of Brazil, to the smaller ones of the Mexican Yucatan peninsula, weighing approximately 150 pounds. Jaguars, which fall under the genus *panthera*, are considered "big cats."

Silver discussed the recent history of jaguar research, calling the primary focus of it "serving the jaguar population." As recently as 1998 there was, according to Silver, "no unifying strategy for protecting jaguars, so the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) held a 'jaguar workshop' which attracted a wide variety of people involved with jaguars in some way: from students to hunters to scientists, pooling everyone's knowledge. This was the birth of the jaguar conservation program." The WCS has developed techniques for extracting information on jaguar populations and, by virtue of being a large and influential organization, has been able to teach teams of other researchers, in many countries, these same techniques so that a unified model of study is applied to all of the research. Currently, per Silver, there have been over 70 surveys completed in 50 sites in 11 countries in Central and South America. Some of the surveys have been repeated for five years.

The main focus of Silver's talk was the methodology employed in getting accurate counts of jaguar populations. Before describing how this was done, he talked about why getting such a count was so difficult. Jaguars:

- Exist at very low densities
- Are extremely cryptic – they make a living by not being seen
- Inhabit places where it is difficult to observe animals

And why is counting so important? Silver says that we "have to have knowledge of increases and decreases [in population]; we also need to figure out what a viable population is. Saving just a handful of jaguar is not enough, a genetic variability is required ... Counting tells us where efforts should be made to conserve and ... it helps to monitor and identify trends in

jaguar populations."

So how do you count animals you can't see? Jaguars are notoriously people-shy—in all of his years of research, which included living in Belize for two years, Silver has seen only one live, in the wild, although he stated that, "I have *almost* seen them many times! They've got a conspiracy against me!" The counting is done by a system called marking and re-capturing, originally designed for tracking small animals. This system involves estimating the overall number of individuals in a sample area based upon the proportion of animals captured or photographed once to animals re-captured/re-photographed. A multi-triggered camera track "marks" a beam much like a spotlight: if something warm-blooded walks by, it takes a picture. Images are then examined through a system both complex (mathematical reasoning and formulas are employed) and straightforward (images are layered upon each other so that animal patterns can be discerned by seeing what does or doesn't match up).

There are a host of parameters attached to this scientific model, including demographic closure, careful date and time monitoring, no 'gaps in the grid' of camera placement and many other conditions. Although some of the marking and re-capturing description was fairly complex, by relating it to a specific research endeavor of his, Silver was able to explain it in layman's terms so that audience (which included many birders, accustomed to keeping count) was able to follow and grasp the concept.

In the course of the presentation, Silver imparted general information about the jaguar. For example, jaguars hunt by scent, not sight, with their mouth frequently open to guide them. They generally don't touch "kills" made by other animals. They are solitary animals, and do not live in prides. In some of the black jaguars (they are not found in Central America) the spots are visible through the black coat. Jaguar density is highest in moist, tropical forest and lowest in grassland. (continued next page)

Silver ended his talk by speaking of the future. "There's still a lot more to do. We need to fill in gaps of knowledge. Now we're identifying individual areas, maintaining genetic connectivity. This allows us to make suggestions about land use to allow jaguar populations to migrate between locations." Silver confirmed "man is the biggest threat to jaguar," be it from hunting for medicinal uses or pelts, or conversion of habitats, or by hunting the prey that the jaguar eat.

Questions from the audience followed the talk. Topics included a

comparison between jaguar and leopards, the number in zoo populations, and new techniques for researching populations, including hair collection for DNA.

At the conclusion of the program, Rich Anderson of Putnam Highlands Audubon spoke of using some of the same tracking techniques in monitoring local wildlife populations, mentioning an increase in fishers, an animal he described as "showing up more and more here." Anderson and Audubon's Pete Salmansohn spoke about future Audubon programs, including another talk by

Silver on thick-billed parrots (the Queens Zoo has the largest flock of these rare birds in the U.S.); the Backyard Bird Count; Frog Watch, which is a Citizen Science project which monitors frog populations for which local volunteers are needed; and Eaglefest, which takes place on Feb. 5 at locations along the Hudson, including at locally at Constitution Marsh.

(Click [here](#) for original article with photos.)

## EVENTS

### 14th annual Great Backyard Bird Count

Friday, February 18 through Monday, February 21  
Detailed information is available at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc).  
Please, *Count and be Counted*.  
It's easy, fun, and important.

### 7th Annual Hudson River EagleFest

Contact [Pete Salmonsohn](mailto:puffpete@gmail.com) (puffpete@gmail.com) to offer your help.

Saturday, February 5th  
9:00am-4:00pm at Croton Point Park  
Detailed info at [www.teatown.org](http://www.teatown.org) (home site of the organizer).  
Features (some of which require tickets) are:  
*Birds of Prey Shows* in the Eagle Theater  
*Eagle Exploration Bus Tours*  
Collaborators exhibits with educational displays  
Children's area - with interactive games, crafts, and hands-on discoveries  
Additional presentations in the Eaglet Stage  
Eagle Viewing Along the Hudson River

### Guest speaker Eric Lind, Director of Constitution Marsh with 2010 summer intern Conor Austin

Sunday, February 6, 2011 at 2:30pm  
Sponsored by the Philipstown Garden Club, Desmond Fish Library, Program room located on the corner of Routes 403 and 9D in Garrison. This event is open to the public and light refreshments will be served. Admission is free.  
Snow date is February 13.

## Nature's Calendar Hudson River Almanac

### January

- Mating season for raccoons
- Watch out for shrub-browsing rabbits
- White-tailed deer lose antlers
- Many species of ducks in Croton Bay

### February

- Think about planting bird food: select fruiting shrubs and trees when the gardening catalogs start to arrive
- Cut some forsythia branches for a forced indoor spring
- Mid-February: Bald eagles start aerial courtship battles
- Mid-February: Pussywillows start their emergence
- Mid-February: Red-wings, Grackles and Cowbirds reappear
- Mid-February: Maple sap starts running

Bio-Eco Briefs  
Nancy P Durr

### **Unwanted Exports from Us**

Natural enemies wanted:  
ARS researchers in France have teamed up with European colleagues to search for insects, mites, microbes or nematodes that could be used in a biologically based approach to controlling silverleaf nightshade, an invasive weed from the Americas that has spread to southern Europe, Africa, India, Australia and elsewhere. (11/24)  
<http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/pr/2010/101124.htm>

Website and Place to Visit  
(and Book)  
Nancy P Durr

### **Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology -- [wfvz.org](http://wfvz.org)**

This non-profit is dedicated to the preservation of bird egg and nest materials from around the world. It is also colloquially known as "The Camarillo Bird Museum". One of their publications celebrating their collections is a elegant table-top book "EGG and NEST", by Rosamond Purcell, Linnea S. Hall, and René Corado, published by Harvard University Press, October 2008. (Hardback, 224 pp., \$39.95 each, autographed by the authors, plus S&H). The book is fully described at the website which provides connections to reviews by Audubon, The New York Times, and American Scientist. Camarillo, CA is a little north of Los Angeles and just south of Oxnard.

BOOKS (and related Websites)  
Nancy P Durr

### **American Wasteland: How America Throws Away Nearly Half of its Food (And What We Can Do about It)**

Jonathan Bloom; Da Capo Press, 2010; ISBN 9787382-1364-4; Hardcover List \$26; Kindle edition available.  
Related Jonathan Bloom Blog: [www.wastedfood.com](http://www.wastedfood.com)  
Comment by Nancy P Durr: I saw Bloom give a presentation on this book on BookTV (Cspan2) <http://booktv.org/> and found his observations realistic and suggestions mostly practical.

### **Dura Guides & Pocket Naturalist Guides**

Soft cover \$7.95 and 5.95 respectively  
Waterford Press  
[www.waterfordpress.com](http://www.waterfordpress.com)  
Pamphlet-sized & waterproof. There are two that are specific to NYS: one about wildlife and the other about trees & wildflowers. Reviewed in the December 2010 issue of Conservationist.  
Comment by Nancy P Durr:  
Conservationist is a great publication of the NYS DEC always with fine photos and articles 7 times a year for \$12; you can subscribe at [www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/24071.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/24071.html).

### **Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area Heritage Site Guidebook**

The Heritage Site Guidebook (a project of the Hudson River Valley Greenway) features over 100 pages of information about the sites and themes of the region and costs only \$9.95 plus shipping and handling. For more information and to purchase a copy, visit <http://www.hudsonrivervalley.com/ExploreHeritageArea/Guidebook.aspx>.

## SNOW IS GOOD

On Friday, January 28th at 7 p.m. there will be a lecture by Cary Institute senior scientist Peter M. Groffman. Dr. Groffman will discuss how mild winters threaten soil productivity, plant growth, and freshwater resources. Most people pay attention to climate change in the summer, when faced with heat waves, hurricanes, and severe thunderstorms. In the Northeast, climate warming is actually more marked in the winter, and the loss of snow cover can have a ripple effect on soils, trees, and water quantity and quality. The event will be held in the Cary Institute auditorium, located at 2801 Sharon Turnpike (Rte. 44) in Millbrook, New York. For more information, call (845) 677-7600 x 121 or e-mail

Because of New York State's fiscal crisis, the Department of Environmental Conservation, along with other state agencies, is currently reducing its workforce. As a result, DEC will close both the Rogers (Chenango County) and Stony Kill (Dutchess County) Environmental Education Centers. DEC apologizes for any inconvenience this may cause and thanks past supporters of the centers. The centers are expected to be closed as of January 1, 2011. Please visit [Stony Kill Foundation](#).

--Nancy Durr

January 17, 2011

## Conspiracies Don't Kill Birds. People, However, Do.

By LESLIE KAUFMAN

New York Times

At the beginning of this month when about 5,000 red-winged blackbirds fell from the sky in one night in Arkansas, biologists were called on to put a damper on public speculation about pesticides and secret military tests by reminding everyone how many birds there are and how many die. They often do so as a result of human activity, but in far more mundane and dispiriting ways than conspiracy buffs might imagine.

"Five billion birds die in the U.S. every year," said Melanie Driscoll, a biologist and director of bird conservation for the Gulf of Mexico and Mississippi Flyway for the National Audubon Society.

That means that on average, 13.7 million birds die in this country every day. This number, while large, needs to be put into context. The federal Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that a minimum of 10 billion birds breed in the United States every year and that as many as 20 billion may be

in the country during the fall migratory season.

Even without humans, tens of millions of birds would be lost each year to natural predators and natural accidents — millions of fledglings die during their first attempts at flight. But according to the Fish and Wildlife Service, people have severely complicated the task of survival. Although mortality rates are difficult to calculate for certain, using modeling and other methods like extrapolation from local research findings, the government has come up with estimates of how many birds die from various causes in the United States.

Some of the biggest death traps are surprising. Almost everyone has an experience with a pet proudly bringing home a songbird in its jaws. Nationally, domestic and feral cats kill hundreds of millions of birds each year, according to the government. One study done in Wisconsin found that domestic rural cats alone (thus excluding a large number of suburban and urban cats) killed roughly 39 million birds a year.

Pesticides kill 72 million birds directly, but an unknown and probably larger number ingest the poisons and die later unseen. Orphaned chicks also go uncounted.

And then there is flying into objects, which is most likely what killed the birds in Arkansas. The government estimates that strikes against building windows alone account for anywhere from 97 million to nearly 976 million bird deaths a year. Cars kill another 60 million or so. High-tension transmission and power distribution lines are also deadly obstacles. Extrapolating from European studies, the Fish and Wildlife Service estimates 174 million birds die each year by flying into these wires. None of these numbers take into account the largest killer of birds in America: loss of habitat to development.

All of this explains why about a quarter of the 836 species of birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act are in serious decline. For a third of the other birds there is not enough information to be sure about the health of their populations.

Of course, poisons and electric wires are not as exciting to think about as secret government plots, but Ms. Driscoll says it is time we pay attention to them anyway.

"It is the story that the press and the public have largely missed, and it is important, and timely, given the current concern," she said. "And it is what gets those of us who work in bird conservation motivated every day to try to deal with human-induced changes to our habitats, our landscape and our very climate."

This is the first edition of the PHAS newsletter to come to you electronically. As a member of PHAS, please consider yourself a potential source of information and photographs for future issues. Send contributions of photos, website/book recommendations and other things that might interest fellow members to [Cynthia Murray](mailto:csamurray@mac.com). ([csamurray@mac.com](mailto:csamurray@mac.com))

After reading the Bird Walks & Field Trips report in the last issue, we thought we would let you know that the Belted Kingfisher has returned to Indian Brook in front of our home. We had not seen it or heard its call for some time prior. --Jerry & Vicki Albanese

[The Birdwatcher's General Store](#) is a place I like to visit in Orleans, MA and the owner has a wonderful website that includes his weekly newspaper column.

To inspire you, here is a photograph taken by Margaret O'Sullivan.



## Connecting People with Nature

*The mission of the Putnam Highlands Audubon Society  
is to preserve and maintain those lands and waters  
that have been entrusted to our stewardship;  
to inform and educate the public  
on issues involving birds, wildlife, and the environment;  
and to encourage membership in the chapter  
and participation in its activities.*



Putnam Highlands Audubon Society

[www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org](http://www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org)

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