

Putnam Highlands Audubon Society Newsletter

Volume 119, No. 1 Winter 2019

Putnam Highlands Audubon Society

P.O. Box 292, Cold Spring, NY 10516

www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org



WINTER WALKS ANDS TALKS

Saturday, January 5, 2:00-3:00 P.M.,
Desmond-Fish Library: “The Secret
Lives of Scavengers: revelations from
a four-year camera trapping project
in the heart of Harriman State Park,”
with guest speaker Ed McGowan,
director of the Science and Trailside
Museums and Zoo at the Palisades
Interstate Park.

What happens to a deer when it dies
in the woods? Lots. A parade of
scavengers, from common raven to
bald eagle to bobcat, recycle the
carcass in short order. Using motion-
activated cameras, park researchers

PUTNAM HIGHLANDS AUDUBON SOCIETY: CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE

The mission of the Putnam Highlands
Audubon Society (PHAS) is to
preserve and maintain the lands and
waters that have been entrusted to its
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.

chronicle the expected and
unexpected wild animals drawn to
the life-supporting protein of a dead
deer. The images reveal the

importance of this food source for regional rarities, such as golden eagles, and also the risks to wildlife of lead poisoning from unrecovered hunter-shot deer. Highlights from other camera-trapping projects, including an effort to estimate the size of our local black bear population, will be also be shared. No registration required.

Saturday, January 26, 3:00-6:00 P.M.:

Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Reserve. Join expert birder and renowned photographer Kyle Bardwell to observe winter raptors such as short-eared owls, rough-legged hawks, and northern harriers. This event is co-led by our friends at the Saw Mill River Audubon Society. Dress warmly, as the owls are most active thirty minutes before and after sundown, when temperatures drop considerably.

To register, e-mail

office@sawmillriveraudubon.org.

Registration is REQUIRED in order

to coordinate carpools. The event begins with a search of the Black Dirt Region for arctic birds such as snow buntings and horned larks.



Short-eared owl

Birders of all experience levels are welcome to join. Walks are free and supported by donations to Putnam Highlands Audubon Society.

Donations are welcome on our website. A limited number of binoculars are available for loan. Participation is contingent on acceptance of the *Safety Pledge and Agreement*.



***BIRD SEED ORDER DEADLINE:
FRIDAY JANUARY 7***

This winter is forecast to be a winter finch irruption year. Due to widespread hardwood and coniferous seed crop failure in Canada's boreal forest, pine siskins, evening grosbeaks, and purple finches will be more numerous in our area. These long-distance migrants arrive stressed and hungry after flying hundreds of miles. Help them out by keeping your feeders stocked with high-quality Blue Seal™ feeds. Proceeds help support PHAS's schedule of events and community involvement. Download an order form or order online at www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org.

Saturday, January 12, 9:00-noon: Pick up your preordered birdseed at Hubbard Lodge. Volunteers will be on hand to answer bird-feeding questions, offer squirrel-proofing tips, and help identify birds that may have stumped you.

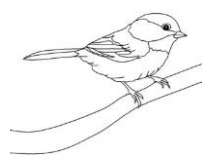
***PHAS ANNUAL DINNER MOVES
TO NEW LOCALE***

Ellyn Varela-Burstein

Believe it or not, spring is just around the corner, and we have already begun planning for our annual dinner. This year it will be held on **Saturday, April 6**, so mark your calendar now. We will be in a new venue this year, as the Taconic Outdoor Education Center is undergoing extensive renovation and will not be available. Instead, the dinner will be held at the old VFW Hall in the heart of Cold Spring. It is a beautiful room, recently completely renovated, and will provide a wonderful space for our speaker. (Wait for the official invitation to find out who this year's speaker will be.) We will also have a new catering company, For the Love of the Craft, so expect the dinner to be a culinary delight.

In addition to the dinner, there will once again be a silent auction, with opportunities to bid on items donated by local businesses. In the past,

auctioned items have ranged from jewelry to dinners at some of our fine local restaurants and everything in between, including handmade feeders and other items of interest to birders. So make sure to save the date, **April 6,** for an exciting evening.



NOVEMBER “DUCK SIT” OFFERS A COUPLE OF SURPRISES

Kyle Bardwell

On November 17, PHAS sponsored a "Third Saturday" walk at Canopus Lake to search for waterfowl. Canopus Lake, located right off Route 301 in Fahnestock State Park, has hosted some diverse and interesting waterfowl throughout the years. The walk, which was actually a "duck sit," took place at the parking lot adjacent to the lake. It was a surprisingly cold November day, with snow remaining from the oddball snowstorm that produced significant accumulations across the region.

The waterfowl search quickly became a success as the group sighted several hooded mergansers across the lake, including some striking-looking drakes. However, the stars of the "duck sit" were not ducks. The first highlight occurred when we saw three otters swimming across the lake. River otters are not a common sight in the Hudson Valley. They are generally nocturnal, but are occasionally seen during the day in the winter months. They have a diverse diet but mainly eat fish. It was fun to watch them dive and swim around the lake.



No, it's not Nessie! These otters were spotted by participants in PHAS's November 13 "duck watch" at Canopus Lake. Photo by Kyle Bardwell

Right after the excitement of the otters cooled down, an immature bald eagle soared right by the group, banking and circling around before flying off.



Photo by Kyle Bardwell

It was a successful walk, even though there weren't many waterfowl on the lake. This will change as the weather continues to get colder. Smaller bodies of water will freeze, forcing ducks to congregate on any remaining open water.



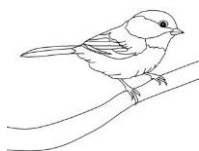
Can you identify this bird? (answer on p. 13)

EAGLEFEST

Ellyn Varela-Burstein

Once again, PHAS and Constitution Marsh will co-host an eagle-watch at Boscobel. The event is set for **Saturday, February 9**, and there will be an “eagle walk” on **Sunday, February 10**, for those who want a second chance to see these magnificent birds. Last year we saw more than a dozen eagles at Boscobel and even more during the eagle walk. Early February is an ideal time to look for eagles along the Hudson River, as many birds migrate here when ice closes their usual fishing grounds. They can be seen not only in the trees

but also, if we're lucky, fishing in the river or skittering along on the ice. It's a good idea to bring binoculars, but we will also have scopes set up and assistants to help all comers spot the birds. Dress for the weather. Children are welcome.



In the depth of winter I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer.

Albert Camus

All members of PHAS are welcome to attend meetings of the Board of Governors. Board meetings are held at Hubbard Lodge (or at the Red Line Diner in Fishkill on snow days). They're a good way to learn about what PHAS is doing, the problems we face, and the interesting wildlife in our region. The next board meetings will be held on

Saturday, January 5, at 9 A.M.

Saturday, February 2, at 9 A.M. and

Saturday, March 2, at 9 A.M.

For more information, e-mail Connie Mayer-Bakall at concoyote@aol.com.



Other dates to remember:

Deadline for birdseed orders: **January 7**

Birdseed Sale: **Saturday, January 12, 9 A.M.-noon** at Hubbard Lodge

Saturday, January 19: Birding at Shawangunk Grasslands NWR

Saturday, February 9: EagleFest at Boscobel

Saturday, February 9, 1:00 P.M.:

Discussion of climate change and gardening at Desmond-Fish Library

February 16: Eagle walk at Little Stony Point

March 16: Duck spotting at Canopus Lake.

Annual dinner: **Saturday, April 6**

Birdathon: **Saturday, May 11**

Annual meeting: **Friday, June 10**



CY, THE BIRD GUY

To send questions to Cy, the Bird Guy, go to www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org and enter "Cy, the Bird Guy" in the Contact Us box.

Dear Cy,

My daughter and I were watching some ducks on the pond by our house last weekend, and she asked me an interesting question. It was the first really cold day we've had this winter,

and she asked me if the ducks were cold.

I told her no, but when she asked me why not, I didn't have a good answer. How were the ducks staying warm? I mean, they probably aren't cold, are they? I would love to be able to tell her more about this, so can you tell me how little, delicate creatures such as birds can stay alive and warm in winter?

Thanks in advance for your help, Cy (and I love your column!).

Never-too-old-to-learn

Cy, the Bird Guy, says:

Dear Never-too-old,

That's an excellent question!

Birds have a variety of strategies to deal with the cold of winter. Many are similar to some of the strategies we employ ourselves. Lots of species fly south, of course, but there are plenty of birds that don't, and they have many ways to cope.

We are all familiar with down jackets and vests, but not everyone realizes that down is actually the short, insulating feathers that birds produce to keep themselves warm even in the coldest conditions. Just like me, winter birds in our area are essentially wrapped in a nice layer of downy feathers to help them retain heat.

Most folks know that down loses its insulating properties when it gets wet, so birds usually have an outer layer of protective feathers on which they spread a coat of waterproofing obtained from a preening gland (also known as the uropygial gland) at the base of their tail. This gland produces an oily, waxy substance that keeps the feathers waterproof and allows the down to stay dry and warm beneath them, even if the birds are in the water, like the ducks you saw.

Even more amazing to me, though, is the way ducks keep their feet warm in the icy water. I couldn't keep a toe in ice water for one minute, let alone both feet!

To minimize heat loss, ducks and other water birds have interesting blood

vessels and circulation patterns that help keep their feet from freezing. The blood vessels themselves are often located close to each other, so the heated blood that is pumping from the core of the bird warms the cooler blood that is returning to the body from their feet. Also, they restrict the blood flow to their feet so that less heat is lost. The foot is much colder than the rest of the body, sometimes even just above freezing.

There are other tricks, too. Some birds actually burn fat to produce heat, and others shiver, just as mammals do to generate heat.

So I hope this helps you answer the question for your daughter. It's just another set of amazing facts for some amazing animals. And it sure is something to think about the next time you watch ducks on a pond, or tiny goldfinches at your bird feeder this winter.

Cy (the bird guy)

WINTER FINCH FORECAST

Ryan J. Bass

Every autumn, bird lovers anticipate the arrival of the winter finch forecast the way wine lovers anticipate the arrival of Beaujolais Nouveau. Ron Pittaway, an Ontario field ornithologist, publishes an annual report of seed crop yields in Canada. In years when hardwood and conifer cone crops are poor, winter finches "irrupt" (a term that refers to migration in search of food).

The 2018-2019 winter finch season is slated to be very special for bird lovers in our area. Moderate numbers of pine siskins have been visiting area feeders stocked with Nyjer seed. Purple finches have been observed in strong numbers, stopping at area feeders to feast on black-oil sunflower seeds. According to the NYC Area Rare Bird Alert and Cornell Lab's eBird, observers surveying migrants on the barrier beaches of Long Island have witnessed hundreds of these birds in flight.

The common redpoll, another boreal finch, is expected to follow suit, preferring Nyjer seed stocked in special fine mesh feeders. Evening grosbeaks, a real treat, have arrived in moderate numbers across the Hudson Highlands. This species is in decline, and observers haven't seen it since Alf was on TV and Lionel Richie dominated the Billboard Top 20.

Birders are hoping to see red crossbills and pine grosbeaks as well.

Although they aren't finches, other birds that are "irrupting" include the red-breasted nuthatch (related to our resident white-breasted nuthatch) and the Bohemian waxwing (related to our resident cedar waxwing). Look for the nuthatches at suet feeders and the waxwings gorging on fruits of ornamental trees.

These birds have traveled a great distance, through all seven levels of the Candy Cane Forest and arrive in our area under stress. If your feeders have been "cellared" for awhile, this is

a "vintage year." Be forewarned, these hungry Winter Finches have been reported to completely wipe out feeding stations faster than Buddy the Elf can make a snowball.

Link to Winter Finch Forecast:

<http://jeaniron.ca/2018/wff18.htm>

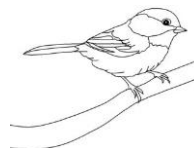
We hope you enjoy the spectacle!



Pine siskin feeding on seeds of American sweet gum (Liquidambar styraciflua). Photograph taken on April 21, 2013, by Ryan J. Bass in Prospect Park, Brooklyn



Purple finch (adult male). Photograph taken on October 21, 2018, by Kyle J. Bardwell at Hook Mountain State Park, Rockland County



LBJs

Ryan J. Bass

Most folks associate the initials LBJ with our thirty-sixth President. Birders, on the other hand, are fondly frustrated by these initials. For them, they stand for Little Brown Job, a whimsical term written in field notes to record a nondescript sparrow diving into dense brush, skulking from curious eyes peering through binoculars.

Introducing the "chippies": a seasonal rotation of approachable "sparrow ambassadors," unafraid to be identified! In spring, birders fondly await the April arrival of the chipping sparrow. In open woods, parks, and suburban habitats, the male chippy is easily identified when belting out a

long, dry trill from an exposed perch. The rufous cap and dark eye line are good field marks. Chippies commonly feed on the ground, including lawns, and even visit bird feeders. In autumn, they form flocks and migrate in search of warmer climates in the southern states. As the weather turns colder, the "Winter Chippies" begin arriving in late Autumn. Flocks of the American Tree Sparrow, a breeder in northern Canada, roll in with a chatter of short sweet notes, brightening up dreary winter days.



American tree sparrow, photographed at Constitution Marsh Audubon Center & Sanctuary by Ryan J. Bass

Also sporting a rufous cap, the "Winter Chippy" is a bit plumper and has a dark spot in the center of its breast. If you see what appears to be a Chipping Sparrow at your feeder in December, it is most likely an American Tree Sparrow.



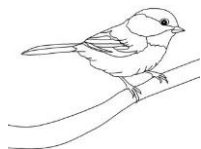
Chipping sparrow, photographed on a lawn in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, on April 21, 2013, by Ryan J. Bass

We hope you will find this article helpful. If you need help identifying a bird, please e-mail me at ryan.j.bass@gmail.com.

A photo is always helpful!



Common redpoll. Photo by Jillian Fitzgerald



Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.

--Rachel Carson

DID YOU KNOW?

- People are far more likely to be bitten by dogs, alligators, or other people than by sharks.
- Moose antler is the fastest-growing animal tissue, adding an inch each day, and is sensitive enough to feel a fly landing on it.
- The “short-circuit” beetle chews through the lead sheathing on telegraph cables to get to the fiber insulator around the copper wires.

Just living is not enough...one must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower.

--Hans Christian Andersen

THE MARTY MCGUIRE AUDUBON SCHOLARSHIP

The Marty McGuire Audubon Scholarship is available to college students from the PHAS area who are interested in nature. For details, go to www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org/scholarships.

Words

In woods are words.
 You hear them all,
 Winsome, witless or wise,
 When the birds call.

In woods are words.
 If your ears wake
 You hear them, quiet and clear,
 When the leaves shake.

In woods are words.
 You hear them all
 Blown by the wet wind
 When raindrops fall.

In woods are words
 Kind or unkind;
 Birds, leaves and hushing rain
 Bring them to mind.

James Reeves



Photo by Carolyn Doggett-Smith

The bird pictured on page 5 is a fox
 sparrow.

PHAS BOARD OF GOVERNORS

President: Connie Mayer-Bakall

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Birdathon: Ian Kingsley and Ryan J.
Bass

Bird walks/hikes: Ryan J. Bass

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Sanctuaries: Perry Pitt and Max
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Conservation: Connie Mayer-Bakall

Education: Pete Salmansohn

Nominating: Connie Mayer-Bakall,
Adele Stern, and Paul Kuznia

Marty McGuire Scholarship Fund:
Ralph Odell

For additional information about
PHAS, send e-mail to

info@putnamhighlandsaudubon.org.