



THE OSPREY

July/August 2019 — Vol. XLIV, No. 4

Juvenile Bobwhite Quail Released in Montauk County Park

Third House Nature Center (THNC) is partnering with Suffolk County Parks to restore the native Bobwhite Quail population in Montauk. In 2018, THNC began the Montauk Quail Restoration Project, a program to reintroduce native Bobwhite Quail to Suffolk County park lands in Montauk.

Talk to Montauk old timers and they will speak wistfully of a time when Bobwhite Quail were a common sight, but the days are long gone when their baleful, unmistakable song – “bob-white, bob-white” – would be heard at dawn and dusk throughout the moorlands and backyards of Montauk. Theories abound as to what caused the precipitous decline in Bobwhite populations over the last 20 to 30 years. One thing is for sure: the fact that these charming, stout little birds are ground nesters makes them and their young easy prey for predators, especially feral, and even outdoor pet, cats.

“2019 is year two of a five-year program to raise and release birds in Montauk,” says Ed Johann, president of Third House Nature Center, a group of local scientists, naturalists and devoted volunteers that brings a variety of environmental programs and events to Montauk. “Survival rate for Quail in the wild is generally low, and so we will continue to release birds over a number of years until we can establish viable breeding colonies. The first year of our program we spent most of our energy establishing best practices for hatching and rearing healthy birds, and we raised about 200 quail in 2018. This year we will aim for 300+ and we intend to increase those numbers significantly every year thereafter.”

Recognizing the plight of Bobwhite throughout Long Island, the Montauk Quail Restoration Project manager, Jessica James, has wanted to raise and release Bobwhite for years, but it wasn't until she got involved with the passionate birding community of THNC that a plan took shape. Four months after the initial batch of eggs went into the incubator, the first two dozen juvenile quail, all sporting personalized leg bands, were released at Third House, in Montauk County Park to the cheers of onlookers. This year the first release is on Thursday, May 23 at historic Third House. Further groups of banded birds will be released throughout the summer at various locations throughout Montauk. Ms. James notes that “Quail are omnivorous. Besides eating greens and seeds, they are stealthy and effective hunters, scouring the grasslands and thickets for bugs. Could there be a correlation between the frightening rise in the local tick population and the demise of the Bobwhite?”

The local community has embraced the Montauk Quail Restoration Project, including school children. This is the second year that THNC has provided Quail eggs to the Montauk School. Mr. Brunn's science classes are enjoying hatching and rearing Bobwhite. The school children will be at the Third House on the release date to watch their birds take flight. Montauk Library also is also hatching a brood under the supervision of THNC. Using a webcam the library will live stream the project.

THNC, a 501c3 environmental education organization is happy to accept donations to support their quail restoration project. For more information about them and their programs, visit www.thirdhousenaturecenter.org and follow them on Facebook and Instagram.



Quail chicks almost ready to be released. Wouldn't it be lovely to have them running all over Long Island! Photo: Christopher Elliott/Audubon Photography Awards

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

ELIAS Volunteers

Byron Young

The business of the Eastern Long Island Audubon Chapter is cared for by a dedicated cadre of volunteers that constitute our Board of Directors and several other folks who lead bird walks, or actively assist with Chapter activities. This group puts in many hours of volunteer time to make sure we have monthly programs of interest, monthly bird walks throughout eastern Suffolk County and further afield when possible, conduct the necessary business of the Chapter and participate in several annual events. Our major annual events begin with Earth Day at the Quogue Wildlife Refuge, followed early in the Fall with our Annual Dinner; and then the Annual Seed Sale, which is a shared enterprise with the Quogue Wildlife Refuge.

Board members have attended the two Long Island Audubon Council meetings each year. This group is made up of representatives from the seven Long

Island Audubon Chapters. This provides an opportunity to report on our activities and to hear what other chapters are doing and to discuss major issues related to Long Island environment and birding. Recently, we have made an effort to attend the Semi-annual New York Audubon meeting where representatives from across the state meeting to discuss statewide issues and again report our local activities to a larger audience. The Spring New York Audubon meeting is always held in the Saratoga Springs area and the Fall meeting is held at some location across the state supported by a local chapter. This Fall the meeting will be held in Connecticut since the New York and Connecticut Audubon have joined forces under one Executive Director.

Beyond the business activities of the Chapter, volunteers maintain two Bluebird trails one at Indian Island County Golf Course and the other at Sandy Pond Golf Course. We had a third Bluebird trail in Moriches but the fields became overgrown and the volunteer who maintained the bird boxes moved off Long Island. Given the availability of a suitably maintained location (mowed paths) and volunteers to maintain the nest boxes we would like to set up another trail in our area.

We would attempt to approach entities (Golf Courses, Town or County owned property) that can maintain the trails and open spaces while our volunteers maintain the nesting boxes.

Where am I going with all of this, well, the answer is simple we are always looking for people who are willing to give a bit of time to help us with a Chapter event or activity. I am reaching out to all of our members to see who might be interested in helping because once we get into the middle of an activity our focus turns single-mindedly to that task at hand and we forget to ask for help until it is too late. So I would like to put out a call for volunteers who we can reach out to as needed for the Annual Dinner, Earth Day, the Fall Seed Sale, help with a Bluebird Trail, help with a bird walk, volunteer to bring refreshments to a monthly meeting, post events on-line or write an article for *The Osprey*.

If you are interested in volunteering please see one of us at a Monthly Meeting or drop any of us a note or email. We would like to develop a list of folks who might be able to help and reach out to you as an event or activity comes up to see if you can help. Any help would be greatly appreciated. 🐦



ELIAS table at Earth Day where volunteers greeted guests and led walks. Volunteer Emily Young took the photo.

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Summer Meetings

Monday Evening, July 1, 2019 @ 7:30 pm

Tick-Borne Disease

What You Need to Know

Anna-Marie Wellins, DNP, M.Ed., ANP-C

Chances are that you, or someone you know, has been diagnosed with Lyme or another tick-borne disease. Dr. Anna-Marie Wellins, a member of the Medical Advisory Panel of Stony Brook Southampton Hospital's Regional Tick-Borne Disease Resource Center, will speak about the types of diseases that are carried by the different species of ticks found on Eastern Long Island, and the symptoms, diagnostic tests, and treatment options that are available. Tips on preventing tick bites will also be shared. Each attendee will receive a free tick removal kit. There is no charge for this event and it is open to the public. For more information please call (516) 443-4906.

Monday Evening, August 5, 2019 @ 7:15 pm

Take a Walk and Explore QWR

Enjoy a walk around Quogue Wildlife Refuge. We do have our meetings here, but have you explored the Refuge? Have you checked out the walk at the Fairy Dell, found the Chocolate Pudding Pond or found the Pollinator Garden? If it is a nice evening, maybe we will catch the flying squirrels or see the Egrets roost. You just never know. Let's find out together and come back for a short movie, a meeting and a snack.



**Meetings are held at
Quogue Wildlife Refuge,
3 Old Country Road, Quogue, NY**

**Directions are on the website:
www.easternlongislandaudubonsociety.org**

Meetings are open to the public, there is no charge

Summer Beach Birding Walks

Saturday Morning, July 13, 2019 @ 8:00 am

Dune Road, Hampton Bays

Leader: Eileen Schwinn

Meeting at 8:00 am, NEW LOCATION: County Parking Lot at the End of Dune Road, overlooking the Shinnecock Inlet (east of Oakland's Restaurant). ELIAS has bayside day passes to be used as we travel along Dune Road, and stop at Tiana, Trustee Roads and other Points of Interest, as the birds dictate. Restrooms are portapotty, or "real" at Ponquogue Pavillion (ocean side and walkable from bayside parking) and at Tiana (again, walkable on Ocean side from the bayside parking area).

Sunday Morning, August 25, 2019 @ 8:15 am

Totally Remarkable Cupsogue Sand Flats

Leader: Eileen Schwinn

Meet at 8:15 am, at the western end of the Cupsogue parking lot. Low tide is approximately 10:40 am giving us a good amount of time to meander the way to the Bay, and cross with minimal water. Parking fees are collected at this County Park, beginning at 8:30 am, so arrive early. Restrooms are on site, as are refreshment stands will be open by at the end of the walk. Once inside the park, one can stay all day if you wish.



People don't become good at bird identification by being right all the time

Courtesy of Bob Duchesne

Used with author's permission. This article appeared in the Bangor Daily News.

People send me photos, hoping I can identify a strange bird they've just seen. I enjoy doing it. But I also secretly cringe. A bird in the wild gives all sorts of clues to its identity. You can see the field marks as it moves around. You can note how it acts, where it sits, what it's feeding on, how it behaves around other birds and even what it sounds like. But in the typical photo, all you can see is one angle, usually distant and blurry, and there's no way to distinguish relative size.

A few weeks ago, a reader in Hermon sent me a photo of an unusual bird that was visiting her feeder on the back deck. She wondered if it might be a Varied Thrush, even though that's a western bird. In truth, the Varied Thrush does wander east, and at least one has been seen in southern Maine this winter. I looked at the blurry photo, and could make out a bronze colored bird, roughly the size of a Robin, with a long pointed bill, and the distinct impression of a dusky mask around the eye. Furthermore, visiting a backyard feeder is exactly what a lost Varied Thrush would do. She was right!

Except that I was wrong. With more views of better photos, the bird turned out to be a female Rusty Blackbird.

Secretly, I rejoiced at being wrong. People don't become good at bird identification by being right all the time. They get better by being wrong, and then remembering the mistake. There's nothing like a good mistake to sear a particular field mark into your brain. For example, a Rusty Blackbird has a white eye. The Varied Thrush eye is black. That wasn't visible in the original photo, but it was obvious in later ones.

Golden Eagles are my nemesis. People often report Golden Eagles, even though they're actually seeing an immature bald

eagle. When I receive such a photo, I immediately start running down the checklist in my mind. People who report Golden Eagles frequently exclaim that the bird is huge, larger than a Bald Eagle. In real life, the two eagles are the same size. As with most raptors, females of both species are larger than males, and immatures are larger than their parents, because their parents have just spent the past few months stuffing them with free food. Thus, a "huge" eagle is more likely to be a young Bald Eagle.

Bald Eagles have bigger heads and bills. Golden Eagles have feathers covering the entire leg, whereas the lower leg of a Bald Eagle is bare. At certain plumages, both eagles have white patches underneath, but the patches are in entirely different places. Bald Eagles soar with their wings straight out, flat as a board. Golden Eagles soar with their wings tilted upward in a slight v-shaped dihedral.

Of course, none of these field marks are visible in the blurry photos I'm sent. All I can see is a big, dark bird of uncertain size, with legs and plumage patterns hidden from the camera. Be aware that I am absolutely capable of making an identification mistake.

Meanwhile, having a Rusty Blackbird at one's feeder is good news. She continues to make daily visits, and I hope she survives the winter. While a wandering Varied Thrush from out west is a cool bird to have in the backyard, the Rusty Blackbird is much more in need of saving. The Rusty Blackbird breeds in Maine, but it's hard to say how much longer that will be true. It's disappearing from the planet faster than almost all other birds.

The collapse of the Rusty Blackbird population is epic, but it took awhile to notice. It's a hard bird to study because it nests in boggy portions of northern spruce forests. It winters in equally damp southern swamps. They're difficult to access.



PHOTO: BOB DUCHESNE

Rusty blackbird populations have decreased by 90 percent since the 1950s. The birds are common in Maine during the summer, when it's difficult to assess the population on their wet, dense and buggy breeding grounds. Luckily, the birds flock together after leaving Maine and can be easily counted in the southern U.S. during the Christmas Bird Count.

It's becoming clear that many things are contributing to the population collapse. Due to climate change and deforestation, 30 percent of the continent's northern wetlands have simply dried up. Mercury from coal-fired power plants and other sources has contaminated their feeding grounds. On their winter territories, they are sometimes the victim of blackbird eradication programs, targeted at abundant Red-winged Blackbird and Grackle flocks around southern grain fields.

So we're all rooting for this young lady, and we hope she flies north soon to lay some eggs.

Meanwhile, keep those photos coming. My mistakes are making me a better birder. 🐦

Bob Duchesne serves as vice president of Maine Audubon's Penobscot Valley Chapter. He developed the Maine Birding Trail, with information at mainebirdingtrail.com. He can be reached at duchesne@midmaine.com.

Spring Highlights with ELIAS

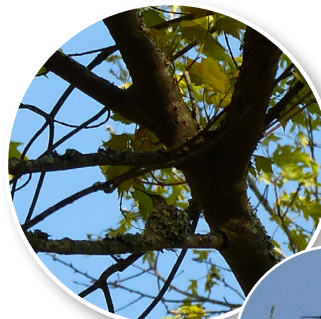
Our first Spring event was Earth Day at Quogue Wildlife Refuge. Lots of exhibitors, canoes and kayaks available on Old Ice Pond, bird from Evelyn Alexander Rescue and bird walks led by ELIAS. A fun and educational event for all.



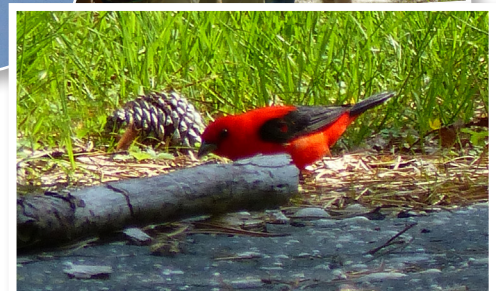
Earth Day Photos:
Emily Young



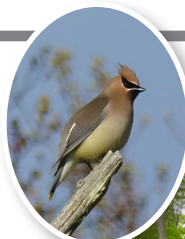
On May 4 it was on to the Rocky Point DEC Area. It was chilly but the rain held off. Eight species of warblers were spotted including a Northern Waterthrush.



On May 17 at Manorville Hills, two Hummingbirds, one Hummingbird nest & one very cooperative Scarlet Tanager were some of the birds found.



Hunters Garden is always an interesting, out of the way place to visit. On May 19 we visited this nice and woody spot. It is, indeed, far from the madding crowd. Scarlet Tanager and Baltimore Orioles were spotted here. The most cooperative bird for a photo was the Cedar Waxwing. The most unusual was a Chestnut-sided Warbler. The sign is well-hidden off the circle that is about a mile off of Route 51.



Early on the morning of May 21 we visited Quogue Wildlife Refuge. It seemed as if most of the warblers had departed.



By the time June first rolled around our visit to The South Fork Museum of Natural History yielded the birds that breed on Long Island. The museum has a thriving Purple Martin colony. Indigo Bunting, Tree Swallows, Bluebirds and even Green Heron breed on the property. Each year we have seen and heard Baltimore Oriole and Orchard Orioles. Frank Quevedo, SoFo director, picked up one of the black racer snakes that live under the boards that are placed around the field.



As Spring wrapped up and we waited for summer, which seems to be a little late this year, Ranger Eric Powers joined us at the June 1 meeting. He brought an assortment of critters including a horned lizard, leopard gecko, blue-tongued skink and a large mama boa (enjoy the people's expressions as she made the rounds).



Update

Preserve Plum Island Coalition *from Save the Sound*

Federal lawmakers ask Homeland Security appropriators to repeal sale mandate

A bipartisan, bicameral, and bi-state coalition of lawmakers sent letters in April to the House and Senate Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittees asking for a repeal of the mandated sale of Plum Island in the 2020 Homeland Security Appropriations bill. The Connecticut and New York legislators also call for any future disposition of the island to be strictly for the purposes of conservation, education, and research. The Preserve Plum Island Coalition is pleased that our legislators from both chambers are speaking with one voice to tell DHS appropriators to repeal the mandate and preserve this ecological and historical gem for future generations.

Kaminsky and Englebright ask Governor Cuomo to intervene

Senator Todd Kaminsky and Assemblyman Steve Englebright, Chairs of their respective Environmental Conservation Committees, sent a letter to Governor Cuomo on May 10 asking that he inform the General Services Administration of New York State’s formal interest in purchasing Plum Island as a state park/ preserve. Additionally, they ask Cuomo to use his considerable powers under the NYS and Long Island Sound Coastal Management Programs to declare the federal government’s proposed sale of Plum Island inconsistent with the state’s coastal policies. The PPIC thanks Senator Kaminsky and Assemblyman Englebright for their important letter.

“Tread Lightly”

If we had to choose two words to exemplify the advice from scientists and naturalists at the Long Island Natural History Conference, those might be the ones. Save the Sound and The Nature Conservancy, with the New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP) and the Long Island Nature Organization, hosted a whirlwind lunchtime workshop to

“Envision Plum Island’s Conservation District” at Brookhaven National Laboratory on March 23. (See page 9 for more on the conference). Our aim was to gather input on best outcomes for the over 600-acre part of Plum Island zoned by the Town of Southold for conservation purposes, should the island be sold to a private entity.

Fifty-five people attended the round-up of ideas, concerns, and further questions. After learning about the island’s most significant ecological communities and species of conservation concern through an excellent presentation by NYNHP scientist Steve Young, small groups of participants considered queries about camping, natural history retreats, “no-go” areas, restoration needs, and more. Each table’s report-out was recorded on video; 30 people handed in questionnaires with detailed responses. Overall, people were extremely concerned about unfettered access to sensitive ecological areas of the island. Camping was widely frowned upon, yet overnight access for ecological studies and educational purposes was considered a valid use, if carefully planned and supervised. This assemblage of experts was critical for garnering input for the transfer and re-use plan we are working on with consultants Marstel-Day. We will continue discussions through the summer and provide all results later in the year when the overall Envision Plum Island report is prepared. 🐦

Contact if you would like more information:

Chris Cryder in CT:
ccryder@savethesound.org

Louise Harrison in NY:
lharrison@savethesound.org



224th bird species identified on Plum Island

This spring the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service identified a Cattle Egret on Plum Island, making it the 224th bird species to be found there. The Cattle Egret is a Protected Bird under New York State law.

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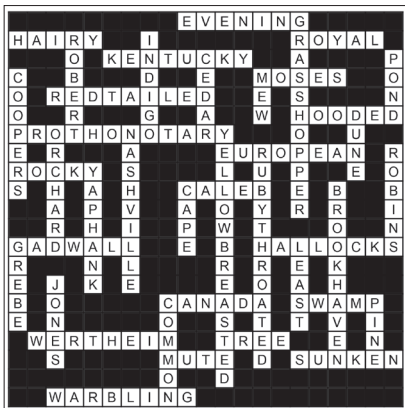
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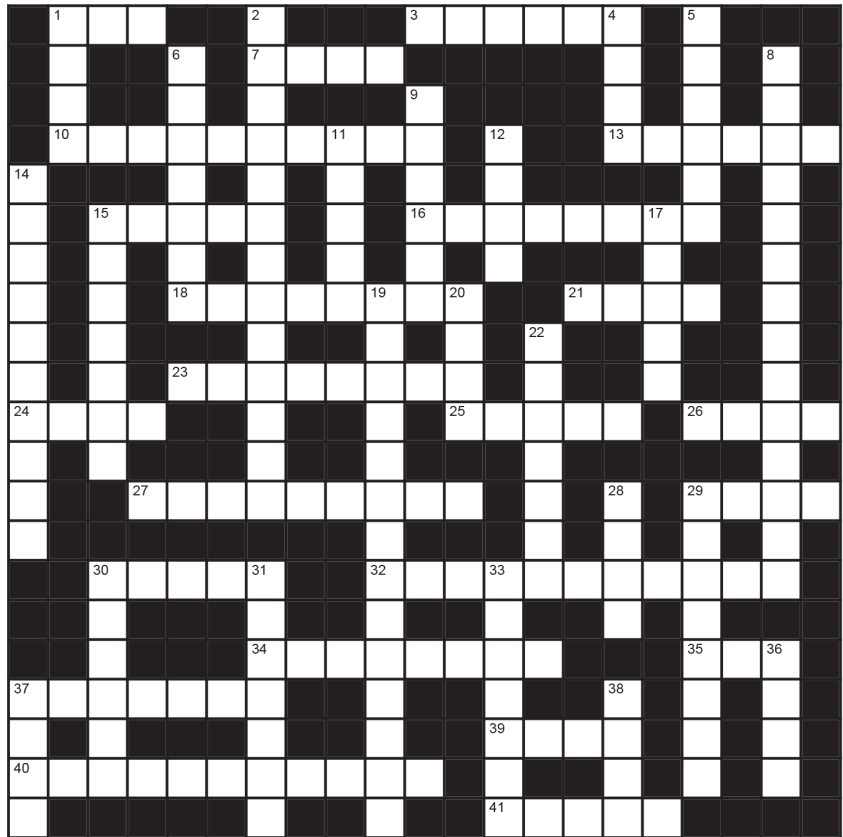
Our mission is to be an inspiration to those who feel a sense of kinship with Long Island by encouraging an appreciation for the natural world and a commitment to the environment.

Recents & Warblers

Answers to May/June puzzle by Tom Moran



Spring & Summer Sightings Tom Moran



Across

- 1 ___ -headed Woodpecker
- 3 American Golden _____ or the more common Black-bellied
- 7 A Buteo, in more common parlance
- 10 Empidonax some are best identified by voice
- 13 _____ Blue Heron, seen at Captree Island this spring
- 15 Small goose, similar to Canada.
- 16 "teacher, teacher, teacher"
- 18 _____ Junco
- 21 Mourning _____
- 23 _____'s Gull, a bird seen is a bird earned, to paraphrase
- 24 _____ Sparrow, uncommon, has a boldly patterned face
- 25 Great or Snowy
- 26 Red _____, migration is tied to horseshoe crab eggs
- 27 Eastern _____ not for its size but its call
- 29 _____ Swan
- 30 _____ Waxwing
- 32 _____ Swallow
- 34 _____ Sparrow, similar to Song, prefers open fields, marshes, dunes
- 35 Burrowing _____, a one-day wonder, seen at Big Egg Marsh this spring
- 37 _____ Sparrow, look for it in marshes
- 39 Mississippi _____
- 40 Blue-gray _____
- 41 Bald or Golden _____

Down

- 1 Seen in the spring of 2017 & 2018 at Timber Point and Heckscher
- 2 Sparrow that sings: *Oh, Canada, Canada, Canada*
- 4 Clapper or Virginia _____
- 5 _____ Duck, looks like it has a pony tail
- 6 See 9 Down
- 8 _____ Warbler
- 9 See 6 Down
- 11 _____ Sparrow or Wren
- 12 American _____ Sparrow
- 14 _____ Tern, uncommon, will catch insects over marshes
- 15 Least or American _____
- 17 Common _____ Bird that comes tapping
- 19 _____ Chat
- 20 _____ Rd, Cupsogue at one end, Shinnecock at the other
- 22 Eastern _____ Owl, has a whinny and tremolo song
- 28 White-faced _____, seen at Heckscher SP this spring
- 31 _____ Spoonbill or Tern
- 33 Boat-tailed or Common _____
- 36 Pacific _____ seen at Oyster Bay Marine Center and off Robert Moses this year
- 37 _____ Thrasher, seen at Jamaica Bay and Fire Island this year
- 38 Green-winged or the less common Blue-winged _____

Day Two of the LI Natural History Conference, 2019

Kathleen Heenan

As I drove over to the Brookhaven Lab for the second day of the conference, I thought about the dinner conversation the night before at the Westhampton Yacht Squadron. When I explained to friends at the table about the topics of that day's conference some expressed shock that Wild Turkeys had been re-introduced to this area by the NYSDEC. One woman exclaimed her disbelief that a government agency would deliberately bring back a nuisance species that had inhabited this area for centuries. Another woman said that her friend had actually shot one. It was not true. Perhaps more education is needed about the wild creatures and the habitat we share. We, like many others, think they enhance the area and, therefore, we are interested in protecting them. This was the seventh year of the Conference and it is open to the public.

Great Ferns I Have Known

Great Ferns I Have Known was the first lecture, it was given by Andrew Greller of Queens College. It included a Ferns 101 short introduction. Ferns are pre-historic and found all over the world – Antarctica, Yunnan in China, the Tropics, Upstate NY and Long Island. I drew pictures of the ferns from the slides and recorded the local names. I will still be hard pressed to

ID them in the field. But, ferns seen on LI are Virginia Chain, Curly-grass, Water, Spleenwort, Climbing, Grape and Adders Tongue.

The Pageantry of the Monarch Butterfly

John Potente spoke next on The Pageantry of the Monarch Butterfly. It was some pageant thanks to John's presentation and his iPhone video. John is a local naturalist and instructor affiliated with the Greentree Foundation.

In the 1990's John bought a house in Hauppauge that is on "native soil." It sits on "original soil with native plants," including "orange monarch butterfly plants". Probably milkweed! A butterfly deposits eggs on a plant leaf or perhaps on a seedpod. When a black dot appears inside the egg a caterpillar hatches. It has six legs, two short ones in front and two pairs on the body. The caterpillar eats the eggshell. It is approximately 2 cm long and grows to 50 cm as it eats lots of green leaves. Meanwhile, a Monarch butterfly develops inside the caterpillar. Soon an exoskeleton called a chrysalis forms over the caterpillar. Next, a mound of silk-hurricane proof- is spun from the spinneret, the head of the larvae, and attached to a leaf. John and his iPhone

Continued on page 10

Please Share the Shore with Nesting Birds

Each summer, beach-nesting birds return to New York's shores to nest. Many of these species are listed as endangered or threatened. They all lay their eggs directly on the sand and raise their chicks right on the beach! As ground-nesting birds, their well-camouflaged eggs and chicks are vulnerable to many threats. Our "Be a Good Egg" program raises awareness about the impacts of human disturbances and predators while encouraging beach-goers to share the beach with nesting birds. Together we can help them nest and raise their young successfully.

I pledge to:

- ☉ Keep away from marked or fenced areas where birds are nesting.
- ☉ Keep the beach clean by using proper receptacles or carrying out trash.
- ☉ Keep my dog off of nesting beaches.

With your help, we can protect New York's beach-nesting birds and their young.

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took in the slow action of the Monarch wiggling, squirming and emerging from the chrysalis. John explained that he stayed up all night recording this natural birth. (He worried that someone would call him and interrupt his video.) The moderator, Mr. Green, gave John extra time (his Q and A period) to show the spell bound audience the birthing and fledging of this beautiful creature.

Monarchs have their predators, but luckily the monarchs eat milkweed that is poisonous to Blue Jays (they throw up if they eat a Monarch and never eat one again) and Preying Mantis. Wasps and Ladybugs are predators of the monarch's eggs. John believes RoundUp (perhaps the DDT of the 21st C.) is contributing to the decrease in the butterfly population. RoundUp kills good bacteria in the soil and the plants on which the butterflies seek to lay their eggs do not thrive.

Coastal Adaptations: Harnessing the Power of Nature to Protect People

Next up was Alison Branco Director of Coastal Programs of The Nature Conservancy in New York. TNC has done good work predicting and mapping where flooding and coastal changes will occur on our shores/coast lines. Hurricane Sandy proved their assessments were accurate.

Alison talked about, "sunny day flooding" and "chronic flooding" on the east end. Flooding is occurring because of storms, hurricanes and nor'easters. In addition, twice a month we get high tides during a full moon and then there are the times when we get a few days of strong winds off the ocean. Predictions are that 15,000 homes in our area will have chronic flooding by 2045 and that by 2100 140,000 homes in NY State will have the same problem. According to Alison, sea levels are predicted to rise 6 feet in 80 years. Places such as Napeague and Orient will no longer be accessible by road and bridges will have to be built after the ocean breaks through into Peconic Bay.

A suggested adaptation is to elevate buildings. Alison wrote: "We need a healthy coastline, clean water, freedom to change, room to move, a full tidal range and people and infrastructure that are safe. Communities are more resilient when people and nature thrive together. Nowhere is this truer than

on Long Island's vulnerable shoreline. By protecting our remaining natural shorelines, restoring coastal habitats where possible and re-thinking how we



manage our coasts to provide for those needs, we can ensure that the natural and human systems will thrive in the face of our changing climate. And a community committed to these changes." She added that sea walls are not helpful.

There was a sense of urgency in her remarks about the rising sea levels because of higher air temperatures. Our temperatures now are on average one degree higher than in a pre-industrial time and with continued use of fossil fuels could rise to 1.5-2 degrees higher in the immediate future. In the Q and A someone asked about Fire Island. Alison said it is in a "tough spot; it is underwater." "Before the ocean comes up the ground water comes up." Hopefully, TNC's and Alison's work will be heeded.

Encounters with the Raccoon & Virginia Opossum

I didn't know an opossum is a marsupial. The only one in North America is called a Virginia Opossum. There are also possums in Australia, but they are different animals. Just in case you forgot, a marsupial is an animal that develops after birth in its mother's pouch. Sound similar to the Australian kangaroo and koala bear? The speaker was Dale Cullum of Hampton Wildlife Rescue and Rehab/Imagination Nature, an organization he runs to rescue raccoons and opossums. He sometimes retrieves baby raccoons from home heating systems and opossums from window wells when they fall out of their mothers' pouches.

Opossums have two uteri and 11-13 days after mating the embryos are born. The mother has 13 nipples for some 20 joeys (survival of the fittest or luckiest). They ride around on their mother's back for

approximately 3 months. The maternal bond is not strong. When a joey falls off and lands in a window well, mama does not bother to retrieve the joey. They are on their own when they become 10-12" long.

Opossum are nocturnal. They have very good eyesight, and use their tail as a GPS. Like raccoons, they have opposable thumbs (which also can go 180 degrees in either direction) that allows them to climb up and climb down. They are social and communicate using a clicking sound, but they also growl and hiss. They are omnivores that eat ticks (5,000 per season) and need calcium.

They have a strong and "unique body chemistry," attributable to their low blood temperature. Snake venom cannot incubate in them so they are immune to the poison. They also resist disease. They do not hibernate although they seek shelter during times of snow and cold because of the lack of fur on their feet and legs. And, most importantly and uniquely they "play possum."

Raccoons are also social and often in the summer we see them as a family unit with babies. They use their sensitive paws to scratch and eat. (When they dip their "hands" into your swimming pool water it gives them diarrhea, hence the droppings beside your pool the next morning.) They are also nocturnal, eat grubs, moles and garbage, have great hearing and love to climb. They love roofs (keep a cover on your chimney), attics, and trees.

Plum Island Discussion

Lunchtime, I signed up for a working lunch discussion on Plum Island's future, discussed in this newsletter. What was surprising to me was the number of people who lobbied hard for the island not to be developed or touched. They were passionate. There were also people who insisted that an plants be removed from the island. It was a good discussion at our table and every team of eight was able to express their opinion. (See page 7)

Sharing the Shore with Coastal Birds

Amanda Pachomski from New York Audubon spoke about Sharing the Shore with Coastal Birds. Black Skimmers, American Oystercatchers, Least Terns

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and Piping Plovers nest here. Threats to these birds are: the sea-waves and tides, development, vehicles, fireworks, red fox and raccoons.

She also discussed Great Gull Island and Bird Safe Glass. There was a problem with the microphone and I heard very little of her talk. The same problem occurred in the presentation on Northern Long-eared bats by Samantha Hoff of NYSDEC.

Fish Passages

Enrico Nardone of Seatuck and Greenfell and Byron Young of ELIAS spoke of their work with diadromous fish i.e. fish that migrate between fresh and ocean waters. A local example are the river herring which spend most of their lives in the ocean, but return to rivers, streams and lakes to spawn. But, their migration is impeded by some of our 1,800 dams that were built a long time ago for mills and cranberry bogs. So why are these fish necessary for our LI eco-system? They are foraging fish/bottom fish that provide ocean energy and nutrients to other species in or near fresh water. A female diadromous fish can lay a quarter of a million eggs that other species higher in the food chain will eat. "They provide many vital ecosystem services: filtering the water column and serving as prey to other fish species, migratory birds and mammals. River herring populations have declined due to migration barriers, dams and road culverts that block access to important freshwater habitat."

On Mill River in Rockville Center the fish cannot get around the dam. Enrico and Byron are working with the Governor's office of Storm Recovery formed after Hurricane Sandy to eventually build some type of fish ladder. There are fish passages, rock ramps or a nature like fish ways near Grangebelle Dam and Edwards Avenue Dam on the Peconic River; and at the Woodhull Dam on Little River, a tributary of the Peconic River. Swan Lake in Patchogue will have a fish line out of the river so the fish can reach the lake.

Orchid Colony Restoration

Julie Sakellariadis of the Garden Club of East Hampton told us of the efforts by the club to save the threatened native NY State yellow-fringed orchid in Amagansett. "Development is the biggest threat to this plant out there." Of course, the deer don't help. It was the summer of 2015.



Jim Ash, resident amateur botanist from South Fork Natural History, identified one remaining yellow-fringed plant on the roadside. As Julie explained, one plant does not give you a big gene pool, but they caged it and cleared the area of nearby bushes so the orchid could get sun and possibly bloom. With help from a very cooperative Highway Department the orchid was safe from roadside cutting and trimming. In order to protect runners from brushing up against plants and getting tick bites the Highway Department cuts way back on the roadside. Heavy fencing also was put up to protect the orchid. That summer there was a drought and Julie, with the help of the Highway

Department's watering truck, watered the plant at 7am many mornings. The orchid bloomed and seeds were collected. By the summer of 2018 there were 25 blooming yellow-fringed orchid plants. Julie explained that when the garden club takes on a project it sticks with it. They are coming up on their fifth summer of work with the restoration of this orchid.

Diamondback Terrapins

John Turner of Seatuck reported on the plight of the Diamondback Terrapin, a turtle with clown lips. There are diamond shapes on its back. It is endangered and protected from being harvested as of three years ago. However, there are still problems. The turtles are drowning in the crab pots. The solution is for these pots to have a smaller opening that would prevent a turtle's entrance. Other threats are: red algae, a toxin to Terrapin; excessive predation; crossing busy roads and shoreline hardening (bulkheads are an impediment to these turtles.)

The conference was over and it was time to leave, but first there was an opportunity to make suggestions for next year's conference. I suggested we look into how the younger generation, kids, are learning about nature.

My friend Fran and her friend left saying, "We learned so much." And I agreed. 🐦



Don Riepe showed this photo of a Barn Owl in the wheel well of a jet plane at Kennedy Airport at his talk on barn owls at first day of the conference. The photo did not make the ELIAS publication deadline for April, but here it is now. Don was given the photo by a Port Authority officer who may or may not have helped remove the barn owl (it was traveling on frequent flyer miles) from the wheel well. Thanks for the photo Don!

The **OSPREY**

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2019

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