



THE **OSPREY**

Fall/Winter 2021 — Vol. XLVI, No. 3

Quebec's Tadoussac Bird Observatory Sees Record Breaking Finch Flights

By Ryan Mandelbaum for the
Finch Research Network

*Will they be coming to
Long Island?*



Crossbill is a well-named species. Check out that beak which is ideally suited to extract the seed inside the pine cone. The birds come down to our area when their food supply is low in the north. This one was found last year in the pines by Cupsogue County Park by Eileen Schwinn. They are among the finches tracked by the Finch Research Network. There are two species of Crossbills, White-winged and Red.

The Observatoire d'Oiseaux de Tadoussac (OOT) has recorded some legendary bird migration events—take its historic 2018 warbler flight, for example. This year, birders at the observatory logged a record-breaking day sure to excite finch fans: observers tallied over 23,000 White-winged Crossbills in just a few hours.

Jessé Roy Drainville was the observer present to watch the flight, and recounted some of his experience with us. Drainville has been birding since he was seven years old, and at 27 years old today, now monitors bird migration events professionally as a biologist at Tadoussac. He's skilled at identifying and tallying birds, any birds, flying overhead.

The fall began slowly for finches at the observatory, he said. At the start of the month only small groups of White-wings flew by the dunes, perhaps only a few dozen to 150 in a day. But then,

around October 10th, numbers started to increase, especially the number of Pine Siskins. The observers on the dunes figured that this species would be the one to overwhelm the count. But then from October 14 to 16 bad weather set in, preventing the team from counting on the 15th and the 16th.

Things got interesting once the weather cleared. On the 17th, the counters recorded 449 White-winged Crossbills and 1,279 Pine Siskins. On the 18th, the White-wings eclipsed the Siskins; 3,265 Crossbills versus 2,239 Pine siskins, and 6,666 crossbills passed Tadoussac on the 19th. But even those numbers couldn't compare with what Tadoussac's observers would experience the next morning.

"We were three people there—I'm the only one counting the birds, and then two others were there banding Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers

Continued on page 10

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*FINCH RESEARCH NETWORK is
dedicated to the study and
conservation of finches and their
habitats globally. To learn more:
<https://finchnetwork.org>*

*Ron Pittaway's forecast is now done by
Tyler Hoar. It is available at
<https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2020>*
.....

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Volunteers Appreciated

Byron Young, Eileen Schwinn & ELIAS Board of Directors

Do you finding yourself with a little time on your hands, looking for some stimulating environmental activity? If you are looking for something to help fill your day, your bird club, Eastern Long Island Audubon Society could use your help, for an hour or two or even more, if you'd like! Our non-salaried Board of Directors has openings. While those remaining have been able to *Take Care of Business*, we are now finding the need to sometimes ask for help! Here are a few of the activities that might spark your interest.

In the Spring join ELIAS and others at the EARTH DAY Event hosted by the Quogue Wildlife Refuge. ELIAS members will be distributing environmental information, answering birding questions, possibly leading a short bird walk at the Refuge. As we, hopefully, return to more normal ELIAS activities such as the ANNUAL DINNER, we will need help in securing a venue for an Annual Dinner, organizing the event, obtaining raffle prizes, a guest speaker, setting up the venue before the event. The Annual Dinner is our one big event for the year and more help is always greatly appreciated.

There are a host of other activities that go on behind the scenes such as applying for GRANTS which would help with Club costs and projects. We are always looking for ARTICLES FOR THE NEWSLETTER, for help sending reminders about events, and for help responding to environmental issues (EPCAL Drag Race Agenda, proposals for new parkland usage, DEC Requests for comments on proposed legislation, etc). It is difficult to keep up with all the local issues, so more eyes and ears will help us keep up with our local current events.

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We'd love to expand what we provide for the birding community, in front as well as behind the scenes.

ELIAS has established and maintained BLUEBIRD TRAILS throughout our region and can always use help in monitoring the success of these nesting boxes and maintain them. This effort typically takes a couple of hours a week from April through July at our current Bluebird trails

on the Indian Island Golf course and the Sandy Pond Golf Course. We can always use help with planning for future Members Programs and Field Trips for the Club.

With us being dragged into the virtual world we certainly need some help with our COMPUTER/TECHNOLOGY SKILLS. While we have some computer skills we could really use a Go-To person to help occasionally.

That's the tip of the iceberg of what we – the directors – do! We'd love to expand what we provide for the birding community, in front as well as behind the scenes. If anything here sounds like something you'd like to help with, please let us know! Please feel free to contact me at young53b@optimum.net or by phone at 631-295-9612. You can also reach out to other Directors at meetings, bird walks or events.

Thanks and Good Birding

Byron Young, Eileen Schwinn & the Board

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Join Our Zoom Programs December & February



It does not look like we will be able to schedule in-person meetings this year. But we are happy to bring you these programs which we hope you will enjoy from the comfort of your home. They are on Monday nights, like our regular meetings. Quogue Wildlife Refuge is helping us by hosting these Zoom meetings. We are grateful to Cara Fernandes for her help to make these programs possible.

You will need to register for each program in order to receive a link. The invitations are available on the website:

easternlongislandaudubon.org
go to the program page and click on the link. You will receive an acknowledgment from Quogue Wildlife Refuge and on the day of the program, a reminder.

We have recorded some of our past meetings and those recordings are available on the program page of the website.

MONDAY, DECEMBER. 6, 2021 AT 7:00 PM

Wild Long Island

with Chris Paparo, The Fish Guy

Chris will talk about some of the fascinating wildlife that can be found on the land, in the air, and in the waters of Long Island. He is a wildlife photographer, writer and lecturer who enjoys bringing public awareness to the diverse wildlife on Long Island. Currently he manages the new Marine Sciences Center at the Southampton campus of Stony Brook University.

An award winning member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America and the New York State Outdoor Writers Association, Paparo is a freelance writer for several fishing and wildlife related publications. Although his work tends to focus on marine life, everything in the natural world is fair game.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2022 AT 7:00PM

Owls of Long Island

Presented by Dianne Taggart

Fascinating, mysterious and beautiful! Owls are all of these things and we see many here on Long Island. Using lots of photos as well as fun and interesting facts, Dianne Taggart, long time LI birder, will tell us all about these magnificent and wonderful birds.

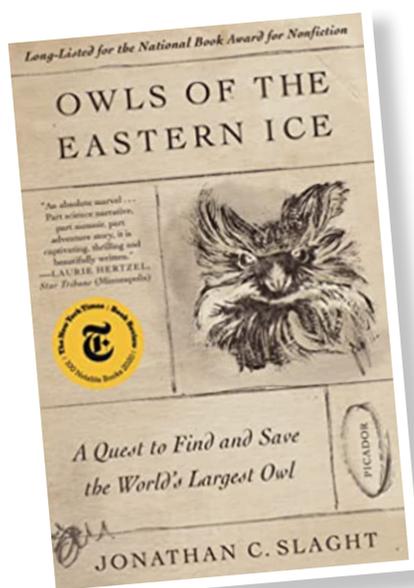


Owls of the Eastern Ice

*A Quest to Find
and Save the
World's
Largest Owl*

By Jonathan C. Slaght

A Book Review by
Kathleen Heenan

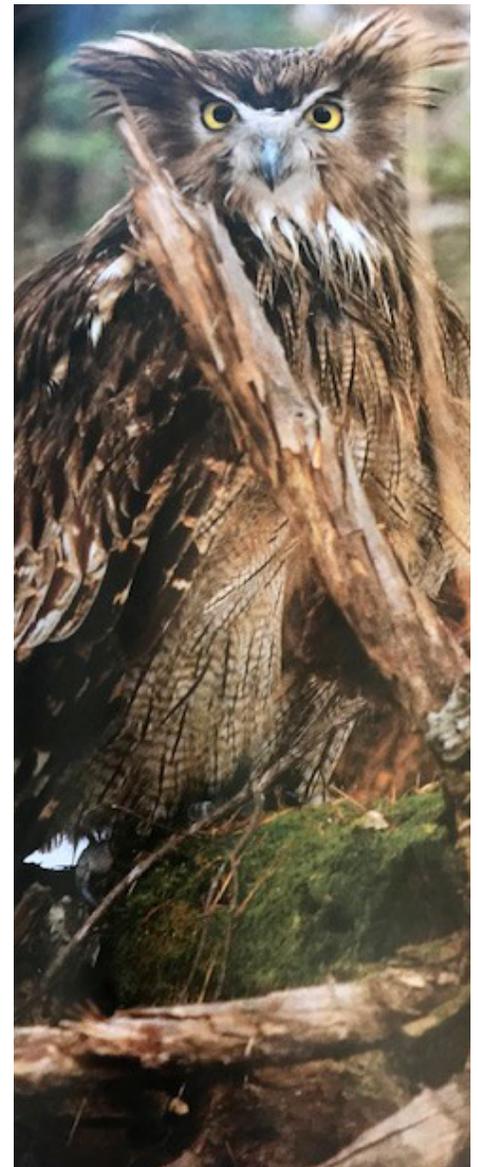


JONATHAN SLAGHT has written a most interesting and entertaining book about the world's largest owl. The Fish Owl has a six-foot wingspan, stands two feet tall, sports fluffy brown feathers on a portly body and has piercing electric yellow eyes. Living in a remote area known as Primorye in northeastern Russia north of Vladivostok, it eats fish, primarily salmon, which it catches simply by wading into open river water. The owl's habitat consists of forested mountains and the rivers that flow to the Sea of Japan and their tributaries. Logging companies are building roads and cutting down trees destroying the owl's habitat. The Fish Owls need a conservation plan.

Slaght fell in love with this area as a teenager while flying over it with his dad, a United States government employee stationed in Moscow. He spent six months there as a college student and three years as a member of the Peace Corps. It was on a hike with a friend that he first saw an unbelievably large owl...or was it a bear? Photos verified its identity and records revealed it to be the first time in one hundred years that the Fish Owl had been seen in southern Primorye.

Slaght, a budding biologist then decided that his Ph.D. project at the University of Minnesota (my alma mater) would be to develop a conservation plan for this elusive owl. At a meeting with the Sergey Surmach at the Institute of Biology and Soil Sciences in Vladivostok in 2005, they agreed to work together to learn about the secret lives of Fish Owls – where they nested and where they ate – to be able to develop a plan to protect their territory. It would be a three part study: first, training in ways to find the Fish Owls (they sing duets); second, identifying areas of nesting Fish Owl populations; and third capturing and tagging and then analyzing the resulting data regarding their movements. They estimated that the study would take five years.

Finding the nesting owls had to be done in the winter. Winters are extraordinarily harsh in this area of mountainous terrain with sub-zero temperatures, blizzards, ice and melting rivers. There were all night monitoring missions in freezing cold tents and dashes across thawing rivers and free climbing rotting trees to check nests for eggs. They learned by trial and error how to trap and tag these giant birds.



The author also met and worked with local Russians, some of whom lived alone in the woods, surviving by their hunting and other outdoor skills. At night, bottles of vodka/ethanol were plunked down on the table and local tradition is that it all must be consumed. The characters the author met enhance the book and through them one gains an understanding of how people can live in such unforgiving wilderness. They were interested in Jonathan, his politics and even whether he was a Chicago Bulls fan.

Two examples illustrate the types of local characters Slaght met or learned about. Slaght spent parts of three winters with a hermit named Antoliy in his cabin in the woods. Antoliy thought he could unlock the secrets of the Ancients mystical knowledge with his Russian icons,

Continued from page 4

triangles and cards. Nothing was ever confirmed by Antoliy (he would say, “that is in the past”) about his time working in the Soviet Merchant Marine, possibly as a KGB agent spying on other Russians.

Slaght’s assistant Vova Volkov told him why his father, Valeriy, never went out to sea. Valeriy had once provided a ride home in his boat to a friend who lived about 30 km away. On the return, the boat’s motor failed and the current took it out

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 to learn about the
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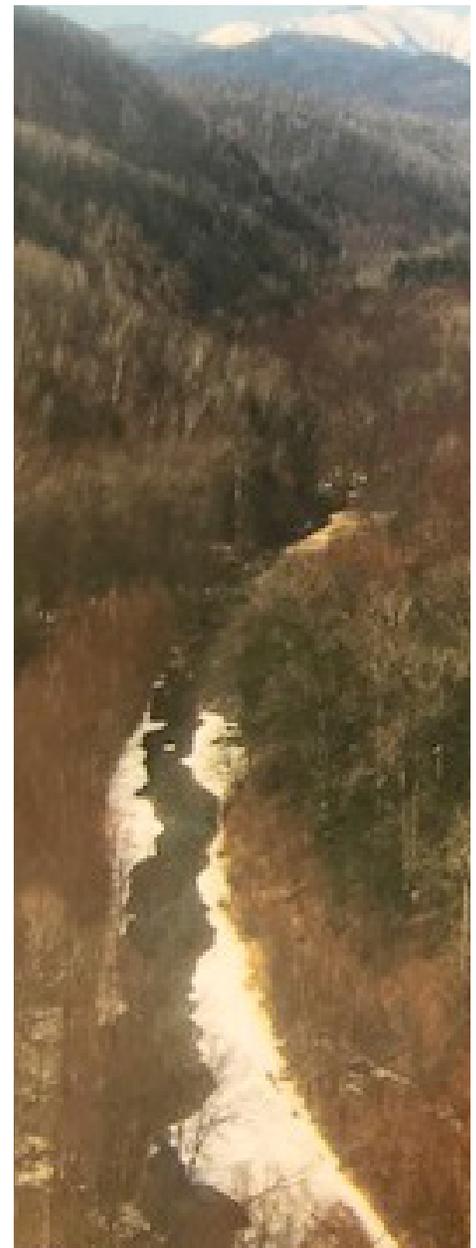
to sea. On the second day Valeriy shot a gull but could not retrieve it. On the third day a Russian trawler refused to pick him up. On the fourth day he jumped out of the boat as he hallucinated seeing his wife on shore. On day five a Russian ship picked him up and dropped him off at a port 350 km from his village. Authorities interviewed him, but then asked for his papers. Valeriy had to explain to these

Soviet bureaucrats that he had no papers because he was just helping his friend. When he finally returned to his village one month later, his family and friends had already had the funeral, “burial” and now were in the grieving/recovery process. At work, Valeriy’s boss said it would have been better if he had disappeared at sea because allowing an undetected boat in the Sea of Japan for five days betrayed the incompetence of the Soviet border patrol.

Slaght, with the help of local Russians, ended up spending five winters working in this remote area. At one point the author explained that he felt as much at home there as in the USA. The Fish Owl’s survival habits and abilities in a harsh and shrinking habitat are detailed by the author whose conservation work with his Russian and American colleagues have helped increased the number of nesting pairs.

Once started, this book is difficult to put down because of the strange and unusual owl which is its subject, the entertaining characters who play a part in the narrative and the author’s engaging writing style.

Primorye, in northeastern Russia is home to the Fish Owl. The habitat consists of forested mountains, and wild, remote rivers that flow to the Sea of Japan.. Photos from the book.



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The Real Reason Behind This Year's Bizarre Spoonbill Sightings

The exotic pink birds appearing up north are part of a larger wading bird wave, driven by this summer's breeding boom on the Gulf Coast.

By Nick Minor



The exotic pink birds appearing up north are part of a larger wading bird wave, driven by this summer's breeding boom on the Gulf Coast. On August 26th, the rare-bird alert went out. A Roseate Spoonbill, the first on record for Minnesota, was discovered just 30 minutes outside of the Twin Cities—nearly a thousand miles outside the species' usual range in the Southeast. It followed on the heels of a Wood Stork in New Hampshire and a Great White Heron in Ohio, both thousands of miles away from their Florida homes as well. Between the three of them, the wayfarers racked up enough mileage to fly from the White House to Buckingham Palace.

Yup, it was an exciting August—and the excitement isn't over yet. Spoonbills have popped up in Saint-Martin, Quebec, Sebec, Maine, Stratford, Connecticut (perhaps the same individual seen in Maine). One spent some time between Nassau and Suffolk County in New York.

The sightings are sensational, but they aren't exactly random: They represent an ongoing pattern in North American breeding cycles. Wading birds such as Wood Storks, Reddish Egrets, and Spoonbills are occurring farther and wider than they have in years following an exceptional breeding season, thanks to the strongest rains the Gulf Coast has seen in 80-some-odd years. It's a phenomenon that mirrors what we see in Snowy Owls and winter finches, when a summer-breeding boom is followed by unexpected records outside the species' ranges.

While each vagrancy event is fascinating and exciting in its own right, one has to wonder about the broader impulses. What could possibly drive these individuals to fly so far in the "wrong" direction?

Birders and ornithologists have long speculated about what makes vagrants tick. Some believe the birds get lost due to defective navigation systems. Others look to the weather, arguing that rarities are swept up by storm fronts and transported to parts unknown. Others still contend that some fraction of all bird populations have an inherent tendency to disperse far—in other words, that

vagrancy is normal for any species. If certain individuals are born with a genetic predisposition for exploration, known as neophilia, then the pattern would be exaggerated in breeding-boom years.

These explanations are all hypothetical; it's tough to put them to the test without a large sample of vagrants. We may never understand some truly mind-bending rarities, like this year's Eurasian Skylark in Quebec or the Tahiti Petrel offshore from Hatteras (unless we somehow have the foresight to place GPS trackers on individuals yet-to-be famous).

Can a Spoonbill travel a thousand miles outside of its range without the asterisk of inclement weather? Sure it can.

That said, we can still take a step back and consider the bigger picture. Take Spoonbills, which have so far been spotted in Minnesota, Iowa, Ohio, Maine, Connecticut and New York this year. While exciting, these out-of-character movements aren't really novel. Dr. Richard Veit, a vagrancy expert and ecologist at the College of Staten Island (City University of New York), recalls many other exceptional sightings from the past, like the "famous Roseate Spoonbill on Staten Island in 1992, as well as a probable second bird on Block Island, Rhode Island the same summer." Rather than attributing them to unusual weather or behavior, Veit points to a "combination of large production of young, coupled with depletion of resources" that send birds seeking food in farflung places.

Still, that doesn't account for the distance these birds have traveled. Can a Spoonbill coast a thousand miles outside of its range without the asterisk of inclement weather? Sure it can. Roseate Spoonbills breed along vast stretches of coastline along the Gulf of Mexico, Mexico's Pacific Coast, and around the Caribbean, not to mention their year-round residence across South America. A regular flight from Florida to Panama could span up to 3,500 miles of circum-Gulf migration; A journey of 1,500 miles between Florida and Maine, then, should be well within their abilities.

Continued next page

The Roseate Spoonbill spotted in central Maine this fall was the first record for the state. Experts from Maine Audubon believe it might be the same bird that later turned up in Connecticut, due to an odd dent in its bill. Photo: Louis Bevier



Continued from page 6

And while most spoonbills probably have no reason to venture so far north, young and inexperienced birds—which made up most of the sightings this year—might just make the trek.

In the context of the summer of 2018, this all makes sense. The wading bird blitz on the Gulf means more individuals are competing for prey and space. This ups the chances that some individuals would opt to explore far and wide to find less-crowded habitats with ample food. “Maybe only 1 percent of birds go as far as Pennsylvania,” Veit says. “But if there are hundreds of birds dispersing, then 1 percent is a substantial number.”

Especially for daytime migrants like Spoonbills, Herons, Ibises, and Wood Storks, these explorations may be par for the course. Indeed, ever since birders have been tracking vagrancies, the number of far-north sightings has ebbed episodically. In fact, it's phenomena like these that help species expand their ranges or even, given enough time, establish colonies that split into new species. And while the exact details of each vagrant's journey may be a mystery, we can temper our expectations that rare birds always come with a dramatic backstory. Sometimes, weather and behavior notwithstanding, a vagrant may just be a loner looking for a place to itself.

If you missed one of our meetings, most of them have been recorded and are available on the website. Click through to programs and follow the link to the program you would like to hear.

Audubon Christmas Bird Counts are on!

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is the nation's longest-running community science bird project. ELIAS plays its part in this annual bird population survey, which is conducted across North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Bermuda, and the Pacific Islands. Birders of all skill levels are welcome and encouraged to participate. Beginners too! The data collected by observers over the past century allow researchers, conservation biologists, and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America.

The 122nd annual Christmas Bird Count will be underway nationwide from Tuesday, December 14, 2021 through Wednesday, January 5, 2022. ELIAS is responsible for Eastern Suffolk County. To get more information or sign up for the count, please contact the coordinator listed below. Each leader will determine how their count is to be conducted. Here are the leaders and the dates of the planned counts.

To participate please contact the leaders of each count:

Quogue-Water Mill CBC

Sunday, December 19, 2021

Contact Steve Biasetti

sbiasetti@eastendenvironment.org

Central Suffolk

Monday, December 27, 2021

Contact Eileen Schwinn

beachmed@optonline.net

The Central Suffolk count circle on eastern Long Island is bounded on the north by the village of Wading River; on the south by the Atlantic Ocean; on the west by the village of Yaphank; and on the east by Westhampton.

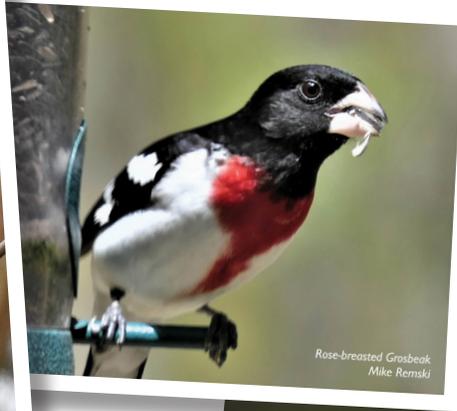
Orient Count

Sunday, December 26, 2021

Contact: John Sep at

JohnSep@optonline.net

This count covers the North Fork of Long Island from Peconic eastward to Orient Point including Shelter Island and several northern areas of the South Fork such as Jessup's Neck, North Haven & Cedar Point County Park.



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All the photos were taken right here on the East End of Long Island by members of ELIAS.

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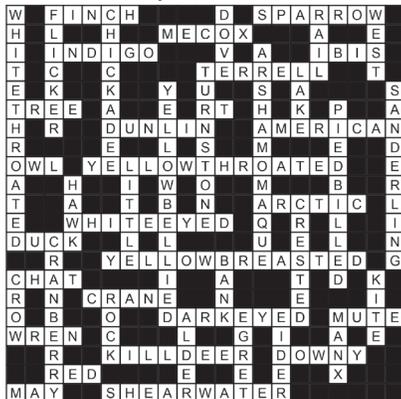
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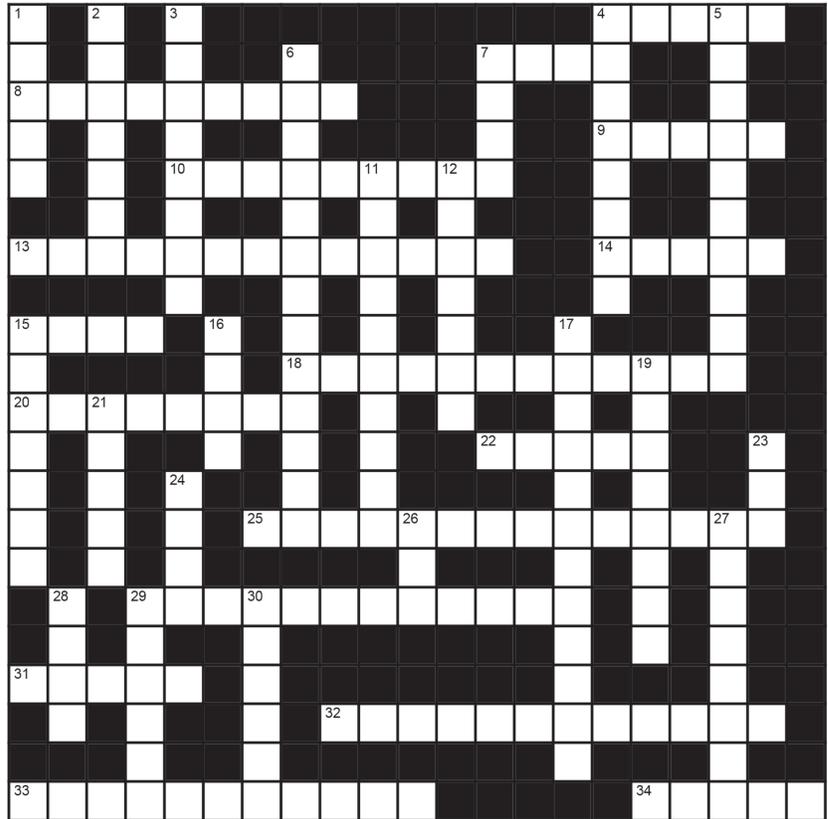
Our mission is to be an inspiration to those who feel a sense of kinship with Long Island by encouraging an appreciation for the natural world and a commitment to the environment.

Summertime

Answers to summer puzzle
by Tom Moran



Black, White and American Tom Moran



Across

- 4 Brown _____ unusual visitor; a few seen on LI this season
- 7 Clapper or Virginia depending on salt or fresh water
- 8 Common _____, found by a rather charismatic birder on Cooper's Neck Pond in 2016
- 9 22 Across _____, second word
- 10 American (2 words _____), on fresh or saltwater
- 13 American _____
- 14 American, no, just kidding, _____ Tern, not Capsian
- 15 American _____, no seriously
- 18 _____ Sparrow
- 20 _____ Sparrow, not Song, has some yellow in front of eye
- 22 _____ 9 Across, first word
- 25 _____ 21 Down, first word
- 29 According to legend, on W.C. Fields's gravestone, it says "All things considered, I'd rather be in _____" or an uncommon vireo
- 31 Great Blue or Little Blue _____
- 32 A grasspiper seen at a sod farm in Eastport this summer, odd head, gentle expression
- 33 Black-throated (two words)
- 34 House or Purple _____

Down

- 1 Golden _____, try Franklin Mountain
- 2 28th president (possessive) or a plover from Florida
- 3 Long decurved bill
- 4 NYS bird, of happiness
- 5 Vireo with spectacles
- 6 _____ Warbler, acts like 12 down
- 7 _____ of Ages, _____ and Roll, or a feral pigeon
- 11 *Spiza americana*
- 12 Brown _____, acts like 6 down
- 15 Larger, redder bill than Royal
- 16 Common sparrow
- 17 _____ Grosbeak, maybe at North Fork County Park
- 19 White or Red-breasted _____
- 21 25 Across _____, second word
- 23 First, outermost color of a rainbow
- 24 Not American! Wimpy call crow
- 26 Symbol of wisdom
- 27 _____ Starling
- 28 Christopher _____, one of the most famous architects of all time. Or a small bird with an attractive song
- 29 Say's _____, made a short appearance at Cupsogue in Sept.
- 30 _____ Yellowlegs

Continued from page 1

for a research project,” Drainville said. It was too windy for them to band, so the two joined him on the dunes. “I started the count at 7, and then at 7:20 the birds started to pass by in huge numbers. I had a group of 85 at 7:20, then by 7:30 the groups were mostly in the 100s. A group of 270 passed by at 7:37, and we knew at that point that things were going to go crazy.” At this point, Drainville started using a handheld counter to tally birds in groups of 10.

So, what does 23,357 finches look like? “It was insane,” Drainville said. “The birds are all in groups. It’ll be a group of 100, then a ten second break, then a group of 200, then maybe a group of 2 birds. The two other guys who were with me stopped counting so they could enjoy the show, but I had to keep counting. It was really hard—I probably missed one or two thousand for sure. Things started slowing down after 9 am; 17,000 birds passed in just the 1.5 hours from 7:30 to 9.” The day trounced previous records from 2006, which saw 30,000 total birds in a season maxing out at 6000 in one day.

Tadoussac is a special place to observe birds. The observatory sits at the wide mouth of the Saint Lawrence River. Birds moving out of the boreal eventually hit the coast, and rather than cross, chose to follow the river, concentrating them. Birds also may reorient themselves after a night of migrating, again using the coast to find their way.

The White-winged Crossbill flight is historic, but perhaps not unexpected. Poor spruce cone crops in the western boreal forest, in part caused by fires, drove White-winged crossbills eastward this past summer, well east of Tadoussac into Maine, the Maritime Provinces, and even Newfoundland. As that crop runs out, the inflated number of crossbills in the East are on the move in search of their next meal.

As Tyler Hoar predicted in this year’s Winter Finch Forecast, these birds are headed back west and perhaps south to better spruce crops in Central Ontario eastward to Newfoundland and southward into northern New York and New England, visiting traditional winter

finch hotspots, and perhaps even further south.

It’s unclear how far White-winged Crossbills will move out of the traditional finch hotspots. Despite large numbers flying by Tadoussac in 2006, those birds didn’t move far out of the boreal. This year’s birds didn’t seem to move far past Tadoussac either, Drainville said; despite being only a two hour drive southwest, Québec City birders didn’t observe nearly the same volume of crossbills on October 20th. Meanwhile, during the historic 2012-2013 irruption of White-winged Crossbills that brought birds as far south as North Carolina, Tadoussac counts reported just a few dozen birds per day, maxing at 156.

But anything is possible. The sheer volume of birds this year, combined with poor crops in the west, might still crowd some crossbills out of the forest and into surprising areas, such as conifer forests in central New York and southern New England or even plantings of ornamental spruce in towns and cities. White-winged Crossbills are already moving southward west of the Great Lakes, and a birder observed one male White-wing on the Long Island barrier beaches in late October of this year.

The faucet of White-winged Crossbills has slowed at Tadoussac, but Drainville is still counting dozens, and sometimes hundreds of White-winged Crossbills in a day. Another finch is beginning to take its place—Common Redpoll numbers have started increasing, and on November 1, over 11,000 Common Redpolls flew past the dunes. How far south these birds will travel is again a mystery.

Other surprising birds are showing up as well. Despite bumper mountain ash crops, Drainville tallied 427 Bohemian Waxwings and 308 Pine Grosbeaks on Monday, October 25—perhaps a reflection of a good breeding season from these birds. And birders across North America have by now heard of the apparent White-crested Elaenia, a mega-rare South American vagrant, which ended up in a Tadoussac mist net on October 26.

Still, for us finch fans, Drainville’s October 20th count has solidified itself permanently in bird lore. Most of us will forever remain jealous that we couldn’t see 23,000+ White-winged Crossbills in one day.

SATURDAY, NOV. 13 - SEED SALE DAY

Thanks to everyone who ordered seed, helped at the seed sale or just stopped by to say hello. It was a beautiful day followed by 5 record breaking tonados on Long Island.



Field Trips - Proceeding Slowly



A few of our field trips have managed to take place. Where possible we have broken into smaller groups, each group with its own leader. On September 12 we headed to North Fork County Park where we were fortunate to find a feeding flock that included Cedar Waxwings, Robins and Hummingbirds.

On October 3, it was off to Quogue Wildlife Refuge (one of the small groups, pictured right) where we enjoyed finding a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Pine Warbler on the west side of Old Ice Pond.

We hit the jackpot on October 13 on a trip to the Fire Island Lighthouse and the Hawk Watch Platform. Some of the group saw a Yellow-breasted Chat and then as we were exploring the walkway to the Bay behind the Lighthouse a Gray Kingbird popped out of the shrubs. Several of the photographers got some good shots of it. And, no, it is not supposed to be here. Usually it is found in Florida and the Caribbean.

Our field trips are announced on the website and by email via Constant Content.

If you are a member and submitted your email mail, you are on the list. If not you can sign up on the website.

(Top) ELIAS does a little bird watching at the Hawk Watch Platform on Fire Island.

(Right) A Gray Kingbird was spotted between the Lighthouse and the Bay. Photo by Doug Dittko

(Below) At Quogue Wildlife Refuge.



THE OSPREY

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COMMITTEES/PROJECTS

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Programs: Vacant
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2022

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