



THE *OSPREY*

Winter 2023 — Vol. XLIXI, No. 1

Calliope Hummingbird

A Rare Visitor to Long Island

Cathy Taldone Cammann

A rare Calliope Hummingbird found its way to Long Island this past November delighting bird lovers from near and far, many traveling great distances to catch a brief glimpse of it.

In early November the temperature rose to 77 degrees, a rare weather event that confused most Long Islanders who were ready for crisp cool days of Autumn. The appearance of a Calliope Hummingbird was even more of a rarity when he landed in the backyard of ELIAS member, Darlene Massey's home in the midst of that warm spell.

The Calliope Hummingbird's range is the Pacific Coast of North America and is considered an accidental species in New York. This bird was way off track in its migration down the Rocky Mountains towards Mexico. The last time a Calliope Hummingbird was spotted in our area was in Water Mill in 2016. A rare bird alert went out and due to the home owner's hospitality over 300 birders arrived to view this tiny creature and for many including this author, this was a life bird. Many thanks to Darlene Massey for her generosity.

Although this tiny bird took a wrong turn on its migration route, it was a treat for all and created quite the stir.

The Calliope Hummingbird is the smallest bird native to the USA and Canada. Weighing in at one tenth of an ounce or the weight of a ping pong ball, and only 3 inches, it is the smallest long-distance migrant in the world. Despite its size, this hummingbird manages to fly more than 5,000 miles each year from Mexico to Canada and back.

The Calliope Hummingbird is named after Calliope, the muse of eloquence and epic poetry who inspired Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. It is tiny, even for a hummingbird and its hunched posture and small bill make it appear smaller. These hummingbirds are quite territorial and will defend their turf even chasing a Red-tailed Hawk. Male Calliope hummingbirds have a magenta gorget, glossy green backs, flanks and dark tails. The gorget was aptly described by one birder as looking like "fine embroidery".

In Spring Calliope Hummingbirds migrate to their breeding range in the western US from California and into British Columbia in Canada. They winter in the Southwestern US, Mexico and Central America. Their nests are usually on evergreen trees and they are known to reuse or build on top of an old nest. The females lay 2 eggs and incubate them for 15-16 days. Nestlings are fed by the female. They fledge in about 3 weeks. The oldest recorded hummingbird was 8 years old, but their lifespan is usually 6 years in the wild.

With a belly full of nectar hopefully this tiny traveler will find his way back on course and head south for winter.

Sources: *All About Birds, Wikipedia, Birds and Blooms, National Audubon Society*



To read Darlene Massey's tale of what it was like to host the hummingbird, turn to page 3

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION — SEE BACK COVER!



THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Welcome to 2023!

Byron Young

Welcome to 2023! May the New Year bring you good health, good birds and wonderful experiences with nature.

ELIAS is making plans for the upcoming year with our usual Bird Walks, Earth Day celebrations, Annual Seed Sale, Monthly Members meetings and other activities. We are always looking for help at events such as Earth Day and the Annual Seed Sale. With the help of membership volunteers, we were able to participate in two Earth Day Events in 2022, the Quogue Wildlife Refuge event, and an event sponsored by the South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) in Bridgehampton.

One change for 2023 – *The Osprey*, our newsletter will be published four times during 2023. There will be a Winter Edition (January, February, and March); a Spring Edition (April, May, and June); a Summer Edition (July, August, and September) and a Fall Edition (October, November, and December). We are always looking for articles for the *Osprey*, so if anyone would like to submit a birding article, please feel free to do so. The article could be a report on an interesting birding trip, a particular bird species, or some environmental issue in our area. If you are interested in writing an article

but do not know where to start, please feel free to reach out to us at a member's meeting or drop us a note.

Another change is that some of our future meeting may be in person, as well as available by Zoom.

We will continue to keep Members up to date on upcoming events, issues, changes, and other important short-term notices via Constant Contact. It has been a struggle to return to normal activities with Covid lingering and impacting our daily lives. We want to thank you all for your patience and support for our Chapter.

I would like to thank the birding photographers who submitted photographs for the 2023 ELIAS Bird Calendar. We hope you enjoy this year's selection of photographs from our talented member photographers. All the photographs in the Calendar were taken here on Long Island and represent just a few of the birds that you might encounter. We will be looking for Photographs for the next iteration of our ELIAS Calendar later in 2023. So have your camera ready in case your encounter a cooperative bird.

Our monthly bird walks around Eastern Long Island begin in January with a visit to the Lakes of Patchogue looking for

overwintering waterfowl. In February we will visit Dune Road and the Shinnecock Inlet area looking for oceanic birds and possibly a Snowy Owl. March will take us to the Elizabeth Morton Wildlife Refuge visiting the friendly birds that make this refuge home. Further details about the winter walks are provided in this issue.

In closing, we continue our search for help on the Board of Directors. We have added one new Board Member during 2022 but have lost two Board Members. We are looking for someone to become our Program Director. The Board of Directors meets once every two months for about two hours to discuss Chapter issues, function and plans for future events and activities. If you have an interest in helping, please reach out to us.

Good Birding!

Correction

The January photo on our calendar was identified as a Northern Saw-whet Owl. It is an Eastern Screech Owl, the photographer is Patrick Dorrien (not Darrien).

We sincerely apologize for the mistakes.

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MORE ON THE VISIT OF THE CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD

Darlene Massey answers the question — What's it like when you spot a rare bird in your yard?

I am so thankful to Eileen Schwinn, who read my first email and talked to me when I spotted the bird. I wasn't sure who to ask when I sent my SOS! She sent over HELP, in the form of Sally Newbert who tried to verify that I had what I thought I had! While waiting for HELP, I got a much better photograph and a good look at the bird, so I was confident it was a Calliope. I was just confused as to why it was here. I sent a Facebook message, with the picture, to Darlene McNeil. She had been helpful to me on a recent ELIAS trip and showed me where to find a flock of Bobolinks. She contacted her hummingbird banding friends who confirmed it was a male Calliope. She and Tom Moran arrived after Sally, but the bird had vanished by then. Darlene helped me post on eBird without my actual address and told me what would happen if word got out. Pointing out that it might be better not to list the exact location. I chose to share with other birders. The next morning, when the bird was still there, Darlene McNeil and I came up with a plan for parking and visitation to allow others to see my unusual visitor.

Eileen Schwinn arrived the next morning equally excited to see the bird and advised me on where I needed to report it (NYSARC) and she put it on a list serve for those that don't use eBird.

The Calliope Hummingbird was last seen mid-morning on November 23rd. I'm hoping he flew south for Thanksgiving! I didn't find any "remains" in the areas he was last seen frequenting, so I can only hope he took advantage of the milder weather and moved on.

I filed a report with the New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC) as Eileen suggested. When I originally

contacted them, they asked that I wait until he was gone before I filled out the paperwork. I waited until the 29th to be sure he wasn't still around and then submitted it.

During the bird's visit I asked visitors to log in and write down any observations to help others locate the bird. I was curious as to how many people came to see the bird, so I compiled a list of as many names as I could find from the sign in sheet and from eBird reports. My list was over 300!

I was overwhelmed by the number of people who traveled to see the bird, a few even stopped by numerous times. Some brought me gifts! What impressed me most was the positivity of everyone, the pure joy in seeing the bird, and how appreciative they were that I opened my yard to them. A few people did not get to see the bird, yet they were happy to have had the opportunity to try. People were KIND, they were RESPECTFUL, no one was nasty, rude or impolite.

Not a political word was spoken. They helped one another spot the bird and gave suggestions for finding it if it wasn't visible. They were patient, even when it was cold, windy and/or rainy. I was thrilled to see a number of eager young birder/photographers who came with their families, or in some cases, brought their families to see this special tiny bird. Several actually skipped school, with their parent's blessing, to travel to Long Island to see it. Adults played hooky too! An Audubon group from Connecticut sent a text to ask if they could stop by on Sunday morning. Unfortunately, I was serving breakfast for a fire department fundraiser and didn't see the text until late afternoon. I felt terrible that I hadn't responded in time, but they happily replied that they had made the trip, saw the bird and were delighted! Another group of guys sent a thank you text after they decided, on a whim, to make a one-day trip down and back from Rochester and Ticonderoga. It involved leaving at 4 am, meeting up by the Mario Cuomo bridge, battling traffic and arriving in time to see the bird for 5 minutes, then turning around and doing it all again! I got another message from someone in Buffalo, after the BIG snow storm, asking if he should chance the drive. Unfortunately, the bird was gone by then. At least I was able to save him the drive! One man flew in from



One of the photos Darlene Massey took that synced the ID of this Calliope Hummingbird. The bird, noticeably smaller than the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, has the unusual gorget that looks like it was embroidered in addition to the very short tail.

Washington D.C. just to see it! I think Steven Glover came the farthest, from Texas, but I have a feeling the Calliope wasn't the reason he was here! There were so many stories! And personally, I think THAT the real story here is not the bird, but the amazing birders.

Of course, my local birds put on quite a show for the crowd, all vying for attention! Two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and a Brown Creeper showed up unexpectedly. A pair of Carolina Wrens scolded photographers who snapped too many pictures of the Calliope and not of them. A Cooper's Hawk and a Sharp-shinned Hawk made several raids, flying low across the yard, perching on the fence and yelling possible obscenities at the group. Two Bald Eagles regularly passed by overhead, once just above the tree tops! A few Pheasants, from the hunting club up the street, were sighted by delighted birders. I finally put up a list of all the "yard" birds that had been seen, not realizing that they weren't as common elsewhere. I had several requests for "Pine Siskin and Evening Grosbeaks", but the best I could do was a Calliope Hummingbird and two Bald Eagles!

I am so glad that I could bring so much happiness to so many.

Darlene Massey



UPCOMING PROGRAMS

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6 AT 7 PM

The Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP)

We are looking forward to learning what The Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP) is doing to bring together partners from different sectors around common goals. As part of the National Estuary Program, established by the EPA, PEP acts as a backbone organization. PEP staff and their partners support monitoring, research, collaboration, and education to address priority issues within the Peconic Estuary Watershed. PEP works to restore clean water, protect and enhance vibrant ecosystems, and communicate sound science for nature-based coastal planning in the Peconic Estuary and its watershed. Updates explained on the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan, and all of the beneficial projects for our water and wildlife!



MONDAY, MARCH 6 AT 7 PM

Birds of Kenya

Janis Hurley

While on photography safaris in Kenya, Janis Hurley was able to see many varieties of birdlife as she traveled between six parks in two separate trips: Amboseli National Park, Nairobi National Park, Lewa Conservancy, Samburu National Reserve, the Maasai Mara, and the Mara Triangle.

Although the main goal of the trips was photographing big game animals, there were incredible lifetime birding opportunities as well. Even at the start of the journey, at a Nairobi hotel, she observed city-dwelling Baglafaecht Weavers and Variable Sunbirds.

The bird highlight may have been a Secretary Bird as it stomped and captured a poisonous Black Mamba snake!

Although not claiming to be a bird expert, please come and enjoy some lovely photographs of unusual African Avians Adventures!

FIELD TRIPS FOR 2023

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2023

THE LAKES OF PATCHOGUE

Meet 8:30 am at the parking area at the corner of Lake Drive and East Main Street in East Patchogue by the side of Swan Lake. We will check out Swan Lake and then visit several other area lakes to look at the bountiful water birds that flock to LI in the winter. Hopefully a surprise or two will be waiting for us. Contact Rosemary Valente to register: hobbesmom4ever@gmail.com

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2023

SHINNECOCK EAST

Meet at 8:30 am on the EAST (Southampton) side of Shinnecock Inlet at the County Park. Hopefully, we will see Alcids, wintering ducks and shorebirds, and perhaps an owl and hunting raptor or two! We will be walking the jetty, shoreline and the dunes. Perhaps a stop along the road heading east after the park, will allow a Bittern or ?? to be found! Dress for the weather. To register, please contact Eileen Schwinn (beachmed@optonline.net).



Reflections on the Season Past

Eileen Schwinn

As I sit here at the mid-point of the Fall, and have the months of Winter ahead, I can't help but look back on one of the most delightful late Summer and early Fall seasons I can remember! Not only was the weather warmer and sunnier than I recall past years being, but I personally, have taken a step back (or a step down!) in my birding activities. No, I haven't taken up a different hobby – or obsession – I just approached it a little differently. And I found I enjoyed it more than ever. Over the past 18 years, I've been fortunate enough to see 353 different species of birds in Suffolk County. Lots of driving, lots of "drop what your doing", constantly checking the various websites and contacts to see what just showed up and where. But, for the past few months, I've been more inclined to let the birds come to me, rather than the

me going after the birds. Oh, I did make a special trip out to Cupsogue sandflats to see the Bar-tailed Godwit (a life bird for me), and I did make a trip or two to spots on the North Fork when the "grass peeps" were being reported. And, of course, by leading a handful of ELIAS Field Trips, I ventured out of my regular patch. Those Field Trips are especially rewarding because it's not just about the birds, it's about the PEOPLE – a good time spent with new and long-time friends is always rewarding.

But, for the most part, I just enjoyed biking with my binoculars, cruising Dune Road with binoculars, and just sitting on my back deck – with my binoculars. It's amazing to cover the same areas over and over again. Every day was different, and every day brought a different cast of characters. Most late summer and early fall birds are quiet – no vocalizations to help the birder – so more attention to just watching, is required. From ground to treetops and everywhere in between, my focus was on movement. Small flocks of migrating warblers and other song birds would travel together, usually active as the morning sun hit the trees and "woke the bugs up", and later in the afternoon, when the birds were fueling up for their night time journey. I spent most mornings with a cup of coffee, and late afternoons with a cup of tea, watching the show. Warblers I didn't see in their springtime colors were showing up as the sun lit the tree tops – a challenge, yes, because of the similarities between species, age and sexes fall birds display. But taking the time to study the individuals from the comfort of a back-yard deck chair was rewarding!

My yard seemed to be a refueling stop for numerous Ruby-throated Hummingbirds – a delight I was unaware of before. I also had the pleasure of watching the neighborhood deer herd nibble my recently planted garden, the bunnies chomp the heads off my marigolds, and obviously, the squirrels emptying the bird feeders almost as quickly as I could fill them!

By now, nearly all the summer nesting and migrating birds have left. The winter residents have started to arrive. White-throated Sparrows, and Juncos have joined the ever-present Cardinals, Blue Jays, Chickadees and Titmice. Sapsuckers have joined the resident Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers at my Magic Tree (where the feeders hang from, and visible from my kitchen window). Ducks are soon to arrive both on salt and fresh water. In some song, there's a line, "the seasons change, and so do I". But there's always something to look forward to – and I plan to keep it that way! Enjoy your birding, no matter which path you take. You know I will!

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The Right Whale

Larry Penny

About 50 million years ago a fox-sized mammal with a long tail, pointy snout and webbed feet roamed along the water's edge banks in Pakistan hunting its prey. At times it would enter the water to catch a fish. It's name? *Pakicetus!* Although it looked nothing like a modern cetacean, evolutionary scientists are pretty sure it is the single most likely mammal that gave rise to toothed whales. It took, however, more than 40 million years of intermittent forms eventually giving rise to three offshoots, dolphins, porpoises and baleen whales. The one land mammal the cetaceans are

most closely related to is the hippopotamus, itself, perfectly a home in the freshwaters of Africa

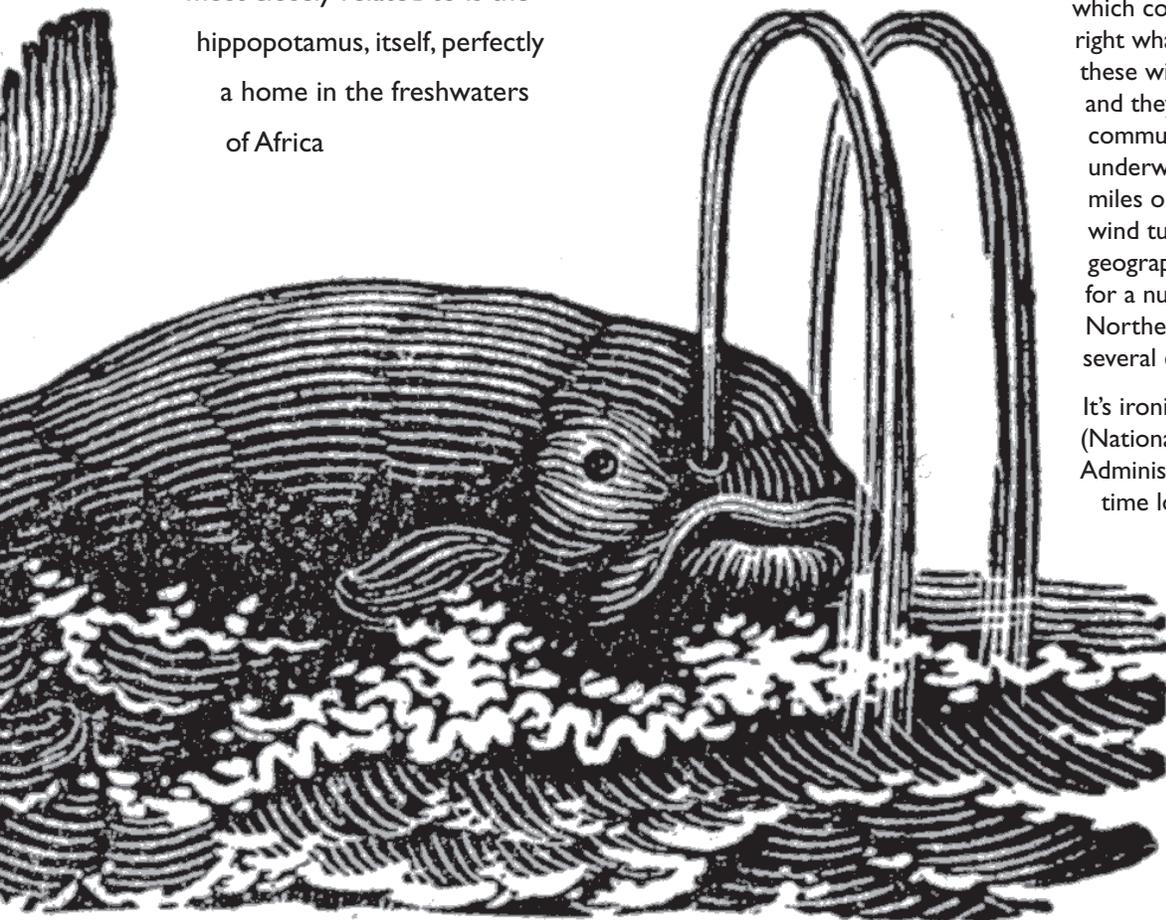
There are 92 living members of the whales, dolphins and porpoises, collectively. All whales were hunted at one time for their oil, flesh and bone. The right whale, a baleen whale, got its common name "right" because it was the right whale to hunt. It was slow moving, it rose to the surface when dead, it swam next to land and, thus, could be hunted from small boats launched into the surf, it produced a lot of whale oil, it had copious baleen and its flesh could be eaten.

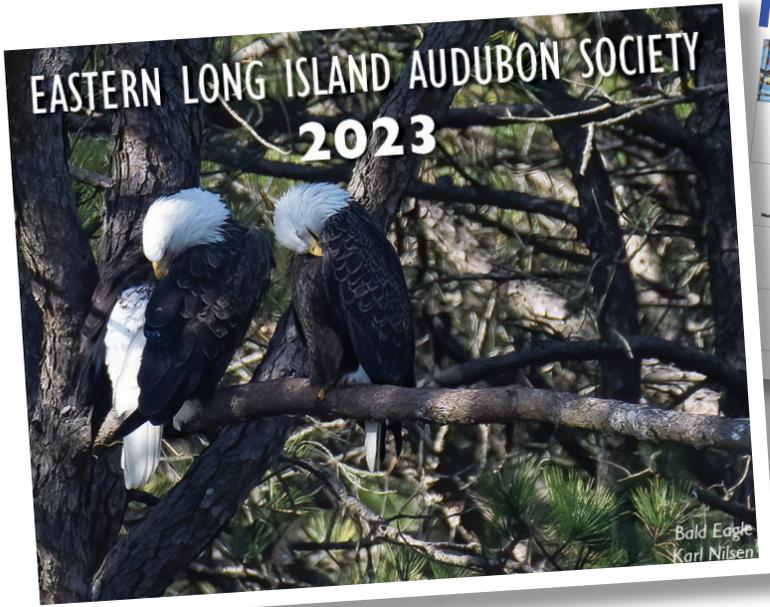
The European population of right whales, mainly living in the Mediterranean Sea, was wiped out early, by the turn of the middle of the eighteenth century. In 1935 all hunting of right whales was banned. The largest contemporary existing population is that of the southern right whale which is only found below the equator and which has a circumpolar distribution. While there may have been fewer than 300 individuals at one time, there are at least 13,000 now according to estimates. Thus it is a "species of least concern".

At last count there were 403 (although there may be even fewer now) North Atlantic right whales, and about 330 North Pacific right whales, both forms of which are considered "endangered". Right whales are injured and killed by colliding with big ocean going vessels and being hung up in fish nets. In the United States NOAA does a good job of keeping tabs on their migrations, north for feeding along the coast after birthing in southern U.S. waters, and movement south as winter approaches. Some of these right whales live to be 50 years or older. The big fear for their continued safety, of course, is the large number of ocean wind turbines planned for the coastal waters between Canada and the southern U.S. Orsted is one of the companies presently under contract with PSEG and East Hampton Town to install several of these very large and very tall wind turbines in ocean waters south of East Hampton Town.

The installation of the mounting towers may involve blasting and other impact producing effects, and the constant running of the rotors produces a noise which could seriously confuse migrating right whales as they swim near where these wind turbines will be installed and they have very good hearing, communicating with each other underwater up to a distance of twenty miles or more. Moreover, where the wind turbines are slated for installation geographically, is an important flyway for a number of oceanic birds including Northern Gannets, terns and gulls of several different species.

It's ironic, however, that NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) spends so much of its time looking after the North Atlantic right whale population, while the other U.S. government organization working with the oceans, BOEM (Bureau of Ocean Energy Management), has been pushing (one might say) for the Orsted project and appears anxious for it to get going.





Order your 2023 ELIAS Calendar

The calendar makes a wonderful holiday gift.

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

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Field Trip to Robert Moses State Park



Eileen Schwinn

Saturday, October 8th was our day at Fire Island Hawk Watch/Robert Moses State Park/Fire Island Lighthouse. It began at 8:10 am, with cloudy skies and a temperature around 46°, a north-west wind at approximately 10 mph. The sun did break through the clouds, warming us to a balmy mid 50°. That's when the birds began to show themselves – popping up from the shrubs to dry off and to feast on warming bugs. The first birds seen included the gulls in the parking area – and a small flock of Canada Geese at the water tower traffic circle at the south end of the bridge to Robert Moses State Park. As we walked the boardwalk and made our way to the lighthouse we spotted Merlins, a Peregrine Falcon, an Eastern Phoebe and a small, tough to ID flycatcher (who did not call), several Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, several Red-breasted Nuthatches, possibly an irruptive species this year and many Yellow-rumped Warblers. There were over 30 species in total.



Some of the birds seen and photographed included a mystery flycatcher, a Golden-crowned Kinglet photographed by Bob Gunning and a nice portrait of a Yellow-rumped Warbler by Brad Miles.



Suffolk County Farm

Eileen Schwinn

Saturday, November 5, 2022

Although the day felt more like an early day in Spring, it was a delightful November day for a bird walk! The temperature ran between 58 and 68 degrees, a very light wind, sometimes sunny, and sometimes partially cloudy skies made viewing birds pretty comfortable. Our group of 25 or so was divided into two and sometimes three groups, so pretty much everyone was able to get to see most of the birds we encountered. Thanks to Byron Young and Tom Moran – officers of ELIAS – for helping to lead the groups!

We started the walk at 9:00 am and concluded around 11:20 am. We covered about 2 miles on foot, and did not encounter any mud along the way! We did encounter a group of birders from South Shore Audubon, and we tried to keep our list very secret – but they pried the info out of us on what we saw along the way!! (Just kidding - it was very interesting to me that two groups, as well as a handful of individual birders, decided to cover this location at the very same day and time!)

Here's the list of birds – seen by most

Canada Goose
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Herring Gull
Northern Harrier
Red-tailed Hawk
American Kestrel
Merlin
Blue Jay
Common Raven
European Starling
Northern Mockingbird



Highlights were finding an Eastern Meadowlark and an American Pipit in the fields. Those Pipits hide in plain sight and can disappear into field's furrows. Photos by Gretchen Dietrich and Mohammed Arif.

American Pipit - our main target bird and difficult to see in the dirt field, but I believe we all had a chance to add this to our list – and for some of us, a Life Bird!

American Goldfinch

Dark-eyed Junco – a real sign winter is on the way

White-throated Sparrow

Song Sparrow

Swamp Sparrow

Eastern Meadowlark - a pleasant surprise found by some good eyes! Come by in spring to hear him sing!!

Red-winged Blackbird

(Brown-headed Cowbird – I personally did not call this out, or see it but many others in our group did. Flying with the large flock of blackbirds in the dirt field.)

Common Grackle

Northern Cardinal

As always, I'd like to thank you all for attending this Field Trip – I love seeing birds and I'm as equally happy seeing good people while I'm out there in the field! New faces and long-time familiar ones are always welcome!!!

One of the break out groups walking the field's hedge row. Photo by Bob Gunning



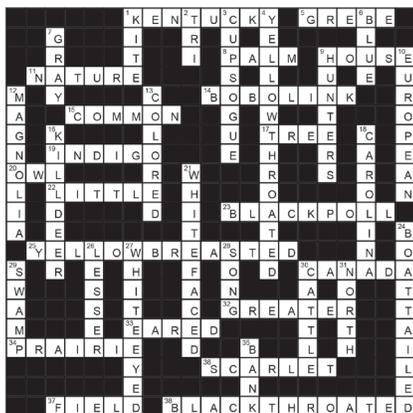


For the latest information - check the website for meetings, walks & other events

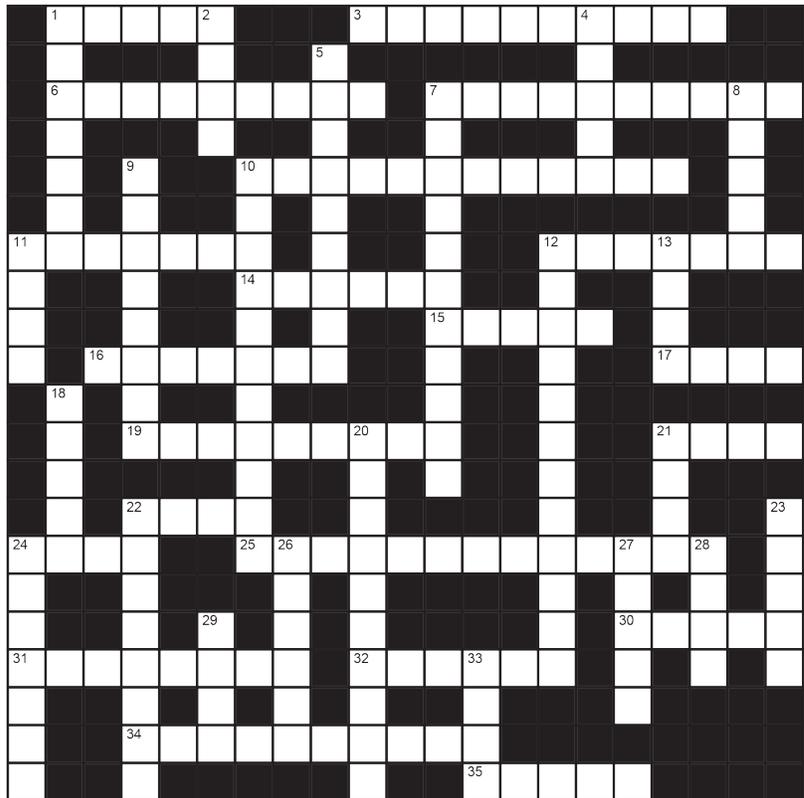
Our mission is to be an inspiration to those who feel a sense of kinship with Long Island by encouraging an appreciation for the natural world and a commitment to the environment.

Florida Visitors

Answers to Fall 2022 puzzle by Tom Moran



It's not as good as birding, but ...



Across

- 1 More than one thing that's used to catch a fish
- 3 Not a Redhead
- 6 Town at end of Peconic River
- 7 Eastern here, check mulleins at EPCAL
- 10 _____ Night Heron
- 11 _____ Yellowlegs
- 12 Boat-tailed or Common...
- 14 Long bill, curved at the end, mixes with lighter colored Sanderlings
- 15 Great, Herring, Ring-billed..., plural
- 16 _____ Point
- 17 Common, Forster's, Royal...
- 19 Or is it a grasspiper?
- 21 Common, Red-throated, Pacific...
- 22 Mute, Trumpeter...
- 24 A protected area, or _____ Pond, Montauk
- 25 _____ Sparrow, a surprise visitor Brookside and CP, 201
- 30 _____ Point State Pine Barrens Preserve, good place for warblers in the spring
- 31 Hummingbird, a wow bird that the homeowner generously gave access to this fall
- 32 _____ Yellowlegs
- 34 Black-crowned _____
- 35 Canada _____

Down

- 1 Northern _____
- 2 _____ Scoter, not Black or White-winged
- 4 _____ Thrasher
- 5 _____ Pond, check the beach out, too (omitted the c, oops)
- 7 Northern _____, a mimic
- 8 _____ Tern, not Caspian
- 9 _____ Gull, large, large billed, all white.
- 10 Good Eastern Long Island Audubon program topic this fall
- 11 _____ Catbird
- 12 American _____, smaller bill than Black-bellied
- 13 American _____
- 18 Dark-eyed, slate-colored, Oregon...
- 20 _____ Grebe
- 21 _____ Ronkonkoma
- 22 European _____
- 23 _____ Shearwater
- 24 Yellow-shafted here
- 26 _____ Point
- 27 _____ Fork, where 26 Down is the end
- 28 Dabbling _____, but starting to fly, it springs into the air
- 29 _____-billed Dowitcher, Santapogue Creek and Dune Rd this fall
- 33 _____ Sparrow



A Winter Trip Along Dune Road

Sally Newbert

This is a trip I know most of the local birders have taken many times. Some people have told me it became a favorite during the pandemic. There are more experts that could be writing this, but I hope I can encourage you to take a trip down Dune Road and see what you can find – even if you keep the heat cranked up in the car.

As you come across the Ponquogue Bridge, take a deep breath, can you feel the world fall away as you enjoy the view of the assorted islands from the height of the bridge. Take a moment to anticipate what the trip will bring. For your first stop – let's go to the inlet. Hope you brought your scope. The Shinnecock Inlet should have some seals swimming about. Keep looking, one is bound to pop up. If not at the inlet, perhaps further out lounging on the sandbars toward the shore. The inlet is usually a good place to see Long-tail duck flying in or out. Common Eider should be around. It is usually fairly easy to spot the large black and white males with the sloping bills. As a special treat, especially when the weather is really cold the alcids (the closest we get to penguins) come in. Watch the churning inlet for Razorbills, Murres and maybe a Dovekie which to quote Eileen Schwinn “looks like a little fat baked potato”. You might only catch a glimpse of these guys. As you take a short walk to the ocean check the shore for Sanderling running near the surf. Look out and see if the Great Cormorant is at the end of the jetty. It has a white patch on its side when it flies and if it is not flying, a white patch on its cheek. As you glance to the ocean, look for Northern Gannets. A large bird with black on its wingtips, from the right angle it looks like a flying cross. Once you see it dive headfirst into the ocean, you will know you have found it. Amazing to watch it as you see it one moment and then it turns and it seems to disappear. Common Loons and Red-throated Loons are frequently swimming in the inlet (and all along the coast). They do not have their fancy plumage so check the bird books to recognize the duller feathers.

As you leave the inlet and head west check the dunes, the duck blinds, and the poles for the *piece de resistance* – the Snowy Owl. Down from the Arctic they are usually young birds with lots of barring. They are not terribly active during the day, and are not habituated to people – so please don't get too close. They are not reported to ebird. So keep their location a secret.

Stop by the fishing piers, every now and again there will be a bird taking advantage of the calmer water between the boats. The gulls are everywhere but we will leave them for another time.

Pull off at the small roads for different views of the bay and ocean. There are no permits needed this time of year. Take your scope and find a little cover to watch the ocean from one of the pavilions. Flocks of scoters, Black, White-wing and Surf are frequently flying by low to the water. Sanderlings and Dunlins are by the waters edge.

Look in the parking lots for Snow Bunting, usually feeding in the bits of grass growing through the pavement. They are a little flighty but will take off and frequently come back to the same place. Sparrows can be found at the edges and in the parking lots, too. If we have a finch irruption this winter, it just might bring us Pine Siskin, Purple Finch, Redpoll and Crossbills. There have been a few local reports. If they will they come here in numbers is still to be determined. But if that happens, Dune Road is sure to be a good spot to check out.

Drive under the Ponquogue Bridge. It will give you a view of the bay. Check the islands. Great Blue Herons like the islands you can see from this spot. Loons like the current under the bridge where a Peregrine Falcon usually spends the winter. Depending on the season Boat-tailed Grackles can be regulars under the bridge. Sparrows like the edges of this road. Savannah Sparrows and their subspecies Ipswich Sparrows are two sought after species to look for.

Keep your eyes on the dunes and the marsh to look for Northern Harriers. These hawks have a rocking flight as

they fly close to the top of the grasses looking for prey. The white rump is a distinguishable mark.

Another Dune Road specialty is the American Bittern. Highly sought after by birders, he skulks along in the ditches, blending with his surroundings, frequently putting his head up in order to become a reed. Good spotting if you catch him at his trick.

Stop at Tiana Bayside look out at the bay for Bufflehead, Goldeneye and Red-breasted Mergansers. They are frequent winter visitors.

Triton Lane, if it is not flooded or you have a car that can go over rough terrain, provides a look at the bay and over the marsh.

Quogue Wetlands is a nice stop, and gives you a chance to stretch your legs, it has boardwalks through several habitats that go to the bay. There is a parking area that only holds 2 cars – so look carefully before you miss it. Pull in and take a walk if the weather permits.

Once you reach Westhampton access is limited, it is not until you get to the end that you can check out Pikes Beach (better in the spring) and Cupsogue County Park where there is beach access and a road to the inlet for a brisk walk or if you have the proper permits and a 4x4 car you can drive to the inlet.

That's all for now. Hope you can use a few of these tips but there can always be a surprise. I hope you find it!

Good Birding, Always

American Bittern, head up — working hard to try to be invisible!



THE OSPREY

Published by
Eastern Long Island Audubon Society
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society
P.O. Box 206
East Quogue, NY 11942-0206

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