



THE OSPREY

Spring 2024 — Vol. X, No. 2

Horseshoe Crab Endangered Species Protection Petition

Byron Young

Taking my lead from the National Television News Programs “Breaking News”, on February 12, 2024, a petition was filed with the Secretary of Commerce to list the Horseshoe Crab as an Endangered Species. The horseshoe crab ESA petition was filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, the Humane Society of the United States and American Bird Conservancy, joined by the American Littoral Society, New Jersey Audubon, Delaware Audubon, Delaware Ornithological Society, Healthy Gulf, Humane Society Legislative Fund, League of Women Voters of New Jersey, Maryland Ornithological Society, Revive & Restore, One Hundred Miles, The Safina Center, Wild Cumberland, Forest Keeper, Coastal Expeditions Foundation, Mobile Baykeeper, Shark River Cleanup Coalition, Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance, Save Coastal Wildlife, New Jersey League of Conservation Voters and the Delaware Riverkeeper Network.

The Secretary of Commerce, specifically the National Marine Fisheries Service has 90 days to review this petition and decide. Such action will include other entities such as the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission which is a compact of the coastal states from Maine to Florida, plus the Potomac River Fisheries Commission and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Horseshoe Crab population along the east coast of the United States has been in decline primarily due to overharvest, and habitat loss. Horseshoe crabs are harvested for bait in the Whelk Fisheries (large gastropod snails), American eel fishery, and to a lesser extent in the capture of killifish to be used as bait by recreational anglers. Beyond that there is a large fishery (Not in New York State) to



Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones and Sandpipers are among the shorebirds enjoying a feast of fresh eggs. Look carefully you can see the horseshoe crabs mating in the water.
Photo: Byron Young

harvest horseshoe crabs for their blood for use in medical testing. There are restrictions on how much blood can be withdrawn from each crab and they need to be returned to the water near where they were harvested. This sounds good but there is an estimated loss of at least 10%, possibly higher of the crabs because of this activity.

An equally serious threat to the Horseshoe Crab is habitat loss from sea level rise and continued building along our shorelines whether it be homes, sea walls, or bulkheads, anything that prevents the horseshoe crab from gaining access to its historic spawning areas. Folks who have traveled Dune Road for a longtime have reported finding horseshoe crabs attempting to cross the road from the bay to reach historic nesting habitat. This road crossing does not happen much now with the raising of the roads bed to prevent flooding and the decline in the horseshoe crab's population locally.

Declines in horseshoe crab's populations along our East Coast have serious

consequences for local shorebird populations which rely on the high energy horseshoe crab eggs as food for their spring migrations from South America to their nesting grounds in the Arctic. This is especially true for the shorebird called Red Knot which has seen its population decline concurrent with the declines of the horseshoe crab. Declines in horseshoe crabs and horseshoe crab eggs impacts a host of other species but not to the same level as our shorebird populations.

By the time this note reaches your mailbox we will have heard more about the petition. The decision on whether to list horseshoe crabs is due around the middle of May, right in the heart of horseshoe crab spawning season and the height of shorebird migration. We will do our best to keep everyone posted on the status of the petition and what actions we might be requested to take as a Chapter.

**THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

This and That... Annual Report for 2024

Byron Young

Welcome to 2024, but what happened to 2023? I thought it might be a good idea to summarize some of the ELIAS activities. The ELIAS Board of Directors is working hard to make some adjustments to how we operate and to keep up with our rapidly changing world.

On the good news front, we have added three new Board Members, Janis Hurley, Darlene Massey, and Darlene McNeil. They will fill the void left by two long time Board Members Ridgie Barnett and Evelyn Voulgarelis, who are not able to participate actively, and one of two vacant Board seats.

Our Treasurer, working with the Board, is working to consolidate our various bank accounts into a more manageable arrangement with only one or two banking institutions. Previously we had CD Accounts in several banks which created a tremendous amount of work for our Treasurer. The consolidation of these accounts and the set-up of a new account in a new bank has been a time-consuming process for our Treasurer. We all thought it would be an easy task, but no. I will not bore you with the details, but it has taken several months of filing the paperwork for our Chapter with the new bank and waiting for the various CDs to mature so they can be closed out and moved to the new institution. The bottom line is the Chapter is financially secure and with the opening of a new account in a local bank will make the treasurers job a bit easier.

Save the Date for the return of our Annual Dinner on Wednesday, October 23 at Rock Hill Country Club. The last one was held in 2019. This year's Committee is hoping to make it a successful event. more to come on this.

Later in the year we will be looking for your best birding photographs for the next iteration of the ELIAS Birding Calendar. Keep your cameras ready whether it be from your back yard, one of your own birding treks around Suffolk

County or on one of our Bird Walks.

Our Newsletter Editor, webmaster, social media person is looking for some help keeping up with our website. If there is anyone that has an interest in volunteering some time to help maintain and update our website, please reach out to Sally Newbert or any member of the ELIAS Board. We would like to make our website timelier with reporting events and possibly expanding its content.

The coming year will see us again participate in the Quogue Wildlife Refuge's Earth Day Event on April 27th. We encourage you to join us for this event and spend a bit of time at our Table. The Annual Seed Sale will again be held in early November, one of our Fund-Raising events.

We will again hold a monthly bird walks at a spot near you. Places like the Quogue Wildlife Refuge, the North Fork Preserve, Cupsogue County Park, Dune Road, Rocky Point's RCA Property, Smith Point, Wertheim Wildlife Refuge, Manorville Hills County Park, Hunters Garden, and others. The month of May will be the

busiest with several bird walks at Spring Migration hotspots.

We have a couple of other activities that we are working on. The first is to complete our first set of Birding Back Packs (5) for local libraries. One backpack containing two sets of binoculars, a *Sibley's Bird Guide*, and information about local birding areas has been completed and submitted to the Hampton Bays Public Library. The library is responsible for loaning the backpack and ensuring that the content is intact. We have the materials for four additional back packs.

The second activity we are considering is the construction of a Chimney Swift Tower in conjunction with the Quogue Wildlife Refuge. We are not very far along with this idea other than we like it. We do not know how best to proceed with the construction of the chimney swift tower as none of us on the Board have the necessary skills nor equipment. This would be a wonderful project for a local Eagle Scout, once again reach out to us if you know someone.

Earth Day Celebration

Saturday, April 27th, 12:00 pm - 3:00 pm

**COME AND CELEBRATE NATURE AND OUR LOVELY PLANET
AT THE REFUGE!**



The day will include guided birding walks, live animal presentations, crafts, environmental exhibitors, and self-guided kayaking and canoeing on Old Ice Pond.

Bring old electronics for recycling.

This celebration is offered by Eastern Long Island Audubon Society & Quogue Wildlife Refuge.

A great day for all ages!
No reservations necessary. Rain or shine.



Walks this Spring

All walks will begin at 8:00 am, unless otherwise noted with an * . Walks will last approximately 2-3 hours, depending on the birds! Pre-registration with the trip leader is necessary.

SATURDAY, MAY 4, 2024

EPCAL

Meet at Veteran's Memorial Park Parking Lot, on Route 25, Calverton, this walk will follow the biking/hiking trail south toward the western runway. Byron Young (youngb53@optimum.net) will be leading this walk. Please be sure to tell him you will be joining him.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2024

MEET AT 9 AM*

Bayard Cutting Arboretum

Tom Moran (tjmoran101@gmail.com) is leading this trip. **Meet at 9:00 am** in the main parking lot, 440 Montauk Highway, Great River, this walk covers the 691 acre state park and its riverfront, marshland, specimen trees, and open fields – providing a great habitat for north-bound migrating birds. It's always a great place to find warblers found no where else on Eastern Long Island.

SATURDAY, MAY 11, 2024

Hubbard County Park

Brian Moldashel is leading this walk, but please register with Eileen Schwinn, (beachmed@optonline.net). Meet at the trail head on Red Creek Road, Hampton Bays, this area features pine/oak forest, beetle-ravaged clearings, tidal creeks, high and low salt marsh and Peconic Bay. The walk is approximately 2.5 miles over level – but maybe muddy – trails. A new, exciting area to explore by a leader, Brian, who describes the area as “a bit of a gem off the beaten path!”

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2024

Terrell River County Park

Tom Moran (tjmoran101@gmail.com) – will meet you at the parking area (across from Kaler's Pond, 43 Montauk Highway, Center Moriches. Easy walking trails along wide trails, with over 260 acres through various oak and cedar groves, along the Terrell River, to Moriches Bay. Approximately 2.75 miles, Restroom facilities are across the street at Kaler's Pond.

SATURDAY, MAY 18, 2024

Shoreham Beach, Brookhaven Town Park

with Tom Moran (tjmoran@gmail.com) - TENTATIVE - INFORMATION TO FOLLOW WHEN AVAILABLE

SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2024

MEET AT 12 NOON*

Hunters Garden/ Bald Hill

Eileen Schwinn (beachmed@optonline.net) — is leading this walk which will **begin at 12:00 noon** along Route 51, Northampton. Always a favorite spring walk, this has a late start due to DEC authorized Turkey Hunt Season in the morning. Warblers and other migrating and summer resident/nesting birds are usually vocal and exciting to see in the old woods, and vernal ponds of the wide walking trails of approximately 1.5 miles. We may move to nearby Bald Hill if necessary, with an earlier start time.

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2024

Quogue Wildlife Refuge

Join Gigi Spates for a walk around QWR. Currently on the Board of the Refuge she has been the director and knows all the secret spots the birds may be hiding. Please register with Gigi at gspates@me.com.

SATURDAY, MAY 25, 2024

Manorville Hills

Tom Moran takes the lead for this walk (tjmoran101@gmail.com) – meet him at the first parking area within the park, located on the east side of County Road 111 (Captain Daniel Roe Highway), Manorville. Various trails in various habitats usually host a nice selection of our returning nesting birds among the new growth woods and shrubs. Sometimes hilly, this walk is approximately 2.5 miles.

TUESDAY, MAY 28, 2024

Quogue Wildlife Refuge

Eileen Schwinn (beachmed@optonline.net) leading – meeting in the parking lot, 3 Old Country Road, Quogue. The walk – at this Home of ELIAS – circles the Ice Pond, travels to the North Pond and visits the Chocolate Pudding Pond through new and old woods and streams. There are real changes in the woods, with wide, open spaces due to the clear cuts to hopefully limit the spread of the Southern Pine Beetle. If you haven't walked the trails at QWR you have to join us now! The walk is about 1.5 miles on wide pine-needle pathways.

SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 2024

Joint South Fork Natural History Museum and ELIAS Eric Salzman Memorial Walk

Eileen Schwinn (beachmed@optonline.net) – will meet the group at 377 Bridgehampton-Sag Harbor Turnpike, Bridgehampton, this annual walk around the open fields and edge-lined woods of SoFo offered excellent views of resident nesting warblers and song birds – and sometimes, some interesting bird surprises! Approximately 1.5 miles on wide, neatly mowed paths, with multiple stops to observe and listen, this walk honors the late Eric Salzman, a director of SoFo and long-time friend and mentor to many members of ELIAS, including the leader, Eileen.

Reminder:

The DEC is allowing turkey hunting this May from Sunrise to Noon on certain state owned areas. Please be careful and aware.

The Tradition Continued

Eileen Schwinn

Beginning on January 1, 1954, with five participants, a Christmas Bird Count was established, with the center point located in Manorville, Long Island. Extending from Smiths Point County Park and Cupsogue County Park to Calverton, and from Gabreski (Suffolk County) Airport to Ypank, this Count includes ocean, bay, marshland, ponds, farm fields, wooded area, and massive residential habitat.

The Tradition Continued!! Held on December 27, 2023, the morning started with heavy fog, mild temperatures, light breezes and some light showers, which continued throughout the day. I don't highlight "the misses" – that happens – but I prefer to share the positives of the day, so here goes: This year, 37 participants on 12 field teams, and 4 feeder-watchers, totaled 122 species and 16,385 birds seen. Highlights included: Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Northern Shoveler, Bald Eagle, Willet, Red Knot, Iceland Gull, Black-headed Gull (from a Feeder-watch!), Red-headed Woodpecker, Palm Warbler

and Boat-tailed Grackle. Count Week birds – which might have been seen on Count Day had there not been dense fog

*Nice birds and
great people
made for a successful –
and satisfying day*

throughout the day – included Harlequin Duck, Great Cormorant, and Razorbill. Full details and statistics will be available on the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count website. We had a few last-minute glitches, however, everyone stepped up and the entire area was covered quite well – even tho we had fewer participants than last year. It was a tremendous effort by a wonderful group of people, and all of us at ELIAS should be very proud to be sponsors of this Count!

Nice birds and great people made for a successful – and satisfying day. The

Compilation Dinner, held in Eastport, was greatly appreciate by the 17 who were in attendance, with nearly all teams sending representatives – the socialization and face to face at the end of a long day was almost as enjoyable as the chow! Many thanks go out to Eastern Long Island Audubon Society for providing the catered dinner. Nice birds and great people made for a successful – and satisfying day. And a thanks to the ELIAS Board of Directors for their continued support of the Central Suffolk Christmas Bird Count.

**Save December 27, 2024
for the next Central Suffolk
Christmas
Bird Count!**

Eileen Schwinn
Eastern LI Audubon Society
Compiler, Central Suffolk CBC

SAVE THE DATE

THE ELIAS ANNUAL DINNER

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23RD

At ROCK HILL COUNTRY CLUB, MANORVILLE, NY

WATCH FOR MORE INFORMATION AND INVITATION TO COME



Monday Evening Programs at Quogue Wildlife Refuge

MONDAY EVENING, APRIL 1, 2024, MEET AT 7:00 PM

Reflections on a Transparent Problem: The Window/Bird Strike Issue and What You Can do

PRESENTOR: John Turner

Collisions with windows cause the deaths of hundreds of millions of birds a year in North America, making it the second most significant cause of bird mortality. John Turner will discuss the dimension and details of the problem and provide ideas on ways to address the problem at your home and buildings in your community.

John Turner currently works part-time in the Division of Land Management of the of the Town of Brookhaven involved in the Town's open space and farmland protection program and also serves on a part-time basis as a Conservation Policy Advocate for the Seatuck Environmental Association, working on a variety of wildlife, open space, and water quality issues with specific focus on horseshoe crab and diamondback terrapin protection, reducing bird mortality from window collisions, and water reuse.

John is a co-founder of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society and serves on its board. He is also a founding member of the Long Island Nature Organization (LINO). He is also on the board of the South Fork Natural History Society and the Four Harbors Audubon Society where he is Chair of the Conservation Committee. He also serves as Spokesperson to the Preserve Plum Island Coalition, an alliance working to secure the permanent protection of Plum Island.

*All are welcome at these programs,
no reservations, snacks will be available.*



MONDAY, MAY 6 AT 7:00 PM

Pollinator Gardens to Pollinator Pathways

This talk will explore the importance of pollinators to our ecosystem, including their importance to birds. We'll discuss specific plants that can thrive in our area and talk about the ways we can provide a mosaic of pollinator-friendly gardens that together create a pathway.

Alicia Whitaker is a Master Gardener, 1st VP of the Westhampton Garden Club, and a member of the Eastern Long Island Audubon Society chapter. She is also a leader of the Suffolk Alliance for Pollinators (SAP) for the South Fork

MONDAY, JUNE 3 AT 7:00 PM

Walk Around Quogue Wildlife Refuge

Join us as we take a walk around QWR. Various Board Members will be leading this walk

We should see breeding birds this time of year and hear thier songs. Pine Warblers, Red-wing Blackbirds, Geese and Ducks all are beginning to have young. We hope to catch them feeding the brood.

"Home of the \$1.99 Suet Cake"



Eastern LI's Largest Wild Bird Store

Feathered Friend & Wild Delight Bird Seed
Large Selection of Bird Feeders, Bird Houses & Accessories in Stock

Garden Center – Plants – Organic & Low Impact Remedies
Pet Food & Supplies – Beekeeping – Home Brewing – Canning
Equine – Poultry – Livestock – Animal Feed – Farm & Stable Supplies
Husqvarna Power Sales & Service – BBQ Fill – U-Haul Truck Rentals



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NEW BOARD MEMBERS

ELIAS is happy to welcome three new board members, Janis Hurley, Darlene Massey and Darlene McNeil.

Janis Hurley who lives in Eastport is a wonderful photographer of birds, animals and exotic animals. She has given us a programs on her last African trip. Maybe we can talk her into one more. She just returned from another trip to Africa.

Darlene Massey is a retired science teacher, another talented photographer who also lives in Eastport.

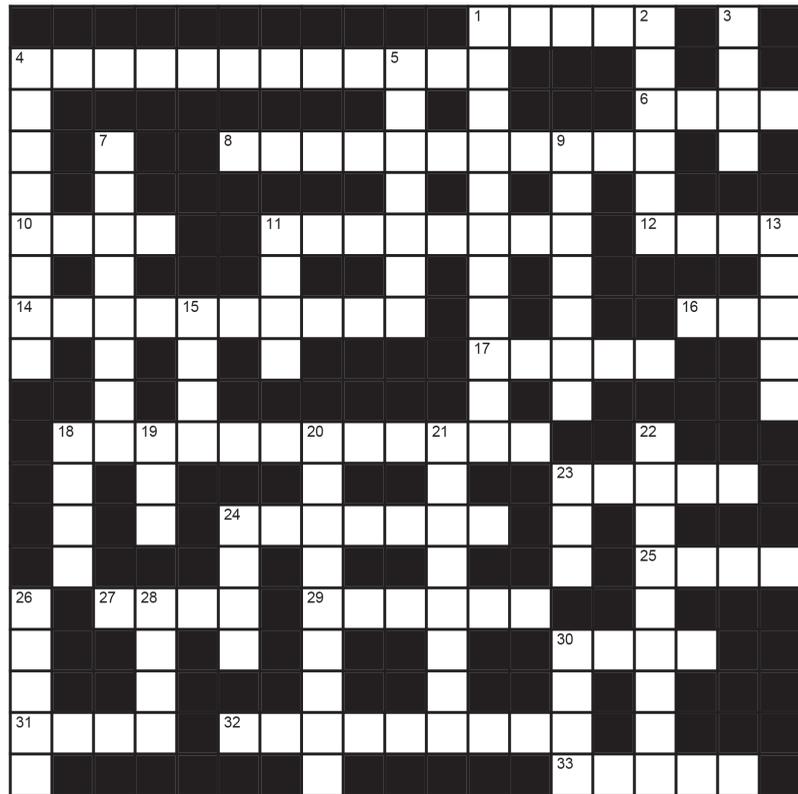
Darlene McNeil (daughter of long time board member John McNeil) is a neo-natal nurse and has worked (and birded) all over the country. She recently gave ELIAS a program on bird banding.

Have you tried BirdCast?

Have you tried Bird Cast? It is part of Cornell's ebird that tracks (via radar) birds as they come north. BirdCast develops and maintains tools that predict and monitor bird migration. These include forecast bird migration maps that predict how much, where and when bird migration will occur, live bird migration maps that show how much, where, and when migration is occurring in real-time, migration alerts to which one can subscribe to learn when intense bird migration will occur, and a dashboard that provides radar-based measurements of nocturnal bird migration at county and state levels. For a primer on weather surveillance radar and its applications to studying and monitoring bird migration, please visit them online <https://birdcast.info>.

Using that information you may be able to use the information to your advantage in knowing what to look for as you plan your birding trips.

Something to do on a Rainy Day Tom Moran (otherwise get out and bird!)



Across

- 1 How you feel after a good day of birding or _____ Egret.
- 4 _____ Warbler; in spring, amazing orange and black face
- 6 _____ Crow, a nest robbing Corvus, ca-ha
- 8 A state that NY Audubon merged with recently or a skulking warbler
- 10 _____ Eagle
- 11 Ring-necked _____
- 12 A bar of soap or a Mourning _____
- 14 _____ Woodpecker
- 16 _____ Harbor; town near Elizabeth Morton NWR.
- 17 Great Blue _____
- 18 Who names a bird after a chief court clerk?! Did you get it at Frank Melville last year?
- 23 _____ Sparrow, pink bill, eye ring
- 24 Small, hovering falcon
- 25 Red-tailed _____
- 27 One of a species named for an instrument played by Louis Armstrong that was seen at Fort Pond last year.
- 29 A word describing the diversity of birds or a rare visiting thrush from the Northwest.
- 30 A Eurasian Green-winged _____ was seen at Heckscher in January.
- 31 An inconsequential conversation or a rare visitor from the Southwest, Yellow-breasted _____
- 32 Pierce Brosnan's first appearance in a James Bond movie, or Common or Barrow's _____
- 33 24 Down, then 33 Across. a wow bird!

Down

- 1 Bird whose colors are both the North and South of the Civil War
- 2 _____ Duck, nice coif.
- 3 In Mrs. Minerva, a 1942 movie, Henry Travers's character develops a flower of this species and names it after the title character. or a Grosbeak that nests in North Fork Preserve.
- 4 NYS bird, the bird of happiness
- 5 _____ Gull, regular in winter at Montauk Inlet.
- 7 What happens when a car hits one, a bit gruesome, sorry, sadly speaking from personal experience!
- 9 Considering what one does to the other, an interesting conflict in a bird name!
- 11 _____ Warbler; a tail pumper
- 13 Bald or Golden
- 15 A wind that might blow some pelagics to be seen from a beach.
- 18 _____ Warbler; when will you see the first of this early spring arriver?
- 19 Symbol of Athena, symbol of wisdom...and she was also the symbol of war
- 20 Good place to hear country music or _____ Warbler.
- 21 _____ Robin.
- 22 The Lucille Ball of ducks.
- 23 The X Files bird of sparrows.
- 24 See 33 Across.
- 26 A good place to see Sanderlings run back and forth.
- 28 Timothy _____, husband of Prunella Scales, Faulty Towers! Or _____ End at Jones Beach
- 30 Where most birds hang out or American _____ Sparrow



The Wren – By Any Name, an Intriguing Bird!

Troglodyte des Forêt

A recent ELIAS program presented by Dianne Taggart, “Our Feathered Friends: Fact, Fiction and Folklore”, inspired me to take a look at one little bird more closely: Usually hard to see but easy to hear, it runs like a mouse among the understory of usually moist, pine-dominated forests, and can be described as a plump, round ball with a short tail, usually held high! Smaller than its more common “cousin” (named Carolina), this brown and tan bird weighs in at between 0.3-0.4 oz., and is only 3.1-4.7 inches from bill to that stubby tail! Although (according to the Cornell Lab site, All About Birds) North and South America have more than 80 species, there is “only one — which occurs in the rest of the world”. My first introduction to this little powerhouse of a noisemaker was one late September afternoon, while sweeping and raking some leaves along my driveway. I was a newbie birder and just couldn’t figure out what was making such a noisy, big fuss right where I was attempting to make a dent in the leaf pile!

If you haven’t guessed by now – the Bird in Question is a Winter Wren! Or, as our British and Euro relatives – and The Bard – call him, The Wren. And even we here in the US had only one Winter Wren to add to our Life List. But, in 2010, that changed! Basically using the Rocky Mountains as the dividing line, the American Ornithological Union decided, based on song, the species was “split”, making the birds in the east, Winter Wrens, the west, Pacific Wrens, and in Europe, the Wren (or Eurasian Wren to those of us on this side of the pond). One of my favorite things about the Winter Wren was its “former” name – pre-split. Check any old birding field guide – the Winter Wren is a Troglodytes Troglodytes! Being called a Troglodyte by some of my more computer-savvy family members, it’s the only Latin name of a bird I can remember! The word “wren” possibly comes from the Anglo-Saxon “wroene”, meaning lascivious. And female members of the British navy are still called Wrens, from Women’s Royal

Naval Service, NOT because they look or behave like the bird with that name!

So what in particular made me spend the better part of a day after Dianne’s program, exploring the little bird that Shakespeare mentions in a number of his

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*The Wren, the Wren,
the King of all Birds,
St Stephen’s Day
was caught in the furze
Give us a penny to bury the Wren.
If you haven’t a penny,
a halfpenny will do.
If you haven’t a halfpenny,
God Bless You*

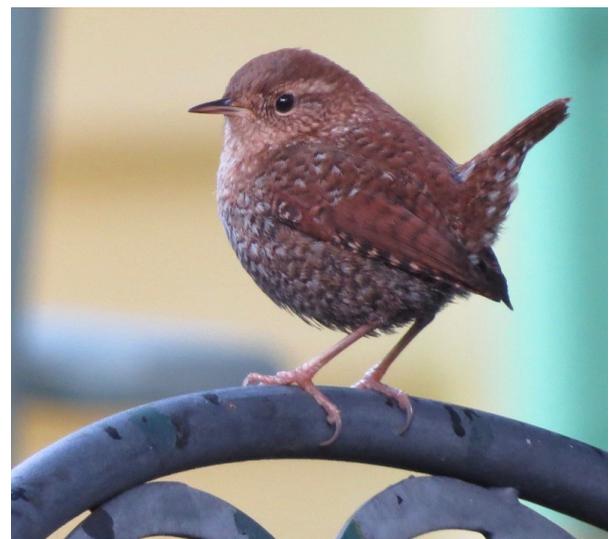
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plays? Why, the folklore associated with the Wren! Called the “King of Birds”, the Wren supposedly outwitted an Eagle in a contest to fly the highest. How? By perching on the back of the eagle to gain height, and then flying off when the eagle tired! Sneaky little bird, that Wren!

But there’s also a sadly dark side to this European Wren – You might remember even in our own history, the day after Christmas, Saint Stephen’s Day, our folks would go out and have massive “shoots”, killing as many birds as (in) humanly possible, stacking them high. Hey, Christmas Bird Count??? Remember why THAT was started???? Yes, Saint Stephen’s Day Hunts! Well, in Great Britain, where the day is also called “Wren Day”, a more gruesome activity took place as recently as the mid-20th century. Traditionally, men and boys would flush and catch a Wren, kill it, and decorate it with holly and ribbons, and parade from house to house, singing and begging for donations. One “song” went, “The

Wren, the Wren, the King of all Birds, St Stephen’s Day was caught in the furze (a type of dense shrub).....Give us a penny to bury the Wren. If you haven’t a penny, a halfpenny will do. If you haven’t a halfpenny, God Bless You”. Sound familiar? After begging, a mock funeral would be held. On the Isle of Man, when a donation was collected, the donor would receive a feather from the Wren – as an amulet to “guard against supernatural harm and witchcraft”. The tradition continues in some communities, but, thankfully, a toy or symbolic Wren is carried around, occasionally by men and boys dressed in straw masks and clothing.

Poor Wren – no wonder they are difficult to see both in GB as well as here in the US! Well, where can we see Winter Wren here on Long Island??? Try the Quogue Wildlife Refuge! Near the Chocolate Pudding Pond, along the boardwalk near the railroad track, most Springs, a tiny, brown ball with an upward-pointing tail, will be hiding out! The habitat is perfect and the bird has been as reliable (as reliable as most birds can be) if you are patient! By the way, according to All About Birds, “per unit weight, the Winter Wren delivers its song with 10 times more power than a crowing rooster”. If he starts calling, you won’t be able to miss hearing it! Seeing it, well, that’s another story!



Winter Wren Photo: Troglodyte des Forêt

Seal Cruise (*Birds on the side*)

Eileen Schwinn, *Field Trip Chair*

ELIAS members joined with CRESLI (Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island) and ventured out onto Shinnecock Bay for a Seal-watch Cruise! The weather wasn't optimal (and the "low" tide wasn't that low!!). In addition to some up-close and personal views of the hauled-out seals on the sandbar, and the seals swimming around near the vessel, a good selection of birds were seen by most! A copy of the list I was able to put together at the end of the trip follows – as always, not everyone saw everything. (Like fleeting appearance of a Snowy Egret at the dock as we were leaving). Sometimes it just depended on which side of the boat you were standing on!

ELIAS will be offering another field trip in April – details as to when and where will be posted on our website once selected. If you are on our Constant Contact list you will receive a notice.

Thanks to all who took the trip again for supporting CRESLI – and perhaps a Whale Watch (and Pelagic Bird Watch!) is in your future this Spring or Summer!

The list of 21 species spotted:

- 18 Brant
- 18 Canada Goose
- 2 Mute Swan - Dock
- 4 American Black Duck
- 1 Greater/Lesser Scaup
- 120 Common Eider
- 2 White-winged Scoter
- 4 Black Scoter
- 50 Long-tailed Duck
- 8 Bufflehead - Dock
- 4 Red-breasted Merganser
- 1 American Oystercatcher
- 4 Herring Gull
- 3 Great Black-backed Gull
- 3 Common Loon
- 1 Great Blue Heron

and in the parking lot:

- 1 Turkey Vulture
- 1 Sharp-shinned Hawk
- 3 American Crow
- 2 Fish Crow
- 2 Common Raven

Dr Artie Kopelman (CRESLI), top right, presented a 20 minute summary of the identification and research of seals over the years.



A Common Loon checks us out. A Common Eider, an eclipse male was among the Eider flock. Don't you just love those little Buffleheads bouncing along in the waves. Photos: Bob Gunning. Seal photo: Tom Moran



A year in the life of an Atlaser

Julie Hart

Project Coordinator

New York Breeding Bird Atlas III

New York Natural Heritage Program

The purpose of NY BBA III is to assess the distribution and abundance of the breeding birds of New York State in the period 2020-2024 to allow valid comparisons with prior and future NY BBAs and inform the conservation of birds and their habitats.

As we cycle through the seasons each year, so changes the breeding calendar. Some birds nest in the cold, dark winter, while others await the last hot rays of summer. Hopefully your foray into atlasing has helped tune you into the seasonal changes that birds use to tell them when it's time to start nesting. Journey through a year of atlasing.

European Starlings nest early and often, usually having several broods each year. Photo by Adam Zahm/Macaulay Library.

Great Horned Owls are our earliest reliable nester, starting their courtship duets as early as November and beginning nesting in January. In the first few months of the year, other large raptors like Bald Eagles and Common Ravens initiate nesting, followed by the smaller corvids and owls. Urban birds that can nest near warm heating vents and other artificially warm locales also start nesting while there is still snow on the ground, birds such as House Sparrows, European Starlings, and Rock Pigeons.

Most of our forest residents, like chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and some of the woodpeckers, start nesting in April and can survive early cold snaps by holing up in their cavity nests. At the same time, our forests and fields are enriched by the drumming of Ruffed Grouse, the peenting and twittering aerial displays of American Woodcock, and the whirring of male Spruce Grouse as they perform their flutter-jumps to attract mates.

Things start to heat up in late April and the first part of May, literally. The soil thaws, rivers come to life, and the leaves start unfurling. Some of the larger, hardier waterbirds start nesting as soon as the waters thaw, such as swans, Canada

Goose, Mallard, Great Blue Heron, and Sandhill Crane. Coastal areas of Long Island warm up sooner than the rest of the state, and early returning birds take advantage, such as American Oystercatcher and Clapper Rail. Our trusty harbinger of spring, the Red-winged Blackbird, can be heard from every patch of reeds in the state by now.

Great Blue Herons start building their nests before the leaves are back on the trees.

As spring advances, insects begin to emerge, which means there is more food available to support returning migrants. By mid-May, the migrant hawks, swallows, wrens, sparrows, and flycatchers have returned, and warbler migration hits its peak. By the end of the month, rails, nightjars, and thrushes fill out the avian soundscape. Males arrive first to stake a claim to the best territories so that when females return a week or two later they can quickly scout out a good place to build a nest. They get down to business gathering nesting material right away.

In the first couple weeks of June there is a lot of bird song filling the air, but it slowly diminishes as they lay eggs and start incubating. This is followed by a lull in the breeding season, kind of a calm before the storm, that breaks in late June and early July. There is a rush of chatter, not of bird song, but of call notes between pairs communicating to each other as they frantically try to find enough food to feed their young. We as atlasers feel this rush, too. It's a glorious time to be out watching bird behaviors. Birds are so busy collecting food to quiet their incessantly begging young, that they pay little notice to us interlopers.

During an invasion year, both Red and White-winged Crossbills may attempt to nest twice, once in Jan/Feb and again in Jul/Aug. And then it's suddenly done. We are left with a feeling of loss as we watch the birds we've gotten to know so well disperse or congregate in large flocks. At the same time, some birds are just getting started! Just as the warblers waited until there were insects to return north, and just as the hawks timed their



European Starling with nesting material

nesting to coincide with maximum fledgling song birds to feed their young, other species were waiting for conditions to be right for raising their young. Cedar Waxwings were waiting for bountiful summer fruits while American Goldfinches were waiting for thistle, aster, and sunflower seeds to be available. Red and White-winged Crossbills, if they have dropped down for a visit from Canada, wait to take advantage of soft, fresh cones on the trees. Birds with second and third broods can also be seen feeding young into late summer.

Fall is pretty quiet for atlasers. Birds migrate south, the leaves change color, and mammals get ready to hibernate. But one bird, the Barn Owl, has been known to nest in every month of the year!

Before you know it, the days shorten, the first snow falls, and Great Horned Owls delight us with their evening duets and it starts all over again. Now that you have witnessed a full breeding calendar firsthand, you can enjoy atlasing in the new year with an even deeper appreciation.

[This article first appeared in *New York Birders*, a publication of the New York State Ornithological Association.]

To learn more about the atlas and submit data, visit: ebird.org/atlasny

SNOWIES

Where are you?

Long Islanders were not the only ones wondering what happened to our Snowy Owls. There were very few spotted here this year. I did not see or hear of any being seen in our area. This research and some of the other research being done by SNOWstorm is beginning to explain why. This article was written by Scott Weidensaul for SNOWstorm, an organization he helped create. Editor

It's impossible to overstate the importance of small rodents, especially lemmings, to snowy owls. Although snowies eat a remarkable variety of prey during the winter, from voles, muskrats and rabbits to waterbirds like ducks, gulls and occasionally even birds as large as snow geese and red-throated loons, during the summer breeding season in the Arctic their nesting fortunes are largely tied to rodents, particularly lemmings. In a nutshell, snowy owls rarely nest successfully — or may not even try nesting at all — if there isn't a population peak among these rodents, which like many small mammals undergo periodic boom-and-bust cycles roughly every four years. Many other Arctic predators, from foxes to rough-legged hawks to weasels, also depend on lemmings, which are foundational to the food chain. Big snowy owl irruptions in winter usually follow a lemming boom and a productive owl nesting season.

That's why reports in recent years from across the global Arctic and subarctic that the timing of such cycles has been changing, or that the lemming cycles have collapsed altogether, has been very worrying. That news has come as some researchers have argued that other population cycles, ranging from those in several kinds of boreal-forest grouse to snowshoe hares to outbreaks of a particular defoliating caterpillar in Switzerland for which records go back to the Middle Ages, have been slowing or stopping altogether, possibly due to the

effects of climate change.

In the case of lemmings, the concern is what effect changing winter weather has on the animals' ability to breed. Lemming populations peak in summer only if the rodents can begin to breed successfully through the winter, shielded from the Arctic cold beneath an insulating layer of snow. (This world beneath the drifts is known as the subnivean environment, a surprisingly benign place where a tubby rodent can easily tunnel, feed on tundra

Perhaps most intriguingly, the data also showed periodic fading and re-emergence of lemming cycles, cycles within cycles that did not appear to be correlated with winter weather effects. Nor did they seem to be getting worse with time.

vegetation, build tidy grass nests and start producing lots and lots of babies in midwinter.)

If early winter is unusually warm, though, that thick snowpack may not form, or it may thaw and refreeze; midwinter rain-on-snow events may also bring water to ground level that then freezes, sealing off food. The concern is that slowing or collapsing lemming cycles, which have been reported from Fennoscandia, parts of Greenland and Russia, may be a reflection of these changes. And if lemming cycles slow or vanish, that would not bode well for Arctic food webs, including top predators like snowy owls.

So a newly published analysis of global lemming cycles, coauthored by 24 scientists from nine countries encompassing the circumpolar Arctic (many of whom are colleagues of ours in the International Snowy Owl Working Group), caught our attention last week. Appearing in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* and titled, "Taking the Beat of the Arctic: Are Lemming Population Cycles Changing Due to

A Norway Lemming Ventures from its snow tunnel.



THE OSPREY

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