The Broadwing

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Message from the Editor
May 2024

Dear Members and Friends,

The Montclair Bird Club will be celebrating a milestone—our 105th anniversary—at an in-person meeting on June 12. Please plan to be there if you can.

This issue features articles written by club members. I hope that when you read them you consider writing your own stories and sharing experiences with birding or any other interactions with nature. For example, I was stopped from birding one day because a moose blocked one trail and a bear occupied another. Let me know if you think this warrants a paragraph or two.

If you're ready to be published in the Broadwing, send me a note and I'll answer questions and motivate you with a deadline.

Sandy

MontclairBirdClub100@Gmail.com

In This Issue

Next club meeting: Wednesday, May 8, 2024
Virtual Bird Walk: Thursday, May 30, 2024

Unknown maker

Hair Ornament

c.1905
Black and peach-coloured feathers on black silk chiffon

This ornament is similar to that worn by 'Isa' Boit in her portrait nearby, and rendered by Sargent in exuberant flickers of paint. Ornaments, hats and entire garments made of feathers – or even whole birds – had been prized for centuries around the world. They became immensely popular in Europe and the Americas in the late 1800s: 'There are estimated to be about 10,000,000 ladies of bird-wearing age in the United States today,' announced one 1897 journal. The toll fashion took upon nature became a rallying cry for reform.

Fashion Museum Bath. X87166

Science

The hidden rule for flight feathers and how it could reveal which dinosaurs could fly

by Field Museum

Birds can fly—at least, most of them can. Flightless birds like penguins and ostriches have evolved lifestyles that don't require flight. However, there's a lot that scientists don't know about how the wings and feathers of flightless birds differ from those of their airborne cousins.

In a new study in the journal *PNAS*, scientists examined hundreds of birds in museum collections and discovered a suite of feather characteristics shared by all flying birds. These "rules" provide clues as to how the dinosaur ancestors of modern birds first evolved the ability to fly, and which dinosaurs were capable of flight.

Not all dinosaurs evolved into birds, but all living birds are dinosaurs. Birds are members of the group of dinosaurs that survived when an asteroid hit the Earth 66 million years ago. Long before the asteroid hit, some of the members of a group of dinosaurs called Penneraptorans began to evolve feathers and the ability to fly.

Members of the Penneraptoran group began to develop feathers before they were able to fly; the original purpose of feathers might have been for insulation or to attract mates. For instance, Velociraptor had feathers, but it couldn't fly.

The full article: Phys.org, Hidden Flight Feathers.

New Jersey Earthquake 2024
Deb DeSalvo

On the morning of April 5, 2024, Jason and I sat down at our dining room table in Tewksbury for a meeting with four colleagues from the NJ Foodshed Alliance. We were going to discuss grain growing and bringing locavore farming back to this part of New Jersey. Just as we began our conversation in earnest, we were silenced by an excruciatingly loud roar. The table started to bounce— a ten-foot-long table of solid white oak that weighs well over 400 pounds. The floor beneath us shook violently, and all six of us immediately stood up, staring at each other with perplexed looks on our faces and fear in our eyes. I had the instinct to run or climb under the table, but there really was nowhere to go.

The entire house was shaking as if a freight train were rumbling through our living room. A glass vial fell from the mantel to the floor and shattered. Our cats ran under the coffee table with their tails between their legs. It lasted between 5 and 25 seconds: none of us could remember with certainty. Even as it was happening, we were shouting to each other over the din. "This is an earthquake!! A really big one!"

Fifteen minutes later, we learned that a magnitude 4.8 earthquake had struck in the heart of Tewksbury, NJ, and its epicenter was just 1.3 miles from our farm.

This was not the first earthquake I had experienced. As a child in San Francisco, I experienced a magnitude 3.6 earthquake. That earlier quake felt like riding an inner tube down a river, gently rolling and much quieter. This one was much stronger, more violent, and jarring. The sound of the earth trembling still resonates: that could be because our area has had approximately 60 aftershocks since April 5. No, that is not a typo. Sixty!

Most of these aftershocks have been little rumbles, like a distant truck or thunder. The sound is accompanied by a little tremor, but nothing like the explosive jolting of the original earthquake. There have been a few larger aftershocks, though, including one of magnitude 3.8 the same day as the big one *and whose epicenter was less than half mile from our home*! There have been a couple in the high two's as well.

Experts agree that there are more aftershocks in regions where earthquakes are shallower in the earth's crust, as this one was). Those aftershocks are helpful in releasing built-up pressure.

Once the deafening sound of the moving earth subsided, Jason, our four companions, and I joked about day-drinking, and had a difficult time focusing on our meeting. Our phones started to ding and ding and ding. Family members were reaching out; friends from across the globe were texting, asking if we were okay, and remarking that Tewksbury was on the map! Our township of just 5,800 people was at the center of this tremendous and historic event.

The daughter of our elderly neighbor texted from Ireland to ask me to check on her mother. I called her but she didn't pick up, so I got in my car and drove down our dirt road half a mile to her farm to see if all was okay. When I arrived, she was just coming out of the barn, waving to me. At 83 years young, she is an inspiration to Jason and me. She still farms her own land and takes care of about two dozen cows and sheep. Her barn was built in the 1800s, and I breathed a huge

sigh of relief to see that she was alive and well and that the barn was still standing.

"What was that?" she asked, with a smile on her face.

I answered her with a laugh and said, "God was angry about something!"

We spoke for a few minutes; I took a selfie of us and sent it to her daughter, who was relieved to find that her mom was still in one piece. We said goodbye and I drove back home to join Jason, and we resumed our meeting with the people from the Foodshed Alliance. Every few minutes, though, one of us would break the conversation with a sigh of relief and a pause. We were literally and figuratively shaken.

Afterwards, we invited our four (now) friends to join in planting a small plot of Kamut wheat, a grain not typically grown in our region. Our friend and regenerative farmer extraordinaire, Bob Quinn (for a wonderful and optimistic read, check out his book *Grain by Grain*), had sent us a small quantity of seed to see what it would do here. We'd planted a tiny test plot last fall, and now were planning on planting our spring plot. We thought that having our Foodshed friends help us after the meeting would be a wonderful gesture. Planting seed, making things grow, and putting our hands together in the earth's soil after a huge earthquake also seemed essential and cathartic. And restorative. And life-affirming. So around noon, we wrapped up our meeting and went out to the field and planted four rows of Kamut wheat.

The rest of the day was a blur until the large aftershock around 6:00 pm. Again, Jason and I were at our table. This time, the roar and rumbling lasted only a few seconds. Still, it was surprising, and made me nervous. Just when and where the next earthquake or aftershock would take place was on my mind. I was quite jumpy for the next several days. And after each aftershock, I felt a rush of adrenaline and had the urge to crawl under a table, just like one of my cats.

Thirteen days later, I am used to the aftershocks and can even reflect on the extraordinariness of the event. How lucky we were that no real damage occurred. A few cosmetic cracks appeared in the walls—we'll leave at least one of them as a conversation piece. And most of the artwork and photographs on our walls were askew. Our water turned brown for a day, but soon thereafter returned to its clear and delicious self.

It could have been *much* worse. And we may still experience a more significant earthquake, but since we can neither predict nor prepare for one, we may as well enjoy going outside, planting our plants, and looking to the skies for solace.

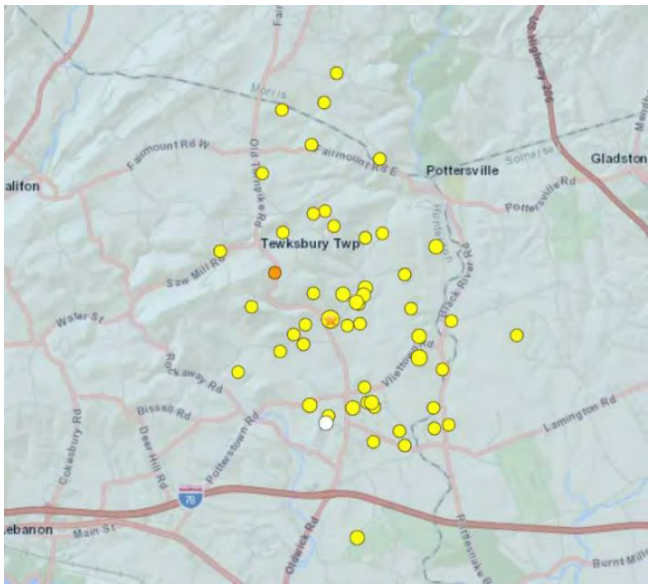
The incredible number of birds that share this little place on earth with us seemed completely unfazed by any of this!

From the US Geological Survey website: Interesting descriptions and explanations of our earthquake

The April 5, 2024, M 4.8 earthquake near Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, occurred as a result of oblique reverse and strike-slip faulting at shallow depths in the crust. Although this event did not occur near a plate boundary, such "intraplate" earthquakes can and do occur. While this earthquake is relatively small globally, earthquakes of this magnitude are commonly widely felt in the eastern United States because of efficient seismic wave propagation in the region. Earthquakes in the eastern US are infrequent but not unexpected. Since 1950, 40 other earthquakes of magnitude 3 and larger have occurred within 250 km of today's earthquake. Over that time range, the April 5, 2024, earthquake is the largest. Within 500 km of the April 5 earthquake, 13 earthquakes M 4.5 and larger have been recorded since 1950, the largest the August 23, 2011, M 5.8 Mineral Virginia earthquake, which caused substantial damage and was felt throughout the eastern US. The April 5, 2024, earthquake occurred in a region where faults had previously been identified and may be reactivated at any time. (Courtesy of the USGS)

At such well-studied plate boundaries as the San Andreas fault system in California, scientists can often determine the name of the specific fault responsible for an earthquake. East of the Rocky Mountains, this is rarely the case. New York City, Philadelphia, and Wilmington are far from the nearest plate boundaries, which are in the center of the Atlantic Ocean and in the Caribbean Sea. The urban corridor is laced with known faults, but numerous smaller or deeply buried faults remain undetected. Even the known faults are poorly located at earthquake depths. Accordingly, few, if any, earthquakes in the urban corridor can be linked to named faults. It is difficult to determine if a known fault is still active and could slip and cause an earthquake. As in most other areas east of the Rockies, the best guide to earthquake hazards in the New York–Philadelphia–Wilmington urban corridor is the earthquakes themselves. (Courtesy of the USGS)

The map of the location of the original earthquake (in orange) and the numerous aftershocks. Our home is the little red dot.



We also experienced a short, but intense earthquake on March 14, 2024, at around 3:00 pm. That one lasted only a few seconds and was magnitude 2.2. Both Jason and I thought one of the quarries in this area had had a nasty explosion. Many of our neighbors called us, and there was a flurry of phone calls to the township police. By 5:00 pm, it was determined to have been an earthquake.

Migrant Trap
by Æneas Faber
XIV

"Well, it's a mixed answer. His behavior on the big day to the contrary, Bob does care about the club, and you know what a unique resource this collection is, Phoebe; so personally, and as a birder, he will definitely be impressed. But Robert A. Lenquist, Esq., as your attorney, is going to have an awfully hard time demonstrating that you and your father have been pouring money down a rathole for the last however many years. It's hard to say what a full set of Audubon might go for at auction nowadays, but the rest of the library is going to be worth nearly a hundred thousand dollars by itself."

"I hadn't thought it would be quite that much. But I must admit that Bob's plan seemed a bit far-fetched to me from the start. These aren't just any old books, and he knows that." Phoebe bit the head off a fresh-baked whip-poor-will and poured me a cup of coffee. "Grasping at straws, I guess."

"Well, it was worth a try. Don't worry, Phoebe, I'm sure the lawyers will come up with another way."

We finished our lunch in silence. Phoebe drank her coffee while I checked my calculations one last time.

"I think that's about it. There are just a couple of titles I still need to check; do you mind if I leave the books on the table here?"

Phoebe's face tightened briefly; she smiled apologetically and said, "More and more I believe in the genetic component of eccentricity. My father's one rule was that the books go back on the shelves, in their proper order, at the end of the day. And that's a rule I've continued to enforce. Indulge me, Andy, and let's put the books back where they belong—just make a note of which ones you need to look

at again and you're welcome to come by whenever you'd like. You must think I'm old and sick *and* silly, but it just makes me feel better."

"Of course, no problem." Phoebe was visibly relieved as I returned the books to their places. "I'll just mark them on my list and try to do a little quick research this evening or tomorrow. And tonight I'll put these figures together with whatever Dorothy has come up with today; we should have a final report for you by tomorrow. Should I bring it by here, or take it straight to Bob?"

"Oh, just drop it in the mail to Cybil down at Bob's office; she'll know which of the lawyers is handling the details. But if you think of it, though, you could bring a copy along for me on the Thursday morning walk. I really am grateful, Andy."

"Not at all, Phoebe, not at all. It was a pleasure to have a chance to look at so many really fine books all at once. And thank you for lunch: the food was nearly as good as the company."

"Nice of you to say, Andy. Now, though, let's see about your honorarium. Do you generally charge by the hour or by the number of books when you're doing an appraisal? And don't forget to add in Dorothy's time. Just send the bill to Bob with the report, and you should have a check by the end of the week—or, knowing Lenquist, Little, and King, cash by the end of the day."

"No, no, I couldn't possibly accept anything for helping you out today. I consider the appraisal a favor to a friend, or, if you'd rather, I suppose ultimately a contribution to the club. Any cookies left?"

Phoebe handed me a crispy anhinga. "All right, Andy, but I do feel bad about taking you away from the shop all day. Are you sure there isn't anything …."

"Well, I suppose that if you really want to spend some money, there is the Ridgway matter."

Phoebe laughed and walked across to the shelf holding the major North American handbooks: the pioneering standards of Wilson and Coues, Palmer's abortive first volumes, and neat binders filled with the latest installments of the new *Birds of America*. In the very center of the shelf stood the eleven monumental volumes by the early twentieth century's most important American ornithologist, Robert Ridgway, their quiet dignity marred only by the garish appearance of Phoebe's volume 5. For some reason, old Mr. Miller had bought this volume separately; it must have been a used copy—badly used—and it had obviously been rebound in, I guessed, the late 1930s. But instead of matching it to its companions, whatever miscreant was responsible for this binding had selected the dingiest of dimpled blue buckram, with a shadowy pattern of pale purple diamonds across the boards; I could barely look at the book without smelling the waxed floors and musty air of my elementary school's library, where such a binding would have been right at home. It just wasn't right to hide Ridgway's considerable light under such a bushel, and many times I had heard my father urge Mr. Miller to have the entire set redone in matching—by which he meant "tasteful"—bindings, an admonition I had repeated myself more than once to Phoebe.

To be continued

“Hope” is the thing with feathers

By Emily Dickinson

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

A Bird, came down the Walk –

By Emily Dickinson

A Bird, came down the Walk -
He did not know I saw -
He bit an Angle Worm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then, he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass -
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass -

He glanced with rapid eyes,
That hurried all abroad -
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought,
He stirred his Velvet Head. -

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb,
And he unrolled his feathers,
And rowed him softer Home -

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam,
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon,
Leap, plashless as they swim.

In Search of The Southern Cassowary
by
Hillary Leonard

I didn't really understand what I was asking of my friend Jason when we agreed I'd come up to Townsville, Queensland, where he and his wife, Kate, had been living since just before the pandemic. When we were discussing things to do during my brief visit, I casually asked over text, "What about a cassowary?" I had been looking at a map of Queensland and saw that "not too far" from Townsville was something called the Cassowary Coast, so I figured maybe cassowaries were rather common and easy to see in that general area owing to their big size and the fact that an entire coast was named for them.

Apparently I was mistaken in my assumptions about the ease of sighting a solitary, territorial rainforest dweller classed as endangered in Australia. Scientists and conservationists are not entirely sure how many cassowaries remain in their habitat of tropical northern Queensland. I've read estimates that anywhere from about 800 to 4,000 or 5,000 individuals remain (southern cassowaries are also found in Papua New Guinea). Threats to Australian cassowaries are many. They are suffering from habitat loss and fragmentation (remember that they are solitary and territorial, with each bird occupying a range of several square kilometers). They are frequently run over by cars while darting across the road. Dogs are also considered a threat as are, if somewhat less so, wild pigs. Cyclones have been known to kill dozens at a time while also destroying their forest dwelling places, which winds up bringing cassowaries into close contact with humans as they seek food and survival. The reality is that people with limited amounts of time in Cassowary Country are not guaranteed to see one and often go home empty-handed.

Lucky for me, Jason and Kate know this part of Queensland quite well and are fond of outdoor adventures that include hiking and wildlife observation. They knew just the spot to likely see cassowaries. But it did require a drive. Even luckier for me, they had just got a new SUV and were up for a road trip north into the wet tropics.

Overnight accommodations were booked, bags were packed, and the Esky cooler was stocked with ice and enough food and wine to last us through lunch the next day. We set off around 10:00 am for the leisurely journey north up the Bruce Highway to Etty Bay Caravan Park, where apparently "the cassowaries roam." We knew we were in Cassowary Country when we saw the crossing signs warning drivers to slow down for them. We pulled into the park around 4:30 pm, and behold, a southern cassowary was waiting for us!

At the end of March, the Australian tropics are starting to come out of the rainy summer season and into the dry season. You wouldn't know it by the weather we had. It was quite rainy and steamy, so after being in an air-conditioned car for over five hours, my camera lens immediately fogged up when we came upon the cassowary, meaning that my first photos of this amazing bird were with my mobile phone, which turned out to be fine because the bird was just calmly sitting on the ground

next to a vehicle. And they are huge, so a mobile phone camera is actually just fine.

Just how huge is a cassowary? Males weigh in at about 120 pounds, and females are a bit larger at about 170 pounds; they can be anywhere from 4.5 to 5.5 feet tall. They are the third largest bird in the world after ostriches and emus, and only the ostrich exceeds them in weight. After observing this resting bird for a while, I went into my container-cum-accommodation to unpack and clean off my camera lens so it would be ready for action.

As luck would have it, the cassowary got up from its rest and went on a walkabout, foraging for palm fruits that had fallen to the ground from the trees above thanks to flocks of metallic starlings. Cassowaries are frugivores, and are considered a keystone species because of their diet and a digestive process that spreads seeds far and wide in the rainforest. According to some studies, cassowaries disperse the seeds of 238 different rainforest plant species. Because of their roaming habits, cassowaries' seed dispersal also promotes diversity by moving seeds far away from their relative plants. Some plants, like the cassowary plum, rely exclusively on the cassowary to spread their seeds, which are too large for smaller creatures to move. Sadly, a challenge for conservationists is the reliance cassowaries have come to enjoy on humans as a source of food. The cassowary I saw certainly spent some time at the camper park bins looking for scraps, and also knew enough to look for food in open cars. Jason and Kate, experts in bush travel, had removed our food from the car, so this cassowary had only a brief look around.

Photo by Jason Delisky. Note large seeds in scat.

As far as being bad-tempered, cassowaries have a reputation that precedes them, and they can be quite dangerous when provoked. Their powerful legs are capable of debilitating kicks, and they have a very sharp talon on one toe of each foot. These talons can do some serious damage. While a cassowary is foraging or attending its young, it is best to give it some space, so we did not chase it away from our car and maintained some distance from it in the park. This particular cassowary ignored people and focused on foraging.

The name cassowary is derived from two Papuan words, “kasu,” meaning horned, and “weri,” meaning head. The casque at the top of the cassowary’s head is one of its many distinguishing features. Science is not entirely sure of its function. Some think it enables the birds to hear the low-frequency grunts and calls of other, distant cassowaries. Others think it’s for defense or to facilitate pushing through dense rainforest.

The cassowary is culturally significant to the aboriginal people who are the traditional owners of the lands in tropical northern Queensland. Some aboriginal people refer to the cassowary as Gunduy/Gundulu, and have lived with this bird for thousands of years since Dreamtime.

The cassowary is a ratite, related to other birds that have a flat breastbone without a keel, which prevents them from flying. Other birds closely related to the cassowary are the emu, ostrich, rhea, and kiwi. It is also thought that while all birds descend from a dinosaur ancestor, the cassowary and other ratites are more closely related to avian dinosaurs. Maybe just ponder the casque and the foot of the cassowary for a minute to make that connection.

I was fortunate to have two encounters with the southern cassowary, evening and morning, which aligns to their crepuscular nature. But our time in Etty Bay came to a close. It had been a truly unforgettable experience to see this bird but even more important was the time I spent with Jason and Kate traversing Queensland, battling rain, enjoying a sausage sizzle, hiking to waterfalls, and spending quality time together. As we packed the car, we made one final scan for the cassowary, but alas, it had retreated back into its hidden home in the thick rainforest.

Nebraska with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours: March 2024
by Rick Wright

Read more about Rick's VENT tours here.

What can I say? The experience of birding the Great Plains in March truly is ineffable—there are no words. How to describe the all-enveloping roar of the evening flight of the Sandhill Cranes, how to capture the ludicrous solemnity of the Greater Prairie Chickens on their lek, how to encapsulate the good spirits and good company of our outings and our meals together? Can't be done. Memories like these cannot be reduced to words.

We started making those memories right away on this year's tour. After a first chance to get to know each other over an excellent Mexican dinner, we drove just around the corner to one of the Midwest's best and best-known birding sites, Lake Manawa. Manawa, created by the devastating Great Flood of the Missouri River in 1881, was made an Iowa state park in 1932, after the usual interstate boundary disputes over the large, shallow oxbow lake were settled.

The next morning found us on what is now the other, the Nebraska, side of the river, birding the floodplain of Fontenelle Forest. At some 1,600 acres, this privately owned and managed woodland is one of the most significant remnants of the Carolinian forest that once extended in a continuous narrow tongue up the Missouri. The southeastern character of the local birdlife was obvious as we listened to a singing Carolina Wren and watched Red-bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers in the beaver-killed cottonwoods. We enjoyed our first fantastic views of American Tree Sparrows here, and the fine Harris's Sparrow seen by some of us left no doubt that we were in fact on the Great Plains.

And then it was time for us to head west. Our greatly anticipated first Sandhill Cranes appeared in the air and on the fields just as we passed from Hamilton to Hall County, and their numbers only increased as we crossed channel after channel of the Platte River on our way to Kearney. We settled in to our hotel, then walked across the street to an excellent dinner before piling back into the vehicle for our first evening encounter with the roost-bound cranes. As we stood on the Fort Kearny footbridge, untold thousands of huge gray birds, in small family groups and in massive concentrations, flew over our heads and away from the sunset. Birding may be all about geography, but in this case, we found ourselves transported across time, too, back to an era when examples of nearly incredible abundance like this could be found across the continent. All told, we spent three mornings and an evening with the cranes, watching them from some of the famous viewpoints along the river and slowly driving back roads for upclose views of feeding, loafing, and dancing birds. Every visit was different, and every visit equally memorable.

Today, the vast flocks of pigeons and endless herds of bison survive only in books, but the springtime staging of migrant Sandhill Cranes here on the Platte remains one of the most spectacular wildlife phenomena on earth.

Our time searching through the crane horde turned up many other exciting birds, of course. Our arrival in the Platte Valley matched the beginning of Western Meadowlark migration, and there were times when we seemed to be in the middle of a flock of bright yellow-breasted singers. None was louder than the meadowlark that perched above us while we were watching the dance of the Greater Prairie Chickens in Red Willow County. This proud individual had obviously investigated the acoustic properties of metal stock trailers, and took full advantage of them to broadcast his aspirations and availability to the wider meadowlark world—threatening to deafen us in the meantime. The rich, low-pitched warble of Nebraska's official state bird is one of the most heartbreakingly beautiful sounds of the prairie spring, excelled only by another grassland vocalist, the prairie chicken.

For some of us, our morning on Angus Garey's ranch just south of McCook was the first experience of dawn on a grouse lek; for others, it was a repeat visit to old friends. For all of us, though, these two hours among the chickens will long be among our most cherished nature memories. Eight males and two vaguely bored females were on the lek, often just a few feet from our admiring eyes and cameras, remarkably close prolonged views of birds so many observers know only as beating wings headed into the distance. The presence of the hens inspired the males to put forth their best efforts, and the crowing, clucking, and mad leaping made this one of the best dawn performances I had ever seen. After the birds flew off, we stood on the lek ourselves for a while, admiring the view and soaking up the clear clean air of the springtime prairie.

A hearty breakfast followed, for us and no doubt for the birds, too. Sehnert's Bakery, one of McCook's oldest businesses, has been transformed into a James Beard award–winning café, a bit of what I imagine must be like Brooklyn transported to the shortgrass of western Nebraska. Omelets, breakfast burritos, Delaware doughnuts: who would expect to encounter those words, let alone those objects, way out here? Even better than the delicious food was sitting with Carol and Angus to hear their stories, their thoughts, and their ideas about what has turned their small city into one of the most livable on the Great Plains.

It was shaping up to be a beautiful day, the warmest of a series of comfortably warm days. After a break at our hotel, we drove the short distance to Medicine Creek State Recreation Area, its centerpiece Strunk Lake (Harry D. Strunk was the founder and longtime editor of the Red Willow County Gazette, famous as the first newspaper in the world to offer delivery by plane). We were immediately greeted by the greatest concentration of Bald Eagles we met with on the trip, both adults and immatures skimming the water to take fish from the surface, then chasing each other with unaccustomed vehemence to steal the scaly prey. Two of the adults engaged in a furious race low over the red cedars, nearly making contact as they waged war over what looked like barely a beakful of fishlet. While these dozen or more lingering winterers played and fought, another adult sat stoic on a distant nest, incubating or brooding the next generation of eagles.

It was not the best time on a warm day to be looking for passerines, and much of our stroll was uninterrupted by songbirds. As we approached the beaver dam, though, we caught some movement in the cottonwoods and willows, and were delighted to find a small group of Yellow-rumped Warblers moving through the trees, investigating the twigs and buds and once in a while leaping up to hover briefly and catch a fly. Most were the expected Myrtle Warbler, but we soon discovered an Audubon's Warbler among them, the first we'd recorded on this tour ever. Here on the extreme eastern edge of this taxon's regular range in Nebraska, the first migrants typically appear in mid-April, and this individual was likely a local winterer, an infrequent phenomenon anywhere in the state.

The water itself at first seemed bare of birds. Taking a different vantage point, though, we found a secluded pool behind a beaver dam with a surprising number and variety of late-season ducks. Most impressive were the Wood Ducks. We'd seen a pair the afternoon before at Barnett Park, on the Republican River at McCook, and now a flock of nineteen splashed off the water. This species, thought to be on the brink of extinction a century ago, has recovered and expanded its range beyond all hope, thanks in large part to the return of the beaver, which created an abundance of habitat just right for the placement of nesting boxes.

The waterfowl were joined by small numbers of American White Pelicans, loafing on gravel bars and preening on fallen willow logs. A perfect day ended perfectly with ice cream in town.

We bade a leisurely farewell to McCook before exploring one of the least-known habitats in Nebraska, the Loess Canyons of Lincoln and Dawson Counties. Deposits of windblown clay—loess—have been carved over the centuries by wind and water into a daunting landscape of steep cliffs and deep gulches, some lined by cedars and others carpeted in prairie.

The shores of 600-acre Midway Lake, a reservoir created for the irrigation of Platte Valley farms, offer several access points to this rugged, remote area, and we strolled some of them, birding others from the vehicle. American Tree Sparrows and American Goldfinches were feeding in last year's sunflowers, and we had by far our best and most leisurely looks at the near-threatened Harris's Sparrow, here at the very western edge of its regular winter range. This robust bird, among the most sought-after of North American passerines, bears in English the name of Audubon's generous benefactor Edward Harris, and in scientificquese the name bestowed on it a dozen years earlier by Thomas Nuttall, querula, "mournful," an epithet whose appropriateness came clear to us when we heard the gentle, quavering whistles of its song. The nest of this species was not found until 1931; early observers, among them Maximilian of Wied, believed that the breeding grounds were on the Platte River.

The dominant species at Midway were those associated with eastern red cedar. Flocks of American Robins were nearly outnumbered by flocks of Cedar Waxwings, and after playing hard to get for a while, both gave us excellent views. Our search for other waxwings, which must be present in small numbers most winters, was fruitless, but we had fun conducting it, even though any Bohemians must have moved northwest by this late in the season.

Our own direction was east, ever east, taking us to Kearney for lunch and a short drive south into the Rainwater Basin. We saw precious little rainwater in any of the basins, but black-tailed prairie dogs, after a quick 75-mph glimpse along the interstate, proved a source of endless entertainment on the pastures around Clark Waterfowl Production Area. Once inconceivably abundant on the Great Plains, from Canada to Mexico, these big, cheerful squirrels have been the victim of habitat loss and relentless persecution to the point that they are now extinct over much of their range. Nebraska, in spite of nearly continuous shooting, poisoning, and vacuuming (you can look it up), still has good numbers of dogtowns over much of the state; the burrow systems provide homes for prairie rattlesnakes and Burrowing Owls, and the dogs themselves are welcome prey for Golden Eagles and Ferruginous Hawks. We sought those fancy birds in vain, and indeed, the lively good nature of the prairie dogs as they scampered and chirped all around us suggested that they hadn't seen a big predator for quite a while.

After checking in to our hotel in Grand Island, we enjoyed a light supper and headed for the river, where we drove the traditional crane route along Platte River Road, from Doniphan to the

Martin Brothers Memorial. This was a new perspective on the cranes, which were taking their final meals for the day on the fields and gathering to fly to their nighttime roosts. Dozens, hundreds, then thousands upon thousands joined the flocks, the adults shouting their deep, primeval rattles and last summer's young piping and trilling all the while.

We repeated that route the next morning, our last together, enjoying the whole process in reverse as the fields slowly filled with cranes fresh from the river sandbars. Winding up at the Crane Trust's marvelous visitor center, we enjoyed fresh cinnamon rolls and good activity at the feeders, a contrast to our first visit a few days earlier, when the wind kept all but the Red-winged Blackbirds under cover. This time, dozens of American Goldfinches were at the seed, and careful scrutiny of the Dark-eyed Juncos let to our first good looks at one of the less frequently seen "flavors" of that so varied creature, the Cassiar Junco. Few birders even know of the existence of this bird, and we relished the chance to admire this fine male's elegant gray and black patterning.

Pleasantly enough, we would see another Cassiar at Schramm Park later that day—but first came a stop for homemade chocolate chip cookies, followed by lunch in one of eastern Nebraska's fastest-growing cities, Ashland, on the banks of Salt Creek. We made our final of the uncountable Platte River crossings of the tour, and soon we were at Schramm, tucked into the steep clay bluffs along the Platte just west of where it flows into the once-mighty Missouri. The park is famous as the westernmost regular breeding locality for a number of southeastern specialties, and we succeeded almost immediately in getting great looks at one of them, the

Tufted Titmouse. The well-stocked feeders here are a must-stop on any visit to this part of the state; they were busy with juncos, including a lovely Cassiar Junco and a couple of quite Oregon-like female birds. The brushy edges were full of Harris's Sparrows, not far from the very spot where Maximilian and Audubon had seen their first nearly two hundred years ago, and a seasonally uncommon White-throated Sparrow joined them, too, skulking beneath a dense cedar before it finally emerged to claim the title of last new species of the tour.

We had left Omaha just a few days earlier, but when we arrived at our Carter Lake hotel after the short drive from Schramm, it felt like we had traveled far in distance and farther in time. As we enjoyed a last festive dinner together in Omaha's charming Old Market, we reflected on the ways that cranes and prairie chickens, sparrows and meadowlarks had taken us to new places and new visions of the American past. I cannot imagine a more congenial group of friends to experience it with, and look forward very much to the next chance for us to take to the field together.

- Rick Wright

New Members

2023

January

Monica Cardoza	Ridgewood, NJ
Susan & Michael Monaghan	Montclair, NJ
Anil & Seema Nerurkar	Wayne, NJ

February

Karen Nickeson	Edgewater, NJ

March

Grace Friend	Montclair, NJ
Camille Gutmore	Nutley, NJ
Christie Morganstein	Randolph, NJ

April

Hillary Leonard	Montclair, NJ
Kathrine McCaffery	Maplewood, NJ
Kathy & Bob Wilson	Newton, NJ

May

Michael Yellin	Montclair, NJ
Amanda & A. J. Tobia	Rockaway, NJ

June

Vicki Seabrook	New York, NY

July

Michael Davenport	Succasunna, NJ
Eileen Diaz	Upper Montclair, NJ
Victor Go	Bloomfield, NJ
Liz Hillyer	
Marc Holzapfel	
John Smallwood	Randolph, NJ

August

Eric Knies	Clifton, NJ
Diane Louie	Madison, NJ
Roland Straton	Montclair, NJ
Susan Sheldon	Seattle, WA
Peter Rosario	Patterson, NJ
Mary Conroy	Montclair, NJ

October

Jimma Byrd	TX

November

Diane Holsinger	VA
Lauri Carlotti	Belleville, NJ
Lisa Kroop	Berkely Heights, NJ

December

Eva DeAngelis	Franklin Lakes, NJ

2024

February

Samuel Crespo	Clifton, NJ

March

Peter A. Axelrod	Berkeley Heights, NJ
Sharon Gill	Bloomfield, NJ

April

Howard Spaeth	Glen Rock, NJ

This list includes new members, returning members, and additions from our Friends roster.

Field Trips

South Mountain Reservation, West Orange, NJ
Saturday, May 4, 2024
(rain date Sunday, May 5)

Meet at 7:30 am in the main parking lot on Crest Drive (2nd on right; you'll see a wooden sign that says "Bramhall Terrace, entrance to Summit Field").

South Mountain Reservation is a 2,100-acre nature reserve in southern Essex County. Nestled between the first and second ridges of the Watchung Mountains and overlooking the urban sprawl of the greater Newark area, it can be a tremendous migrant trap in the heat of spring migration. We will walk several trails through the reservation and hope to see good numbers of warblers, thrushes, sparrows, and others taking advantage of the feeding opportunities in the reservation's varied habitats. Many of the trails are paved, but sturdy hiking boots are recommended, as some trails can be a little rocky and uneven.

There are no bathrooms at this location, but they are available at a later stop. For more information, email us mbcoutings@gmail.com.

Directions from the Montclair area: From I-280, take Exit 7, Pleasant Valley Way, south for 3.5 miles, then turn left onto South Orange Avenue. Take this road for 1 mile and turn right onto Crest Drive, marked with a sign for the dog park (you will encounter Crest Drive just after you've reached the crest of the hill). Stay straight on Crest Drive, and within half a mile there will be a very long parking lot on the right, in an open space with a vista to your left. We will meet at the far end of this parking lot.

Cold Brook Farm, Tewksbury, NJ
Sunday, May 19, 2024, 8:30 am
(Rain or shine—trip will take place unless it is pouring)

Join us at Cold Brook Farm, the home of club members Deb and Jason DeSalvo. We will explore the fields, wooded areas, river, and wetlands on and bordering their property to discover the many different migratory and breeding bird species that use this restored property to refuel and to nest. Deb and Jason have been working hard to remove invasive plant species and plant native species to improve the habitat for insects, birds, and other animals, so it is a real treat to explore this bird-friendly habitat. Last year, on the NJ Audubon Big Day, they saw 53 species of birds.

Bring binoculars, a snack, and something to drink. If it has rained recently, waterproof boots are recommended. Email mbcoutings@gmail.com if you want to attend. The address and driving directions will be sent to you once you register.

Field Trip Reports

Liberty State Park: Birds and Beer
April 14, 2024

It started as a gorgeous day, but as we drove from Montclair to Liberty State Park, the skies opened and rain began to pour. As we pulled into the parking lot, the blue sky to our south moved in on strong winds and created whitecaps in the cove along Morris Pesin Drive.

When we arrived, we saw flocks of brant, cormorants, and gulls huddled against the wind along Caven Point. As the six of us walked towards the Hudson River Walkway, our first close bird was a single red-throated loon—a wonderful harbinger of the good birding we were about to enjoy.

All in all, we recorded 26 species, including numerous northern shovelers and green-winged teal hugging the Caven Point shoreline, while male and female buffleheads swam and dived in front. A snowy egret was stalking along the shore while a great blue heron circled overhead.

We continued our walk through the wooded area, where we heard and saw yellow-rumped warblers, red-winged blackbirds, a brown-headed cowbird, downy woodpecker, white-throated sparrow, and tree swallows. Mourning doves, grackles, American robins, blue jays, and northern mockingbirds rounded out the passerine list. Returning along the water, we saw that some gadwall and American black ducks had flown in.

Returning along the path for one last look at the red-throated loon, we stopped and talked with a family out biking. We tried to point out the loon, but it kept diving and popping up where we weren't looking. But the best part of the adventure was the look of amazement from the father, who apparently didn't know that some birds lived on the water and dived for food. Maybe our encounter will have planted the seed for him to become a birder!

And of course, a few of us ended up at Zeppelin Hall, where we sat outside in the beer garden enjoying the sun and some delicious brats and beer for well over two hours, getting to know new friends.

My thanks to Dena Ressler, who took meticulous notes and entered all the birds in eBird: ebird.org/checklist/S168751572.

Virtual Bird Walks

2020

July	1	Local Birding
August	2	Backyards and a Marsh
September	3	Backyards and Trips
October	4	Member Birding
November	5	Member Birding
December	6	Member Birding

2021

January	7	International Birding and New York City
February	8	International Birding
March	9	Member Birding
April	10	Shore Birds
May	11	Local Birding
June	12	Member Birding
July	13	Birding Costa Rica
August	14	Identify a Bird by Its Eyes
September	15	Birds and Water
October	16	Birds with Masks
November	17	Winter Birds

2022

January	18	Personal Choice
February	19	Color
March	20	Signs of Spring
April	21	Birds Eating or Black & White Birds
May	22	Local Birds
September	23	My Summer
November	24	Bird Pairs
December	25	A Trip

2023

January	26	Winter
February	27	A Month in a Birder's Life
March	28	Egrets, Herons, and Wading Birds
April	29	Woodpeckers
May	30	Small Birds
June		Members Meeting, no Virtual Bird Walk
September	31	What I Did on My Summer Vacation
October	32	Black & Orange

2024

January	33	Cold
February	34	Water
March	35	Beyond the Bird
May	36	Pick-a-Place

Montclair Bird Club Meeting History

2020

May	An Online Quiz, with Rick Wright.
June	A Walk on Pipeline Road, by Sandy Sorkin.
July	The Real James Bond, by Jim Wright.
August	An Online Quiz, with Rick Wright.
September	Manakins and Microbes, by Jennifer Houtz.
October	Bizarre Breeding Behaviors of Tropical Cuckoos, by Christine Riehl.
November	Dispersal in Young Peregrine Falcons, by Elise Morton.
December	An MBC Story Slam, by Pamela Olsen.

2021

January	Modern-Day Exploration in the Tropics, by Dan Lane.
February	Winter Raptors, by Giselle Smisko.
March	Damselflies and Dragonflies: The Other White Meat, by George Nixon.
April	Wolf Natural History and Tourism in Yellowstone, by Paul Brown.
May	Sandhills and Saw-whets, by Matthew Schuler.
June	Magnificent Namibia, by Linda Woodbury.
September	Raptors, by Wayne Greenstone.
October	Watershed, by Hazel England.
November	Build-a-Bird, with Rick Wright.

2022

January	A Tale of Many Penguins, by Ardith Bondi.
February	Oh! Canada, by Chris Sturm.
March	Tracking the Migration of New Jersey Birds Using the Motus Network, by Cailin O'Connor.
April	Spotlighting Voices in Bird Conservation, by Mardi Dickinson.
May	101 Great Birds from Around the World, by Mark Garland.
June	Members Meeting.
September	Exploring the Big Bend in Southwest Texas, by Donna Traylor.
October	Build-a-Bird II, with Rick Wright.
November	On Safari: Botswana and South Africa, by Ric Cohn.

February	Winter Raptors, by Giselle Smisko.
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October	Watershed, by Hazel England.
November	Build-a-Bird, with Rick Wright.

2023

January	America's Iconic Birdman: Frank Chapman, by James Huffstodt.
February	A Bird Club in San Diego, by Rick Wright.
March	The Peregrine Project, by Wayne Quinto Greenstone.
April	Piping Plovers on the Rockaway Peninsula, by Chris Allieri.
May	Basic Ornithology, by Phil Echo.
June	Members Meeting.
September	Build-a-Bird III, with Rick Wright.
October	Finding W. H. Hudson, The Writer Who Came to Britain to Save the Birds, by Conor Mark Jameson
November	Attracting Screech Owls, by Jim Wright
November	Birding and Conservation in Italy, by Marcos Valtriani

2024

January	Panama, by Rick Wright
February	The Spectacular Staging of the Whimbrel on the Texas Coast, by Sam Wolfe –YouTube
March	Looking for the Goshawk: The Lost Raptor, by Conor Jameson
April	The Life of the Whooping Crane, by Paityn Bower

In This Issue

2023–2024 Officers and Executive Board

OFFICERS

President	Donna Traylor
Vice President	Evan Cutler
Secretary	Pat Sanders
Treasurer	Sandy Sorkin

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Ric Cohn
Wayne Greenstone
Don Traylor
Rick Wright

From the Editor's Desk

Please feel free to email any items you would like included in future issues of *The Broadwing*. Please include pictures and any other news that will entertain or educate our members.

Sandy

MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com

The MBC Bulletin Bird

Montclair Bird Club Officers for 2023–2024

President.....Donna Traylor
Vice President .....Evan Cutler
Treasurer .....Sandy Sorkin
Recording Secretary....Pat Sanders

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Programs .....Donna Traylor
Publicity .....Wayne Greenstone
Refreshments.....Betsy Cohen

The Broadwing Editor and Photographer .....Sandy Sorkin

THE BROADWING

The *Broadwing* is published ten times a year. We vacation during July and August.

Send photos, field notes, or articles to Sandy at MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com.