

The Rivertown Naturalist

NEWSLETTER OF THE HUDSON RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY OF WESTCHESTER



April 2010, vol. 37, no.6

Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester, Inc. is a non-profit chapter of the National Audubon Society serving the communities of Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry, Hastings-on-Hudson, Irvington and Yonkers.

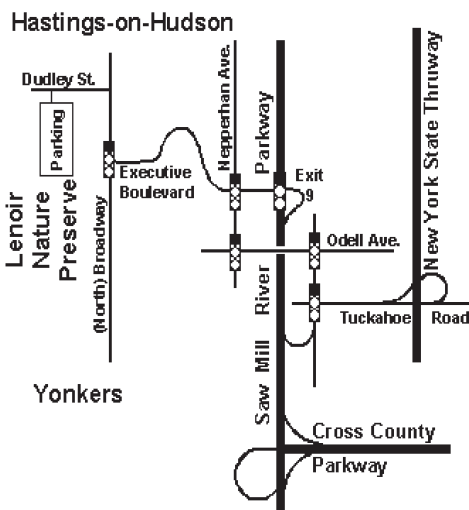
Our mission is to foster protection and appreciation of birds, other wildlife and habitats, and to be an advocate for a cleaner, healthier environment.

www.hras.org

DIRECTIONS TO LENOIR PRESERVE

Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester, Inc. holds its meetings at Lenoir, a Westchester County Nature Preserve, on Dudley Street in Yonkers, New York (914) 968-5851.

By car: Take Saw Mill River Parkway to Exit 9, Executive Blvd. Take Executive Blvd. to its end at North Broadway and turn right. Go ¼ mile on North Broadway and turn left onto Dudley Street. Parking lot is on the left.



The Birds of Central Park

APRIL 28 ~ 7:00 PM ~ LENOIR NATURE CENTER

Join us and researcher/nature photographer Deborah Allen as we explore the bird life of Central Park.

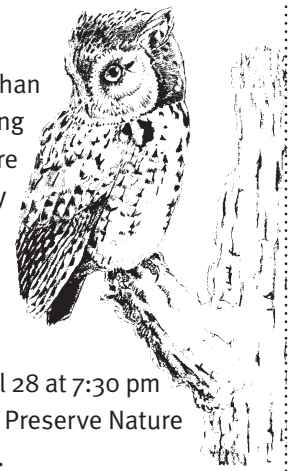
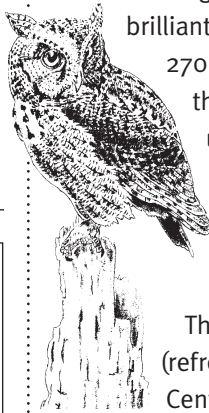
Situated on the Atlantic Flyway, Central Park has a long-standing reputation as one of the best places to observe migratory birds in spring and fall. In April and May, as songbirds travel north to nest, many stop to rest and feed in the Ramble and North Woods of Central Park,

including the small and colorful wood warblers, in brilliant breeding plumage. Over the years, more than

270 species of birds have been recorded visiting the park. We'll take a look at some of the more unusual birds, as well as some of the many species of nesting birds, such as the Baltimore Oriole, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Eastern Screech-Owl, Red-Tailed Hawk, and American Kestrel.

This program will take place Wednesday, April 28 at 7:30 pm (refreshments served at 7:00 pm) at the Lenoir Preserve Nature Center. Program is free and open to the public.

Also, this presentation precedes a field trip in Central Park on Sunday, May 2, led by Michael Bochnik, President and Field Trip Leader of the Hudson River Audubon Society.



Another Successful "Seasons at Lenoir" Art & Photography Exhibit

Many thanks to all of you who participated in making the Ninth Annual Exhibit a wonderful event — those who planned and hosted the Opening Reception, hung the works in such an artful way, and contributed refreshments. We appreciate the efforts of curators, Danniela and Melissa, who were on hand to prepare the Nature Center for the exhibit, contributed goodies, and helped in every way possible. Visitors enjoyed refreshments as they viewed DVDs of Lenoir by Walter Chadwick and Lyn Christie. Of course it was the artists and photographers (see list of names on following page), who shared their works with us, who deserve major recognition.

Be sure to bring your cameras/pencils/brushes, etc. on your visits to Lenoir so that you can join us for our 10th exhibit next year.

Upcoming programs:

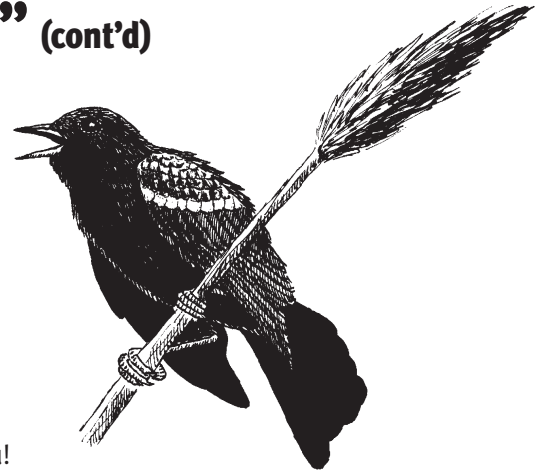
May 26: Costa Rican Ecology

June 23: Members' Night

Another Successful “Seasons at Lenoir” (cont’d)

The following lists the participants in our Art & Photography Exhibit 2010:

Gunthur Kilsch	Kathryn Kilsch	Barbara Schulz
Aija Sears	Ardeth Schyler	Susan Zeiger
Mabel Cohen	Berenice Cohen	Tomiko Goldman
Mary Harrington	Harriet Hammerstein	Lyndon Christie
Walter Chadwick	Paul Oehrlein	Christopher Tyrone
Melissa Sullivan	Alan Soiefer	Kelli Bochnik
Michael Bochnik	Nancy Delmerico	Walter Chadwick
Saul Scheinbach	Danniela Ciatto	Judi Veder



Thank you!

Birdathon!

Hudson River Audubon’s BIRD-A-THON will be held Saturday, May 15th (rain date May 16th) to raise money for the chapter. You can help by making your pledge today. A BIRD-A-THON is like a walk-a-thon, bike-a-thon or any other “thon” in that we ask people to pledge X amount of money per lap, mile, or as in our case, bird species seen, within a 24 hour period. The combined list for the teams should be between 100 to 150 species. Pledges can be given for a flat rate such as \$25.00 or you can pledge per species such as 25 cents/bird. If we see 120 species your pledge will come to \$30.00. We will send out reminders after the bird-a-thon on how much you pledged. Thank you for your generous support!

National Audubon Birdathon Pledge Card

- I am happy to pledge \$ _____ per species in support of your bird-a-thon.
- I prefer to pledge the enclosed gift of \$ _____ .
- I will give you an additional \$ _____ if the _____ team spots a _____ (bird species).

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip Code _____

Telephone _____

Send to: Hudson River Audubon Society, P.O. BOX 616, Yonkers, New York 10703

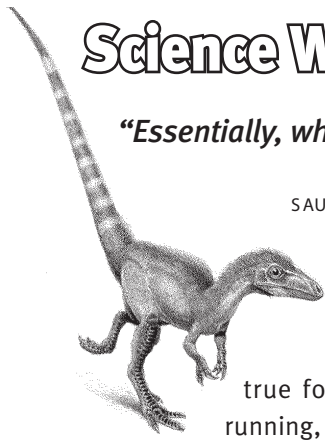
Make Donations Payable to HUDSON RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY.

Remember, if you’re not participating, please pledge to the Bird-a-thon to make our efforts worth it.

Science Watch: “This is Actual Science, Not ‘Avatar.’”

“Essentially, wherever you look, you find it.” —M. Benton

SAUL SCHEINBACH



Scientists have long assumed that the drab dinosaur fossils they dig up were once colorful creatures. This has been especially true for certain theropods, those fast-running, feathered reptiles thought to be the ancestors of modern birds. In fact, one theory to explain the origin of feathers is that they originally arose not for flight, but to provide a colorful display for sexual selection during mating or to startle predators or prey. But until this year, apart from what existed in an artist’s imagination, paleontologists could offer no evidence of colored dinosaurs. Now two research papers provide evidence that the feathers were boldly bedecked with color.

The first report by a Chinese and British team of scientists, published in the January 27, 2010 online issue of *Nature*, finds that a 125 million-year-old, turkey-sized theropod fossil, *Sinosauroptyrex*, had a tan and white-striped tail.

Sinosauroptyrex was first discovered in China in 1996 with a downy fringe of hairlike filaments, “dino fuzz”, along its neck and backbone. At that time proponents of the dinosaur-bird theory said the filaments were feather precursors and hailed them as supporting evidence that dinosaurs evolved into birds. Opponents countered they were merely part of a reptilian fringe of internal collagen fibers that looked feathery because it had frayed — see *ScienceWatch: Birds(?) of a Feather??* (January/February 1999) or at www.hras.org. The Chinese/British team, headed by Fucheng Zhang, Institute of Paleontology and Paleoanthropology,

Beijing, China, and Michael Benton, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK, has now laid this criticism to rest by showing that the filaments have the coloration typical of modern feathers.

They used scanning electron microscopy (SEM) to find melanosomes, pigment-bearing organelles 1,000 times smaller than a human hair, crammed into the filaments. SEM can

examine surface topography at very high magnifications of up to 500,000X. The team found two types of melanosomes, rod-shaped eumelanosomes, which produce black and shades of gray, and phaeomelanosomes, which are round and generate reddish-brown to yellow hues in the feathers of modern birds. Dark bands along the tail were “absolutely packed with phaeomelanosomes”, according to Benton and it led the team to conclude that *Sinosauroptyrex* had a chestnut to reddish-brown striped tail and a rufous back (see Figure 1 and title cartoon).

The second report, published in the online version of *Science* on February 5, 2010, took the melanosome analysis one step further. This Chinese/American team, headed by Qunguo Li, Beijing Museum of Natural History, Beijing, China and Richard Prum, Yale University, New Haven, CT, examined a well-preserved, 150 million-year-old fossil of a chicken-sized theropod (*Anchiornis huxleyi*) with its crown and limbs covered in feathers.

The scientists sampled portions of feathers throughout the fossil. They then measured the dimensions of the melanosomes using SEM and noted the distribution and density of each morphological type. Next they used the skills of team member Matthew Shawkey, a University of Akron, OH biologist, who has studied melanosomes in living birds, and can make predictions of feather color from the types of melanosomes found in the feather. The plumage coloration pattern they generated for *Anchiornis* is a red-and-black crown with black-and-white limbs, reminiscent of a modern pileated woodpecker (see Figure 2). The startling color pattern exhibited by *Anchiornis* led Li *et al.* to conclude that a signaling function for early feathers may have been the reason why they first evolved.

According to Prum, “a more likely function for both the crown and limb feathers of *Anchiornis* is communication or signaling. This could have been in lots of contexts, including sexual display, territoriality, etc. It could have been like modern redstarts, which use their bright wing and tail patches to scare up insects, which [the birds] then seize in flight.”

In the world of early birds what mattered most is not who you are but how you look.

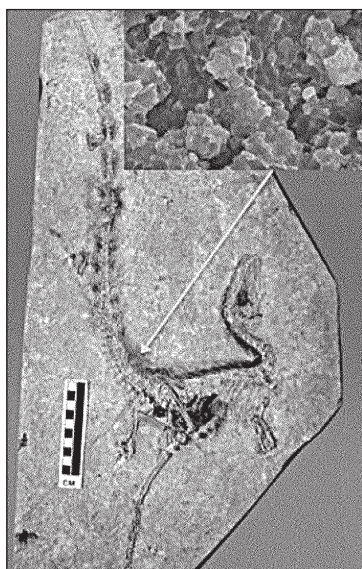
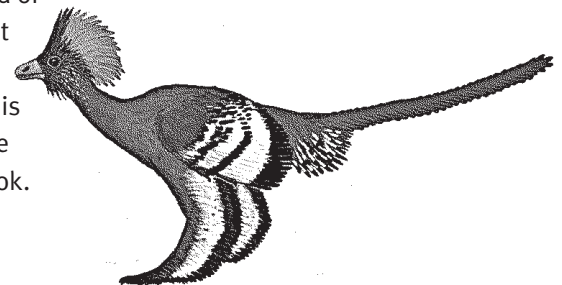


Fig. 1: *Sinosauroptyrex* with melanosomes (inset) 5,000x

Fig. 2: Proposed color pattern for *A. huxleyi*

Dragons & Damsels at Lenoir Nature Center

June 29, 2010 – 11:00 am

Winged wonders, aerial acrobats, dragonflies have been around since before the dinosaurs. Their flight is studied by the United States military and NASA. They come in a variety of colors from muted browns to brilliant blues and greens, bright reds and neon, they sparkle like dazzling jewels.

Join us on June 19, 2010 at 11:00 AM at Lenoir for an introductory program to learn about their lifestyle, the different species in our area, followed by a field session as we attempt to capture and observe these fleet flyers.



Studies show that most wild birds will die in their first year of life. But if they can survive this first year then they stand a strong chance of living for some considerable time. The American Robin, for instance, can live up to 12 years and both the Great Blue Heron and the

Canada Goose can live for more than 23 years, the Blue Jay for more than 18 years, and some blackbird species for 15-plus years.

BRRRRRRding in Florida



With Bermudas, bikinis and binoculars, Saul and Judi left NYC in a snow storm. We sat on the last plane to leave LaGuardia while it was being de-iced in the hopes of getting to warm, sunny Florida. HA HA HA and BR BR BR (not a recognizable bird call?). Little did we know in our three weeks there, the temperature would not go beyond the 60's with wind and clouds. Even the birds were hiding!

But we persevered. We traveled north from Miami to Merritt Island, headed west to Orlando and Kissimmee, and then went south on the west coast, back to Miami.

We birded the popular spots — the “hatchies”, Corkscrew, Sanibel, Big Cypress and the Everglades and even some less well known ones, like the Panther Reserve and our friend’s Dunellon neighborhood. We stopped at the Marrafino’s “bird and butterfly sanctuary” in their Dunellon home. Sandra, a former HRAS Board member and avid birder, gave us information on the “whereabouts” of two of our nemesis birds, the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and the Florida Scrub Jay, which again, alas, we did not see. But we did see 116 species, no lifers. The highlights were a pair of Egyptian geese (can we count these?), Whooping Cranes, a Red-headed Woodpecker, Painted Buntings, Limpkins, Swallowtail Kites, a Short-tailed Hawk, a Snipe, many nesting birds and breeding birds in lovely plumage.

We also saw marsh rabbits, armadillos, an American crocodile and of course many alligators and turtles. When it began to warm, just a little, we saw mangrove buckeye butterflies, gulf fritillaries and zebra long wings at Flamingo, in the Everglades.

Now we are home and it seems warmer here than there. And soon the Florida birds will be here. — JUDY VEDER



Hudson River Audubon Field Trips

Spring is here and we are approaching the peak of migration. This is a perfect time to join one of our field trips. Beautiful and colorful wood warblers will delight first time bird watchers. Birding with a group is a wonderful way to share your interests with like-minded people to learn more about nature, and to enjoy many preserves and natural areas.

Hudson River Audubon Society field trips are free. Bring binoculars and field guides if you have them. Some are available for loan for those who need them. Dress appropriately for the weather. For more information call Michael Bochnik at (914) 237-9331 or e-mail at Bochnikm@cs.com

Additional information with maps and directions to each location is available on our web site at www.hras.org



Tibbetts Brook Park ***Saturday, April 24, 2010***

MEET AT 9:00 **AM** AT FLAGPOLE
(OFF MIDLAND AVENUE BETWEEN YONKERS AND
MCLEAN AVENUES)

Part of Yonkers Green Month – Yonkers Green Policy Task Force. Some early migrants are expected. Last year the walk found a rare Prothonotary Warbler on the edge of the second lake.

Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge ***Sunday, April 25, 2010***

MEET AT 9:00 **AM** AT THE REFUGE
(JOINT TRIP WITH BRONX RIVER/SOUND SHORE
AUDUBON)

Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge is one of the best birding locations in New York. It's located on Cross Bay Boulevard in Broad Channel, Queens, 3 miles South of Exit 17S off the Belt Parkway.



Central Park ***Sunday, May 2, 2010***

MEET AT 7:00 **AM** AT CENTRAL PARK WEST AND
79TH STREET

Early warblers and other migrants. This may be the easiest place to view warblers.

Evening Bird Walk at ***Tibbetts Brook Park*** ***Friday, May 7, 2010***

MEET AT 6:00 **PM** AT FLAGPOLE
(OFF MIDLAND AVENUE BETWEEN YONKERS AND
MCLEAN AVENUES)

Enjoy a walk around the lakes after a hard week of work, or a way to start your weekend off right.

Mother's Day Warbler Walk ***Sunday, May 9, 2010***

MEET AT 8:00 **AM** AT THE LENOIR NATURE PRESERVE

A Hudson River Audubon tradition! We will walk around the park including a visit to the Butterfly Garden. Refreshments will be served afterwards at the Nature Center.

Evening Bird Walk at Crestwood Lake ***Friday, May 14, 2010***

MEET AT 6:00 **PM** AT THE SMALL PARKING LOT ON THE
SOUTHBOUND SIDE

Bronx River Walk, Crestwood train station. Wood Ducks, Eastern Kingbirds, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles and more!

HRAS BOARD MEMBERS & VOLUNTEERS

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Join The Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester!

Every membership supports Audubon's vital efforts to protect birds, other wildlife and natural habitats. Membership includes a subscription to *Audubon* magazine and affiliation with National Audubon. As a member, you will also receive our chapter newsletter, *The Rivertown Naturalist*, and an open invitation to all our guest lectures, field trips and events.

**SIGN ME UP AS A NEW MEMBER.
ONE YEAR FOR \$20.**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone _____

CHAPTER NO C9ZR200Z

Send check and this application to:
National Audubon Society
P.O. Box 422250
Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250

Please make check payable to National Audubon Society.



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