Northern Saw-whets: the little known owls

Presenters: Gertrude Battaly and Drew Panko
Wednesday ~ January 11, 2012 ~ Lenoir Nature Center

Join us for a presentation on Northern Saw-whet Owls. The smallest owl found in the Northeast, standing just 7 inches tall, is a common winter visitor to southern New York.

For seven years, Trudy and Drew have been studying these owls. Where do they come from? How long do they stay? Will they come back next year? Do they ever stay to breed? Join us for some answers and more questions about these wonderful creatures! Trudy and Drew will also share some interesting encounters they have had with Saw-whets.

Refreshments served at 7:00 pm. Program begins at 7:30 pm.

Join us for Ghost Bird, a special film

Wednesday ~ February 22, 2012 ~ Lenoir Nature Center

Ghost Bird is a documentary by Scott Crocker, featuring David Sibley, Nancy Tanner and Jerome Jackson.

Set in a murky swamp full of birders, scientists and reporters, this movie explores the limits of certainty, the seductive power of hope, and how one phantom woodpecker changed a small southern town in Arkansas forever.

All these people are searching for the “Holy Grail with wings,” the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker. Is it really extinct? The bird’s fate remains a mystery.

Film begins at 7:00 pm. Popcorn will be served. In case of inclement weather, please call Michael Bochnik at 914-237-9331.

Camouflage & Color

Saturday ~ February 25, 2012 ~ Lenoir Nature Center

Why are some animals brightly colored and other animals dull colored? Why do some male birds have brilliant colors and the females are drab? How do bright colors help an animal? Why are some animals brown or gray? Why do animals have stripes, bands or spots?

See and learn the answers to these questions and more.

Children will make their own animals using camouflage & color.

Ages 5 to 10. Program starts at 10:00 am. Fun for the whole family.
Preregistration required. Call the Nature Center at 914-968-5851.
11th Annual “Seasons at Lenoir” Art & Photography Exhibition

It’s time to decide on works you would like to submit for the March 2012 exhibit. As always, artwork in any media and photographs are welcome.

Potential exhibitors should keep in mind that works must be inspired by the Lenoir Preserve. There are so many possible subjects — Lenoir’s wildlife, gardens, trees, structures, volunteers, staff and visitors involved in activities or just enjoying the serenity — to name a few. There will be a “Kids Corner” for the creations of children involved in our education programs.

To have your works included, or if you have any questions, please call Lynn Shaw at 718-540-2380 or e-mail her at Lymbshaw@gmail.com. (put “Seasons at Lenoir” in the subject area) before February 20th

Dates to Remember: Please make note of these dates. There is no February newsletter, so there will be no further reminders.

Saturday, February 25th, 9:30 am to 12:00 pm: Bring works to Lenoir (must be ready for hanging)
Saturday, March 3rd, 11:00 am to 2:00 pm: Opening Reception
Saturday, March 31st: Pick up works
The gallery will be open to visitors on Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Upcoming HRAS Field Trips

Sunday January 22, 2012
Eagle Viewing on the Hudson
Georges Island ~ 7:00 am

George’s Island is one of the best spots to find wintering Bald Eagles. Early morning offers your the best chance. They roost overnight in nearby trees. Common Merganser, Bufflehead and other ducks should also be seen.
Directions: Take Route 9 to the Montrose/Bucannan exit. Turn left onto Route 9A north. Take 9A 1.3 miles to Dutch Street on your left, just after FDR VA Hospital. Take Dutch Street all the way into the park, follow the road down to the Hudson River.

Sunday January 29, 2012
Pelham Bay Park Owl Prowl ~ 8:00 am
Meet at the far left corner of the Orchard Beach parking lot.
Pelham Bay Park is a well know owl hot spot. A number of different species may use the pine groves as winter roosts. We will look for Long-eared Owls, Northern Saw-whet Owls and local Great Horned Owls. With its mixture of woods, pine groves, shoreline, marshes, and capped landfill make this the top place to bird in the Bronx. The woods can hold many half hardies and Long Island Sound may have loons and ducks.
Directions from Westchester: take the Hutchinson River Parkway south to the Orchard Beach exit. At the traffic circle take the second right (half way around the circle). Make a left at the end of this road. It will lead to a huge parking lot. Meet us at the far left corner.

Saturday February 4, 2012
Eighth Annual Hudson River EagleFest
Croton Point Park
For more information see www.teatown.org/eaglefest

Project FeederWatch

We are continuing our Project FeederWatch sessions at Lenoir every two weeks. Come and join us!

We meet in the “observation room” at the Lenoir Nature Center and count the birds at the feeders. There is also plenty of jolly conversation and food!

Below is the schedule for January and February:

Saturday, January 14 – Fran Greenberg
Sunday, January 15 – Kelli and Michael Bochnik
Saturday, January 28 – Paul Oehrlein
Sunday, January 29 – Carol Lange
Saturday, February 11 – Carol Lange
Sunday, February 12 – Sandra Wright
Saturday, February 25 – Kelli and Michael Bochnik
Sunday, February 26 – Jackie Bruskin

For the exact times, please contact Carol Lange at 914 668-5101 or CarolLange@aol.com
Mimicry, in which one organism copies the salient features of another, is widespread in nature. For example, certain plants, especially orchids that depend on a single insect species for pollination, produce flower parts resembling the female insect. This attracts amorous males, who try to mate with the flowers, thereby pollinating them. Many innocuous animal species mimic the bright, contrasting colors of toxic species in order to hide from predators under the mantle of a warning signal. The harmless milk snake (Lampropeltis triangulum) closely resembles the red, black and yellow banding pattern of the poisonous coral snake (Micrurus fulvius). This impersonation, known as “Batesian” mimicry, is common among insects. Many harmless fly species mimic the warning coloration of stinging bee or wasp species, even copying the hovering flight and body shape of the model to broadcast a false danger signal.

“Müllerian” mimicry is another form of imitation, except here the mimic and the model share the same toxic attribute along with the warning signal. This double whammy adds greater protection because each species reinforces the shared signal, losing fewer members than it would without its toxic partner. The close resemblance between the monarch (Danaus plexippus) and the viceroy (Limenitis archippus) butterflies are well-known examples of Müllerian mimicry.

An extreme example of Müllerian mimicry is exhibited by the Amazonian butterfly Heliconius numata, which has seven specific wing patterns. Each pattern mimics a different local butterfly species of the genus Melinaea. How H. numata maintains seven distinct patterns with no gradations has long puzzled geneticists. It’s as if people only grew to 5, 6 or 7 feet tall with nothing in between.

Now a team of 23 biologists, headed by Mathieu Joron, National Museum of Natural History, Paris, has discovered that the Heliconius mimic employs an unusual genetic trick to conserve the seven patterns. The research is described in the August 14, 2011 issue of the journal, Nature.

Joron et al. sequenced the DNA of the chromosomal region responsible for the wing patterns. That DNA segment, containing 18 genes, forms a “supergene” cluster. The 18 genes cannot recombine with genes from a different cluster, but are locked together and inherited as a single unit. Each supergene falls into a hierarchy of genetic dominance; when the parents have different wing pattern supergenes, the offspring will inherit both versions, but will exhibit the pattern of whichever version of the supergene is more dominant.

Individuals generally inherit two sets of genes, one from each parent. During gamete formation (meiosis) DNA strands line up in pairs so that maternal and paternal genes controlling the same traits lay side-by-side in close proximity. The pairing is based upon the similarity of their DNA sequences. This is when maternal and paternal genes can normally recombine to form new varieties. But the DNA of supergenes does not recombine and the team has learned why.

By sequencing three versions of the seven possible supergenes, they found that in each version a different segment of DNA is reversed. Since the DNA strands of different supergenes contain large segments that don’t match up, alignment during meiosis is blocked, effectively preventing recombination within the supergene and maintaining the seven distinct wing patterns.

“We were blown away by what we found,” said Dr. Joron. “These butterflies are the transformers of the insect world. But instead of being able to turn from a car into a robot with the flick of a switch, a single genetic switch [supergene] allows these insects to morph into several mimetic forms—it is amazing and the stuff of science fiction. Now we are starting to understand how this switch can have such a pervasive effect.”

*Each form of mimicry is named after the naturalist who described it, Henry Walter Bates and Fritz Müller.
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