

# The Rivertown Naturalist

NEWSLETTER OF THE HUDSON RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY OF WESTCHESTER



June 2010, vol. 37, no.8

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.

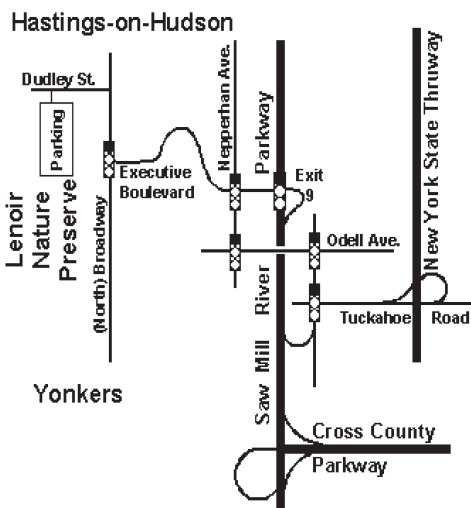
Our mission is to foster protection and appreciation of birds, other wildlife and habitats, and to be an advocate for a cleaner, healthier environment.

[www.hras.org](http://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.



## Members' Night

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23 ~ 7:00 PM ~ LENOIR NATURE CENTER

Selected volunteers will be recognized for their special contributions to HRAS during the year. It is our volunteers who keep our chapter strong, vital and active.

Officers of Hudson River Audubon Society (HRAS) will be elected.

HRAS members are encouraged to share favorite nature slides and digital photos, taken during the past year, with us. Please bring no more than 10 to 20 images, and prepare a five- to ten-minute presentation.

For digital images, pictures must be on a CD, USB drive, or memory card: contact Michael about format. You may expect to see photos from HRAS field trips as well as members' nature and birding trips.

This program will take place Wednesday, June 23 at 7:30 pm (refreshments served at 7:00 pm) at the Lenoir Preserve Nature Center. Program is free and open to the public.

Please note: at 6:00 pm, Michael will lead a leisurely walk around the Preserve — meet behind the Nature Center.

*Have a great summer! We'll see you at the first program next season on September 22!*



## Bad Buzz for Pesticides

America's embattled bee colonies will get some relief thanks to a recent Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) court victory. After rounds of legal wrangling, a federal court judge has ruled that a pesticide toxic to bees — spirotetramat — must be removed from store shelves because it entered the marketplace illegally. NRDC filed suit against the pesticide's maker, Bayer CropScience, after beekeepers voiced concern that it can threaten entire colonies by disrupting reproduction. In recent years, insecticides and other threats have devastated the U.S. bee population, jeopardizing some \$15 billion worth of domestic crops that depend on bees for pollination.



# Dragons & Damsels at Lenoir Nature Center

**SATURDAY, JUNE 19 ~ 11:00 AM ~ LENOIR NATURE CENTER**

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.



## THE PIGEON MAN

Judith Veder

I thought my bubbe always would be there  
on the feathered pillow  
on the window sill  
on Delancey Street.

I thought she always would be there  
waving to the Spanish pigeon man  
across the roof,

his hand too waving  
as his millions of pigeons rose  
like magic from the ground  
and flew from left to right from right to sky  
until the sun was too high  
and then they'd all retreat:

the pigeons to the corner of their coops,  
the man to his cerveza in the corner of his roof,  
my grandmother to her glass of tea in the corner of her room.

I thought she always would be there  
smothering me with kisses,  
sounding like a hundred Yiddish bubbas,  
smelling sometimes like  
camphor and sometimes like cinnamon,  
feeling like  
what warm challah feels like.

I was little then.

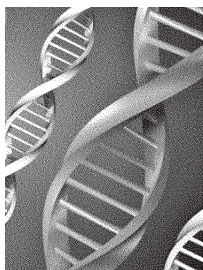
I thought she was Queen Esther  
and that windowsill, a throne.

I thought that roof was heaven,  
the pigeon man, the Keeper of a magic wand,  
and the pigeons,  
angels in disguise.



## Science Watch: Whose Children Are They Anyhow?

*"It's a wise father who knows his own child." —W. Shakespeare*



SAUL SCHEINBACH

The male three-spined stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*) works very hard at fatherhood. During the spring-to-summer breeding season he stakes out a territory, collects grasses and algae, and using sticky secretions from his body, builds a tunnel-shaped nest in a shallow

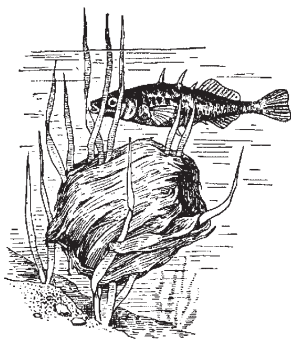
depression on the lake bottom. Now in full breeding colors he does a zigzag courtship dance to entice a gravid female into his nest. If he is successful, she enters and lays her eggs, which he fertilizes and then he immediately chases her away. He then spends the next 6–8 days guarding the nest and vigorously fanning the eggs to oxygenate them. Once the eggs hatch he continues to guard the tiny fry for a few more days until they swim away. All this activity takes its toll and the male's health deteriorates. Nevertheless, after a brief rest he repeats the process several times during the breeding season.

As a reward for all his hard work the male may end up raising young fathered by another male known as a "sneaker". Sneakers approach the rival's nest while he is busy dancing for the female, and after she has

spawned, the sneaker darts through the nest and releases his sperm. This may occur before or after the nest owner has passed through the nest to fertilize the eggs. Estimates vary, but up to half of stickleback nests can contain varying proportions of eggs fertilized by a sneaker. The sneaker phenomenon also occurs in other fish such as the bluegill

— see *ScienceWatch: Father Knows Best* (March 2004).

Nesting stickleback males often eat some or all of the eggs they guard, a practice called "filial cannibalism". The incidence of filial cannibalism may be affected by the physical condition of the father. Studies suggest that the males eat eggs when they need to improve their physical condition, giving up some or all of the current brood in order to produce more progeny in the future. Another factor that may affect cannibalism is the question of paternity. Nesting males may eat a clutch containing foreign eggs because it is not advantageous for them to invest energy in raising another male's children. However, no one has determined that nesting males can recognize eggs that were not fertilized by them.



Now a study in the April 27, 2010 issue of the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* by Marion Mehlis, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Bonn, Germany, and her colleagues, looks at whether nesting males can determine the paternity of the eggs they are guarding and use this knowledge to decide whether or not to eat the eggs.

Sticklebacks were collected at the beginning of the breeding season, set up as pairs in separate tanks and allowed to spawn. The scientists collected the eggs from 92 nests after spawning and determined the total number of eggs in each clutch. During the next three months they set up six different exchange conditions in which 0, 20, 40, 60, 80 and 100 per cent of the male's eggs were replaced by those from another nest. To distinguish foreign from those fertilized by the nesting male they stained one or the other with a blue dye known not to affect viability. After the egg exchanges were done they placed each nest back in its tank and reintroduced the nesting male. Body measurements were taken periodically to assess the physical condition of each male.

Eighty-two males accepted the nest and began their normal behavior of fanning the eggs. Ten other males immediately destroyed the nest and were not included in the analyses. The number of nests in each exchange condition ranged from 11 to 20. After one week the nests were removed and all the remaining native and foreign eggs were counted.

Total cannibalism occurred in 57 of the 82 nests, and its occurrence was strongly influenced by the presence of the foreign eggs. In general, as the proportion of foreign eggs went up, the rate of total cannibalism went up, indicating that the males could determine the proportion of foreign eggs in the nest and adjust their rate of filial cannibalism appropriately. Cannibalism also increased as the breeding season progressed, especially for males with many foreign eggs, and males in poorer physical condition were more likely to eat the whole clutch.

Since a previous study showed that adult sticklebacks recognize their siblings by smell, the authors think olfactory cues allow nesting males to discern the presence of foreign eggs. They suggest that as the eggs develop and the father's genes get expressed, the developing embryos emit a "paternal" odor that the nesting male can detect and he acts accordingly.

All of this makes sense in a world where males are trying to raise their own offspring and not those of others.

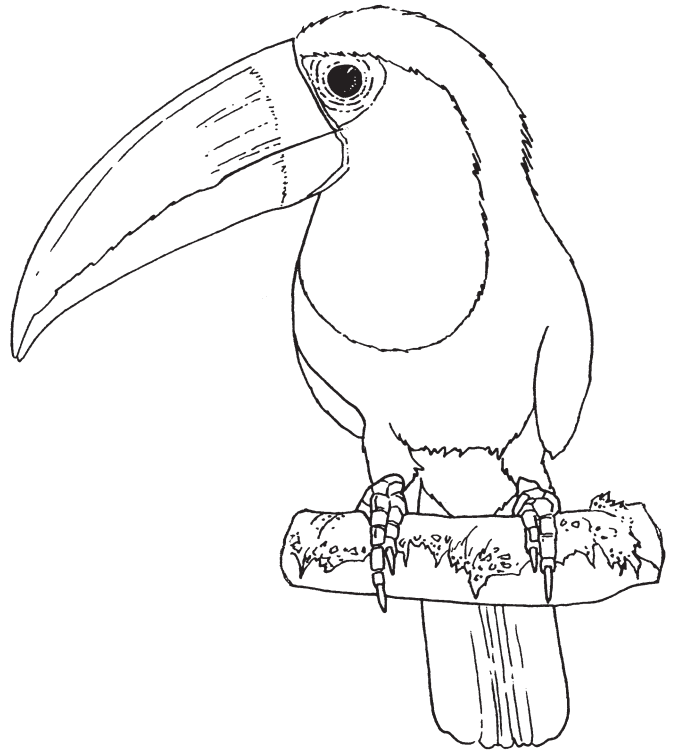
## My Costa Rica Adventure

From April 14 to April 20, 2010, I visited Costa Rica staying at Villa Lapas, an eco lodge in Puntarenas Province. The hotel protects a natural reserve that follows the Rio Tarcolitos and borders Carara National Park. Over 225 species of birds have been observed on the grounds and reserve. Unfortunately, I only saw 18 species at the national park and the hotel grounds.

The highlight species were Scarlet Macaws and a Toucan. Iguanas and lizards are numerous as are butterflies. Long-tailed Skipper, Tropical Checkered Skipper, Zebra Longwing and Banded Peacock are a few of the butterflies seen. Green-eyed leaf frogs were seen and heard singing at night. Also seen were 16 species of Dragonflies which were one of the highlights of the trip. Red-faced Dragonlets, Slough Amberwings, Carmine Skimmers and Setwings were a few of the Dragonflies observed. The American Crocodile was spotted on the Rio Tarcoles.

The area where I stayed is in the Central Pacific Zone encompassing both wet and dry forests. April is the end of the dry season and there was just one morning with rain. Costa Rica is in the tropics and the Pacific lowlands are hot and humid. Being about 8 to 11 degrees latitude north, Costa Rica is close to the Equator and the sun is strong.

Costa Rica is a wonderful place to visit, the people are friendly and courteous and the wildlife diverse and colorful. Go and you will be amazed at the diversity of life in the tropics. — WALTER CHADWICK




---

## Spotlighted Species: **Gray Squirrel** (*Sciurus carolinensis*)



A small animal with a gray back, white furred belly and large bushy tail, the gray squirrel is a familiar creature. Intelligent and resourceful the gray squirrel will raid bird feeders to the consternation of birders. It seems as if there is no strategy that can deter their feeder raids.

Some gray squirrels may have a cinnamon shading on their gray fur and others may be entirely black (a color morph). Gray squirrels store nuts for the winter by burying them in the ground. They find them by smelling either the nut or a scent left on the spot.

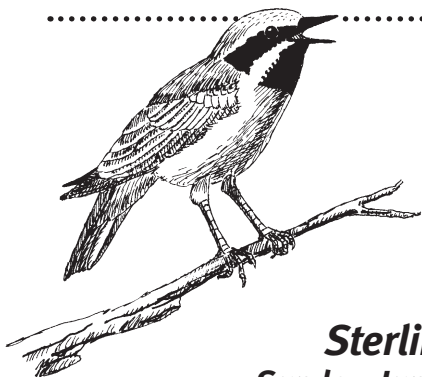
Gray squirrels live in tree dens or leafy nests. Their bushy tail serves as a blanket and for balance as they flit through the trees. Watch their amusing acrobatic antics as they scamper up and down trees often chasing one another. — WALTER CHADWICK

---

# Hudson River Audubon Field Trips

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](mailto:Bochnikm@cs.com)

Additional information with maps and directions to each location is available on our web site at [www.hras.org](http://www.hras.org)



## ***Sterling Forest*** ***Sunday, June 6, 2010***

***MEET AT 7:00 AM AT THE END OF IRONWOOD ROAD***

Sterling Forest is an Important Bird Area featuring Golden-winged Warblers.

Located in Orange County, 35 minutes from the Tappan Zee Bridge—the area hosts many other breeding species such as Cerulean, Chestnut-sided and Prairie Warblers. Alder Flycatcher can often be heard and Indigo Bunting can be abundant. We'll stop by the Visitor Center later in the morning.

### **Directions:**

Take the New York State Thruway north to exit 15A (Sloatsburg, Suffern, Route 17 North). Turn left onto 17 North and after 1.4 miles exit right onto Route 72 West.

Take Route 72 for 2.8 miles (watch your speed!) and turn right onto Route 84 North (Long Meadow Drive).

Take Long Meadow Drive 6.6 miles and turn left onto Ironwood Road.

Take Ironwood Road to its end and park.

## ***A Visit to the Beverly E. Smith*** ***Butterfly & Hummingbird Garden*** ***Saturday, September 18, 2010***

***MEET AT 9:00 AM AT LENOIR NATURE PRESERVE***

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and Monarch Butterflies will be searched for, along with a talk about each of these animal's interesting life histories.



## ***Fall Migration Bird Walk***

***Saturday, September 25, 2010***

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

Join Hudson River Audubon bird experts to look for migrant birds using the Hudson River Flyway.

## ***Lenoir Hawk Watch***

***Saturday, September 25, 2010***

***FROM 10:00 AM–1:00 PM AT LENOIR NATURE PRESERVE***

Join the bird experts from Hudson River Audubon to watch and count hawks flying down the Hudson Valley.

## ***Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge***

***Sunday, September 26, 2010***

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

Car pool from Lenoir Nature Preserve at 8 AM or meet at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge at 9 AM.

## ***Tentative day for Hawk Day***

***Saturday, October 2, 2010***

***MEET AT 10:00 AM AT LENOIR NATURE PRESERVE***

## ***Lenoir Hawk Watch***

***Saturday, October 9, 2010***

***MEET AT 10:00 AM AT LENOIR NATURE PRESERVE***

**HRAS BOARD MEMBERS & VOLUNTEERS**

<b>President/Field Trips</b> Michael Bochnik	BochnikM@cs.com 914-237-9331
<b>Vice-President</b> Saul Scheinbach	judisaul@aol.com 718-884-4740
<b>Conservation</b> Paul Steineck	barbpaul@optonline.net
<b>Treasurer</b> Paul Oehrlein	paulzoobea@optonline.net 914-693-2569
<b>Secretary</b> Judi Veder	judisaul@aol.com 718-884-4740
<b>Education</b> Beverly Smith Walter Chadwick	Bev186@aol.com 914-965-5553 mrcnaturally@optonline.net 914-237-5791
<b>Publicity</b> Jeanette Johnson	JNTT3456@verizon.net 914-965-7541
<b>Membership</b> Carol Lange	Carollange@aol.com 914-668-5101
<b>Programs/Season's</b> Lynn Shaw	lynnbshaw@gmail.com 718-549-2380
<b>Butterfly Garden</b> Mary T. Harrington	TCTallon@aol.com 914-667-1494
<b>Science</b> Saul Scheinbach	judisaul@aol.com 718-884-4740
<b>Circulation</b> William Van Wart	914-376-2401
<b>Hospitality</b> Kelli Bochnik	kellimike@verizon.net 914-237-9331
<b>Educator</b> Walter Chadwick	mrcnaturally@optonline.net 914-237-5791
<b>Feeder Watch</b> Carol Lange	Carollange@aol.com 914-668-5101
<b>Development/Bluebird Trail</b> Pamela Sullivan	pamalama@earthlink.net 914-591-7399
<b>Lenoir Liaison</b> Daniela Ciatto	dac4@westchestergov.com 914-968-5851
<b>Rivertown Naturalist Editor</b> Sandra Wright	tralac@verizon.net 914-674-9147

**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.



[www.hras.org](http://www.hras.org)

DATED MATERIAL  
Please Expedite

HUDSON RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY  
OF WESTCHESTER, INC  
P.O. Box 616  
YONKERS, NY 10703

NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
WHITE PLAINS, NY  
Permit 7312