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 19 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.

Program:

Birding New Zealand
Kiwis, Tuis, Penguins, Shags and Mollymawks

Wednesday Jan. 24th
Refreshments 7:00pm; Program 7:30pm

Jerry McGee, Road Scholar Tour Guide and Member of HRAS, will take us on a tour of New Zealand from Auckland on the North Island to Stewart Island off the South Island. This program will include spectacular photographs, taken by Gerry, of New Zealand's birds and landscapes.

Note: With an eye on potentially inclement weather, we do not schedule a formal program during February. But try to join us at Feeder Watch or on a local Field Trip.

Spring Luncheon - April 21 2018

Plan ahead and Save the date. Mark your calendar. Our not-to-be missed Spring Luncheon is scheduled for Saturday, April 21, 2018 at the River View, Hastings-on-Hudson. Join us.
ScienceWatch – Bigger is Better for Snail Kites

“We often assume that these large bodied animals can’t keep up with changes to the system, like invasions or climate change, because their generation times are too long. And yet we are seeing this incredibly rapid change in beak size of this bird.” – R. J. Fletcher Jr.

Darwin’s theory of evolution says that as the environment changes, attributes enabling individuals to better withstand these changes are favored by natural selection. If the attributes are inherited, a new species will form over time.

However, not all adaptations are inherited. For example, at higher elevations we have trouble breathing because “thinner” air at higher altitudes means less oxygen is available to us. Over time we adapt by producing more red blood cells to bring more oxygen to our body. The change is not permanent; each time we ascend to heights we must adapt all over again. We are taller now than a century ago, not because of genetic changes but diet. A current example of the latter is the fact that South Koreans are up to three inches taller than North Koreans.

These adaptations in response to environmental changes occur because of changes in gene expression, not changes in the genes themselves. Scientists call such changes phenotypic plasticity (“phenotype” is what an organism looks like, whereas “genotype” refers to its genetic constitution). Now a study published in the November 27, 2017 online version of Nature Ecology & Evolution says that phenotypic plasticity rather than true evolution may be helping snail kites reverse their decades-long decline.

Snail kites feed almost exclusively on apple snails (Pomacea paludosa) by using their curved beak and long talons to extract snail meat from shells. But apple snails have greatly declined in number due to the loss of Florida wetlands to farming and their further degradation by agricultural pollution. As a result, the Florida subspecies of snail kite (Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus) was listed as endangered in 1967.

About a decade ago a much larger exotic snail (P. maculata) invaded Florida waterways. Early observations indicated that snail kite fledglings had difficulty eating the much larger prey and conservationists feared it would be their death knell. But according to the Nature study, the reverse has occurred; snail kite populations are increasing wherever the invasive snail has appeared.

To find out what was happening, a research team, which included Robert J. Fletcher Jr., an ecologist at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, examined whether the change to larger prey affected snail kite body mass, toe length and beak size. They analyzed 11 years of morphological data concluding that all three parameters have increased substantially in barely one generation. Nestlings grew faster and larger where the invasive snail was present and beak size increased even more than body mass. Larger kites with larger beaks were more likely to survive their first year so these changes allowed snail kites to cope with the larger prey and increase in number.

Although the morphological changes were rapid, occurring over 5-8 years, or just 1-1.4 generations, the team found little, if any, variation in beak size among the parents. So it appears that natural selection had no genetic variation to act on and true genetic changes, i.e., evolution, did not occur in the next generation. Rather, the changes appear to be driven by phenotypic plasticity because the larger food source enabled chicks to grow larger.

The scientists point out that they did not look at any genes responsible for the changes they saw. However, since beaks grew even larger than expected in relation to body mass, they suspect that some change in the genetic regulation of beak growth also may have occurred, which could presage a true evolutionary change.

The good news is that, since the larger snails invaded, snail kite numbers increased from a low of 700 in 2007 to well over 2,000 in 2017. “This work illustrates very clearly that these large top predators can respond to invasions at a rate much quicker than most people ever imagined,” said Dr. Fletcher. This rapid adaptation by the snail kite may save it from extinction.

--Saul Scheinbach
Upcoming 2018 Field Trips

Call Michael Bochnik at 914-237-9331 for more information. Visit our web site at www.hras.org

All field trips are free and open to the public. Bring binoculars (some are available for loan). Bring lunch and refreshments for all day trips. Dress appropriately for the weather. More details about the trips can be found on our web site.

Saturday, January 27, 2018
Pelham Bay Park
Meet at Pelham Bay Park at 8:00 AM; far left corner of the Orchard Beach parking lot.
Pelham Bay Park is known for its wintering owls, such as Northern Saw-whet, Great Horned, and Long-eared. We will also search the woods and water for winter birds. American Wigeon, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Merganser should be in the bays.
http://www.hras.org/wtobird/pelhambay.html

Saturday, March 10, 2018
Evening Timberdoodle Walk
6:00 PM Croton Point Park Ball Field
Look for displaying American Woodcocks
http://hras.org/wtobird/croton.html

Saturday, March 31, 2018
Jones Beach – Early Spring Arrivals
8:00AM at the Coast Guard Station West End II
This is a good time for a rarity or a western stray to show up. A variety of bird should be seen from seabirds, ducks, hawks, shorebirds and late land migrants.
http://hras.org/wtobird/jonesbeach.html

Saturday April 28, 2018
Nature Study Woods
Meet at 8 AM at entrance along Webster Avenue at Flandreau Ave at 8:00 AM (~ 806 Webster Ave)

Friday to Monday, May 4 – May 7, 2018
The Delmarva Peninsula
Thursday – drive to Cambridge, MD
Friday – Blackwater NWR, MD
Saturday – Chincoteague NWR, VA
Sunday – Milburn landing SP, MD
Monday – Bombay Hook NWR, DE
We’ll visit Delmarva – DELaware, MARyland and Virginia to search for American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Red-headed Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Prothonotary and Yellow-throated Warblers.
Details on accommodations and full itinerary to follow.

Saturday, May 12, 2018
Birdathon
Bird like crazy in Westchester County to raise money for our chapter. Details to follow.

Sunday May 13, 2018
Mother’s Day Warbler Walk
Lenoir Nature Preserve 8:00 AM
19 Dudley St. Yonkers
Meet us for our 25th year of this Audubon tradition. Spring migrants will be searched for; followed by refreshments at the nature center.
http://www.hras.org/wtobird/lenoir.html

Saturday June 23, 2018
Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge
Meet at the refuge at 8:00 AM
Grasslands birds such as Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrows are expected with the possibility of rarer birds such as Henslow’s Sparrow and Dickcissel.
Feeder Watch Season in Full Flight

Our Feeder Watch program is rolling again. In the first few Feeder Watch we have already seen over 20 species, including most of the usual suspects as well less common winter visitors such as Flickers and Chipping Sparrows. In addition, we have already set the record for the youngest Feeder Watch participant: 11-month old Ben spent an hour watching the birds (and the people) and is said to have enjoyed the experience. He added several new species to his birding life list. You can also.

Feeder Watch is a citizen science program organized by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The idea is simple. We sit snuggly inside Lenoir Nature Center watching the flow of birds to the many bird feeders located just outside large picture windows. Not only do we enjoy watching the birds (that’s the fun part), we also count and record the number of birds we see (that’s the scientific part). Then we transmit our data to Cornell where it is combined with data from tens of thousands of other Feeder Watch sites.

Each Feeder Watch session runs for about two hours. Join us for all or part of a session. A key element is the social aspect. We always have a nice mix of really nice people of all ages and levels of birding skills. Conversation and camaraderie abound. Some feel the best part is the abundant refreshments – coffee, tea, juice, bagels, sweets.

For those new to birds and bird feeding, it’s a wonderful way to learn and sharpen your skills in bird identification in a pleasant social setting. Join us. Everyone is welcome. Last year over 60 people participated, some joined in every count, others only once or twice. Ages varied from youngsters to seniors. Stop by one of these feeder watches. Check our website for exact times  http://HRAS.org

Sat., Jan. 6 - Sun Jan. 7  Sat., Mar.3 - Sun, Mar 4
Sat., Jan.20 - Sun, Jan 21  Sat., Mar.17 - Sun, Mar 18
Sat., Feb. 3 - Sun, Feb 4  Sat., Mar.30 - Sun, Mar 31
Fri., Feb. 16 -Sat, Feb 17
Lenoir Nature Preserve

Lenoir Preserve is a 40-acre county nature preserve comprised of woodlands and field habitats. It is adjacent to the Old Croton Aqueduct, high on a slope overlooking the Hudson River, providing spectacular views of the river and the NJ Palisades.

Opened in 1978, Lenoir Nature Preserve is owned by the County of Westchester. The property was formerly home to two large Hudson River estates and boasted unusual specimen trees and shrubs imported from around the world. Walking trails crisscross the property.

The nature center building is located in a restored turn-of-the-century carriage house on the north end of the property. We use this building for our popular monthly programs as well as the site for our Feeder Watch and other activities. The Lenoir Mansion itself stands on the south end of the property. The setting and beauty of the mansion, which is currently vacant, has made it a popular location for filming feature films and TV shows.

Every spring and autumn, bird watchers gather to observe major hawk migrations along the Hudson River. Nature enthusiasts can learn about raptor identification markings, such as flight patterns and silhouettes, and can take part in official tracking counts of raptors.

In summer, the Beverly E. Smith Butterfly/Hummingbird Garden (created and maintained by our chapter) is filled with many native species plants attracting a wide variety of butterflies.

### Board Members

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