Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester, Inc is a non-profit chapter of National Audubon.

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.

Birding Brazil

Wednesday, March 27th
Refreshments 7:00pm; Program 7:30pm

Wagner Nogueira, Brazilian field biologist and ornithologist, will once again fascinate us discussing the more than 1,870 species of Brazilian birds, their environment and behavior, and the beauty of the country and the birds, as well as his part in the team that re-discovered the blue-eyed ground-dove, a species that hadn’t been seen for 75 years and was thought to be extinct.

Don’t miss this wonderful program.

Spring Luncheon

Saturday, April 27th
Pas-tina’s Restaurante 155 S Central Ave Hartsdale NY
Noon until 4:00pm

Join us for a wonderful Luncheon celebrating the return of spring.

*Delicious Food * Prizes* Good Company * Games * Great Fun

The Luncheon will take place at Pas-tina’s, on Central Ave. in Hartsdale, known for its excellent food. Enjoy a fine meal with friends to welcome spring

Cost is still only $35.00 per person. Cash bar. Guests are welcome. Bring your friends. Reservations are required. Complete the Reservation Form on Page 5 today and mail with your check by April 15th.
**ScienceWatch – Smart is Sexy for Parakeets**

“For the first time we looked directly at whether seeing smart behavior influences partner choice.” – C. ten Cate

Biologist Carel ten Cate, Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands, and his team led by Jiani Chen, Chinese Academy of Science, Beijing, China, studied whether female parakeets prefer males that have become skilled in obtaining food over those that haven’t. They used an apparatus where females could choose between two males before and after one male was trained to obtain food from a petri dish and a translucent puzzle box.

Once a female made her choice by spending more time with one male, the less-preferred male was trained to get food from the containers out of sight of the female. The female then watched each male succeed or fail at obtaining food. In each case the trained male was successful while the untrained one failed, and when tested again the females shifted their preference to the previously non-preferred, but now “smarter” male.

Control trials showed that the females didn’t switch merely because the trained males were eating seed. After females in the control group made their choice, they watched the less-preferred male get food from a regular container while the preferred male had an empty container. In the subsequent preference test these females again spent more time with the originally preferred male.

According to the authors, “Our results show that direct observation of behavior indicating the presence of cognitive skills in potential mates can affect mate preference in a non-human animal.” But in an accompanying article, behavioral scientists George Strieder and Nancy Burley, University of California, Irvine, CA, say, “Although the main result is straightforward, its interpretation is less clear-cut.” They say that without performing the foraging tasks themselves, females may not have realized problem-solving prowess was required. Nevertheless, they applaud the methodology of Chen, *et al.*, and hope others will further clarify the role of “smartness” in mate choice.

Maybe one day men will finally figure out what women want. 

Saul Scheinbach

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In *The Origin of Species* (1859) Charles Darwin introduced the idea of sexual selection. Unlike the struggle for existence occurring in natural selection, sexual selection was a struggle between males for possession of females, what he called the “Law of Battle.” It explained the evolution of male large body size and weapons like antlers.

But male competition couldn’t account for traits that are deleterious to survival (“The sight of a feather in a peacock’s tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick,” he wrote a friend).

So, Darwin invoked a second mechanism, which he called the “Taste for the Beautiful.” In *The Descent of Man* (1871) he said females choose males they consider beautiful. “Just as man can give beauty, according to his standard of taste, to his male poultry, … so it appears that female birds in a state of nature, have by a long selection of the more attractive males, added to their beauty or other attractive qualities.” While male aggression concurred with Victorian culture, female choice didn’t. Critics ridiculed the idea and it faded away.

Today evolutionary biologists accept female choice but debate its role in evolution. Many believe sexual selection is just a special case of natural selection. They say females choose males that prove they are truly robust by surviving in spite of the physical handicaps. Others like Richard Prum (*The Evolution of Beauty*, 2017) have returned to Darwin, defending his idea that ornaments like the peacock’s tail occur simply because peahens find them beautiful. “Birds are beautiful because they are beautiful to themselves,” he says. Some have also proposed that female choice is responsible for the development of cognitive ability in humans and nonhumans.

Now a study reported in the January 11, 2019 issue of *Science* looks at the influence of “smartness” on mate choice in budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulates*), a small Australian parrot, or as we know them, parakeets.
What Makes a Bird a Bird?

Whenever I talk to a group, particularly a group with youngsters, I like to ask them what makes a bird a bird. Do they know what separates birds from all other living creatures? What characteristics do birds have that mammals, fish, insects and other living creatures don’t have? As you might expect, I receive a variety of answers to this question.

The most common response is that birds can fly. That makes them unique. Well, yes, the ability to fly is certainly a special talent. Mammals don’t fly. Nor can fish or reptiles. I can’t fly, but I would like to. However, butterflies, bees, and many insects do fly. So, flying is not a unique characteristic restricted only to birds.

Moreover, not all birds can fly. Another frequently mentioned characteristic is that birds lay eggs. Mammals don’t. That is a major difference between the two. However, turtles, snakes, and many insects also lay eggs, so egg-laying is not unique to birds. Other common guesses include the fact that birds have hollow bones, that they sing songs, they have keen eyesight, and have beaks without teeth. All of these are mostly true but not the main answer.

The Real Difference

The most unique characteristic of birds is the fact that birds have feathers. No other living creatures do, only birds. Feathers are amazing, light-weight, yet strong and flexible.

And birds have lots of them, more than you may expect. A tiny hummingbird may have over 500 feathers, while a large tundra swan will have over 25,000.

Hank Weber

Upcoming Program:

Urban BeeKeeping

Wednesday, May 22nd

Refreshments 7:00pm; Program 7:30pm

Todd Patton will speak on all aspects of Urban Beekeeping including the value of honeybees, bee biology and threats to honeybees, as well as how to make your garden honeybee friendly.

Mr. Patton manages his home apiary in Yonkers and a teaching apiary with three hives in the Bronx. He teaches beekeeping to the clients of a drug treatment program at The Osborne Association in the Bronx. He has trained at the Pfeiffer Center in Spring Valley, NY and with Chris Harp of Honeybee Lives. He has spoken to the Yonkers City Council to help them draft a beekeeping ordinance. He works with private clients locally in Southern Westchester to help them manage their apiaries. In 2017 he helped organize the Yonkers Beekeepers Association. In 2018 he helped Andrus Senior Residence Center establish an apiary which is also being used as a community apiary for members of the Westchester Beekeepers Association. He is a medical doctor by profession.
**Audubon Board Members**

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**Project Feeder Watch**

Project FeederWatch is coming to a close for this season. We have enjoyed watching and counting the birds every other weekend since the middle of November. We've had great volunteers at each session, plus the people who support us. When there are a lot of birds at once at the feeders, it's difficult for one person to count all of them.

One highlight has been the return of the Red-breasted Nuthatch. We hadn't seen one at our FeederWatch for the past couple of years. Welcome back, little RbN! Happy to see you again! On the other hand, we used to see little Miss Carolina Wren at almost every FeederWatch. This year she has shown up only now and then. I refer to her as a female only because Carolina sounds like a girl's name!

I want to thank Lenoir Curator Sara Cavanaugh and her assistant Chevaughn Dixon for keeping our feeders filled, and when they couldn't--thanks to Michael Bochnik, Bill VanWart, and Hank Weber.

Thank you to Allegra Dengler for the purchase of the Acopian bird saver that we now have on our windows to help prevent bird strikes. I am totally amazed that when you look through your binoculars, the black cords hanging down disappear! The only explanation I have is MAGIC!

Below is the schedule for the last 4 FeederWatch sessions:  Specific times will be announced the weekend before each session.

- Sat., March 16 -- Host Yvonne Lynn
- Sat., March 30 -- Host Sandra Wright
- Sun., March 17 -- Host May Guglielmo
- Sun., March 31 -- Host Fran Greenberg

- Carol Lange
Register today for Spring Luncheon
Hudson River Audubon Spring Luncheon
Saturday, April 27th Pas-tina’s Restaurante Hartsdale Noon ’til 4:00pm
Yes, we plan to attend
Your Name(s) ____________________________________________
Phone (Home/Cell) _______________________________________
E-mail Address ___________________________________________
Amount Enclosed: ___x $35 /Person Total Amount: ___________
Please mail this form together with your check to:
Hudson River Audubon Society P.O.Box 616 Yonkers, NY 10703
Deadline to Register: April 15

Upcoming Field Trips
for more information call Michael Bochik at 914-9331
or 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, March 30, 2019**
Jones Beach, West End II
Meet at 9 AM at the Coast Guard Station parking lot.
The first American Oystercatchers, Piping Plovers and Eastern Phoebes should be in. Winter waterfowl will still be present along with the first Osprey and Great Egrets.

**Sunday, April 28, 2019**
Cranberry Lake Bird Walk
1609 Old Orchard St, West Harrison
Meet at 9 AM
The first spring warblers should be in as we explore this 190-acre park. Within the preserve are a variety of habitats including a four-acre lake, cliffs and scrubland, mixed hardwood forest, vernal pools, and a swamp.

**Saturday, May 4, 2019**
Richard W DeKorte Park
1 DeKorte Park, Lyndhurst, NJ
Meet at 8 AM
Part of the New Jersey Meadowlands. This 640-acre landscaped park features a capped landfill and trails that take visitors out into wildlife observation areas and bird blinds. It also includes the Meadowlands Environment Center, which contains informative exhibits on the Meadowlands and its ecology.

**Sunday May 12, 2019**
28th Annual Mother’s Day Warbler Walk
Meet at 10 AM
Lenoir Nature Preserve
19 Dudley Street, Yonkers
Join us for the 28th year of this Audubon tradition. We start with a leisurely walk around the preserve on the newly paved paths. Spring migrants should be abundant. After the walk; please join us in the center for light refreshments
http://www.hras.org/wtobird/lenoir.html

**Saturday, May 18, 2019**
BIRD A THON
On this day members and friends will scour Westchester County to spot as many bird species as we can and to raise money for our chapter. Join us if you can. You can join one of our teams or count the birds in your backyard And be sure to pledge (see last page)
Non-Flying Birds

Just because a bird has feathers doesn’t mean it can fly. Not all birds fly. Worldwide there are over 60 species of non-flying birds. One of the best-known examples of a flightless bird is a penguin. A penguin has feathers, lots of them. In fact, penguins have more feathers per square inch than any other bird, except hummingbirds. Yet, you probably don’t expect to see a penguin flying overhead.

At one time all birds could fly. Why did some species evolve to become non-flyers? One theory suggests that they live in isolated area without large mammalian predators. So, flight was not as necessary to avoid predators. Instead their defensive strategies evolved to more closely emulate those of mammals. They developed powerful legs allowing them to outrun predators. In addition, they often grew larger and stronger allowing them to more effectively fight off a predator.

A classic example is the ostrich which grows to over six feet tall, weighs more than 350 pounds and can outrun a horse. Its powerful kicks coupled with sharp toes can seriously injure any fox, dingo, hyena or other predator, even humans. An ostrich doesn’t need to fly. As a result, its wings have become almost non-existent, mere decorative plumes. An ostrich may wave its fluffy wings around mainly during courtship to impress potential mates, but there is no way their puny wings could generate enough lift to raise an ostrich off the ground.

Most flightless birds live in remote, geographically isolated habitats such as the Australian outback, the African savanna, the Antarctic or remote islands such as New Guinea or New Zealand. In the US you might expect that the Roadrunner of the southwest and cartoon fame would be flightless, but it isn’t. It flies. So, do Wild Turkeys and other large, mostly ground feeding birds you may not suspect.

Feathers do make a bird. And feathers are useful for flight. But not all birds fly. Maybe over the next million years, flightless birds will continue to evolve and eventually lose their feathers altogether, because they are no longer required.

I wonder, when that happens, if they will still be considered birds?

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Update on Hawaiian Crows (‘Alalā) Released into the Wild.

Good news!

In 2017 I wrote about five captive-reared ‘Alalā (Corvus hawaiiensis) released on a Big Island reserve in late 2016 (see: http://hras.org/sw/swmarapr2017.htm). Within weeks one died of starvation, two were killed by their natural predator, the ‘Io or Hawaiian hawk (Buteo solitaries), and the program manager had to rescue the two remaining crows.

Happily, of eleven ‘Alalā, released in late 2017, ten have survived multiple volcanic eruptions and a hurricane. One was found dead with wounds, probably from a predatory attack. But the others have attained a record one year survivorship in the wild and an additional 10 birds released in the fall of 2018 on a different part of the reserve are also still alive. Previous releases failed because the crows didn’t know how to react to the hawk and hadn’t been coached to act as a group. Thanks to predator-avoidance and social training during captivity, they now do what crows are supposed to do to hawks, they mob them.

The San Diego Zoo Global, which heads the project, has been trying to restore the ‘Alalā since it disappeared from the wild in 1990.

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Saul Scheinbach
Bird Notes

.... Birth Announcement: Recently on Midway Atoll in the Pacific, Wisdom, a Laysan Albatross, fledged her latest offspring to retain her position as the world’s oldest avian mother at age 68. Albatross are known as long-distance wanderers. Wisdom, first banded in 1956 by Chandler Robbins (author of The Golden Guide to Birds, is estimated to have flown over 3 million miles in her life... like flying to the moon and back six times.

....thanks to member Allegra Dengler for her donation of a “Bird Saver” to prevent birds from flying into our picture window during feeder watch. And to Michael and Kelli Bochnik for installing it.

.... Big Birds coming to NYC: Beginning in April and continuing until December, National Audubon Society is sponsoring the installation of a dozen large sculptures of endangered birds along a stretch of Broadway from 64th to 166th Street. Plan a field trip to see these sculptures, created by Nicolas Holiber. No need for binoculars. The sculptures, some of them 12 feet tall and larger than a mini-van, are constructed from reclaimed wood gathered from the streets of NYC to draw attention to environmental concerns

....Dumb bird joke: Two vultures were feasting on the remains of a dead clown, one turned to the other and asked “does this taste funny to you?”

....We are saddened to learn of the passing of long-time member Gloria Gerasia.

....Under the leadership of Carol Lange, we are completing another successful year of Feeder Watch.

**BIRD-A-THON**

Hudson River Audubon’s BIRD-A-THON will be held Saturday, May 18th to raise money for the chapter. Join a team and help raise money by looking for birds.

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 you to pledge X amount of money per lap, mile, or in our case, per bird species seen, that day

Typically, the combined list for all our teams is between 100 to 150 species. Your pledge can be a flat amount such as $25.00, or you can pledge per species. For example, if you pledge 25 cents per species and we see 120 species, your total pledge will come to $30.00. We will send a reminder after the event on how much you pledged. Thank you for your generous support!

Remember, even if you’re not participating, please pledge to the Bird-A-Thon to make our efforts worth it and to support Hudson River Audubon.

**HRAS BIRD-A-THON 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 you spot more than _____ species.

Your Name:________________________
Address: ____________________________
City __________ State ___Zip____
Telephone: __________________________
Send to:

Hudson River Audubon Society
P.O. Box 616
Yonkers, NY 10703