

THE RIVERTOWN NATURALIST

Newsletter of the Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester



May 2011, vol. 38, no. 7

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.

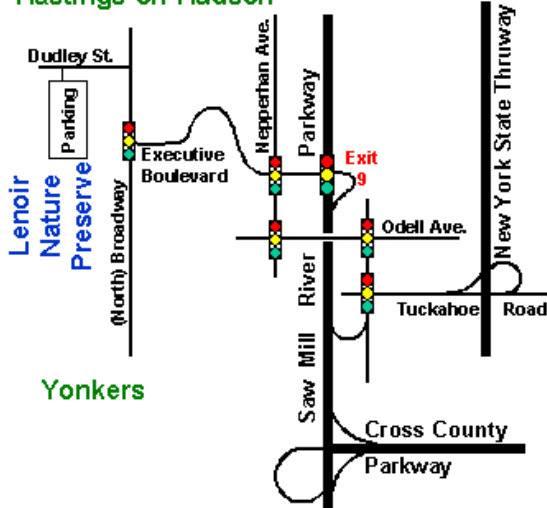
www.hras.org

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.

Hastings-on-Hudson



Wednesday, May 25, 2011
7:00 pm Lenoir Nature Preserve

Birds and Other Animals of East Africa

By Dr. Saul Scheinbach

Refreshments 7:00 – 7:30
Meeting and Program 7:30 PM



Kenya and Tanzania are the premier places to see African wildlife—including over 1,100 bird species. Recently returned from a 3-week tour of the region, our own Dr. Saul Scheinbach will describe the wide array of wildlife he saw in this vast ecosystem and provide some insight into the ecology of the 9,000-square-mile-plain, known as the Serengeti.

Saul has been a Hudson River Audubon Board member for over 15 years. He currently serves as the chapter president. He also writes the *ScienceWatch* column for our newsletter and recently celebrated the publication of his 100th article.



Splendid Starling



ScienceWatch – The Biggest by a Neck

“What makes a sauropod a sauropod is its most conspicuous feature, its enormously long neck.” – P. M. Sander



Sauropods, those long-necked, long-tailed herbivorous dinosaurs, were the largest land animals ever to exist. Some like *Amphicoelias fragilimmus*, *Seismosaurus halli* and *Argentinosaurus huinculensis* attained heights of up to 55 feet, lengths reaching 150 feet and weights approaching 200,000 pounds. Today only the blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*), at 400,000 pounds, is bigger. If sauropods were alive today they could easily graze a five-story rooftop garden as they ambled by on the other side of the street! By contrast, today's largest land animals, elephants (*Loxodonta africana*), weigh a mere 15,000 pounds and stand only 11 feet tall. Adult elephants spend up to 18 hours a day

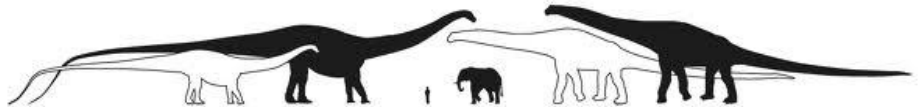
consuming as much as 600 pounds of vegetation. So how did sauropods achieve their unsurpassed dimensions?

For seven years a team of German and Swiss paleontologists, physiologists and zoologists headed by P. Martin Sander*, University of Bonn, Germany, have tested the science behind many hypotheses about organ function, metabolism and even eating habits to solve the mystery of sauropod gigantism. Their findings, which appeared online in *Biological Reviews* on April 29, 2010, and those of others, have now become a book, *Biology of the Sauropod Dinosaurs—Understanding the Life of Giants*, Indiana University Press (March 2011).

Sauropods were extremely successful. Their colossal body size protected them from large predators like *Tyrannosaurus rex*, which was only one-tenth their weight. They first achieved their large-scale life style during the late Triassic, about 200 million years ago, and flourished through the Jurassic until the great asteroid-caused extinction at the end of the Cretaceous, 65 million years ago. Scientists once thought it was the profusion of plants like cycads, ginkgoes and ferns, and other extrinsic factors that favored the massive growth of sauropods. But Sander *et al.* point out that the ancient plants eaten by sauropods were no more nutritious than modern plants and conditions for life were tougher then. For example, oxygen levels were lower. Instead, they say the signature sauropod characteristic of a long neck played a pivotal role in their huge size.

A long neck allowed sauropods to consume massive amounts of foliage without expending much energy because they could stand in one place and

effectively mow down large swaths of foliage. Lacking grinding molars, they didn't waste time chewing. Instead, they used small cutting incisors to wolf down their food, relying on microbial fermentation to digest the vegetation as it slowly moved through their immensely long intestine—a two-week transit time is the estimate. Their necks could grow long because their skulls, lacking large teeth and strong jaws, remained small and lightweight. Even their neck bones were lightweight, as was the rest of their axial skeleton because the bones were “pneumatized”, filled with air sacs.



Sander and his colleagues argue that sauropods never ate their way into starvation. As fast breeders they could maintain a lower population density than slow-breeding large mammals without facing extinction. Since each female laid many eggs, they could quickly recover from population crashes.

Consuming huge amounts of food doesn't make you grow larger, only fatter. Therefore sauropods had to evolve other special features besides long necks to become supersized. Baby sauropods could double their weight every five days, adding several thousand pounds a year as adolescents. Sander *et al.* believe such phenomenal growth rates were fueled by a high rate of metabolism.

Other evidence for a high metabolic rate is provided by the air sacs found throughout the axial skeleton. They indicate sauropods had a highly efficient birdlike lung, which could support a warm-blooded lifestyle. The avian respiratory system allows one-way air flow through tubes (parabronchi) connected to air sacs, creating a loop that allows old air to exit as fresh air comes in. This means old and new air do not mix as occurs in the less efficient mammalian system. Sander *et al.* contend that a birdlike lung was another key component to supersizing and that it would also help sauropods remove excess heat. According to Sander, “The avian lung is crucial for gigantism. If an elephant had birdlike lungs it would grow even bigger.”

Whatever special adaptations allowed these megagiants to achieve such titanic proportions, nothing like them has been seen on earth since their demise. For them bigger truly was better.

Saul Scheinbach

*Dr. Sander will guest curate “The World's Largest Dinosaur”, an exhibit featuring a 60-foot model of the sauropod *Mamenchisaurus* at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. It will run April 16-January 2, 2012.

Gardening through the seasons with a Master Gardener

Volunteers needed for our Butterfly Garden

Come and learn about the needs of a garden throughout the seasons by helping in the maintenance and care of the Beverly Smith Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden at Lenoir Nature Preserve. Planting, transplanting, types of plants, history of medicinal and edible plants of the garden, soil, addressing microclimates are some of the topics that will be addressed during the maintenance.

Join us in the garden between 11 Am and 3 PM on the following dates:
 Sundays May 22, June 26, August 7, September 25 and October 23, 2011
 Contact Mary Harrington at tctallon@aol.com for more information

National Audubon's 2011 Bird-a-thon

Now is the time to form a team to help raise funds for our chapter. A team can be just yourself or a small group that will seek out pledges from friends, neighbors, strangers and family to support the Hudson River Audubon Society. Then, on Saturday May 14, instead of walking or biking a set of miles, the team tries to see as many bird species for the day. You can collect pledges for a standard amount or they can pledge a certain amount of money for each bird seen.



You don't have to be a great birder or see a long list of birds to form a team. You can collect pledges based on just the birds in your backyard, or maybe your local park. Then let your pledges know what you found! It is a great way to raise funds and teach people what birds are around them.

Of course, we will have the returning teams who will try to see over 100 species for the day. The Raven Loon-a-tics and Team Eagle will challenge each other to see who will see more, and collect more donations. These teams will start in the early morning, well before sunrise and bird all day, traveling through a number of counties from Sullivan, through Westchester and out to Queens and Nassau.

Our pledge form will also be in our April and May newsletters. Make copies for your friends and neighbors. Don't forget to make your own pledge too!

For more information call our Bird-a-thon coordinator Michael Bochnik at (914) 237-9331 or contact him at bochnikm@cs.com. The pledge form can also be found on our web site at www.hras.org/trips/birdathon.html

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.

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. Outdoor activities such as birding and hiking with a group are 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. Non-members/ newcomers are welcome

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 contact him at bochnikm@cs.com. Additional information with maps and directions to each location is available on our web site at www.hras.org.

Saturday May 7, 2011

Celery Farm, Allendale, New Jersey

Meet at Celery Farm at 8 AM. Allow at least 45 minutes drive time

1. From Tappan Zee Bridge - Take I-87 north 19.7 miles to Exit 15 (I-287 South/ NY-17 South).
2. Stay left and take Route 17 South 7.3 miles into New Jersey and take the exit toward Allendale.
3. Stay straight to go onto E Allendale Road / Road 90.
4. Take E Allendale Road /CR-90 for 0.6 miles and turn right onto Cottage Place; in 0.1 of a mile, at the T-intersection, turn right onto Franklin Turnpike; and in 0.1 of a mile turn right into the parking area. If the lot is full, or if you wish to explore the north end of the Celery Farm, you may continue north on Franklin Turnpike to the second street on the right, before the traffic light, marked Green Way. Proceed to the end and park in the turn-around area. This is a residential street, so please drive and park considerately. Please do not block the large gates leading into the Celery Farm.



Sunday May 8, 2011

Mothers Day Warbler Walk

8 AM Lenoir Nature Preserve

19 Dudley Street, Yonkers – off North Broadway just north of Executive Blvd.

A Hudson River Audubon tradition! We will walk around the park; and will include a visit to the butterfly garden. Refreshment served afterwards at the nature center.

Sunday May 15, 2011

Doodletown Road, Rockland County

Meet at the trailhead at 8AM, Bring lunch, drinks.

Coming in June

Riverfest

Sunday, June 12, 2011

Mt. St. Vincent College

1:00 PM to 6:00PM

HRAS will again be a participant in the June 12TH "RIVERFEST". It will be held on the campus of Mt. St.

Vincent College overlooking the Hudson River (entrance on Riverdale Ave. and 263rd St. in Riverdale.) Last year's event featured boat rides, live animal exhibits, a farmers' market, nature related exhibits, live music, and activities for children.

We hope you will join us. Look on the HRAS website (HRAS.org) for updated information as it becomes available.

Dragonfly and Damselfly Day

Saturday, June 18

11:00 am Lenoir Nature Preserve

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 18, 2011 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. After the field session we will have dragonfly crafts.

Member's Night

Wednesday, June 22, 2011

7:00 pm Lenoir Nature Preserve

Get your best digital pictures ready! Members will show 10 - 20 of their best nature photos.

NYS Young Birders Club 2010 Field Trips Summary

(Hudson River Audubon Society is a group member of the New York State Ornithological Association, NYSOA and is a proud supporter of the association's New York State Young Birders Club, NYSYBC.)

This 2010 field trips wrap-up was written by a young birder for the NYSYBC Annual Kickoff meeting held on January 22, 2011.

2010 was another great year in terms of NYSYBC trips. The year began with a meeting at the Marshlands Conservancy in Rye, which was a blast. Regardless of the early January date, the group had 41 species, including several waterfowl that hadn't made their way onto the club's total checklist. The next outdoors trip (the American Museum of Natural History had loads of great birds that were not able to make the list), to Stockport Flats in March, gave us long-absent Killdeer for the list and the second club record of Ring-necked Duck. April brought migrants to Derby Hill for our trip there, including Long-tailed Duck, Caspian Tern, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, and Purple Martin. Thanks to those four species, the cumulative list finally shot past 200 species! Definitely not bad for 11 trips and 2 meetings.

The long-awaited spring Bashakill trip came to fruition in May. It brought six new NYSYBC birds and a whole lot of other mentionables: Virginia Rail, Common Moorhen, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Whip-poor-will, Yellow-throated Vireo, another sighting of Northern Rough-winged Swallow, our 3rd record of Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Wilson's Warbler, and Bobolink.

Coordinating a June trip to Whiteface Mountain in the Adirondacks was difficult, but it rewarded the few who could make it with alpine musicians like Winter Wren, and Swainson's and Bicknell's Thrushes. In July, the only logical place to go was the beach, so some club

Trip to Israel Yields Birds

A recent trip to Israel proved to be more productive bird-wise than expected. The trip was mainly designed to cover 4000 years of history, from Canaanite times to the present, but early morning walks equipped with my binoculars provided some really exciting birding opportunities. And, I even got to cross the Jordan on one of them, albeit on a bridge. Unfortunately for us New Yorkers, we brought our weather with us, which limited some of our outdoor adventures. However, our hosts were delighted since they've had seven years of drought. Sound familiar? Check out the reference to the seven lean years in the Joseph story.

Some of the birds were familiar such as Great Egrets, Cattle Egrets, Monk Parakeets, Eurasian Collared Doves and the ubiquitous English Sparrow. But many were new and especially welcome at the end of a winter that has kept my birding instincts at bay. Among the finds:

Magpies, which were everywhere, Spur-Winged Plovers, Syrian Woodpeckers, European Shags, Yellow-vented Bulbuls, Mourning Wheatears, Sunbirds, a Eurasian Kestrel, a European Bee Eater and Yellow Wagtails. Even the names were fun to read.

The next step, obviously is to plan a natural history tour of Israel's Hula Valley where five hundred million birds fly through each migration. Maybe the next trip will yield birds such as the Hoopoe or Ouzel. - Jackie

members got together for a trip at Cupsogue County Park on Long Island. Since it was our first trip directly on the ocean, we racked up some 9 new species for the cumulative list. They were Northern Gannet, Whimbrel, Red Knot, Sanderling, Roseate Tern, Black Skimmer, Saltmarsh Sparrow, Seaside Sparrow, and by some excellent fortune, a Sandwich Tern!

After two years of very productive August trips to Jamaica Bay, it seemed ridiculous to switch anything up. We matched Marbled Godwit and Wilson's Phalarope from the 2009 trip, but upped the ante with an American White Pelican and Marsh Wren. Farther into the wilds of New York City, the September Central Park trip was even more productive. Exciting species included Merlin, Common Nighthawk, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, and Gray-cheeked Thrush. Finally, October's Walkkill walk produced some nice migrants like Blackpoll Warbler and Vesper Sparrow, which happened to be the club's 224th bird species. So the cumulative checklist remains there, after 20 excursions of one sort or another, lots of great finds, and a healthy dose of good company. So here's to another great year with more young eyes for the spotting!

– Brendan Fogarty, Age 18

2010 NYSYBC Records Chair & Photo Editor NYSYBC is a special project of NYSOA (NYS Ornithological Association). Thanks to NYSOA/NYSYBC's generous partner organizations (and the students' very supportive parents), our young birders continue to enjoy great birding experiences in various locations around the state.

We have seen some great friendships develop among these fine young people over the past few years. If you are not yet a member, please demonstrate your support to an amazing group of young birders by joining. For more information, visit

nysyoungbirders.org and nybirds.org.

– Carena Pooth, NYSYBC Adult Chair



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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: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

Please make check payable to:
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