November/December 2011, vol. 39, no. 3

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

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Long Live The Queen!

An introduction to the European honey bee and beekeeping

Presenter: Alan Soiefer
Wednesday
November 16, 2011
Lenoir Nature Center

You will learn all about the busy social life and caste system of honey bees in their hives, including the duties of the queen, the workers, and the drones. The presentation will also describe a typical beekeeper’s hive (as well as the observation hive at the Nature Center), and the tools and equipment used by a beekeeper. You will be treated to a honey tasting as well.

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

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Holiday Luncheon

December 10, 2011 ~ Saturday ~ The Polish Center

There will be a white elephant table with new or gently used books, knick-knacks, or other items that are nature-related. If you wish to contribute something for this table, please mark a suggested donation on the item.

Remember: “one person’s junk is another person’s treasure. Anything not sold must go home with the contributor.

Tee-shirts and sweatshirts will also be available. Proceeds will go to HRAS to be used for activities offered by our chapter. Please see flyer for details and be sure we receive your registration form by December 1st.

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Northern Saw-whets: the little known owl

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.
Save the date!

The Opening Reception of “Seasons at Lenoir” Art & Photography Exhibit will take place on March 3rd at 11:00 AM.

Works must have as their subjects some facet of the Lenoir Nature Preserve — the range is broad and can include wildlife, plants and trees, landscapes, structures, people engaged in activities, etc. Details will appear in the January/February newsletter.

Lenoir Programs

**Birds, Birds, Birds ~ Saturday, December 3, 2011 ~ 10:00 AM**

An introduction to bird identification. Join us as we view images of our common and some uncommon birds of our area. Learn how to use size, shape and color in identifying birds. We will use our new skills as we sit indoors to watch and identify birds at Lenoir’s feeders. Make a journal to record your observations. Fun and informative for the whole family. Bring binoculars if you have them.

**Surviving the Winter ~ Saturday, January 21, 2012 ~ 10:00 AM**

Learn how plants and animals survive the winter. How do squirrels, insects, frogs and turtles live in winter? What adaptations do birds make in winter? Learn the answer to these questions and more. Weather permitting we will take a walk at the preserve looking for wildlife. There will be a craft for the children. Ages 5 to 10. Fun for the entire family. Preregistration required. Call the Nature Center at 914-968-5851.

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Hudson River Audubon Society’s
Holiday Luncheon
at the Polish Center, 92 Waverly Street, Yonkers

Buffet by Polonaise Catering
Saturday, December 10, 2011 ~ 11:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Special Guest Speaker: David Yarnold, President of the National Audubon Society

$33.00 per person ~ Cash bar available
Seating arrangement is on a first come basis.
Checks for reservations must be received by Dec 1 to:
Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester
Holiday Reservation, PO BOX 616, Yonkers, NY 10703

☐ Yes, We would like to attend. Enclosed is a check for $_________ for ________ reservations.
   Directions, tickets, and confirmation will be sent on receipt of payment.

☐ Sorry, we cannot attend but enclosed is a donation of $_________ to further Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester’s efforts to educate children about our natural world.

Name: ____________________________________________
Address: _________________________________________________________________________
City, State, Zip: ____________________________ Tel. ________________________

Yes, We would like to attend. Enclosed is a check for $_________ for ________ reservations.
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Name: ____________________________________________
Address: _________________________________________________________________________
City, State, Zip: ____________________________ Tel. ________________________

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The Rivertown Naturalist
Every birder has been at one time or another been dazzled by the iridescent, flashy colors of a male hummingbird. However, the showy display during his aerial maneuvers is not the only thing a female hummingbird notices. In some species when males dive in front of observing females during their courtship flights they also produce high-pitched squeaks or chirps. In 2008 two graduate students Christopher Clark and Teresa Feo at UC Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, CA, showed that tail feathers produce the squeaks.

But it wasn’t clear exactly how these sounds were produced. So Clark, now at Yale University, New Haven, CT, and his colleagues plucked rectrices, the stiff tail feathers used to control flight direction, from 14 hummingbird species and subjected them to various air speeds in a wind tunnel. They used a Scanning Laser Doppler Vibrometer, which measures the vibrations of a surface, and high speed videos to observe the fluttering feathers in the wind tunnel. The results, published in the September 9, 2011 issue of Science, show that the squeaks come from tail feathers that vibrate only when the bird is at top speed near the bottom of his power dive.

For example, male Anna’s Hummingbirds (Calypte anna) climb to 30 meters (100 feet) or more, and then dive at speeds of over 23 meters per second (50 miles per hour). At the bottom of their dive the birds produce a loud chirp.

When Clark et al. placed individual tail feathers in the wind tunnel and gradually increased airflow, they found that male hummingbird feathers began vibrating and producing sounds at wind speeds corresponding to normal dive velocities. The sound frequencies produced in the wind tunnel matched what was observed during a courtship dive. Once the critical air speed was reached, increasing it made the sound louder, which also happens when males speed up their dive.

In certain instances the researchers found that neighboring feathers amplify sound by sympathetic vibrations. For example, while the outermost tail feather, R5, in the Black-chinned Hummingbird (Archilochus alexandri) produced a sound, the adjacent tail feather (R4) tested at the same wind speed did not. However, placing R4 next to the vibrating R5 feather in the wind tunnel yielded sympathetic vibrations in the otherwise silent feather, which increased the volume of the sound produced by the R5 feather alone. Similarly, removing R4 from a diving male bird decreased the volume of its chirp.

Different species produced different sounds leading the scientists to conclude that each species has a signature sound, determined by physical factors intrinsic to the tail feathers. “The sounds that hummingbird feathers make are more varied than I expected”, said Clark. He speculated that the buzz-bombing displays resulted from sexual selection by females who began using the incidental sounds produced by feathers in flight to determine male fitness. The best flyers are the most fit and they make the loudest sound.

Co-author Richard Prum who has been investigating the realm of evolutionary aesthetics thinks it is much more straightforward than that. He believes that females have simply evolved to like a particular sound. He says, “What intrigues them will ultimately evolve, but what they will find intriguing is as unpredictable as next years fashions.”

Whatever the reason, it seems that a successful male hummingbird must be pleasing to the ear as well as the eye.
Christmas Bird Counts

If you’re looking for a local birding activity that’s not only fun and exciting, but helps with valuable winter bird population data, come on out and help on a Christmas Bird Count. They are censuses, near Christmas, of the number of each species of bird seen in a 24-hour period in a particular area or count circle.

Bird counts will be conducted from December 14 to January 5, 2012. Our local one, the Bronx-Westchester CBC will be held Monday, December 26, 2011. The Peekskill CBC and the Greenwich CBC will be held a week early on the 17th and 18th of December.

There is no particular meeting place for these events. Different groups of volunteers start at various locations throughout southern Westchester and the Bronx and canvass their area for birds. You can also participate by identifying and counting the birds at your feeder on the count day and phoning in the results.

We will tally the results from all the groups at the compilation dinner ($10) at the Lenoir Nature Preserve in north Yonkers.

For more information, see the count’s web site at http://www.hras.org/bwcbc.html or call the Bronx-Westchester Count Compiler, Michael Bochnik at 237-9331, or e-mail him at bochnikm@cs.com.

From the President’s Corner

We are pleased to announce that Hudson River Audubon, in partnership with Groundwork Hudson Valley and Westchester County, has been awarded a TogetherGreen Innovation grant from National Audubon. The program supports creative, ambitious conservation partnerships that engage diverse communities and finds innovative solutions to environmental challenges. The grant for $15,000 was one of 40 approved this year in a nationwide competition. Groundwork Hudson Valley will generously supply an additional $7,000. This funding will allow us to create a new riparian habitat exhibit at the Lenoir Nature Preserve.

Working with a newly formed advisory council representing the greater diversity of the Yonkers community, the partners will create an interpretive exhibit, train interpreters to communicate with area residents about the importance of the park’s habitat for birds and other wildlife, and develop events to attract a more diverse audience. In the year ahead, this community restoration effort aims to open Yonkers citizens’ eyes to the gem of a habitat in their own backyard, while instilling a sense of pride and hope about the future of their city. The new project is also intended to create greater opportunities for all area residents to engage in ongoing habitat restoration in Southwest Westchester County. The work is expected to begin in July 2012.

Saul Scheinbach

Project FeederWatch

Our Project FeederWatch will kick off on Saturday, November 19, with Dana and Frank Fazzino as the leaders. We will gather in Lenoir’s “observation” room and look out the big picture windows to identify and count the birds at the feeders. Please come and join us for two hours of enjoyment! Bring your binoculars if you have them. Refreshments will be served.

The FeederWatch schedule for the rest of the year is as follows:

Sunday, November 20 — Jackie Bruskin
Saturday, December 3 — Paul Oehrlein
Sunday, December 4 — Mary Harrington
Saturday, December 17 — Hilary and Alan Soiefer
Sunday, December 18 — Fran Greenberg
Thursday, December 29 — Sandra Wright
Friday, December 30 — Yvonne Lynn

Please contact Carol Lange at 914 668-5101, or CarolLange@aol.com a few days before each session to find out the exact time.
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 and are encouraged to join us as members ($20 introductory offer).

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.

Directions for most trips can be found on our web site at www.hras.org.

**Croton Point Park**
**Sunday November 13, 2011**
**5:30 AM for early risers**
**9:00 AM meet at the Main Gate**

Paul Oehrlein has volunteered to lead a club bird walk in November. Sunrise is at 06:40 and any hearty souls are welcome to meet him at the Croton River train bridge south of the parking lot at 05:30 to see the departing overnight waterfowl.

Another meeting spot will be the main gate to the park at 9 AM and we'll look for pipits and other grass birds on the landfill followed by a return trip to the estuary to see what waterfowl may be present. There is also a good probability we'll see some eagle activity. Dress warmly; it is always chillier near the water! See http://www.hras.org/wtobird/croton.html for directions and map.

**Jones Beach**
**Sunday Dec 4, 2011**
**8 AM Meet at the Coast Guard Station in the West End II section**

The barrier beaches are great places to bird in the late fall/winter. The bays and ocean can have a variety of loons, grebes, scoters, mergansers and other seaducks. The grassy median and parking lots can hold Snow Buntings, Horned Larks, and Lapland Longspurs. Rare gulls may mingle with common gulls. Birds of prey like the Northern Harrier and maybe even a Snowy Owl may be hunting in the dunes. The trees and shrubs may hold a rare bird or stray from the west. A long and varied list of birds should be tallied. Dress appropriately; expect windier and cooler conditions than at home. The trip should last till early afternoon. Only heavy rain will cancel the trip.

Directions:
In Long Island take the Southern State to Exit 22S, Meadowbrook Pkwy./Jones Beach. Take Meadowbrook Parkway south and at the closed parking tolls stay to the left and go around them, then get back into the right lane. After about ½ mile bare right toward West End 2. Go past the Police barracks on the right and continue to the next turn off. Make two rights into the public parking area. See http://www.hras.org/wtobird/jonesbeach.html for map.

**Considering late year donations to your favorite charities and non-profit?**

Go online to our web page at www.hras.org and click on “Donate” to make a contribution to the Hudson River Audubon Society using Facebook Causes.

Or send us your donation to
HRAS, PO Box 616, Yonkers, NY 10703

Thank you.
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.

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Telephone

CHAPTER # 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.