

JAN/FEB/MAR

2005

VOLUME 60, ISSUE 1



# Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon Society Newsletter



Chapter of the National Audubon Society serving the communities of Bronxville, Eastchester, Edgemont, Hartsdale, Larchmont, Mamaroneck, Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, Pelham, Scarsdale and Tuckahoe

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## PRYER MANOR MARSH BIRD INVENTORY

A Restoration in Progress

Wetlands are becoming a scarce commodity – often filled in for developments of all sort, drained when water is diverted, or dammed. But a restoration is taking place in Southern Westchester and the process is fascinating. As part of the Long Island Sound Restoration Partnership with the NYS Clean Air/Clean Water Bond Act, funds were obtained to restore the Pryer Manor Marsh, a 2.5-acre stagnant freshwater pond to a tidal salt marsh at the foot of Dillon Road on the border of Larchmont and New Rochelle. Culverts were reconnected from the Premium Mill Pond tidal basin to the marsh, a horseshoe shaped trench dug around the perimeter of the marsh, most of the phragmites were eliminated and water gauges were installed to evaluate the changing water levels. The next step in this multi-year process is to replant the salt marsh with native plants.

During this process, concerns arose that the former pond, now mostly a salt-water mud flat, floods only during the highest tides, resulting in far fewer bird species. Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon was asked to conduct a bird inventory from September to mid-October this past year to determine the status of the birds frequenting the marsh. Doug Bloom and Sandra Marraffino volunteered and made 84 visits to the marsh during this time, recording bird species, time seen, tide levels, and weather conditions. Copies of the final report were given to the NYS DEC, officials from the Town of Mamaroneck and City of New Rochelle and local residents. Over 300 digiscope bird photographs were taken and a CD of these photos was included in the report.



*Great Egret on the Marsh*

We were delighted to see shore birds frequenting the marsh. Migrants on their way south from the sub-arctic breeding grounds, stopping to refuel and rest, included Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, up to 100 each on several days. White-rumped, Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers were also spotted feeding on the marsh. Great Blue Herons, one Little Blue Heron, Black-Crowned Night Herons and a Green Heron, along with Snowy and Great Egrets were seen, both at low and higher tides, along with Greater Yellow Legs, and almost daily sightings of Semipalmated Plovers and Killdeer, all looking for small fish, worms, grass shrimp and other food brought in by the tides. A Belted Kingfisher rattled its call as it skimmed the moat. The marsh edges, brimming with jewelweed and black-eyed Susans, attracted Common Yellow-throat Warblers, Song Sparrows, Gold Finches and Ruby Throated Hummingbirds. A total of 73 species of birds was recorded, with 3,980 individual birds counted.



*Sandpipers on the Pryer Manor Marsh*

BRSS was asked to return in the spring to continue monitoring migrant species on their way north and local birds using the marsh for food, shelter and nesting habitat.

## Eastern Bluebirds Vote

By Sandy Morrissey

Round or oval entrance hole? Rectangular or triangular shaped birdhouse? Which would the eastern bluebird prefer? Getting the answer to these questions resulted in 14 baby eastern bluebirds taking flight – our biggest success story of the Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society’s Eastern Bluebird Project.



*Shameka Edmond with two styles of birdhouses.*

Shameka Edmond, a White Plains high school student, needed a bird research project. She contacted BR-SS Audubon Society, and we decided she could create one involving eastern bluebirds.

Our birdhouse kit supplier had suggested that people reported greater occupancy success with Peterson birdhouses (triangular-shaped and named after the designer) than with traditional rectangular-shaped ones. He also had reports that oval holes were preferred by bluebirds to round holes. Shameka’s project was to test these two hypotheses.

We got permission to put up 20 birdhouses on the grounds of The Burke Rehabilitation Center in White Plains, near her school, and with its expansive mowed grounds with scattered trees and shrubs, it was a perfect bluebird habitat.

In one area she tested the house shapes, putting up five Peterson houses and five traditional style houses. In another location all the houses were traditional style, but half had oval holes and half round. All the houses faced the same direction and were equal height off the ground.

The biggest surprise was that within a month we had three nesting pairs of Eastern bluebirds – right in the middle of White Plains! Books on bluebirds recommend placing birdhouses 100 yards apart because they are territorial. But in the area where we were testing birdhouse shapes, two pairs nested only 50 yards apart.

Another exciting event was that one pair laid white eggs, instead of the usual blue. Bluebird literature states that the eggs are blue, but occasionally they are white. We got to witness that exception.

What were the results of Shameka’s research? The eastern bluebirds voted with their nest material. In the area testing birdhouse shape, three out of four bluebird nests were built in Peterson birdhouses. When we included the tree swallows, which also nested in the boxes, all 5 Peterson birdhouses were occupied. In the same area, only two of the five traditional rectangular-style houses were occupied.

As to preference of entrance hole shape, the one nesting pair of bluebirds in this area chose the hole with an oval entrance. Including tree swallows and a house wren, which also nested in this area, four of the five oval entrance boxes were occupied. Only one birdhouse with a round entrance was occupied

White the number of houses used was probably too small to make a statistical difference, the results favor purchasing or building Peterson style birdhouses with oval entrance holes. Thanks, Shameka, for helping us learn this.

### *Neither Rain nor - Annual Christmas Bird Count*

On Sunday, December 26<sup>th</sup>, the Bronx-Westchester Christmas Bird Count totaled 111 species of birds. In the BRSS Scarsdale area of the count, 75 species were found and 11,130 individual birds were counted.

Special thanks to the 19 people who helped do the counting on this day. Some of the good sightings were a Great Egret at Hampshire Country Club in Mamaroneck, a flock of 1,300 Brant and 600 Black scoters off Edgewater Point in Mamaroneck.

*Doug Bloom*



*Thanks to Nadia Valla for the photo*

### **WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS**

*We extend a warm welcome to all.*

**Bronxville** - Emma Fursland, Pat & Rose Hogan, John Isaac, Veronica Mitchell, Peter Shalleck, Barbara Wentzel; **Hartsdale** - Carol Burke, William Goodman, Raymond Napoli, Mark Tyler; **Larchmont** - Holly Brookstein, Alex Buchman, Joseph DeSanto, John Vassallo; **Mamaroneck** - Ann Metcalfe; **Mount Vernon** - Moira Dooling, Monigoe Finley, Mary Gleason, Patricia Monahan, Maureen Newmeyer, June Passantino; **New Rochelle** - Michelle Gallagher, Mr. & Mrs. Gontcharuk, Pam Kie, Italo Mazzella, Edward Mitko, Joyce Newman, Ruth Ni; **Pelham** - Isabel Harther, John Tiggeloven; **Scarsdale** - Stanley Janow, Phyllis Jassey, Ruth Levine, Walter Lockwood, Gloria Neil, Jeff & Wendy Samuelson, Marvin Sharpiro, William Sherman, Peter Simon; **Tuckahoe** - Christa McClory

# THE WORLD OF BUTTERFLIES

SCARSDALE LIBRARY, MARCH 17TH.

Social at 7:30, program at 8.



Open your vision to a whole new world of color and enjoyment provided by these fragile and fascinating creatures, how and where to find them and how to attract more species to your yard. **Jeffrey Glassberg**, author of *"Butterflies Through Binoculars"* and former Westchester resident, is an authority on butterflies and will show slides of some of the butterflies of Eastern North America.

*This program is co-sponsored by BRSS and Central Westchester Audubon.*

*For more information please contact: Mike Bryson, Program 337-0333*

## NYC's Celebrity Hawks, Pale Male and Lola, Set to Rebuild Nest.

by Cece Fabbro

**December 30, 2004.** The cradle support is now up, the pigeon spikes back in place, and the scaffolding taken down. Homeless no more, Pale Male and his mate Lola, NYC's celebrity hawks, are set to rebuild their nest at 927 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue if they so choose. Happily for all Pale Male watchers, the pair was spotted sitting on the new support yesterday. This is good news for all who woke up to the devastating news on December 7<sup>th</sup> that Pale Male's nest of 11 years had been destroyed by an order of the resident co-op board.

The story of NYC's top bird, Pale Male, began in 1993 when, instead of migrating as red-tail hawks normally do, he decided to take up residence on a window ledge of one of NYC's most prestigious co-ops facing Central Park. Since then, he has taken 5 mates, sired 23 live chicks, and provided fans with his own version of a "reality show" as he courted, mated, fought off predators, incubated eggs, and taught his offspring to fly and hunt all in plain view. His life has been the subject of a book, *Red Tails in Love* by Marie Winn, and several documentaries including the film titled *Pale Male* by Frederic Lilien.

But on December 7<sup>th</sup>, Pale Male and his mate were left homeless following the co-op board's decision to remove the nest for "safety reasons". The ensuing outcry from NYC residents and bird enthusiasts the world over was swift and vocal. Protesters, including the actress Mary Tyler Moore, a co-op resident, staged a round the clock vigil in front of the building and spoke openly to the media. Thousands signed an Audubon Society petition, wrote letters, made phone calls and sent e-mails to co-op residents including CNN newscaster Paula Zahn (wife of Richard Cohen, co-op board president) requesting that the nest be put back. So much furor resulted from the nest removal that the co-op board decided to call a meeting of Government officials and environmental advocates, including the Audubon Society, to discuss building a support that would allow the hawks to rebuild while addressing the safety concerns of co-op members.

An agreement favorable to all involved resulted. That support is now up. It remains to be seen, however, whether or not the hawks will accept the new platform for nest building. We will watch and wait. Stay posted for updates.

## Greetings from National Audubon

The dates for the 2005 **Great Backyard Bird Count** are February 18-21, 2005, and we hope you will make a point of taking part on at least one of the four days.

This year we are encouraging you to go out into America's Great Backyard, our public lands, and count birds. Take your family to your local National Park, National Wildlife Refuge or other public space and count the birds you see. Then return to your computer and enter the birds noted at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc). We will then add your sightings to those that others reported to present a full picture of our bird life. For instructions and checklists that can be downloaded, see [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc). Please encourage your friends, family, and colleagues to take part too and help us spread the word.

*Paul Green  
Director of Citizen Science*

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## Turtles on Ice

Painted turtles have surprising winter survival skills and can even be seen moving slowly under pond ice in winter. Decaying plant matter deoxygenates the water under the ice.



*Turtle at Beechmont Lake, New Rochelle*

Storing up body fat in the fall, the turtles alter their metabolism to survive without oxygen and can stay submerged, holding their breath for as long as 3-5 months this way, lowering their heartbeat to once every ten to eleven minutes.

**BRONX RIVER-SOUND SHORE  
AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
(formerly Scarsdale Audubon Society)  
PO Box 1108  
Scarsdale, NY 10583

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## January - April Field Trips

*Please let the leaders know if you plan to attend*



**Saturday, January 29**

### **DAYTIME OWL PROWL**

**Pelham Bay Park 8:00 A.M.**

*Co-sponsored with Hudson River and Central Westchester Audubon Societies. This trip is bi-lingual, in Spanish.*

A winter walk in search of saw-whet, great horned and long-eared owls. Also a good location for a variety of wintering ducks. Meet at the Orchard Beach parking lot, left front corner toward the beach as you enter the lot. Leader: Mike Bochnik 237-9331.

**Saturday, February 12**

### **BALD EAGLES AND MORE**

**Croton Point Park 8:00 A.M. Croton-on-Hudson**

This is the best local site for wintering bald eagles and owls. Up to 30 or so bald eagles winter on the Hudson River in the vicinity of Croton Point. Meet at the Wild Bird Center, Central Ave., Scarsdale, 8:00 AM Leader: Doug Bloom 713-0630.

**Sunday, April 17**

### **SPRING MIGRATION BEGINS**

**Hart's Brook Park And Preserve, 156 Ridge Road, Hartsdale**

*Co-sponsored with Central Westchester Audubon Society This is a bilingual trip, in Spanish.*

One of our newest local preserves, this park, with woodlands and open meadow, draws bluebirds, a variety of warblers and other songbirds. Meet at Hart's Brook Park parking lot, 8:00 AM Leader: Doug Bloom Eves: 834-5203.

**Saturday, April 30**

### **EARLY MIGRANT TRAP**

**Garrett Mountain Reservation, Passaic, New Jersey**

This large mountain reservation provides lakes and ponds, wetlands and hardwood forests, which in turn offer migrating birds a good selection of food on their way north. Meet at Scarsdale City Hall, 6:30 AM Leader: Andrew Block (337-1229).

An added benefit of membership in Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society

**20% Discount on any one item** (*optics and sale items excluded*)

Offer expires on February 28, 2005

*Cut coupon and bring to Center*

Bird Feeders, Bird Seed, Bird Houses, Bird Baths, Mounting Poles and Brackets,  
Squirrel Baffles, Nature Books, Field Guides, Tapes, CDROMs, Videos, Kid's  
Nature Items, Games, Weather Instruments, Nature-Related Gift Items and much more



### **Wild Bird Center**

Greenville Plaza  
400 Central Park Ave.  
Scarsdale, NY 10583  
(914) 713-0630