



Serving Stony Brook, Setauket, Port Jefferson,  
Mount Sinai, Smithtown and the surrounding areas

# THE FOUR HARBORS HERON

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## *A Message from the President*

Friends and supporters of our Planet:

It is difficult not to become depressed by all that is going on in our world, so let's look forward to these wonderful events that will be taking place in the next few months:

- Great-horned Owl young being fed by both parents.
- The arrival of Eastern Phoebes,
- Beautiful spring flowers in bloom,
- American Oystercatchers looking for nest sites,
- The drumming of woodpeckers as they look for mates,
- The arrival of Osprey the third week in March,
- Early warblers appearing at the beginning of April: Pine, Palm and Yellow-rumped,
- Endangered shorebirds looking for beaches to lay eggs, and

- At the end of April, spring migration will be going strong!

May 1st is ALWAYS the arrival date of Baltimore Orioles in my neighborhood.

The numbers of birds seen every migration is gradually decreasing, so please make your yard bird-friendly. If you have questions, e-mail us for suggestions.

Now more than ever our feathered friends need your yard to provide important habitat, both for our residents and for migrants.

Reduce the size of your lawn and save time, money and energy.

Our slogan is:

**Changing Long Island one yard at a time** - it starts with you!

*Susan Krause*



# Calendar of Events

## Four Harbors Walks

March 12, 2016:

Woodcock walk at Avalon Park and Preserve, meet at Barn, before sunset, about 5:30 p.m.

March 12, 2016:

- Avalon Park & Preserve Bird Walk, 9 a.m.
- Frank Melville Memorial Park/Mill Pond Bird Walk, 11 a.m.

April 9, 2016:

- Avalon Park & Preserve Bird Walk, 8 a.m.
- Frank Melville Memorial Park/Mill Pond Bird Walk, 11 a.m.

May 14, 2016:

- Avalon Park & Preserve Bird Walk, 8 a.m.
- Frank Melville Memorial Park/Mill Pond Bird Walk, 11 a.m.

## Four Harbors Presentations

**A Birding Adventure at Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine**, Smithtown Public Library, Main Branch, 3/22/16, 7 p.m.

### Wonderful Wildlife of Long Island, Past and Present:

- Port Jefferson Library, March 29, 7 p.m.
- Emma Clark Library, March 30, 7 p.m.
- Northport Library, April 26, 7 p.m.
- Sachem Library May 16, 7 p.m.

### Birds on the Move!

- North Shore Public Library, May 19, 7 p.m.
- Selden Library May 24, 7 p.m.

## Trees are Terrific!

- Centereach Public Library, April 21, 7 p.m.

March 18-19: 2016 Long Island Natural History Conference, Brookhaven National Laboratory

April 2, 2016: Master Naturalist/Landscape Naturalist Certification Program—Information may be found on this link as it becomes available: <http://www.qualityparks.org/landscape-naturalist-training.html>

April 22, 2016: Earth Day

May 14, 2016: International Migratory Bird Day



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## The Mimic

*Steve Terr*

On a summer's day many years ago, laying in the sun on a lawn in Fort Tryon Park, in northern Manhattan, knees bent, baseball cap over closed eyes and fingers interlaced behind my head, I luxuriate in the warm air and drift into the delicious twilight state between sleep and wakefulness. Unexpectedly, into that inscrutable realm rushes an unstoppable cascade of spirited sound. I remove my cap and rise upon an elbow, searching behind me for the source of those gorgeous notes. I find my first Mockingbird and find myself enthralled.

Some bird species obediently learn their song from their parents; some robotically inherit their script via instinct. The Northern Mockingbird and its cousins, the Brown Thrasher and Gray Catbird, evolved a third method. This method mixes the hardwiring of instinct with the mysteries of selection and improvised expression. Instinct compels it to listen to the randomly occurring sounds in its environment. It then, somehow, selects which sounds to store in memory. These selections are comprised of other avian vocalizations, animal sounds such as those made by dogs, crickets, and frogs, and a variety of mechanical noises, e.g., car alarms, rusty hinges, sirens and the like. It eventually assembles, as a mature individual, a repertoire of these audible phrases and sonic snippets. In the wild the Mockingbird lives about 8 years, at this ripe old age a particular songster can have acquired a cornucopia of 200 separate vocalizations.



To what purpose is this cornucopia of sounds applied? They are, ultimately, when coolly assessed, pragmatic expressions, which we enthusiastically experience as joyous song. Pragmatic expression? Joyous song? What is esthetically pleasing to our ear is sung, in earnest by the songster, to meet three critical needs of survival: one, establish a breeding territory by warning all other competing males to stay away, two, attract a mate, three, strengthen the bond with its chosen partner. Needs which culminate in the paramount drive to propagate its genetic legacy into the future and, thereby, ensure the viability of its species.

This is a bird that does not suffer from stage fright. He accomplishes both objectives by singing and displaying out in the open from a high perch, e.g., a lamppost, atop a tree or my neighbor's roof, upon an ancient TV antenna. Unabashedly exposed, for all rivals and prospective mates to hear and see, the mockingbird accompanies himself with a ritualized dance. In a slow, effortless, loose-jointed motion, he lofts his gray body a few feet into the air, flashing fluttering wings adorned with white patches. Then softly descends and begins again. All the while, he continually reaches into his store of songs. Each phrase is repeated three or more times and is then followed by a different refrain. A seemingly unending string of sonic energy broadcast upon diurnal or nocturnal air. If you are a rival this is a musical machine gun. If you are a female this is an expression of genetic fitness to be carefully appraised. If you are a human this is an exuberant, life affirming expression of joy.



Photos Joe Kelly

## Dr. Language Person's Guide to Bird Name Pronunciations

by Kevin McGowan (with apologies to Dave Barry)

This article was first "published" in an electronic newsletter "The Cup" in October 1996. It was passed around a bit (with my permission), and then was also published in two parts with some slight modifications as "Dr. Language Person's guide to bird name pronunciations, Part 1 and Part 2" in the newsletter of the San Diego Field Ornithologists. 1998, *The Skimmer* 25 (12) 2-3; and 1999, *The Skimmer* 26 (1) 2-3.

Oh, and just so you know, the Rainbow-billed Barking-Duck was a frequently discussed target of birders in the Cayuga Lake Basin in 1996.

You say PLUH-ver and I say PLO-ver,

You say pro-THON-a-tery and I say pro-theh-NO-tery,...

If you spend time birding with other people (and you should), you will find that not everyone agrees on how to pronounce certain bird names. The differences can be as obvious as a southern drawl adding a few more syllables than seems necessary, or they can be as arbitrary (and entrenched) as the to-MAY-to, to-MAH-to debate of the old song. (My old doctoral advisor tells the story of how in his first year in Florida from the north he was mystified by the report from another birder of seeing a puh-ray-uh-ree. He spent the next hour looking for this exotic sounding bird, but could only find the common Prairie Warblers.) But even if you get past the disparate accents and regional dialect problems, still you hear many different versions of common birds. Is it "pa-RU-la" or "PAR-u-la"? Is it "PIE-le-at-ed" or "PILL-e-at-ed"?

If you're a beginning birder, you might be afraid of embarrassing yourself in front of other, more experienced birders by choosing the wrong pronunciation. Well you should be; we birders are a pretty snotty lot, never afraid to snigger at a novice's mistakes. No, that's not true. Actually, we're very nice and helpful. But, never fear, Dr. Language Person is here to set you straight about these nagging doubts. I will give you the definitive pronunciations of the most commonly mispronounced birds, as well as some others that you never thought about mispronouncing, just to make you self-conscious so that you'll make more mistakes, HAH-HAH! No, wait. In keeping with the scholarly tone of this fine publication, I will give you the information as I see it, and then you can make your own decisions.

First, English is slippery language. In fact, all language is slippery. No accepted absolute standards exist, in contrast to official measurement standards, like meters.

So you have to rely on either (is that I-ther or EE -ther?) some authority or on common use. Without a widely accepted authority, all language drifts and people begin to subtly change the way they pronounce things. Languages, like populations of organisms, change and evolve over time.

English is perhaps more confusing than most languages, because it has a history of change (based largely on the number of different invaders that conquered Britain throughout the millennia) and freely borrows words and pronunciations from other languages. "Original" or Old English is a mostly Germanic language that came to Britain with the Saxon (and other) invaders that drove the Celts pretty much out of England around 450 AD. When the French-speaking Normans invaded in 1066, they added a heavy Latin influence to the language, as well as a (still existent) snobbishness for French words and pronunciation and a disdain for "vulgar" four-letter Anglo-Saxon words. In the 15th century, England embraced the Renaissance along with the newly invented mechanical printing technique, adding some standardization to the language. The fairly rigid ideas and temperaments of the 18th century led to more standardization and eventually the language we now speak. Grammar, inflection, case, and conjugation changed with these influences, with the result that pronunciation shifted dramatically as well. After the 1700's another major change in the language was the result of the large number of English speakers in the Americas. Americans created some novel pronunciations and preserved some that became archaic in Britain. We just don't pronounce things the same way. In fact, we don't share all of our vowel and consonant sounds anymore. We'll stick with American here, because, well, we're in America. Also, who wants to talk like someone who thinks Leicester is pronounced "Lester"? (Here in America we try to use more than 2/3 of the letters in each word.)

Because languages change over time, even in the face of authority, the adherence to a "correct" standard is difficult, and some would say unnecessary. As a point of reference, one thinks to look in a dictionary for the "correct" pronunciation. But dictionaries seem to have two, divergent, aims: providing a standard, and documenting the evolving standards. Some dictionaries seem to be most interested in adding new words and documenting the gradually accepted changes in pronunciation and meaning. Others try more to provide a standard and only grudgingly add words as they become too firmly entrenched in the common lexicon to be denied. My own personal favorite dictionary is the "Standard College Dictionary" of Harcourt, Brace & World, which seems to follow the latter idea. The following is their statement of policy: "A pronunciation is correct when it is normally and unaffectedly used by cultivated people. Strictly, any pronunciation is correct when it serves the purposes of communication and does not call unfavorable attention to the speaker... When two or more pronunciations are indicated for a word, the one that the editors believe most frequent in the northern and western sections of the United States is listed first, but other pronunciations are equally reputable. (The dictionary does not list socially substandard pronunciations, no matter how common they may be.)" "Pronunciations," by James B. McMillan, Standard College Dictionary, Harcourt, Brace & World.

It sounds snobby enough to be satisfying.

So what often happens is that you go to a dictionary to find out if it's PLUH-ver or PLO-ver and you find BOTH of them. The one listed first is not the "preferred" one, but rather as admitted by this dictionary, the most frequent one (with a heavy regional bias). So whom do you believe? Trust Dr. Language Person, I'll set you straight. First, just be glad that the one you say is there. If you pronounced it PLEE-ver, plo-VER, or BAR-king-Duk, well then you're just hopeless. Below are the most common North American bird names that receive different pronunciations. I give the Harcourt, Brace & World pronunciations when available, otherwise I make them up. No, I mean I exhaustively searched for other authoritative sources, such as The Random House Dictionary (Unabridged), Webster's International Dictionary (Unabridged), and "The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds" by John K. Terres. Terres does not talk about where he got his

pronunciations, so I treat them with a little skepticism.

Note, pronunciation is difficult to express via the Internet where all the neat characters (like upside down e's) aren't available. I have tried to express long vowels by either doubling them (ee), adding a terminal e (o\_e, \_ie), or adding a terminal y (ay); short vowels either do not have these additions, or have an h associated with them. ALL CAPS indicates the strongest accented syllable, while a Single capital letter indicates a secondarily accented syllable. If multiple pronunciations are listed, that's because both are "reputable." Therefore you can use either one and feel okay. If someone tries to correct you when you use one of the listed pronunciations, you can give them that haughty, look-down-your-nose expression (add a touch of a pitying look for best effect), make a short laugh, and then tell them that despite their pretensions you as an informed birder in fact know more than they do. Cite Dr. Language Person as your source, and watch them cringe in abject apology and obsequious acceptance of your vastly superior intellect (or not). If your favorite pronunciation is not there, well, you'd better learn something and change, or we'll be laughing behind your back constantly.

**BECARD** (as in Rose-throated Becard) - **BEK-ard**. I admit right at the start that I say be-KARD, but I'll try to mend my ways from here on.

**BEWICK'S** (as in Wren and Swan) - **BYEW-iks**. Like the car, not the Bugs Bunny sound.

**BUDGERIGAR** - **BUJ-e-ree-Gar** (remember BUJ-e as the short name). Where I come from, we just called them parakeets.

**CALLIOPE** (Hummingbird) - **keh-LIE-eh-pee; KAL-ee-ope**. Despite its being accepted by the dictionaries, I have almost never heard the second version, so avoid it unless you want to attract attention to yourself.

**CORDILLERAN** (Flycatcher) - **Kor-dil-YAR-ehn, kor-DILL-er-ehn**. Since it comes from the Spanish, I recommend staying with the Y sound of the double l.

**GOSHAWK** - **GOS-hok**. From goose-hawk; separate the s from the h and say "Gosh, I saw a Gos-hawk."

**GUILLEMOT** - **GIL-eh-mott**. This is English from the French; avoid the urge to do a Spanish double l "y" sound, and keep that terminal "t" on there, it's not THAT French.

**GYRFALCON** - **JUHR-Fal-kehn**. From gir [vulture]-falcon. An easy way to remember juhr not jeer is that an old alternative, but now unaccepted, way to spell it is Gerfalcon.

**HARLEQUIN** (Duck) - **HAHR-leh-kwin, -kin**. Add that w sound at your own discretion.

**JABIRU** - **JAB-eh-roo**. (Tupi Indian, via the Portuguese)

**JACANA** - **Zha-seh-NAH**. (Tupi Indian name) I can almost guarantee you that you will be corrected on the pronunciation of this name, no matter HOW you pronounce it. I don't think I have EVER heard anyone pronounce it "correctly" as the dictionary lists it. Terres gives four pronunciations, two as "many American ornithologists" do it: jah-KON-ah, Yah-sah-NAH; and two dictionary pronunciations: Zha-sah-NAH, JAK-ah-nah. Then he proceeds to pronounce the family jah-CAN-ih-dee.

**JAEGER** - **YAY-gehr, JAY-gehr**. Stay with the first pronunciation; think Swedish, even though it's German.

**MURRE** (Common or Thick-billed) - **muhr**. NOT myuhr, he was the Sierra Club guy.

**PARULA** - **PAR-you-lah**. From the diminutive form of Parus, meaning little titmouse, even though it's a warbler. I couldn't find a listing for the way I usually say it, pah-RU-la, so I guess I'll have to change the way I say this one too (hah!).

**PHALAROPE** - **FAL-eh-rope**. NOT BAR-king-Duk.

**PHAINOPEPLA** - **fay-no-PEHP-lah**. No PEEP-ing!

**PILEATED** (Woodpecker) - **PIE-lee-ay-tid, PILL-ee-ay-tid** (having a pileus or cap). This and the next two are commonly pronounced as the two alternate versions listed from the dictionary. If it bothers you when people say it differently than you do, lighten up. They're just birds, for goodness sakes, and THEY don't care what you call them.

**PLOVER** - **PLUHV-er, PLOV-er**. The uh's are first, although the second is a more American, less British version.

**PROTHONOTARY** (Warbler) - **pro-THON-eh-Ter-ee, Pro-theh-NO-the-ree**.

**SABINE'S** (Gull) - Named for Sir Edward Sabine, we would have to know how he pronounced it, which might have nothing to do with any other pronunciation of the word. My dictionary lists s-a-b-i-n-e as being pronounced variously: SAB-in (a shrub), SAY-bine (the Italian people, you know, the famous rape painting), seh-BEEN (a river in Texas). Terres and Websters give the gull SAB-in, so **SAB-in** it is.

**VAUX'S** (Swift) - Here again we have a bird named for a person, this time William S. Vaux, and we need to know how he pronounced it. Those of you with training in French probably, and understandably, think you pronounce it as would the French - "vo" with a silent x. But you are WRONG (and probably pretentious too). Terres and Websters lists it as "vauks." I talked to someone once who knew some relative of William Vaux and said that they pronounced it "vauks."

There you have it, the final word on pronunciation of all the birds you always wondered about. If you have others that you are nervous about, or feel like you're pretty creative with, keep them to yourself. Next month, it's how to pronounce the Latin names! (It's easy; all the Romans are dead, so pronounce them any way you feel like! Maybe even BAR-king-Duk!)

**This article was republished with the permission of the author.**



When ants invade your kitchen, try this natural remedy:

Pour a line of baking soda around the floor base near sink, windows and doors. Ants will not cross a line of baking soda!



## Coyotes...on Long Island?

*Joyann Cirigliano*

So many questions spring to mind, depending on one's perception. They range from one extreme to the other. "What about my feeder birds?" "What about my dog?" "What about my cat?" "What about my children?" "What do I have to do to attract one?" "Where can I see one?" "Are they harmful?" "Are they friendly?" "Are they really coyotes?" "Where did they come from?"

First, let me say that they haven't arrived in any quantity on Long Island yet – that we know of. There was one in Bridgehampton in 2013 and another in Sagaponack in 2014, possibly the same one. So far, these are the only two recent sightings recorded. But according to two local canid specialists, wildlife biologist, Dr. Chris Nagy and conservation scientist, Dr. Mark Weckel, they travel along rail lines and they're already in Queens, so, it's probably only a matter of time before they arrive.

Should we be worried? I've been doing quite a bit of reading on the subject, because, frankly, I find the emergence of a new species on Long Island fascinating, especially a rapidly evolving canine one, (I'm a Dog Person) and I'm curious to see what may happen environmentally when they arrive. I know what I'm hoping for: a return to ecological balance. So, I've been reading about the population in Chicago and the smaller one in Boston. It seems that coyotes pose much less of a threat than our own dogs do. One hundred forty two coyote attacks and two deaths in 45 years compared to 41 FATAL dog bites in 2014, with over 850,000 people requiring at least some form of medical attention, and more than 350,000 of them requiring emergency room visits. Coyotes prefer to move at night and avoid conflicts with people. They prefer to live in areas like state parks and open spaces and generally use urban and suburban neighborhoods as cover to get from park to park. They appear to have a positive effect on natural habitats and seem to fill an empty and much needed niche once they arrive. Now for a bit more

research about our own local urban NYC population. It appears they came from the Midwest in the 1800's. At one point about 100 years ago, they bred with wolves and at a later point, at about fifty years ago, they bred with dogs. The DNA ratio is 60-84% coyote, 8-25% wolf and 8-11% dog, depending on the population. They're slightly bigger than the Midwestern coyotes, and weigh 5-10 pounds more. And, yes, they are still considered coyotes, not wolf or dog hybrids. Many species of animals and plants crossbred at some point. It's what gives populations genetic diversity and creates new species. Interesting.

Now for the rest of the questions. How about the feeder birds? Actually, coyotes prefer rodents, so squirrels, chipmunks, and seed stealing mice and rats are their usual food, along with rabbits. Not that coyotes don't eat birds, but mice, voles, and rodents are preferred. In the Bronx a coyote was seen walking along the top of a riprap stone wall to scare small critters out of their burrows. They're smart and opportunistic. There is also a study in Chicago which shows that coyotes are actually good for bird populations in the parks because they catch and eat feral cats. There is now an emerging territorial behavior with the coyotes using the open spaces and parks, and the feral cats staying closer to human habitation in urban areas. The cats are learning to stay out of the local "forests" and closer to people.



Pencil and watercolor drawing  
by Joyann Cirigliano

What does this mean to our own domestic pets? Most Long Islanders have fenced yards, so most dogs won't have an issue. Of course, if you allow your Chihuahua to run free around the neighborhood and coyotes become more numerous on Long Island, then your pet is at risk. But, it shouldn't be off its leash in the first place; it should be either with its owners, or in its own yard or house. We have leash laws for a reason. The same holds true for domestic cats. They belong indoors at all times, because they DON'T stay in their own yards, and they have been decimating the wild bird population for years, as have the feral cats. It's also healthier for cats to be indoors because of issues with feline leukemia, FIV, Feline panleukopenia, and rabies.

Other interesting facts about coyotes and their positive effect on the ecosystem once they arrive show that when they become more numerous, the local deer and goose populations decline to manageable numbers. This is because coyotes are frequently opportunistic hunters, so if there is a readily available and plentiful food source, that's what they'll be eating. Coyotes don't usually eat the adult geese, but they will egg the eggs, and the goslings. The same holds true for deer. They don't eat the adults, but they target the fawns in the springtime. Of course, in other states, a large coyote population is sometimes considered a problem because their deer populations

are often low; therefore there are less the deer for the hunters. But for Long Island, this would be a godsend, because our native forest understory is almost non-existent in some places due to invasive plant species and deer-browse, especially out east, on Shelter Island, and on Fire Island.

So, yes, I can't wait to see a decent coyote population on Long Island. I'm hoping they will find their way via the rail lines and green corridors and will spread north and south via the parkways and our greenbelt trails and parks. Drs. Nagy and Weckel have asked for our help when we're out birdwatching. They have asked us to log, not only coyotes, but foxes, both the more common red fox and the much rarer grey fox. Yes, we have a grey fox population on the Island. There is a website to log sightings for both the foxes and the coyotes. They would like data on fox sightings, plus not only whether we have seen coyotes but also if and where we haven't seen coyotes, so they can have a "Control" area for when the coyotes do start to arrive. I've been told that the Gotham Coyote Project will have cameras placed in Nassau County by this summer, but they'll never have enough cameras to properly survey LI and our numerous corridors. That's where we come in. So, get out your ID books and hone your field mark skills for canines. There are two sites for reporting sightings:

<http://www.gothamcoyote.com/> and <http://www.inaturalist.org/projects/gotham-canid-survey>

There are also some very interesting articles and lectures on these wily, clever, reclusive animals:

[http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/science/2015/07/coyotes\\_in\\_new\\_york\\_and\\_chicago\\_urban\\_ecology\\_of\\_rats\\_geese\\_deer\\_feral\\_cats.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2015/07/coyotes_in_new_york_and_chicago_urban_ecology_of_rats_geese_deer_feral_cats.html)

[http://longislandnature.org/2015\\_conference/weckel\\_video.shtml](http://longislandnature.org/2015_conference/weckel_video.shtml)

[http://longislandnature.org/2015\\_conference/nagy\\_video.shtml](http://longislandnature.org/2015_conference/nagy_video.shtml)

<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/05/coyotes-new-york-city.html>



## Birds in the News and Other Interesting Tidbits

1. Name the oldest known wild bird in the world?
2. How is the Rock Ptarmigan of the Arctic affected by Climate Change:
3. What is the cause of the coloration of a single black flamingo, maybe the only one in the world, spotted in Cyprus last April?
4. What is the most endangered bird species in North America.



Answers on next page

### A WINTER VISITOR

A rare immature Red-Headed Woodpecker has spent some time in our own backyard. First spied in December just prior to the Christmas Bird Count, our young bird was seen numerous times, and by many, as it foraged for and stored acorns in the trees at Blydenburgh Park's north entrance. Red-headed woodpeckers are not normally found on Long Island, except occasionally during winter. The adult bird in mature plumage has a bright red head, for which it is named, white underparts, black back, and black wings with a central white area. The bird was last seen on February 6th, and there have been no recent eBird reports.



Photo, David Friedman

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## Answers to Interesting Bird Questions

1. Wisdom, a Laysan Albatross banded in 1956, is believed to be 65 years old, the oldest known Albatross in the wild. She returns every year with her mate to their breeding grounds on the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge in the Pacific. It is estimated that she may have raised as many as 40 chicks throughout her lifetime, the most recent having hatched on February 1st and named Kūkini.
2. Rock Ptarmigans feed on a diet of buds, leaves and seeds and nest on rocky ground. Warmer conditions are causing tundra willows and shrubs to grow and spread, even over the rocky areas needed by the Ptarmigan for nesting. The growing vegetation provides additional food sources, but during the breeding season, the rocky habitat favored by the species for nesting is becoming harder to find.
3. The black feathers of this bird are the result of a genetic condition called Melanism. Too much melanin, the color-producing pigment in feathers, is produced, therefore resulting in the black coloration of this flamingo.
4. It is believed that there are fewer than 200 Florida Grasshopper Sparrows left in the wild. Populations only exist at Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area and Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park in Florida. The sparrows' habitat has degraded due to fire suppression policies, and their decline is believed to be due in part to the resultant habitat loss as well as to the presence of fire ants that have been able to multiply without natural and prescribed fire burns. An additional threat to the sparrow is the feral hogs living on the preserves that prey on eggs and young. Efforts to assist the survival of the species by the restoration of habitat through prescribed burns, as well as through the removal of hogs, is underway. See Audubon March-April 2013 issue.

## Where The Birds Are—

by Susan Child Beck

At this time of year, we begin to see the arrival of early migrants. A good place to find a variety of these birds is at David Weld Sanctuary. This park includes fields, woodland and bluffs overlooking the Long Island Sound. As you follow the main trail, you will see Carolina Wren, American Robin, White-throated and Song Sparrows as well as newly arrived warblers in April and May. You may even hear a Virginia Rail near the swampy area, and if you are lucky, you may spot one. As you enter the woods, look for Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Blue-winged Warblers, and Northern Parula. Looking over the bluffs, you may still find Loons, Common and Red-throated, White-winged Scoters, Red-breasted Mergansers and Common Goldeneye.

In addition to the newly arrived song birds and lingering waterfowl, you may see an American

Woodcock. The Woodcock is known for its beautiful courtship display. As it becomes darker, the Woodcock will start to call, a “peent”. After calling several times, it will take off flying high in the sky. It will then start its descent, flying in circles, beating its wings fast, and producing chirps and twitters. As the sky darkens, it will continue to display; it is quite a performance. Although the park closes at 5 p.m., you may still see one of these secretive birds during daylight hours lurking in the undergrowth. The trip to David Weld is well worth it.

The David Weld Sanctuary is located in the village of Head of the Harbor. To get to the sanctuary, take Route 25A to St. James. At the intersection of Route 25A and Moriches Road, you head north on Moriches Road. Continue north on Moriches Road; the road name will then become Boney Lane. Continue another 1/2 mile; the entrance is on the right. Currently the park opens at 9 am and closes at 5 pm. There is no fee to visit this park.

Enjoy, and Happy Birding.

## BIRD OF THE MONTH RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

As I write this, the first early-bird Red-winged Blackbirds (RWBB) are arriving. We can usually expect an influx en masse in March, but just a few days ago, I found two males, singing, at Mill Pond in Setauket. The Red-winged Blackbird is often dismissed as a common, uninteresting bird, and yes, they are abundant and widespread, but uninteresting...not at all. I have had ample time during their absence in the winter to miss them, so the first sight of a male in all his glory is a thrill and a promise that spring is right around the corner.

With his red and yellow epaulets set against a jet black body, the male is as flashy as any other avian beauty. The female, though, bears no resemblance to the male. Her mottled brown upper body and heavily streaked breast provide natural camouflage helping her to perfectly blend in with her surroundings. Even her white supercilium, or eyebrow, adds to her disguise; it could easily appear to be a streak of light or a blade of dried grass.

Did you know that the RWBB male usually arrives a few weeks ahead of the female? He claims his territory, and you will often see the males atop the reeds in marshes, or on trees or bushes, singing, surveying, and finally defending, often within a few feet of countless neighboring males of the species, a cooperative group called a colony. The young, eggs, and even the adults are prey for every type of raptor, herons, fox, and snakes. The colonial system, comprised of numerous sharp-eyed individuals, serves as a defense, an adaptation that helps to protect the nesting area and its inhabitants from predators.

RWBB males are polygamous, they will mate with many females, but females also, will at times mate with more than one male, and the young in any given brood may have several different sires. The small territory of one male can contain several nesting females, and as many as fifteen have been recorded within one male's realm.

The basket-shaped nest, built by the female, is attached between, and contained within, the invisible enclosure of grasses, cattails, or rushes. It is most

often located 3 to 6 feet above water—added insurance designed to discourage predators.

The Red-winged Blackbird, in the family *Icteridae*, is kin to meadowlarks, cowbirds, grackles, orioles, the Bobolink, and other blackbirds such as the Tricolored, Brewer's, Rusty and Yellow-headed. They congregate in large, mixed flocks along with cowbirds, starlings, and grackles during migration, feeding together on seeds foraged from the open fields frequented during this time. During the breeding season, the diet of the RWBB consists of insects, but they will also eat frogs, eggs, worms, berries, when available, and sometimes carrion.

Red-winged Blackbirds, fierce protectors of their territory, have been known to mob and attack much larger birds, such as red-tailed hawks, on the wing, if they are encroaching on their territory.

Because large flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds feed in grain fields during the winter, this species is considered by the agricultural community to be a pest. Therefore there have been efforts to control them through the illegal use of poison. This species has evolved a system whereby they are able to withstand the losses inflicted by their many natural predators. It is a sad fact that they must also contend with human harassment.



Photo, Joe Kelly