

THE OSPREY

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Newsletter of the

Monmouth County Audubon Society



Message from the Board

by Bob Henschel, President

While going over proposed changes to our Monmouth County bird checklist, I was reminded of a lively discussion during an Audubon meeting years ago. Walt Hufnagel, who was never at a loss for a timely comment, hadn't even removed his coat before he began to complain/brag about how much he had spent on sunflower seeds that winter. His group of birding associates, already gathered at their usual corner of the room, quickly seized their opportunity to instigate a friendly game of one-ups-manship. "So Walt, how many 50-pound bags have you gone through this week?" came the first inquiry/challenge. "More than two," he proclaimed. "Maybe closer to three," commented his soft-voiced wife Alice. Someone else quickly laid claim to the status/expense of going through three bags; then another of the regulars suggested he was closer to four. That claim met with skepticism, so no one else bid higher. "And how many birds did you have?" someone else inquired. "Maybe 50," I heard one woman say. Another thought he had at least 75. Already I was out of the running. The most I had entertained at my little homemade bird cafeteria—improvised of scrap wood, assorted nails and a mason jar—was 20.

So, what was the bird monopolizing their feeders; gobbling up seeds as fast as anyone could refill them? The Evening Grosbeak. The year, by the way, was 1972. And it certainly was a

good one for the large black, brown and yellow visitors from the north; but not necessarily unique. For decades, they were reliable winter visitors birders could count on adding to their year list. But then things started going downhill.

Project FeederWatch notes that reports of Evening Grosbeaks at FeederWatch sites declined by fifty percent between 1988 and 2006. At sites where Evening Grosbeaks continue to be reported, average flock size had decreased by 27 percent.

What happened? No one knows for sure. Evening Grosbeaks are gregarious birds in the winter and easily observed, but during the breeding season they're somewhat solitary and comparatively understudied by ornithologists.

The decline in Evening Grosbeak sightings was evident on the 1991 Monmouth County checklist, where at that point it had been downgraded to the status of "uncommon." By 2002 it had declined to "occasional." Unfortunately on the soon to be printed 2012 list, you'll find it now listed as "rare."

But not all is doom and gloom. Take the Bald Eagle. In 1991 it was listed as an "occasional transient." Ten years later it was upgraded to "uncommon." On the new list we'll probably still list it as uncommon, but it is now a



Evening Grosbeak. Credit: Ducks Unlimited, D. Faucher

year-round bird with at least four nests in Monmouth County.

Other big birds are also doing better. The Common Loon will be elevated to "common winter," and both Black and Turkey Vultures are now year-round birds. When I first started birding, "TVs" were generally gone in mid-winter. "BV" numbers have been

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*A City of Glass Towers,
and a Hazard for Migratory Birds*

(excerpted from an article in the New York Times, Sept. 14, 2011)

Most bird-watching enthusiasts spend their days looking up in the hope of seeing something cool. But Deborah A. Laurel looks at the ground.

Ms. Laurel is a volunteer for New York City Audubon, and during the weeks of the fall migration, she is part of a dawn patrol that scans the sidewalks and plazas of Manhattan, searching for victims of the city’s forest of glass towers. The other morning she spied the bodies of six that had collided with the plate-glass ferry terminal at the World Financial Center.

New York is a major stopover for migratory birds on the Atlantic flyway, and an estimated 90,000 birds are killed by flying into buildings in New York City each year, the Audubon group says. Often, they strike the lower levels of glass facades after foraging for food in nearby parks. Some ornithologists and conservationists say such crashes are the second-leading cause of death for migrating birds, after habitat loss, with estimates of the national toll ranging up to a billion a year .

As glass office and condominium towers have proliferated in the last decade, so, too, have calls to make them less deadly to birds. The U.S. Green Building Council, a nonprofit industry group that encourages the creation of environmentally conscious buildings, will introduce a bird-safety credit this fall as part of its environmental certification process, called LEED.

There are no easy fixes, however. A few manufacturers are exploring glass designs that use ultraviolet signals visible only to birds, but they are still in their infancy. Opaque or translucent films, decals, dot patterns, shades, mesh screens — even nets — are the main options available. And they have been a tough sell in the high-design world.

A group of New York City Audubon volunteers are gathering evidence of bird collisions this fall at a dozen buildings, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the World Financial Center and the Time Warner Center. Since 1997, when the collision-monitoring program began, Audubon has collected nearly 6,000 dead birds, then asking for modifications to buildings that prove to be the worst of fenders.

The Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, which has been undergoing renovation, is the most recent building to voluntarily correct the problem of bird collisions. After pleas from Audubon, the architects designed retrofitting that included less reflective glass and a dot pattern.

Some new all-glass buildings are designed so that birds can easily detect them. Conservationists point to Frank Gehry’s IAC headquarters in Chelsea as an example. Horizontal, dotted white bands control the flow of light, while the curvilinear — almost billowing — facade prevents a mirror effect.

About 90 New York buildings now participate in Lights Out New York, Audubon’s initiative to get buildings to turn off lights after midnight during the spring and fall migrations. Bright lights attract and confuse birds. Cities like Boston, Chicago and Toronto also have successful lights-out campaigns.

Exterior lighting is one of many elements in the Green Building Council’s new bird-collision deterrence credit. “I don’t know of any architects out there who want to kill birds,” said Brendan Owens, a council vice president. “To the extent that the LEED credit raises awareness, I think we’ll see more architects sensitive to these issues, which will lead to more companies developing solutions.”

Special Thanks

Our thanks go to David Saidnaway of Wild Birds Unlimited in Middletown, who made a donation to MCAS in September . We appreciate your consideration.



by Harden Fowler

Shorebird monitor program at Seven Presidents Park

The Shorebird Monitor Program at Monmouth County’s Seven Presidents Park began in mid-April with a training session by Todd Pover and Pam Prichard from New Jersey Fish and Wildlife, and Principal Park Ranger Mary Mautner. The approach that works best, we learned, is for monitors to act as an “educational buffer” between the nesting birds and the beach users. We explain the need to stay away from the nesting area to give the Piping Plovers and Least Terns access to the surf in order to feed without any interference; this had a positive effect. People would often ask us, “how are the birds doing today?”

With the roping and signage in place by mid-May, both species had selected mates and established nests. For the next month monitors watched as the adults took turns sitting on the nests to protect the eggs both day and night. Soon the eggs began to hatch, and chicks were visible throughout the dune area. The rate at which the chicks mature is amazing, because growing up fast gives them the best chance of survival. Within a month they grow from tiny fluff-balls to mirror images of the adults and are able to fly.

The plover chicks must feed on their own, eating bugs, worms and crustaceans at the surf line. Since tern chicks eat small fish, the parents fly off shore and return with the fish for them to eat. All must find shelter in the dunes as they slowly separate from ever-watchful parents.

After an early nest was abandoned by a pair of Piping Plovers, a second pair established a successful nest with four eggs hatching and fledging. This is an amazing success considering all that the flightless chicks must face...beach users, stray dogs and cats, predatory birds, nasty weather and rough surf.

The two small colonies of Least Terns at Seven Presidents had more than thirty chicks fledge. Both species are now migrating to distant beaches with the Piping Plovers flying to the southeastern United States and the Caribbean, and Least Terns flying as far as Brazil, only to return next May to repeat the cycle.

In total, the dedicated volunteers spent over 1,500 hours at the nesting sites, sharing a rewarding experience, developing friendships and protecting our endangered shorebirds. Please join MCAS members and the other volunteers next April for the Seven Presidents Shorebird Monitor Program training. Protecting the endangered shorebirds is indeed a wonderful way to spend the summer.

Endangered Species Act

This summer the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was able to remain intact as a strong protection of endangered animals and plants, in spite of an attempt by some members of Congress to undermine the protection.

The defeat of this attempt to “gut the authority” of the United States Fish and Wildlife and the ESA was due in part to the actions of Audubon leaders and the membership who contacted their legislators in support of the full funding and protection that the Act offers. When the voices of many conservationists come together, positive results can happen.



The Piping Plover on volunteers’ hats at Seven Presidents Park.

(Message from the Board, from Page 1)

increasing steadily, and the birds have become regular breeders. Boat-tailed Grackles are also more conspicuous; likewise Cooper’s Hawks and Eastern Bluebirds.

For some of you, the most interesting aspect of the latest list will be the birds that have been added during the past 10 years: Cackling Goose, White-winged Dove, Green Violet-ear and at least eight others.

As you read this, the 2012 edition of “Birds of Monmouth County” is still a work in progress. If you have any suggestions on its content or layout I would appreciate your input. Our objective is to keep it an informative and useful tool that can fit in your pocket.

But there are a few things we will not be doing. One is to list birds by size. How would you do that, anyway—by wingspan or body length? And forget about grouping by color. At least one field guide has tried...didn’t work.

Perhaps the most often requested change is to list the birds alphabetically, but that’s also problematic. The order will remain taxonomic. Which brings us to the bad news for everyone; thanks to powers that be, the taxonomic arrangement has changed once again. The geese and ducks will precede the loons and grebes, and the hawks will be right after the herons and the...Oh, forget it, you’ll have a good 10 years to figure it out before the 2022 revision.



Join the MCAS eGroup!

An eGroup is a bulletin board just for MCAS members. You will receive information on upcoming trips, local conservation news, bird sightings, etc. We also use this system to announce the availability of the newsletter online.

To subscribe, send an e-mail to mcas_newslet-subscribe@yahoo.com.



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- \$20 **National Audubon Society** member - includes Chapter membership (rate for new members only; renewable at \$35)
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Membership questions? Call us at 732-USA-BIRD.

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coming up

Wed., Oct. 12. 8:00 pm
“Orchids of New Jersey,” Rick Radis

Sat., Oct. 15 10:00 am
Sandy Hook bird walk with Linda Mack, meet at Visitor Center

Wed., Nov. 9 8:00 pm
“Wild New Jersey: Adventures in the Garden State,” David Wheeler

Sat., Nov. 12 8:00 am
Sandy Hook Bird Banding Station Tour with Tom Brown; meet in “K” lot parking area

** Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month Sept. - May at Church of the Nativity, Ridge Road, Fair Haven. Meetings are open to the public, and refreshments are served.*

Check our website or call (732) USA-BIRD for more details on field trips, activities or cancellations due to weather. This is a 24-hour message line.