

## Putnam Highlands Audubon Society Newsletter

Volume 117, No. 2 Spring 2017

Putnam Highlands Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 292, Cold Spring, NY 10515  
[www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org](http://www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org)



Greetings, members and friends of PHAS! As we welcome spring and the return of migrating and nesting birds, I am reminded of how important volunteer participation is. This spring we host our annual fundraising dinner on March 25; the PHAS Birdathon on May 13; and several bird walks and nature programs. In addition, we had two successful birdseed sales last fall and winter, and joined Constitution Marsh to host a forest bird workshop for property owners. In February we again partnered with Constitution Marsh and Boscobel to host the annual EagleFest, where a couple of hundred folks enjoyed watching these iconic birds through binoculars and telescopes. None of this would have been accomplished without our cadre of wonderful volunteers! A special thank-you to Adele and Henry Stern, Perry Pitt, Margaret O'Sullivan, Pete Salmansohn, Scott Silver, Lew Kingsley, Ian Kingsley, Carolyn Smith, Mark Hall, Lisa Mechaley, Tom Mullane, Jerry Rubino, Max Garfinkle, Ellyn Varela-Burstein, Ralph Odell, Eric Lind, and Rebecca

### *PUTNAM HIGHLANDS AUDUBON SOCIETY: CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE*

The mission of the Putnam Highlands Audubon Society (PHAS) is to preserve and maintain the lands and waters that have been entrusted to our stewardship; to inform and educate the public on issues involving birds, wildlife, and the environment; and to encourage membership in the chapter and participation in its activities.

Schultz, to name just a few of the individuals who donate their time and skills to PHAS.

We also thank our wonderful partners at the Taconic Outdoor Education Center, led by Center Director John Stowell. We hope you will join us at the various activities and programs we have scheduled. Our Birdathon, besides raising funds, contributes to the ongoing collection of data on migrating and local nesting bird species. If you want to get outside and

start birding, our Beginning Birders Group would be happy to have you join us, even if it's just for an hour or two.

Happy birding!

Connie Mayer-Bakall  
President, PHAS Board of Governors

### DATES TO REMEMBER

**Sunday, April 2, 2 P.M.:** Kim Eierman will speak on “The Pollinator Victory Garden: Winning the War on Pollinator Decline”; Howland Library, Beacon

**Sunday, April 9 2 P.M.:** “Signs of Spring” hike led by Lisa Mechaley; meet at Hubbard Lodge

**Saturday, May 6, 9 A.M.:** Bird walk led by Perry Pitt; meet at Castle Rock Unique Area parking lot

**Saturday, May 13:** PHAS Birdathon; beginners welcome!

**Friday, June 9, 6 P.M.:** Annual Meeting and picnic; Hubbard Lodge

### AUDUBON REACTS TO PROPOSED BUDGET

**The Administration’s budget plan would put birds on the chopping block.** That’s the message for birders, hunters, and outdoors-lovers in the new proposal. If this budget is implemented as written, the result will be crippling reductions to America’s most important and bipartisan conservation initiatives – many of which support Audubon’s efforts to protect birds and the places they need.

It’s the opening move in a process that promises to be a protracted one. Details of the budget will be debated in Congress for months to come before a final version is accepted. **I’m writing to let you know that Audubon will be there at every turn, fighting for the support we need to protect and enhance our conservation legacy, fully engaged to shape an agenda that respects and preserves the natural world we all share.**

Audubon is built to do it: We speak for bird lovers from every shade of the political spectrum, a nationwide community united by our love of wildlife and our duty to protect it. Our long history of putting birds above politics gives us a unique and powerful credibility. And our members sustain this long-term work through their compassion and commitment.

**Your voice is essential if we’re going to win this battle,** if we’re going to pass on our shared natural heritage to our kids and grandkids –

because that's what would be at stake if such a severe budget plan were implemented. It would eliminate ecosystem restoration programs in places like the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay and severely limit local conservation investments, from neighborhood parks to iconic landscapes. It would be a death sentence for America's long bipartisan legacy of protecting our cherished natural places. And it would put hundreds of species at risk. Audubon won't let that happen. I know you won't, either.

**How can you help?** By staying aware and engaged as the budget process unfolds. **By letting your congressional representatives know what you think.** By standing behind the focused mission Audubon has held for more than a century: protecting birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow.

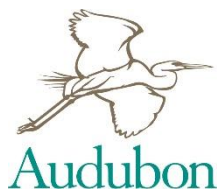
We'll keep you informed in the coming months. Thank you for your support. Remember, you are what hope looks like to a bird!

Sincerely,

David Yarnold

President and CEO

National Audubon Society



## CONSERVATION UPDATES

*Connie Mayer-Bakall*

### Hudson River Barge Plan

U.S. Representatives Sean Patrick Maloney and Eliot Engel are gathering support in Congress for a bill that would halt any plan by the Coast Guard to allow commercial vessels to moor at ten sites in the Hudson River between Yonkers and Kingston. The Hudson River Protection Act would amend previous legislation to not allow anchorages within 5 miles of Superfund sites, power plants, critical habitats of endangered species, and places listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Please e-mail Congressman Maloney to express your support for his bill.

Website:

<http://seanmaloney.house.gov>.

### CSX Train Derailment

On Tuesday, March 7, a CSX freight train derailment occurred in Newburgh along the Hudson River. The train was carrying toxic materials, and crew members were injured. Three locomotives and 14 cars derailed when the 77-car train collided with a 135-foot articulating boom lift. Outdated train cars traveling over outdated infrastructures are a recipe for disaster. We must maintain pressure on the Federal Railroad Administration to come up with alternative methods of transporting crude oil and toxins and to invest in

installing positive train control on all trains. Congressman Maloney joins Senator Charles Schumer in speaking out about this issue.



*This lovely bird was recently sighted in Fahnestock State Park. Can you ID it? (See page 10.)*

## **PHAS CONDUCTS LOCAL AUDUBON BIRDATHON**

*Tom Mullane*

It's spring migration season again! This means that PHAS volunteers will once again be devoting 24 hours to our local Birdathon on Saturday, May 13.

Three teams of fifteen birders will fan out, seeking as many different species

of birds as possible. The teams will survey from Long Island to the Catskills, including New York City; Putnam, Dutchess, Orange, Sullivan, Nassau, and Ulster Counties; as well as Doodletown, Constitution Marsh, and Iona. A fourth team, the beginning birders team, will look for birds locally. If you are interested in joining this team, please contact Scott Silver at [ssilver@wcs.org](mailto:ssilver@wcs.org) or Perry Pitt at [perrypitt@yahoo.com](mailto:perrypitt@yahoo.com).

The Birdathon is our chapter's primary fundraising appeal, providing us with nearly all of our operating funds. The tax-deductible contributions stay local, providing:

- Free public programs for adults and children
- Stewardship of PHAS's three wildlife sanctuaries in Philipstown and Wappingers Falls
- Support for Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary
- Summer internships for high school students at Constitution Marsh
- Environmental leadership on important conservation issues

For more information, please visit our website:

[www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org](http://www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org). Contributions can be sent to:

PHAS

P.O. Box 292

Cold Spring, NY 10516

## A HUGE SUCCESSFUL ANNUAL DINNER

On March 25 PHAS held its annual dinner at the Taconic Outdoor Education Center. Financially, the event broke all records, but better yet, it was very well attended and the “vibe” was terrific. Some highlights:

- Incredible planning and preparation by event chair Adele Stern, ably assisted by Margaret O’Sullivan and other PHAS Board members.
- Delicious appetizers provided by the B&L Deli.
- Lovely items in the silent auction.
- Tasty food for dinner, as always.
- A wonderful live auction, featuring artwork by the late, much-loved Doug Rod, among others, and donated by Lew Kingsley.
- Honoring Lew, who richly deserved it.
- An entertaining speaker (Kevin Hils of the Bronx Zoo), whose interesting and unusual presentation included props ranging from flamingo bills to ostrich eggs.
- Lots of fun, and smiles all around.



*Connie Mayer-Bakall awards a plaque to honoree Lew Kingsley. Among the onlookers is Dee Rod, sister-in-law of the late Doug Rod.*



*Ralph Odell comforts Lew as he relates a story that evokes strong emotional memories.*

Editor’s note: More on this enjoyable event can be found in the article by Katherine Whiteside titled “A Force of Nature: Audubon Honors Birdman Lew Kingsley” in the March 29, 2017, issue of the *Putnam County News and Recorder*.



## A MEMORABLE EAGLEFEST

*Adele Stern*

February 11 was a perfect day, even though it came two days after a snowstorm. Boscobel plowed the paths and set up a campfire where eagle viewers could warm themselves.

The view was ethereal. The early-morning sun reflected off the river, partly shrouded in mist. As the day progressed, more viewers arrived, trying to decide whether to spot bald eagles or just admire the view.

Nine adult eagles were spotted, along with four juveniles; 267 human attendees were counted (adults along with juveniles). One snowman and one snow eagle were added to this tally.

Also “spotted” and “spotting” were PHAS Board Members Perry Pitt, Adele Stern, Mark Hall, Pete Salmansohn, and Ellyn Varela-Burstein, together with Constitution Marsh Sanctuary Director Eric Lind.

In sum, it was a spectacular day!



*Photo by Adele Stern.*

## WELCOME RETURNING BLUEBIRDS

*Connie Mayer-Bakall*

It's spring: Time to make sure your bluebird box is cleaned out and ready for the returning pair to raise their young in the nest box you've thoughtfully provided. Bluebirds are ready to nest in late March or early April. Simply scrape off any debris left over from last year and make sure there are no insects inside. Your box should be mounted about 5 feet off the ground and within 50 feet of a tree, tall shrub, or other perch. The adults will use this to scan the ground for insect prey, and the young will use it for their first flights away from the nest.

There may be competition from other bird species, such as swallows, house wrens, and the non-native house sparrows. One way to alleviate this situation is to place two boxes within 5 to 15 feet of each other to accommodate the other species. Bluebirds build a tall, cup-shaped nest from grasses and usually lay four to six light-blue eggs.

For more information, visit the Audubon website: [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org).

Jim: “In Florida they use alligators to make handbags.”

Bob: “Isn't it amazing what they can get animals to do?”

**ONE SMALL STEP FOR MAN,  
ONE GIANT LEAP FOR A COUCH  
POTATO**

*Heidi Gesson, Haldane Middle School  
Science Teacher*

Have you ever taken one step – just one step – that changed everything? Think about it: Has one step ever changed your life? It happened to me last July. I stepped off the boat onto Hog Island in Maine, and everything changed.

For those of you who love the great outdoors, nothing you read here will surprise you. For those of you who are a little more like me (oh, I love the great outdoors, as long as I'm viewing it through a window from a comfy chair, with a book and a cup of tea), read on. You may be pleasantly surprised by my adventure.

Last year I was fortunate enough to receive scholarships from both the local Audubon chapter and the National Audubon Society to attend "An Educator's Week," one of several week-long educational sessions offered by the Maine Audubon Society. I am a life science teacher at Haldane Middle School, so spending a week learning different ways to get kids excited about being outside sounded like it was right up my alley. When I got the news about these incredible scholarships, I was thrilled. I had heard about the wonderful leaders and classes (okay, be honest, Heidi: *and* the gourmet food) on Hog Island. But

then I was e-mailed the packing list and started plotting how I could gracefully bow out of this generous offer. Don't get me wrong; I love packing for a summer trip. I can throw my book, T-shirts, shorts, swimsuit, sunblock, and sunglasses together in record time. As long as a beach chair is included at my destination, I'm good to go. Well, this packing list was a little different: It included items such as bug spray, binoculars, camera with extra lenses, hiking shoes, and the infamous "soap to wash undergarments." Except for the last, I didn't own anything on the list.

After a week or so, unable to think of reasons to get out of the trip, I went shopping, packed my stuff, and grumbled all the way to Maine.

Well, my grumbling stopped as soon as I stepped off the boat and set foot on paradise. The beauty of the island, coupled with the warm welcome of the Audubon staff, made it seem like I was in a dream, a really good dream. I settled into my room, which was in a building that conjured up fond summer memories: the slamming screen door, the sound of people laughing, the cozy bunk beds and painted dressers, and the view of the Sound. Amazing. I was off to a good start.

The dinner bell rang at 5:45. They didn't have to ring it twice; we were all there, ready to sample what was promised to be "exceptional food." Wow! I didn't realize that there would be a chef making each meal from

scratch. Every bite, from the first night to the last morning, was delicious. The chef shopped locally to support Maine farmers and went out of her way to make sure special dietary needs were not only taken care of but equally tasty.

The following days consisted of choices . . . tough choices . . . amazingly tough choices. It's hard to pick one thing to do when you want to do *all* of them. Needless to say, the people who work on Hog Island are passionate about what they do. Whether we were examining organisms in tide pools, listening to bird calls while lying on a mossy bed, observing baby ospreys, bald eagles, and puffins (oh, the puffins!!!), or learning how to frame a photo, we were completely in awe of the educators' knowledge and enthusiasm. They made it super-easy to get fired up about being outside; their energy was contagious. Since Audubon's mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, getting students outside plays a big part in that goal. I was inspired and filled with admiration for them.

Unfortunately, I had to leave Hog Island, but I will go back. And next time I'll have my binoculars, hiking shoes, and camera ready to pack in record time, *sans* grumbling. In the meantime, Hog Island lives in my heart, and my students have a teacher who isn't afraid to get her feet wet, figuratively and literally.

Visit the Hog Island Audubon Camp website to learn about summer opportunities for your teen or family.

## CY, THE BIRD GUY

To send questions to Cy, the Bird Guy, go to [www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org](http://www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org) and enter "Cy, the Bird Guy" in the Contact Us box.

*Dear Cy,*

*For the past few days it's been much warmer outside, and I have not seen as many of the interesting birds outside my window as I have in the past. When it was cold, I saw black-capped chickadees and white- and red-breasted nuthatches every day throughout the day. However, I don't see them at all anymore, at least since it's been warm. I have seen one of the chickadees, but only for a moment.*

*My question is: Are they migrating to another area? If not, where are they?*

*Monica in Queens*

Cy, the Bird Guy, says:

*Dear Monica in Queens,*

*First, thanks for the very good question. As I received your question in the third week of February, I would*



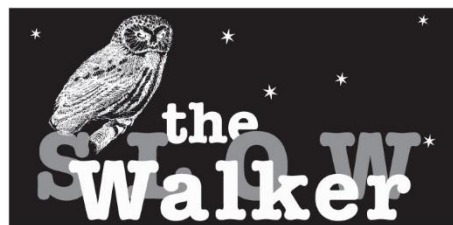
*say the answer is no, the birds probably have not migrated away. Only the very, very earliest migrants start moving in February in New York. You may see the first of the male red-winged blackbirds showing up this early, but most birds will not be migrating for another month or so at least. And in any case, the black-capped chickadees and white-breasted nuthatches should be year-long residents in the New York area.*

*Another potential explanation is energy demand. Unlike mammals, birds do not store substantial energy as body fat (because they have to be able to fly!). So when it gets colder they need to increase their food consumption in order to generate body heat, and therefore they spend more time at your feeder and other feeding sites. Warm weather reduces the demand for energy in birds, so they feed less.*

*This combination of fewer alternative food sources and increased energy demand brings more birds to your feeder more frequently in cold weather, even if they are not migrating. If the cold and snow return before winter departs, you will see those birds again.*

*Have fun bird watching, and remember, spring is right around the corner!*

*Cy (the bird guy)*



## TOGETHERNESS

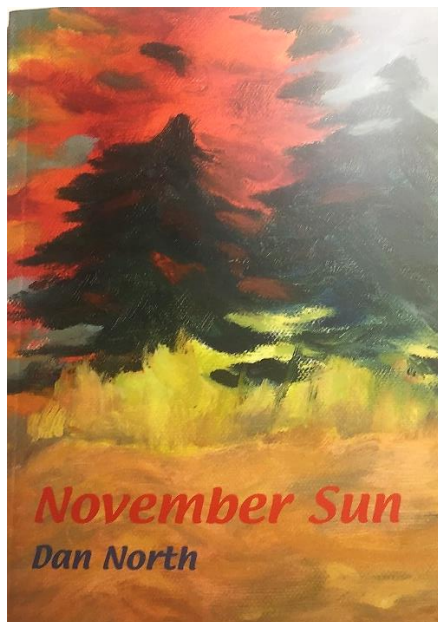
*Dan North*

As my birder son and I walk through a dew-soaked April field, we hear the familiar honking of Canada geese. I glance up briefly as a dozen northbound high-flyers in a wavering V-formation cleave the overcast gray sky. But my son, who knows that discovery usually relies on persistence, raises his binoculars. “There’s some snow geese mixed in,” he says after a moment. Sure enough, the lead goose and the second goose in the formation’s left flank are white – a startling contrast to their dark companions. I’d seen Canada geese and brant together on the ground, but I didn’t know that different species of geese fly together. And I wasn’t sure why. A little reading that night provided some general answers.

First, it’s clear why geese fly in flocks. The aerodynamic lift experienced when flying in linear or V-shaped groups gives large birds an energy saving of as much as 40 percent, says *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior*. With so much to gain, I’d guess that small groups of geese from different species might join each other for their mutual benefit, sort of like recruiting strangers to fill the outfield holes in your pickup softball game.

Mixed-species togetherness is found among a wide variety of animals, reports *The Birder's Handbook*. Defending against predators is one reason. Zebras, which are nearsighted but have keen hearing, graze alongside sharp-eyed giraffes. Nearsighted gleaners such as red-eyed vireos move through their tropical wintering grounds with farsighted flycatchers. Downy woodpeckers use chickadees and titmice as sentinels.

Feeding efficiency is another reason for birds to mix, says *The Birder's Handbook*. Flocks can overwhelm the territorial defenses of single birds. Yellow robins in Australia follow brush turkeys for the insects stirred up by the latter. Cattle egrets stay near cattle and tractors for the same reason. Different-sized legs and bills of mixed shorebirds on a mudflat allow many species to feed together without serious competition. Presumably, each species brings something to the party that's useful to the others. Alone, Don Quixote the dreamer and the practical Sancho Panza are unbalanced and unfulfilled. Together, they become whole.



Just published: *November Sun*, by Dan North. The fifty-eight short essays in this book describe an old man's experience of nature through memory, reading, and the still-joyous act of being there. The book is available for \$10 at the B&L Deli in Perks Plaza on Route 9 in Cold Spring.

### THE MARTY MCGUIRE AUDUBON SCHOLARSHIP

The Marty McGuire Audubon Scholarship is available to college students from the PHAS area who are interested in nature. For details, go to: [www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org/scholarships](http://www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org/scholarships).

*The bird pictured on page 4 is an African grey woodpecker. It is common in southern Africa and doesn't migrate. April Fool!*

## CONSTITUTION MARSH INTERNSHIP REPORT

*Victoria Dema*

My internship at Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary has been by far one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. The amount of new knowledge I obtained from the work we did is not something I could ever get from sitting in a classroom.

When Betty Monroe, from the Garden Club, came to interview me, she asked, “What does a typical day look like for you at Constitution Marsh?” That was the hardest question for me to answer because there is no such thing as a typical day at the Marsh. Not a day went by when I didn’t learn or see something new and intriguing. One day could be devoted to invasive-species removal, another to showing kids how to do a stream study, and the next to vegetation monitoring. Never before had I realized how much work is done at Constitution Marsh.

Conservation and restoration are the quintessence of Constitution Marsh. The projects I had the opportunity to work on taught me so much about these two things. My favorite restorative project was the removal of phragmites through solarization. Phragmites is a non-native invasive species, also known as the common reed. It is spread out in patches throughout the marsh and outcompetes other native plant species. The patches of phragmites are

too large to treat with herbicide, but solarization is a successful alternative method. We used a two-by-four to knock down the perimeter of a patch of phragmites. Then we covered the reeds with a geothermal textile, which was staked into the ground and will be left there for two years – the time it takes for the stems of the phragmites to get completely cooked by the sun. It was very muddy and difficult to walk at times, but it was worth it. It felt very rewarding to lift a geothermal textile that had been in place for two years and see that there were no more phragmites stems beneath it.



Another project I took part in was vegetation monitoring. Its purpose is to see what native vegetation is growing in places from which phragmites have been removed. This involves going out to a point marked by a GPS location and using a data sheet to record the species we see. While repeating this process, I became very familiar with the native plant species on the marsh. Some examples of plants that I could easily identify were

cattails, arrow arum, broadleaf arrowhead, jewelweed, water hemp, wild rice, swamp rose mallow, and pickerel weed. Over the course of my internship I identified and documented more than sixty plant species.

Environmental education makes up another large part of the work done at Constitution Marsh. This education is carried out not only through class and camp trips but also through events for the general public. The Visitor Center itself presents a lot of information to help visitors gain a better understanding of the work done on the marsh, various species, and conservation. There are public canoe trips and wildflower walks as well.

On one occasion a very large group of campers came to visit. We divided them into two groups. One group would walk along the trail out to the marsh and the other would do a stream study; then they would switch. I shadowed the other interns and watched how they explained things to the kids and how the kids responded to them. It was great to see the kids getting involved and excited. They seemed to be most excited when they caught an eel in the brook, and were fascinated when they heard that the American eel comes up here all the way from the Sargasso Sea near Bermuda.

I also developed an interest in butterflies. I was able to observe butterflies that I had never seen before. The ones I identified ranged

from abundant to uncommon. Some of the abundant ones included swallowtails, skippers, and cabbage whites. Some uncommon ones were an eastern tailed-blue, a common buckeye, and a little yellow. Over the course of my internship I became more aware of my environment, and that is when I began to see more uncommon butterflies.

On my last day I was lucky enough to experience the process of bird banding. We caught two birds: a white-breasted nuthatch and a red-eyed vireo. To hear them sing up close, to observe them, to touch them and release them was incredible. I got to release one of them, and I had never held a bird before. This new and foreign experience is just one example of the opportunities that Constitution Marsh has given me. I could not have asked for a better culmination of my internship.

My internship at Constitution Marsh is something I will always value and never forget. I would like to thank the Garden Club for giving me this opportunity and setting it up, and I would like to thank all the Marsh employees and the other interns for giving me one of the most amazing experiences of my life.

Q: Why did the homeless turtle cross the road?

A: To get to the Shell station.

## PHAS BOARD OF GOVERNORS

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*Rebecca Schultz*

*Jerome Rubino*

*Ellyn Varela-Burstein*

*Lisa Mechaley*



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