

## Putnam Highlands Audubon Society Newsletter

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Putnam Highlands Audubon Society

P.O. Box 292, Cold Spring, NY 10516

[www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org](http://www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org)



### ANDY REVKIN AND LISA MECHALEY TO SPEAK ABOUT WEATHER AT PHAS ANNUAL DINNER

*Adele Stern*

On **Saturday, April 14**, the Putnam Highlands Audubon Society will once again celebrate the arrival of spring with its annual dinner at the Taconic Outdoor Education Center's Highland Lodge.

The event will begin with a social hour at 5 P.M., followed by a buffet dinner and a program presented by Andrew C. Revkin and Lisa Mechaley on "WEATHER: From Cloud Atlases to Climate Control." Their recently published book, *WEATHER*, is described as a groundbreaking work, with bite-sized narratives on various topics, such as earth's first atmosphere, the physics of rainbows, the deadliest hailstorm, the invention of air conditioning, increasingly strong hurricanes, and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

*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 its 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.

Andy is well known to the Putnam and Dutchess County communities. He has spent three decades covering many diverse subjects, from the Asian tsunami to the assault on the Amazon, the loss of the space shuttle Columbia, and the changing climate at the North Pole. He has been the environmental reporter for *The New York Times* and was the first *Times* reporter to file stories and photographs from the floating sea ice around the North Pole.

Andy's numerous awards include the National Academies Communication Award for print journalism, presented by the National Academy of Sciences (twice), the Science Journalism Award of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and Investigative Reporters and Editors, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the John Chancellor and Feinstone Environmental awards. He has authored several notable books, including *The Burning Season: The Murder of Chico Mendes and the Fight for the Amazon Rain Forest*; *The North Pole was Here: Puzzles and Perils at the Top of the World*; and *Global Warming: Understanding the Forecast*.



Lisa Mechaley is known for her devotion to environmental education. In addition to more than fifteen years teaching middle-school science, she collaborates with other educators at the Children's Environmental Literacy

Foundation, as well as serving as education director of the Hudson Highlands Nature Museum and staff and programs director of the Bank Street College and other Hudson Valley conservation and educational organizations. She is a member of the PHAS Board of Governors.

Lisa has also been an active member of the Hudson Highlands Land Trust, developing and presenting the River of Words Program, a popular program that combines poetry, art, and watershed science in the area's schools.

As this promises to be a very popular event, RSVPs are important. RSVP to PHAS Events Chair Adele Stern at [ajstern1@gmail.com](mailto:ajstern1@gmail.com) or 845-265-4432. Tickets are \$50 in advance and \$60 at the door. Checks should be made payable to PHAS and mailed to PHAS, P.O. Box 292, Cold Spring, NY 10516. Tickets can also be ordered online at [www.phasbirding.com/phas-annual-dinner/tickets](http://www.phasbirding.com/phas-annual-dinner/tickets). For more information, check the PHAS website: [www.putnamhighlands.org](http://www.putnamhighlands.org).



## ***HUDSON RIVER ANCHORAGE PROPOSAL OFF THE TABLE***

The U.S. Coast Guard has removed from consideration the maritime industry's initial request for ten new long-term anchorage grounds for crude-oil barges. This is a welcome step in the debate over anchorages. PHAS had submitted comments on the proposal, and we celebrate this victory while aware of the challenges that lie ahead in our efforts to preserve and protect the Hudson River from other environmental issues, such as transportation of fracked crude oil.

Q: What did the tree do when the bank closed?

A: It started a new branch.

### ***SUGGESTED LETTER REGARDING THE MBTA***

Dear [Member of Congress],

On behalf of the undersigned organizations [including PHAS], we strongly urge you to defend the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), one of our nation's oldest and most important wildlife conservation laws. In particular, we urge you to oppose any effort that undermines the ability to address the incidental take of birds under the MBTA.

This year our nation celebrates the one-hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Passed in 1918, the law is credited with saving many beloved species from extinction, including the wood duck, sandhill crane, snowy egret, and more. The law implements the visionary treaty signed with Canada in 1916 to protect migratory birds shared by our two countries, as well as similar treaties signed later with Mexico, Japan, and Russia.

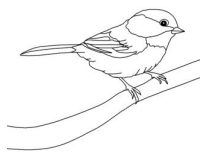
The MBTA protects more than 1,000 species, most of which are not covered by other laws, while also allowing for the regulation of hunting. The treaty and legislation aimed to protect a variety of birds that provide value to the country, including not only waterfowl and wading birds that were overhunted in the early twentieth century, but also insectivorous and pollinating birds, such as hummingbirds, orioles, and woodpeckers, that help reduce agricultural pests and pollinate crops.

While the United States has made great progress in conserving birds, hundreds of species remain at serious risk and many are facing long-term declines. The 2016 *State of the Birds* report found that one-third of our nation's bird species are of high conservation concern and at risk of extinction without urgent conservation action. Birds face numerous modern-day threats, which can often be avoided or minimized with basic precautions and management practices such as covering oil waste

pits, flagging transmission lines, and following wind energy guidelines.

The MBTA is now under serious threat. In December the Trump administration issued a controversial legal opinion providing an interpretation that the law does not apply to the incidental or accidental deaths of migratory birds, thereby reversing decades of precedent. The opinion means that the administration will not hold industries accountable for preventable bird deaths. In Congress, H.R. 4239 – the “SECURE American Energy Act” – would change the law to cement this interpretation and permanently end the government’s ability to address major sources of bird mortality from industrial activities. This change would represent the most significant rollback of the MBTA in its 100-year history. It would dramatically reduce the incentive for industries to implement practices that save birds, and would limit accountability and recovery from events and activities that kill substantial numbers of birds.

As we celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the law and the incredible gains we have made to help protect our nation’s birdlife, we urge you to oppose any effort that would gut the MBTA and turn back the clock on decades of bird conservation.



### ***DATES TO REMEMBER***

**Saturday, April 14, 5 P.M.:** PHAS annual dinner

**Saturday, April 21, 8:30 A.M.:** Glynwood bird walk led by Ryan J. Bass

**Sunday, April 22, 2 P.M.:** Bird identification workshop at Butterfield Library, led by Pete Salmansohn

**Saturday, May 5:** Annual Hudson River Sweep; Scott Silver, coordinator

**Saturday, May 12:** PHAS Birdathon

**Friday, June 8, 6 P.M.:** PHAS Annual Meeting, Hubbard Lodge; picnic to follow



### ***COMING EVENTS***

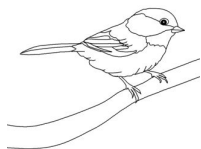
***Bird Walk at Glynwood Farm,***  
***Saturday, April 21***

Glynwood Farm is one of the most beautiful, expansive, and diverse habitats in all of Putnam County. Its landscape attracts a wide variety of birds and wildlife, making it a perfect setting for an Audubon bird walk. Ryan Bass, an accomplished birder and member of the PHAS Board, will lead a walk to explore some of Glynwood’s fields, ponds, and woods for early-returning spring migrants as

well as resident grassland species such as killdeer, eastern meadowlark, and American kestrel. No experience is necessary, and Ryan will have several pairs of binoculars to lend. Follow signs to the visitor parking lot, where we will be welcomed by Lauren Delollo, Glynwood's outreach and events manager. For more information, go to [www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org](http://www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org). This free event, the latest in the Third Saturdays free trip series sponsored by PHAS, is co-sponsored by Glynwood Farm ([www.glynwood.org](http://www.glynwood.org)).

***Bird Identification Workshop at Butterfield Library, Sunday, April 22***

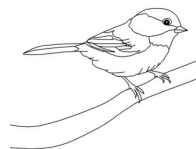
“Identifying Birds by Sight and Sound,” a workshop for adults and children age 7 and up, is an interactive lesson led by local educator Pete Salmansohn. Participants will learn the basics of telling one bird from another, and there will be small-group activities using flash cards and quiz sheets, as well as imitation of bird songs and calls.



***FOUNDRY COVE WALK***

*Perry Pitt*

Saturday, March 17, dawned cold, sunny, and calm. That morning PHAS hosted a bird walk at Foundry Cove in Cold Spring. Three Board members – Pete Salmansohn, Tom Mullane, and Perry Pitt – led a dozen eager birders around the West Point Foundry Preserve with an eye out for early migrants and waterfowl. A small flock of red-winged blackbirds greeted us, as well as a bunch of curious tufted titmice. At the platform on the way to the station we saw a black-backed gull and heard and saw white-breasted nuthatches and chickadees. Common and fish crows circled around. A small group of common mergansers appeared near the far shore. The three kids were excited when, while walking to the cove itself, we were greeted by a cardinal and a mockingbird just off the trail. As we stood and surveyed the cove, turkey vultures wheeled overhead. We walked out to the point, looked back, and noticed bluebirds checking out a duck box and flitting about a large snag. The wind picked up and drove us back to our cars. In sum: a nice bunch of folks sharing some beautiful birds.



## **ORANGE COUNTY BIRD WALK**

*Kyle Bardwell*

Charlie Roberto knew that the recent warm weather and southerly winds would create perfect conditions for a rush of waterfowl into the black-dirt country of Orange County. The onion and corn fields that provide an abundance of food for wintering raptors, including rough-legged hawks and short-eared owls, can also serve as great staging areas for migrating geese, ducks, and a variety of other birds. Larry Tractenberg, Charlie, and I started at the Camel Farm, where we were lucky enough to see a flock of 500 snow geese. Within the flock there looked to be at least eight individuals showing the blue-morph variation. Just as we started to scan for a Ross's goose, the flock took off.

We then went to the Wallkill National Wildlife Reserve. The recent rain and snowmelt have resulted in a significant amount of water in the wetland pools. We walked the Liberty Loop Trail, which borders these wetland pools, and saw high numbers of many duck species, including northern pintail, green-winged teal, American widgeon, gadwall, black duck, and mallard. A couple of northern harriers patrolled the wetlands, putting up flocks of ducks and making it hard to tell which flocks were leaving and which were arriving.

It was a neat site, as hundreds of ducks circled the wetland.

Meanwhile huge flocks of Canada geese could be seen migrating in the distance. There were clear signs of spring to go along with the concentrations of ducks and geese. Red-winged blackbirds covered the wetland and were in full song. We came across a small flock of at least five swamp sparrows foraging together as we continued along the trail.

Away from the wildlife refuge, horned larks covered the agricultural fields, and some were preparing for the breeding season with song while one even showed off his horns. A great day of migration, and only a sign of what is to come.



## **BIRDING TRIP TO SHAWANGUNK GRASSLANDS**

*Ryan J. Bass*

On January 20 Pete Salmansohn and I led a birding trip to the Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge (formerly known as the Galeville Military Airport). We were rewarded with sightings of all three of our target bird species: northern harrier, short-

eared owl, and rough-legged hawk. These uncommon overwintering raptors rely on wide-open habitat to provide them with their usual diet of voles.

While we waited for the sun to go down and the short-eared owls to show themselves, we described the unique hunting method of each raptor. The northern harrier is the "crop duster" on this former airfield. It grazes the tops of the tallest grasses, intermittently flapping and gliding as if the "engine" were ready to stall at any moment. Like owls, the harrier has a facial disk that provides auditory cues to aid it in carrying out its mission.

The short-eared owl is the "stealth pilot." Waiting for the sun to dip below the ridge, these owls emerge from their secretive roosting spots and course above the grasslands in pursuit of their prey. Their flight is moth-like, with fluttery wingbeats lost in the failing light. They execute sharp "pylon turns," like a fighter pilot, and drop to pounce on their unsuspecting target.

The rough-legged hawk, so named for the feathers extending down its legs, hails from the Arctic tundra. Hovering on beating wings, these large hawks survey the habitat beneath them like a "helicopter pilot," ready to dive when they spot their quarry.



*Northern harrier; photo by Ryan J. Bass*

While the runways of Galeville may be a vestige of another era, the pilots of the winter grasslands kept our group of air traffic controllers in awe.



*Photo by Ryan J. Bass*

## ***EAGLE WALK***

*Scott Silver*

When an excited group of birders set out to find and watch bald eagles, they were rewarded with a wonderfully successful bird walk. The weather was nice, and we spotted about thirty eagles. Almost all were far away, but one was fairly close, and many were close enough to enable us to make out their heads and tails through binoculars. There were about thirty participants, including some from New York City as well as some from Beacon and from communities across the river. Special thanks to Pete Salmansohn, Tom Mullane, and Perry

All members of PHAS are welcome to attend meetings of the Board of Governors. Board meetings are held at Hubbard Lodge (or at the Red Line Diner in Fishkill on snow days). They're a good way to learn about what PHAS is doing, the problems we face, and the interesting wildlife in our region. The next two board meetings will be held on the following dates:

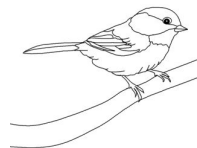
**Saturday, April 7, 9 A.M.**

**Friday, May 4, 6 P.M.**

For more information, e-mail Connie Mayer-Bakall at [concoyote@aol.com](mailto:concoyote@aol.com).

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answer everyone's questions, and no one was neglected. A very enjoyable and well-attended event!



**Can you identify this bird?  
(answer on p. 11)**

Q: What kind of tree can fit into your hand?

A: A palm tree.

***CONFESSIONS OF A BACKYARD  
BIRDER***



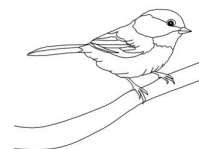
*Ellyn Varela-Burstein*

I love to watch the birds. I can sit in my kitchen and look out at the feeder for hours. This time of year it's full of tufted titmice, chickadees, both downy and hairy woodpeckers, and the redbellied woodpecker whose call I hear as I walk the dog. They float in and out and scabble for their turn at seed and suet. Sometimes they seem to be fencing with each other, with feints aimed at intimidating the intruder to back off and fly away to wait for a clear opening.

As I watch, I remind myself that these are dinosaurs foraging, and when I hear their whistles and chirps I wonder if the dinosaurs sang too. As they were not really great lizards after all, maybe all those roars we attribute to them are mistakes too and in reality they sang with deep bass voices and made celestial music as well as war cries.

But I digress. I find it an avocational hazard, for when I sit with a hot cup of tea watching outdoors my mind tends to fly away a bit too, until some bit of behavior rivets me to attention. Maybe it's a battle for a perch, or the arrival of a small flock of juncos hopping in the snow and leaving a pattern of footprints that would make wonderful wallpaper or a lovely sweater.

There I go again. I find that the birds bring me both in and out of myself. Birding is not only about unusual sightings and lists. For me, it is about sharply observing nature, looking for similarities and differences in the birds themselves and in the environments they occupy, seeking patterns (perhaps where there are none!), and thinking, sometimes even fantasizing, about the world around me. It's the magic of the ordinary. In other words, for me backyard birding is a form of meditation. I confess, it's a meditation in wonder and gratitude.



### ***HOW MANY GOLDEN EAGLES ARE THERE?***

For conservation efforts to be effective, wildlife managers need to know how many individuals of a species are out there. When species are spread out over large areas and occur at low densities, as is the case with the golden eagle, figuring this out can be tricky. However, a new study from *The Condor: Ornithological Applications* applies an old technique in a novel way, eliminating the need to actually capture and mark eagles but instead using a mathematical method that allows scientists to turn individual observations into population estimates.

West Virginia University's Andrew Dennhardt, Adam Duerr, and Todd Katzner and Lafayette College's David Brandes used volunteers' observations of golden eagles migrating along a mountain ridgeline in Pennsylvania to estimate the total number of eagles passing through the area each year. To do this, they developed a new way to apply a classic ecology tool called *mark-recapture analysis*: capturing and marking a portion of a population and then counting the number of marked individuals in another group captured later. Helped by the fact that observers were often able to categorize individual eagles as either immature or adult, the scientists were able to identify instances of individual eagles being sighted at more than one location as they made their way south along the ridge over the course of a day, treating these subsequent sightings as "recaptures."

Volunteers reported more than 3,000 sightings of golden eagles at five count sites along the ridge from 2002 to 2011. The analysis used in the study, which lets researchers estimate how many birds were missed as well as how many were seen more than once, suggests that these sightings represented between 2,592 and 2,775 individual eagles over the ten-year period, with an average of approximately 1,300 passing through the area in a given year. Past studies

indicate that the total population of eagles breeding in Quebec and migrating through Pennsylvania is around 5,000, making this about one-quarter of the larger population. Because the eagles are difficult to count on their breeding grounds, however, better methods for tracking their numbers during migration represent a significant advance.

"Nothing quite like this has ever been done," says Katzner. "We've taken a standard tool, mark-recapture, and turned it on its head to give us a new way to estimate population size."



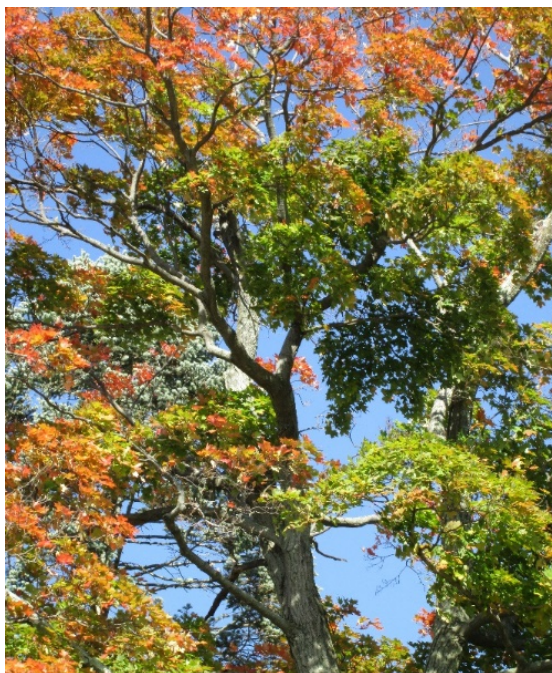
"Partnerships between researchers and citizen-scientists can help improve wildlife management decisions to address threats to migratory golden eagles and other species," says Dennhardt. "I hope this work inspires future researchers to evaluate the populations of other migratory species, and that it encourages the greater scientific community to consider new and existing citizen-science programs

and think about how such programs' data might be used in their own research toward improving resource management and decision making."

*Source: American Ornithological Society Publications Office.*



***The bird pictured on page 8 is not a great blue heron. It's a grey heron, found in Europe, Asia, and Africa. April Fool!***



**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).

Q: How do trees get onto the Internet?

A: They log on.

### ***The Prayer of a Tree (anon.)***

You who pass by and would raise your hand against me, hearken ere you harm me.

I am the heat of your hearth on the cold winter nights, the friendly shade screening you from the summer sun,

And my fruits are refreshing draughts, quenching your thirst as you journey on.

I am the beam that holds your house, the board of your table, the bed on which you lie, the timber that builds your boat.

I am the handle of your hoe, the door of your homestead, the wood of your cradle, the shell of your last resting place.

I am the gift of God and the friend of man.

You who pass by, listen to my prayer and harm me not.

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Website: Tom Mullane  
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([ajstern1@gmail.com](mailto:ajstern1@gmail.com))

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