

Putnam Highlands Audubon Society Newsletter

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Putnam Highlands Audubon Society

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

www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org



IN MEMORIAM: ROBERT BOYLE

Connie Mayer-Bakall

Robert H. Boyle, a true “hero of the Hudson River,” died in Cooperstown on Friday, May 19. He was 88. We mourn the passing of a man who made such a difference in the Hudson Highlands and beyond through his decades of work as a sports writer, author, conservation activist, and environmental leader. For decades Bob was a great friend and respected resource to many of us in Audubon.

In 1965 he joined Scenic Hudson and other groups in a lawsuit against a proposed Consolidated Edison power plant at Storm King Mountain, warning that water-intake equipment would increase small-fish kill totals because the tidal estuary would bring the fish through the water-intakes twice a day. “Their suit resulted in the first federal court ruling affirming the right of citizens to mount challenges on the basis of potential harm to

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.

aesthetic, recreational or conservational values as well as tangible economic injury,” according to *The New York Times*, May 22, 2017.

Bob sounded early alarms about PCBs and global warming. Reviewing his book *The Hudson River: A Natural and Unnatural History* (1969), the author Carl Carmer wrote in *The New York Times Book Review*: “It can safely

be said that Mr. Boyle knows more about his subject — the wide stream by which he and his family live — than any other living man.”

We will miss his dedication and tenacity in the environmental movement.

SPEAKING OF HEROES . . .

On a miserable rainy May morning (Saturday, May 13), PHAS’s four intrepid Birdathon teams set out to spend 24 hours searching for as many species as they could find. While the smart birds were staying out of the rain, the Birdathoners were able to rack up some respectable numbers. The Beakin’ Beginners identified 39 species, the Garrison Gumshoes 63, the Wappingers Creakers 79, and the champion Putnam Valley Bogtrotters 81. Go Bogtrotters!

And the teams are . . .

Beakin’ Beginners

Scott Silver, co-captain

Perry Pitt, co-captain

Connie Mayer-Bakall

Pat Schories

Adele and Henry Stern

Chris and Jerry Rubino

Katherine Whiteside

Garrison Gumshoes

Lew Kingsley, captain

Pete Salmansohn

Gary and Bonnie VanAsselt

Ian Kingsley

Putnam Valley Bogtrotters

Rich Anderson, captain

Marc Breslav

Ralph Odell

Jane Alexander

Arlene Seymour

Paul Maus

Wappingers Creakers

Eric Lind, captain

Max Garfinkle

Joe Potyak

Dylan Jeannotte

Tom Mullane



BIRDATHON DONORS

PHAS would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their generous contributions to our chapter's 2017 Birdathon:

ROBINS (\$10-49)

Anonymous

Janie Bailey and Michael Musgrave

Anne Bellew

Thomas and Ann Elizabeth Brennan

Helen Butler

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Joseph Galati

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Ralph Odell

Roger and Karon Perry

Perry Pitt

Christine and Jerome Rubino

Owen and Zshawn Sullivan

G. Wylie and Sallie Sypher

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Rudolph S. Rauch

HERONS (\$500-749)

Nancy Durr

Friedrike Merck

EAGLES (\$1000-1999)

Elmer Sprague

Lucy R. Waletsky, MD

Special donation: \$50 from the Garrison Fish and Game Club in memory of Ruth Dain, Garrison, NY

SAVE THE DATE!

If you remember how much fun the last PHAS annual dinner was, you'll want to be sure to circle the date for the next one on your calendar.

Put a circle around **Saturday, April 14, 2018, 5 P.M.** so you don't miss the social hour.

THE FLINNS GO SOLAR

Irvine Flinn

Our new solar array, installed in 2016, has 30 pole-mounted panels (15 per pole) and is rated to produce 11,749 kilowatt hours of electricity per year. Our original 4000-KWh system still operates on the roof of our barn, and together they are expected to produce about 15,749 KWhs per year. On an annual net metering basis, this production should equate to all the electricity required to operate, heat, and cool our house and charge our car (an electric-powered Volt). The resulting savings in our electricity costs is expected to cover the system's installation costs in 12.4 years. Since the installation last year, we have been and will continue to be essentially free from fossil fuels.



This lovely bird was recently sighted in Putnam Valley. Can you ID it? (See page 10.)

It's a great restaurant. The catch of the day is fish sticks.

CY, THE BIRD GUY



Gone Solar!

To send questions to Cy, the Bird Guy, go to www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org and enter "Cy, the Bird Guy" in the Contact Us box.

Dear Cy,

I am hoping you can settle something for me. Last summer my son and I started enjoying bird watching. We have a lovely little marsh area near

our house, and we sometimes go for early-morning walks there to see what new birds we can identify. There is always something new to see, and it's even better because we can do it together!

Anyhow, maybe you can address a concern I have. One of my favorite duck species on the marsh is the wood duck. The male is the most beautiful bird, with its blue-green head and clear white lines around its face – I love to see it. Last year we regularly saw at least three or four males on most of our walks. The problem started in around midsummer. I noticed that the wood ducks were beginning to look kind of ratty. They seemed to be losing some feathers, and those that remained were much less vibrant. Were those birds sick? I noticed new birds there this year, and they have the same beautiful coloration I saw on wood ducks early last spring. Are these new ducks? Did the ducks I saw last year die? I hope not. Any information you can give me would be appreciated.

Distressed in Dutchess

Cy, the Bird Guy, says:

Dear Distressed in Dutchess,

Don't be distressed! I think what you saw happening to the male wood ducks last summer was perfectly normal.

These wood ducks were probably experiencing a molt. Molting is a way to replace worn or damaged feathers, and during the brief period of molt many ducks cannot fly. During this period they take on a much more muted coloration (you don't want to stand out if you can't fly away, right?) that is referred to as eclipse plumage. Birds go into eclipse plumage after the breeding season, when males are no longer trying to attract females. It lasts only a few weeks, until the new feathers come in.

So don't worry, the wood ducks are fine! In a few weeks they will be back to their brilliant, beautiful coloration, with brand-new feathers, and the males can once again take their rightful place as one of our most beautiful waterfowl.

Thanks for the question, and keep on birding!

Cy (the bird guy)

A skunk in the bush is worth two in the hand.



MY HOG ISLAND EXPERIENCE

Ellyn Varela-Burstein

Dear Newsletter Readers,

Hello! I am writing to you about the Hog Island Audubon Camp in Bremen, Maine. You might ask, "What did you do up there?" Well, my husband and I attended the week-long "Joy of Birding" program, thanks in part to the generosity of our own Putnam Highlands Audubon chapter. I want to share with everyone my excitement about being there and try to give you an idea of what it's like.

The camp is situated on a 330-acre island in mid-coastal Maine. To get there you could row, or you could be lucky, like my husband and me, and travel with Captain Bill and Meghan for the short 10-minute hop from the mainland on a small boat like those used to set and retrieve lobster pots. Once on the island we were joined by about forty other participants and a small group of experts, and then the fun really began.

Each morning we had the option of an early-morning bird walk with an expert to lead us after fueling up with a cup of delicious coffee. One morning we were treated to a lesson on bird banding. With a mist net set up in the middle of the camp, we could all participate in the banding.

Each day brought something new. The program was geared to the weather. During our stay the first two days were unseasonably cold and wet. All the formal workshops were scheduled for those days. There were talks that everyone attended, like "The Music of Birds," which was all about birdsong. There were also optional breakout sessions; it was tough to decide which of these to attend and which ones to miss. Choices included such topics as learning about feathers (who knew you could look at a single feather and know exactly where on the bird it came from, down to distinguishing between left- and right-sided feathers!) or learning about raptors by mimicking their flight patterns. I was fortunate enough to play an osprey and now will never forget its bent wrists in flight.

But as with many things, the best was saved for last. The weather broke, and we had two successive balmy sunny days. We were split into two groups. One group went ashore to discover the land-based birds, explore the Damariscotta Mills fish ladder, and indulge in ice cream at the Round Top ice cream stand. The other group traveled by boat to Eastern Egg Island to see the nesting puffins. For forty-four years Dr. Steven Kress has been working with grad students and other scientists, including our own "Puffin Pete" Salmansohn, to reestablish

puffin breeding grounds in Maine. The trials, tribulations, successes, and implications of this research were all shared with us by Dr. Kress himself. The next day the two groups switched destinations, so no one was denied ice cream!



Right in the middle of camp, atop a huge platform, there was an osprey nest. Each day we watched as the parents soared and then dove into the channel to catch fish to feed their young. The dining hall was equipped with an osprey cam, and while we ate we watched as the last of three eggs was pipped open and the chick emerged. Meals were served family style and gave everyone the opportunity to meet and mingle. Like any camp worth its salt, Hog Island had its rituals. One of them was the “mystery of the day,” a daily birding puzzle to be solved through

observation and sleuthing through the library. The promised prize was a life-altering gift, and on the final night the recipient received just that. I won’t be a killjoy and tell you what it was, but it was worth all the hard work she put into winning it!

Our birding walks were led by some of the finest birders in America, and their generosity in sharing their knowledge was matched only the humor they shared too. Laughing while you learn may be the best way to master a new skill.

The mission of Hog Island camp is: “to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth’s biological diversity.” Our instructors shared more than just skills to improve our bird watching; they shared their love of and knowledge of the natural world. We examined plants, learned about the local fish that support the seabirds, and watched the harbor seals. We discussed the factors that create environmental changes and pondered the effect those changes have on the animals and plants.

By the end of our stay the group had seen ninety-nine different species of birds, and my husband and I had added thirteen new birds to our life list. We did all this while making new friends from around the country and

Canada, and eating gourmet meals prepared for us by a dedicated and caring trio of chefs who grew some of what we ate and obtained the rest from local farmers and fishermen. Our stay culminated in a lobster feast with puff-pastry puffins for dessert, which alone was worth the six-hour drive from Cold Spring to Maine.

Hog Island Audubon Camp offers numerous programs, including family camp, marine natural history for teens, special programs for educators, and more. If you appreciate nature and want to spend a week in heaven, I urge you to look no further than Hog Island, Maine.

(<http://hogisland.audubon.org/programs>)



Photos by Pat Schories



*LESSON FROM A PEWEE**

Dan North

I'm in a half-overgrown hilltop field this sunny early-summer morning, and the air is full of bird music. I take my usual seat on a shaded rock, close my eyes, and listen. From the underbrush I hear the towhee's familiar che-wink and drink-your-tea. There's the upward trill of the prairie warbler, the insistent brassy chirp of the cardinal, the raspy alarm of the titmouse. I hear the friendly twitter of the tree swallow, the buzzy cluck of a passing raven, the warble of a bluebird, the whine of the catbird, the flat acceleration of a field sparrow, the chip of the chipping sparrow. The word *symphony* comes to mind. But then, as I notice how each performer takes the lead for few bars and then relinquishes it to fade into the background, I decide it's more like the improvisation of a jazz performance.

Eyes still closed, I picture the singers around me. The brown-and-orange towhee is scratching along the ground. The furtive gray catbird is lurking behind eye-level leaves. The swallows are crisscrossing the sky above, and the titmouse is gleaning in crevices of the surrounding white-oak bark. My

ears are bringing distant and invisible birds right to me. This seems important. I've always known a few familiar bird songs, but as I age I find I'm covering less ground on my walks. As this process continues, I'd like to be able to rely on hearing as well as seeing to connect with what's around me. I tried birdsong recordings, but sitting indoors and pursuing abstractions, I had trouble memorizing what I heard. Better was to spend time outdoors with a knowledgeable person, and I've been lucky in that regard. But even the most generous teacher has limits to his or her patience.

Finally, last year, I had my "a-ha moment." It came when I heard a plaintive curving whistle and linked it to the open beak and vibrating throat of a small brown flycatcher on a dead twig high in a nearby ash. The most reliable learning process, the pewee taught me, was to put in the time needed to see and hear a singing bird. I'm still a rank beginner, and I often forget yesterday's lessons. I know I'll never be an expert, but I don't have to be. One new song at a time, each one learned makes my world richer.

*This essay appears in Dan North's 2017 book *November Sun*, available for \$10 from the B&L Deli on Route 9 in Cold Spring. Proceeds from sales of the book go to the PHAS Marty McGuire Scholarship Fund.

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.

The bird pictured on page 5 is a Bohemian waxwing.

WHICH BIRD MIGRATES THE FARTHEST?

From Earth, November 18, 2016

The bird that flies farthest is the Arctic tern, an elegant white seabird. This bird also sees more daylight than any other.

Other birds stay in one hemisphere but go farther. For example, the wandering albatross spends most of its life aloft, circling the world above the oceans of the Southern Hemisphere. It stops only to breed on storm-swept islands near Antarctica. A wandering albatross might fly 30,000 kilometers – that's 18,000 miles – between breedings. So while the Arctic tern flies farthest of all birds, there are other bird species that come in a close second.

The Arctic tern breeds on the shores of the Arctic Ocean in summer in the Northern Hemisphere. And it feeds over the oceans of the Southern Hemisphere half a year later – when it’s summer there. So, like many birds, this bird flies great distances every year to maintain its life of endless summertime.

North American Arctic terns fly about 40,000 kilometers, or 24,000 miles, each year. That’s a distance about equal to the Earth’s circumference.



Photo by Alastair Rae



Two Arctic Terns. Image from Wikimedia Commons

An Arctic tern can live for twenty-five years, so in its lifelong quest for summer it can fly up to 1 million kilometers – nearly three times the distance from the Earth to the moon!

DID YOU KNOW?

- Some albatrosses fly around the entire planet in less than two months and can soar for six days without flapping their wings.
- Cats spend 85 percent of their day doing nothing.
- An owl’s eyeballs are almost as large as a human’s, even though its skull (without feathers) is barely the size of a golfball.

Eve blamed the snake. The snake didn’t have a leg to stand on.

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