

Putnam Highlands Audubon Society Newsletter

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Putnam Highlands Audubon Society
P.O. Box 292, Cold Spring, NY 10516
www.putnamhighlandsaudubon.org

PHAS WEIGHS IN ON COAST GUARD'S PROPOSED ANCHORAGE GROUNDS RULE

Dear Rear Admiral Fagan:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Coast Guard's (USCG) proposed rule: Anchorage Grounds, Hudson River; Yonkers, New York, to Kingston, New York. Putnam Highlands Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society and Audubon New York. Our chapter's area of interest includes the eastern shoreline of the Hudson River from Garrison to Wappingers Falls, New York. Our membership of over 400 constitutes a strong voice for conservation; preservation of habitat for birds and other wildlife species; and protection of the Hudson Highlands' natural resources.

A letter to you dated January 21, 2016, from The Maritime Association of the Port of New York/New Jersey Tug and Barge Committee states that trade of Bakken crude oil on the Hudson River is expected to increase significantly, and these newly designated anchorages are a key element in supporting the growth of oil transportation along the river. We are concerned that this expected increase in barge traffic and oil storage carries an accompanying higher risk of accidents and oil spills that would irreparably damage critical wildlife habitats and restoration efforts associated with the Hudson River estuary.



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

The mission of the Putnam Highlands Audubon Society 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.

The Hudson River is a major migration route for birds, and our tidal wetlands, swamps, and forests are major stopover points, providing refuge and food for migrating birds. The tidal wetlands serve as a nursery and refuge for juvenile fish species, as well as hosting rare plants and other wetland plant species that protect and buffer the shoreline. Our tidal wetlands also protect waterfront communities from flooding and help to clean and oxygenate the water. An oil spill from a barge would result in irreparable harm to these wetlands, the river, and its wildlife.

It is imperative that oil and shipping interests not be given precedence over the decades of environmental preservation and conservation planning that have involved millions of citizens

and millions of dollars. The river and its shoreline habitats must be protected from strong lobbying interests that conflict with conservation goals.

We request that a full environmental impact review be undertaken before any further action is undertaken.

*Sincerely,
Connie Mayer-Bakall
President, Putnam Highlands Audubon Society*



DATES TO REMEMBER

Sunday, January 8: Bird Identification with Pete Salmansohn, Howland Library, Beacon, 2 P.M. (Snow date: January 22)

Saturday, January 21: birdseed pickup, Taconic Outdoor Education Center (TOEC), 9 A.M.-noon.

Saturday, February 11: EagleFest, Boscobel, beginning at 9 A.M.

Saturday, March 25 (snow date April 15): PHAS Annual Dinner, TOEC; keynote speaker Kevin Hils, collections manager, Ornithology Department, Bronx Zoo.

PHAS WINTER BIRDSEED SALE

Orders are due by **Monday, January 16**. Order forms will be emailed out by January 1 and available online at the PHAS website after that date.

Pick-up your seed at the TOEC on **Saturday, January 21**, from 9 A.M. to noon

The early snows have attracted lots of diverse bird species to feeders, and watching them can provide many hours of enjoyment. If you watch the birds at your feeder carefully, you can almost get to know them as individuals. Because of loss of habitat and so many invasive plants that don't provide food for wildlife, bird feeders have become an important source of food for overwintering birds. Woodpeckers, chickadees, finches, tufted titmice, nuthatches, blue jays, cardinals, song sparrows, and doves are all clamoring for seed at the feeders.

Our sale offers quality birdseed, and Audubon birders will be on hand at the TOEC to answer any questions you might have. We hope you will support this fundraiser, which benefits our feathered friends as well as our many PHAS programs.

What happened to the duck who flew backwards?

He had a quack-up !

HUDSON VALLEY EAGLEFEST, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11

Pete Salmansohn

Join PHAS members and staff for eagle-viewing from the scenic promontory of Boscobel. We will have spotting scopes, expert narration, and

a warming tent with hot chocolate. Many bald eagles spend the winter in the Hudson River Valley, and Boscobel is an official viewing area, along with other locations such as George's Island and Peekskill Harbor. The center of activities for this large-scale public event, as usual, will be Croton Point Park. For more information about EagleFest, go to www.teatown.org. Viewing at Boscobel begins at 9 A.M. Admission and parking at Boscobel are free. Be sure to dress warmly!

What kind of parasite do you find on a loon?

A lunatic!

PHAS OPPOSES MONOPOLE PLACEMENT OF MONOPOLE IN NEW HAMBURG

RE: Proposed 150-foot Monopole at the New Hamburg Station

Dear Ms. Mancuso:

I am writing to inform you that Putnam Highlands Audubon Society, a Mid-Hudson chapter of the National Audubon Society, has just learned of the proposal by Metro North and your organization to construct a 150-foot monopole at the New Hamburg train station. We would like to participate as a Consulting Party in the Section 106 review.

We are greatly disturbed by this proposal, since we own and maintain the Reese Sanctuary in New Hamburg. The visibility map indicates that the facility would be visible from our sanctuary's birding trails, as well as directly in front of and obscuring the view from the bench dedicated to Francis Reese, the donor of the property. Many people use the Wappingers

Creek area for recreational purposes such as canoeing, kayaking, and fishing. In addition, our chapter maintains birding trails through the sanctuary that would be affected by the placement of the monopole as currently proposed.

As a chapter of a major environmental organization, we are also concerned that a proper needs analysis has not been undertaken to determine whether systemwide alternatives might be available to meet Metro North's communication needs. It is possible that other technologies would be less visible from our sanctuary and from important historic sites along the Hudson River. A distributed antenna system, which uses lower and less visible towers, should be considered as an alternative, as well as alternate locations and stealth tower designs.

Frances Reese donated the sanctuary lands to our chapter in the 1990s to be preserved in perpetuity for the express purpose of maintaining the land for birds and other wildlife, and for the public to use the trails for bird watching, an activity that thousands of people enjoy. We have a paid warden on site who helps to maintain and protect the birding trails and our property. Many years ago we installed and dedicated a bench in Ms. Reese's honor that allows visitors to sit and contemplate the beauty of nature and the Hudson Valley. The siting of the monopole would destroy this view.

We appreciate the need for communication infrastructure. However, this need must be measured against the decades of protection of the viewshed and environmental integrity of the Hudson River and the lands along its banks.

Sincerely,

Connie Mayer-Bakall
President
Putnam Highlands Audubon Society

BIRD ID PROGRAM JANUARY 8

On **Sunday, January 8**, at 2 P.M., PHAS will be presenting a program on bird identification at the Howland Library on Main Street in Beacon. The interactive program, led by Pete Salmansohn, is open to the general public (age 8 and up) at no charge, and is intended especially for beginners. Refreshments will be served.

PHAS TO HONOR LEW KINGSLEY AND FEATURE EXPERT BRONX ZOO BIRDER AS SPEAKER AT SPRING EVENT

Adele Stern

PHAS will be honoring our own Lew Kingsley as well as welcoming Kevin Hils, collections manager for the Ornithology Department at the Bronx Zoo, as our featured speaker. The annual event will take place on **Saturday, March 25**, at the TOEC's Highlands Lodge, starting at 5 P.M. with a social hour, followed at 6 P.M. with a buffet dinner and program.

Our honoree, Lew Kingsley, is Philipstown's unique character. He is a renowned tree specialist and an authority on birds and wildlife. For decades he has led hikes and trailblazing for PHAS and the Hudson Highlands Land Trust, and has consulted with several bird and wildlife refuges in the Hudson Valley.

For over forty years Lew participated in the national Christmas Bird Count, and as an active environmentalist he has served on the boards of Riverkeeper, the Hudson Highlands Land Trust, and PHAS, among other organizations. In the 1980s he was instrumental, along with Jim Rod, in helping to establish the Constitution Marsh sanctuary, including assisting Jim with the construction of the original boardwalk at the Marsh. He is a co-founder of the Putnam Highlands Audubon Society as well as the annual PHAS Birdathon.

Kevin Hils is an active member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, having started in high school as a keeper in the Children's Zoo at the Cincinnati Zoo. His multifaceted experience includes not only working with Jack Hanna at the Columbus and Cincinnati Zoos but also stints at the Knoxville Zoo in Tennessee, Chicago's Brookfield Zoo, and the Chehaw Wild Animal Park in Georgia. He has also explored wildlife in the rainforests of Bolivia and Guyana.

Kevin oversees the day-to-day care of one of the largest bird collections in the United States and will speak to us about some of the challenges, experiences, and remarkable animal relationships this work entails. His collection includes more than 1400 individual specimens of 260 species of birds.

With two unique, very affable wild life and nature passionate experts, the evening promises to be unforgettable.

What kind of luggage does a vulture take onto an airplane?

Carrion !



CY, THE BIRD GUY

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

Dear Cy,

I have a bird feeder outside my office window, and nearly every day I see what I have determined is a white-breasted nuthatch there. I have two questions: Is this the same bird every day? And if so, could he/she be nesting nearby?

Thanks for any information you can provide about this bird. I am finding him really interesting!

Monica (in my office)

Cy, the Bird Guy, says:

Dear Monica,

Thanks for the great question! I think your question lies right at the heart of what attracts people to birdwatching and bird feeders. When you first start watching birds (or don't watch birds at all), maybe you just see lots of birds . . . But the more you watch, the more you realize that you are not just seeing "birds", but you are seeing cardinals, and sparrows, and yes . . . nuthatches. Like us, birds are individuals, and like all animals (human and nonhuman) they have their own lives and their own idiosyncrasies. They start their day in the morning; they look for food; they have companions, or mates; they may be raising young; they have to watch out for dangers . . . they have their own lives. And the more you watch them, the more you become aware of the details of those lives. And I think knowing those details makes them more interesting to us. So I am happy to answer your question:

Yes! It is very likely that this is the same individual nuthatch you see every day. Or maybe even a pair of nuthatches. As you may know, male and female nuthatches have the same color pattern (that is, they are monomorphic), so it could be a pair. Do you ever see two at the same time?

White-breasted nuthatches in the New York tristate area do not migrate south for the winter, so when they nest, they will probably nest near your office – but that will not be until spring. Some birds (such as bluebirds) may use their nest boxes or nest cavities for shelter during cold weather, but in winter birds are spending their time finding food rather than nesting.

So if you are sure you are seeing only one nuthatch, keep your eyes open come spring, because I would bet dollars to donuts that you will start to see a pair as the days warm up and a young nuthatch's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love!

So thanks for the question, Monica. Happy New Year, and keep those questions coming!

Cy (the bird guy)





FAITHFUL COMPANION

Dan North

It was a long, cold winter. Deep snow blanketed the ground and stayed, crusting hard during the single-digit nights. In January, trying a short walk on a woodland trail, I slipped and fell on the slick, shiny crust. Shaken but unhurt, I remembered legendary basketball coach Red Auerbach's two-word reply when asked, at 90, what advice he had for those hoping to attain his spry old age. "Don't fall," said Auerbach. I'm not so far behind Auerbach in years, so in the spirit of his warning, I decided the rest of my winter's walks would be on sparsely traveled back roads that were plowed and sanded. It didn't take long to find the perfect spot – a winding dirt road that twisted through upland woods past an icebound lake and out into a sloping field that gave view to faraway rows of receding white hills, tinted blue with the cold and bristled with distant forests. I loved this walk, and returned to it throughout February and March. Each time, I'd come home with a sustaining memory. An abandoned hornet's nest hanging from the low branch of a black birch. The skim of ice on ruts and puddles in the road – here windowpane smooth, there a crisscross litter of frozen filaments resembling straw scattered on a barn floor. Or, as March progressed, air dense with the fresh, wet, vapory smell of evaporating snow. But, although I was happy with my winter walks, a little voice of regret penetrated from time to time. "Remember when you used to snowshoe all day through woods like these?" it whimpered. "If you were the man you used to be, you'd be breaking trail instead of taking this namby-pamby little road stroll." Usually, I easily dismiss this voice. Sometimes, though, I let it get to me. For some reason, this eight-degree

morning is one of those vulnerable times. Preoccupied with an aching hip and a rickety back, I limp toward a roadside chestnut oak set above the lake on a knoll striped with horizontal rock ledges. I'm not fully present to enjoy the scene before me. Instead, I'm debating whether to bring a cane next time I'm here. Out of habit, though, I stop and look up. About 20 feet high there's a round, two-inch-wide hole in the oak trunk. Earlier in the winter I'd seen a red-bellied woodpecker vanish into that hole. Now that I knew where the woodpecker lived, each time I passed I'd stop and wait for it to appear. This morning, it isn't immediately present. I wait. I hear a titmouse whistle and distant crows caw. I notice dog, deer, and turkey tracks in the snow. Far out on the pond ice, I see a deer carcass. But no woodpecker. I wait again, stamping my feet and swinging my arms to combat the cold. Then, in the distance, I hear a familiar *chirr*. Zigzagging through the woods, my woodpecker flies closer and closer until it comes into sight. It *chirrs* again, lands on a dead ash, and sidles to the tree's back side to resume hammering for its breakfast. I'm pleased. My faithful companion is back. I've forgotten my hip, and the whiny voice of regret is silent.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Turkeys purr when they're content, much as cats do.
- Sheep can recognize at least fifty faces and remember them for years.
- As soon as a young wandering albatross gets airborne it won't land again until it's ready to breed, which can be ten years later!

What is a baby chicken's favorite kind of pizza?

Peep-a-roni !



***Wishing you peace, joy, and
happiness throughout the
New Year!***

The NSAS Board of Governors

PHAS BOARD OF GOVERNORS

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Recommended viewing: "How Wolves Change Rivers," on YouTube.

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