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# Feathers

*Bi-monthly publication of the  
Hudson-Mohawk  
Bird Club, Inc.*

## **One Very Big Day: A World Series of Birding Recap by Richard White**

The World Series of Birding (“WSB”) is an event hosted by the NJ Audubon Society on the second Saturday in May every year. There are several formats for the competition, but most teams attempt to identify as many species as possible in New Jersey in a 24-hour period. The event was held on Saturday, May 14 this year, and our team consisted of myself, Jackson Mesick, Steve Mesick, and David Luck. We entered as a full-state team, meaning that we were attempting to ID as many species as possible in the entire state. Jackson and Steve are WSB veterans and won the event in 2016 with 190 species (their highest species count ever). David and I were WSB rookies but have done several Century Runs in the Hudson-Mohawk region. Our goal was really against ourselves—we wanted to hit 200 species (as Jackson and Steve have never achieved that and we were pretty certain we wouldn’t be able to beat the young teams from Princeton and Cornell). Our team name will be appreciated by Lord of the Rings fans: “One Wren to Rule Them All.”

As with any big day, it’s all about the scouting. We arrived to northern NJ (Wantage) on Friday, May 6 to give ourselves an entire week of scouting. Our general route is to start at the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (about an hour south of the NJ/NY border), then head north to high elevation spots, then aim to make the 2.5-hour drive south in late morning and spend the rest of the day birding in the south. For scout week, Jackson handled the north the entire time. Steve, David, and I scouted the north until Monday and then went south to scout from Monday evening to Friday. On Friday evening (May 13) at around 5 p.m., we met at a hotel near the Great Swamp for a quick nap before the big day began. Then, after a long week of scouting, we finally arrived to the Great Swamp at around 11:55 p.m. Birds start counting as soon as the clock strikes midnight. I looked down at my phone. 12:00. Here we go.

*(continued p72 )*

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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

This my second time writing a "President's Corner" for the month of June. With the whirlwind of spring migration already behind us in just a few short weeks, it's impossible not to notice how much our local birding has changed between now and the previous edition of *Feathers* in April. Back then we were still getting doses of snow, frost and freezing temperatures as the earliest warblers, vireos, and thrushes trickled back into our area. And now we're on the verge of summer, with songbird migration quickly ebbing to a close, while shorebirds occasionally drop down into our mudflats and flooded fields for a brief respite on their long push northward. We may have a few more weeks to go before the solstice, but for birders, spring started to end when we began hearing the woods around us ringing with the uncanny song of Blackpoll Warblers.

The Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club has done a lot since I last wrote here. We held our annual meeting – in a very different format and at a new venue, but successfully nonetheless – with an excellent and engaging presentation on Antarctica, the Southern Ocean, and its penguins by photographer Yun Wang. We also elected our officers and board of directors for the next year. Many familiar faces are returning, but we're pleased to welcome Daniel Schlaepfer and Colleen Williams to the board as first-time members. Cassie Davis and Patti Fuller stepped down from the board in April, but we thank them immensely for all they've done for the club. And we're delighted that Amanda "Dillon" Dillon has graciously agreed to step into the role of secretary (and for giving us an incredible presentation on her avian conservation work at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve at last month's Club program!).

Of course, April and May meant two whole months of successful spring field trips, including some of our most popular yearly events, all of which were well-attended by our enthusiastic trip leaders and participants. And the Club recently purchased three pairs of walkie-talkies to replace the older, rapidly dying set that we've been using long before I came along; these should certainly come in handy on carpool and out-of-area field trips for many years to come.

Even with all that, the year's only half over. We have a few more field trips coming up in June, then a bit of a break in July before things pick back up again in August in time for fall migration. But in the meantime, we're heading into the peak of breeding and nesting season and now's the perfect time to get out into the field and contribute to the New York Breeding Bird Atlas III. Birders of all skill levels can help in this important endeavor and if you're feeling particularly motivated, please check out the Atlas block map and find one of the many priority blocks in our area that could use your help. The Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club is a proud sponsor of the Atlas and the Board recently voted to make another donation to this worthy science and conservation project, and we encourage you to contribute in any way you can.

Good birding and have a great summer, everyone!

Tristan Lowery  
President, Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club  
[president@hmbc.net](mailto:president@hmbc.net)

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**You, too, can contribute to Feathers!**

- Do you have a birding story or photos that might be of interest to other birders?
- Have you led a field trip for HMBC?
- Have you written short prose or poetry on the subject of birds? We're starting a Writers' Page!
- Did you take a birding vacation?
- Do you have a favorite birding spot?

SHARE them with HMBC members by submitting them to:

***HMBC Contact Information***

**BIRDLINE of EASTERN NEW YORK:**

**E-mail:** [contact@hmbc.net](mailto:contact@hmbc.net)

**HMBC website:** <http://hmbc.net>

Please send all **electronic submissions for Feathers** via e-mail to:  
Denise Hackert-Stoner at [DeniseHStoner@aol.com](mailto:DeniseHStoner@aol.com).

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**6 Knob Hill Road.**

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**New printing of *Birding New York's Hudson Mohawk Region* is now available**

***Birding New York's Hudson Mohawk Region***, a new printing of HMBC's classic book, is now available. A copy is \$20 for HMBC members and \$25 for non-members. An additional charge of \$5 for postage and handling will be added to the price per book. Contact Gregg Recer [gregg\\_recer@alum.rpi.edu](mailto:gregg_recer@alum.rpi.edu) or (518) 899-2678 if you are interested in purchasing a copy. Checks should be made out to ***Hudson Mohawk Bird Club*** and should be sent to:

Gregg Recer

23 Scotch Mist Way

Malta, NY 12020

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## UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

### **Sunday, June 5, 2022, CHERRY PLAIN STATE PARK (Rensselaer County; morning)**

**Location:** Cherry Plain State Park

**Coordinator:** Naomi Lloyd 518-596-5964 [naomi\\_kestrel@yahoo.com](mailto:naomi_kestrel@yahoo.com)

Cherry Plain State Park is situated on the Rensselaer Plateau of the Capital District. The relatively high elevation, cool climate and a variety of forested and wetland habitats make this a good area for northern species. Nesting species include Least Flycatcher, Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow, Scarlet Tanager, Common Raven, Broad-winged Hawk, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Black-and-White and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Veery, Hermit Thrush and Winter Wren also nest here.

Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Hannaford parking lot on the right side of Route 43, just past the intersection of Route 150 in West Sand Lake, to carpool to the park.

### **Saturday, June 11, 2022, Strawberry Fields Nature Preserve (Montgomery County, morning)**

**Location:** Strawberry Fields Nature Preserve

**Coordinators:** Ellen Pemrick 518-366-5360 [lnmp@nycap.rr.com](mailto:lnmp@nycap.rr.com); John Loz 518-708-7825 [jjjazz5@hotmail.com](mailto:jjjazz5@hotmail.com)

Strawberry Fields is located on Cranes Hollow Road in the Town of Amsterdam. It includes a nature preserve protected under a conservation easement with MHLC, a family home, and a working farm, and features 2.5 miles of trails through fields and forest. Birds found here include Bobolink, Eastern Bluebird, Baltimore Oriole, Common Yellowthroat and Ovenbird. We'll walk the trails and see what turns up. Be prepared for possible wet or muddy conditions and tall grass.

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the designated parking area at the preserve.

Directions can be found at [the MHLC website](#).



**Rose Breasted Grosbeak**

**Written By: Marilyn Hamecher**

**5/22/22**

There he is...this morning, gracing my feeder in full dress.  
He's been absent for a while perhaps he was under duress.

Wearing jet black head feathers, accenting his white belly best.  
Sporting a triangular red breast patch, that shows off his chest.

He is very elusive and hides perched in leafy tree tops, high-up.  
He comes down to a feeder to eat, low-down, or for water to sup,

He remains hidden in thick foliage and holds his tongue.  
Maybe this hiding habit, ensures the survival of their young

He's known for the scary folk name of "cut-throat", what the heck?  
Because his name comes from the French term meaning, grosbec.

He heads for the tropics during the winter months to rest and feed.  
This smart bird knows it's more satisfying than crunching bird seed.

They feed on fruiting trees such as his favorite called, Gumbo Limbo,  
I wonder if they ever indulge in that silly dance we call the "Limbo".

There is so much more to learn about the Rose Breasted Grosbeak.  
Listen for his call, it sounds like the Robin or his piercing call of EEK!

## ON NATURE

Keeping it Green, Denise Hackert-Stoner

As Scott and I approached our destination on a recent trip to the Sonoran Desert of southeast Arizona we were dazzled by a sea of chartreuse. For the first time, our visit coincided with the blooming of the palo verde trees. Every tree was laden with thousands of bright yellow flowers, and from a distance, the mingling of those flowers with the green bark of the palo verdes gave a distinctly greenish yellow impression. What a grand welcome to the desert!



The palo verde is Arizona's state tree, an honor I think it deserves for many reasons. First and foremost, this tree is green; not only its leaves, but its bark as well. A desert adaptation, most of the chlorophyll (about two thirds) is produced in the bark of these trees. This gives the palo verde its unique lime green color and is the reason for its name. Palo verde means "green stick." During the regular periods of drought that occur in the Arizona desert the palo verde simply drops its leaves. For most of the year this tree has no leaves at all. But the chlorophyll in the bark goes right on absorbing sunlight and carrying on its role in the sugar-making process. How remarkable!



**ON NATURE** (CONTINUED)

The palo verde is a leguminous tree, and its seeds are edible. They are often picked just before monsoon season when the pods are green. The seeds are tender then, and eaten similarly to peas or edamame. The flowers are also edible, and can be added to salads. Wildlife also eat parts of this important tree. Javelinas eat the seed pods. Bighorn sheep, mule deer and jackrabbits eat the leaves.

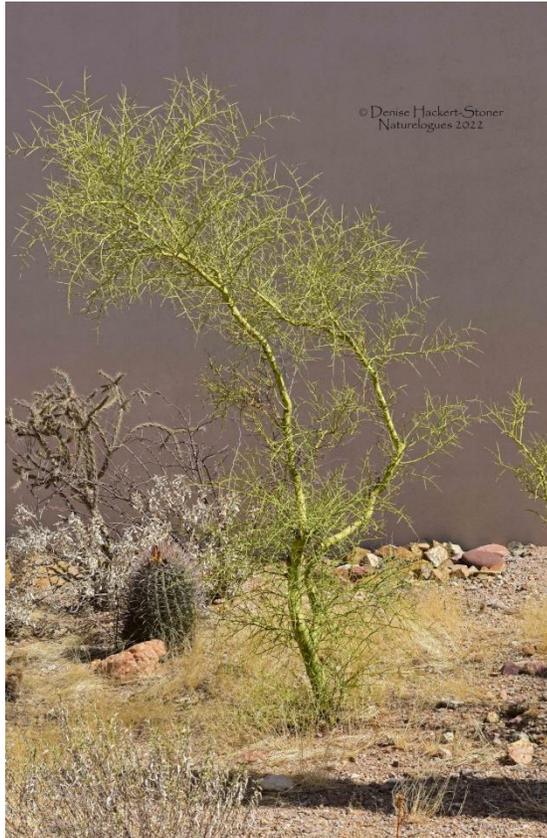


One of the most important roles of the palo verde is as shade-provider. Many of the giant saguaro cactus plants we see throughout the Sonoran Desert got their start as tiny seedlings in the shade of a palo verde tree. Often we see these cactus plants growing up through the tree. The trees are sometimes referred to as “nurse trees” for this reason.



**ON NATURE** *(CONTINUED)*

So there are many reasons I think that the palo verde is a great choice for Arizona's state tree. The thing I keep returning to in my mind is that it keeps its green chlorophyll right in its bark. It carries this life-giving stuff in its own body. This is so amazing to me. What a great example of how evolution works, and how intelligent nature is!



## MEET YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### CINDY EDWARDSON

In a new feature of Feathers, Board member Cindy Edwardson will be interviewing one member of the HMBC board each month. The interviews will be shared in Feathers. First up is our own Board president , Tristan Lowery.



What do you do for your day job?

I'm a utility analyst with the New York State Department of Public Service, which is the state agency that regulates public utilities. My office works primarily with electric and gas utilities on energy conservation and sustainability, renewable generation, transportation and heating electrification, and climate policy. But before moving to Albany to go to graduate school ten years ago, I worked for many years in an entirely different world – as a cook in high-end, fine dining restaurants in New York City.

What hobbies or interests do you have outside of birding?

I still love cooking and – when I have the time – homebrewing. I'm also a lifelong musician with a solid classical background on the trumpet – though these days I mostly just sing in an excellent church choir and dabble on the mandolin at local folk sessions. I write the near-weekly *Birds and Booze* post at the blog 10,000 Birds, where I review bird-inspired beers, wines, ciders, and spirits. And I've been getting into woodworking lately.

## MEET YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS (CONT....)

How did you get into birding?

My father is a wildlife biologist who idolized Aldo Leopold, so I spent a lot of time in the outdoors growing up, though we weren't serious birders as I later came to understand the term. Later, I moved to New York City for college and for the next several years, I didn't get out of the city much or even do any outdoors activities that I'd once loved when I was younger. Eventually I realized I really missed all of that, and I began tiring of my strictly urban lifestyle, so I started looking for something completely different to do on my days off as a restaurant cook – something outside and away from the heat, noise, and fluorescent glare of the kitchen, in particular. I had heard that people birded places in New York City like Central Park, so I decided to give that a try. I didn't know anything about birding or migration back then, and I think my first outing was in June or July in the middle of the afternoon – I don't think I saw anything but pigeons, House Sparrows, and maybe a few robins that very first try. But I stuck with it!

Do you have any destination birding dreams?

Of course. There are so many places I want to visit for reasons other than birding, primarily in Europe. But I'd plan on doing as much birding as possible while there, too.

What was your spark bird and why? How about your favorite bird?

Glossy Ibis. After a few forays into Central Park as a clueless beginner, I noticed some place at the bottom of the New York City subway map called Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. It sounded promising – and even better, it was in Queens, where I lived. So, I took the bus down there one summer day and one of the first birds I saw was a Glossy Ibis. Many of them, actually. I'd never seen anything like them and had no idea birds like that existed in New York City. They looked so strange and unlike other birds I was familiar with, like something you'd see at a bustling waterhole in sub-Saharan Africa – not some spot in Queens you can get to on the A train, with jets from JFK screaming overhead. Of course, I later learned that Glossy Ibises originally came from Africa and worked their way up north from South America in the last two centuries, but I didn't know that at the time.

I can usually never think of a favorite bird, but I'll go with a narcissistic choice – the Tristan Albatross. It's one of a handful of endemics to the remote South Atlantic Island Tristan da Cunha (it's named for a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Portuguese explorer, but it's now a British Overseas Territory). There's also a Tristan Thrush and an extinct Tristan Moorhen. Anyway, the island Tristan is part of the most remote inhabited archipelago in the world, and it's terribly expensive to get there, so I'm not expecting to visit it – or to see its endemic birds – ever. But you never know.

What is your favorite place locally to explore birds?

I'm a big fan of birding opportunistically wherever you are – at work, at school, maybe some spot a few blocks from home. I also love maintaining "patch" lists and seeing what you can find over the years with a bit of effort, even in a location that doesn't at first seem like a promising "hotspot" for birding. So, for years, my favorite local spot has been Normanskill Farm in the City of Albany, just a short walk from my house. Much of my fixation on hyper-local birding stems from the fact that I didn't own a car or even know how to drive when I first moved to Albany from New York City. Now I both drive and own a car, but I still love being able to just walk to a good birding spot. Plus, I think any time not spent driving can be time spent birding, especially during spring migration when I'm trying to cram in as much birding as possible before work every day.

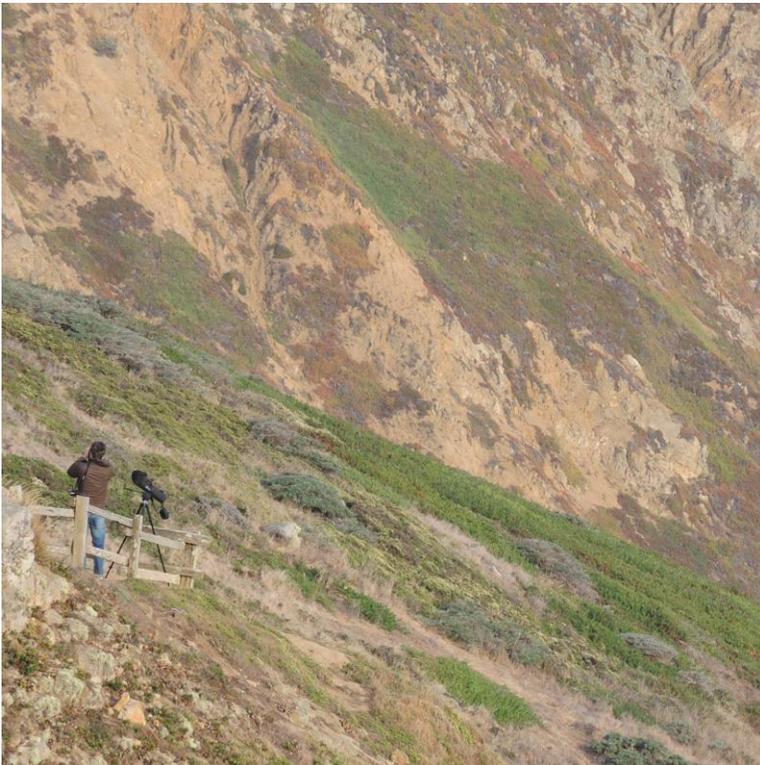
## MEET YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS *(CONT....)*

What is your most surprising birding experience?

I take it for granted now, but when I first started birding, I had no idea that people reported and shared observations and that it was at all possible to relocate these birds. And that people actually do this regularly, particularly with rarities. First of all, I had no idea birds can tend to stick around in the same spot at times, and secondly, that birders actually invest a lot of effort on keeping tabs on those that do. It was really mind-blowing when I realized this goes on. After a year or so of mucking around on my own birding in New York City, I finally found out about the state birding listserv and signed up for it. Only a few days later, I got an email about an American Avocet at Jamaica Bay and I was absolutely amazed when I got there and found it myself.

Do you have any specific hopes or goals for HMBC?

I hope the club can get more involved in urban birding activities. I occasionally lead trips for groups like the Washington Park Conservancy and Friends of Albany Rural Cemetery and I'm always surprised by the turnout and level of interest in these outings. The participants are almost always new to birding and they get excited about commonplace birds. It's wonderful to see people thrilled to see a Blue Jay, or to learn that the song they've been hearing in their backyard, every day all summer long, is a Red-eyed Vireo – especially when these experiences take place in a city park just around the corner from their homes. Even just sharing resources like eBird or the Merlin mobile app, or projects like the Breeding Bird Atlas with people can get them interested in birds. Of course, I always recommend the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club, our field trips and other programs in these situations!



## Field Trip Reports

**April 9, 2022, Five Rivers Environmental Education Center**

**Scott Stoner, Coordinator**

Seven birders explored Five Rivers on a cold (mid-40s) April morning in a light but steady rain. Focused on beginning birders, we started off with a flyover Belted Kingfisher, and Red-winged Blackbirds and Killdeer on the lawn by the parking lot.

We stuck mainly to paved and gravel surfaces due to several inches of recent rain, and encountered a total of 31 species. Highlights included two pairs of Wood Ducks (Fox Marsh and Vlomankill), one of which was up in the trees, several Canada Goose nests, actively flycatching Eastern Phoebes, Hooded Merganser, and likely First of Year (FOY) Eastern Towhee and Northern Rough-winged Swallows. Of likely greatest interest was the close flock of 14 Cedar Waxwings near the Wood Duck Marsh!

Although the highest waters had already receded, the photo herein shows evidence of recent flooding along the Vlomankill, as viewed from Fordham's Crossing.

My sincere thanks to all who ventured out on this beginner bird walk in such challenging weather!



## Field Trip Reports *(cont....)*

**April 10, 2022, Vischer Ferry Nature and Historic Preserve**

**John Hershey, Coordinator**

Despite the widespread flooding at Vischer Ferry Preserve yesterday and today, there was a reasonably dry towpath trail going west from the main entrance. So, with 15 birders, including several novices and new HMBC members, we proceeded west on the towpath this morning and then returned the same way.

Highlights for the morning were numerous. Before even starting we heard a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker tapping out Morse Code across the road. Not far from the bridge we spotted 2 River Otters crossing the towpath in front of us. Later we spotted two Muskrats in a nest at close range. Most of the ducks we saw initially were Ring-necked. However, we eventually found small numbers of Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Teal (4), Gadwall, American Wigeon, and eventually Hooded Mergansers and one Greater Scaup. Including the Sapsucker already mentioned we eventually reached a total of 6 woodpecker species or a so-called "Woodpecker 6-pack". Swallows were a major highlight with as many as 200 Tree Swallows foraging over the water despite rather chilly conditions. Naomi eventually spotted 1 Northern Rough-winged and 1 Barn Swallow among

them. (As I went back up the towpath later I discovered 20 Northern Rough-winged resting on a snag in the canal. This was the same snag where the rare Violet-green Swallow was photographed last year on 4/22. ) Other typical Vischer Ferry marsh birds seen were a Belted Kingfisher, a Great Blue Heron, and at least 4 Rusty Blackbirds. Three Bald Eagles were also spotted.

The final species count at the end of our walk was a respectable 38 species. In some ways the flooding worked to our advantage because it expanded the length of the ponds going west increasing the available habitat for ducks. Thanks to all who braved the cold temperatures and participated, and we hope to see the new members and birders on future HMBC field trips.

**April 17, 2022, Collins Lake**

**Coordinator: Tom Williams**

The weather could not have been less like mid-April as eight hardy souls leaned into the cold, gusty west winds and snow flurries, and tried to find hunkered down birds at Collins Lake in Scotia on Sunday. We shortened the duration of the outing to just a bit over an hour, with the lake harboring very little activity, and concentrated more on the edge and creek habitat across the road from Quinlan Park. There was a Great Egret tucked in the cattails on the west shore of the lake. I'm not sure it moved a single step while we were there. A Pied-billed Grebe made an appearance as we were heading back to our vehicles. One or two Great Blue Herons were around Collins Creek, with Wood Ducks and Mallards. We did observe two Palm Warblers, and a few Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Many thanks to the folks that braved the harsh conditions. We hope to see you on future trips!

## Field Trip Reports *(cont....)*

### **April 29 – May 1, 2022, NJ Early-Spring Weekend Getaway**

**Coordinators: Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen**

Ten HMBC members spent an enjoyable 2 days getting a jump on spring migration at two great locations in New Jersey: Forsythe (aka Brigantine) and Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuges. We spent a full day at Brigantine and had a lot of good birds. Some highlights included brant, whimbrel, lots of breeding-plumaged dunlin, clapper rail (heard), white-eyed vireo, orchard oriole, loads of purple martins, and a nice mix of warblers. Sunday at Great Swamp had more migrant warbler activity, hermit and wood thrushes, bald eagles, and a large group of rusty blackbirds.

This was the first overnight HMBC field trip since the beginning of the pandemic, and we were very happy to be out traveling with a great group again. Thanks to all who joined us.

### **May 7, 2022, Birds and Breakfast, Five Rivers EEC**

**Coordinators: Tom and Colleen Williams**

Birds 'n Breakfast morning was cool and a bit breezy, but not enough to affect auditory observations. Groups went out at 6am, 7am and 8am, and returned to the Five Rivers Visitors Center at 10:30am for refreshments and a compilation of the day list. Despite the somewhat early date (normally this is held in the second week of May) and less than ideal weather conditions, our collection of roughly forty birders observed a rather surprising 95 species.

Some notable birds included: a Virginia Rail at the Heron Pond; a Black-billed Cuckoo and a Scarlet Tanager calling on the western leg of the North Loop Trail; a fledgling Great Horned Owl perched along the Big Pine Trail; a White-crowned Sparrow seen singing just outside the Visitors Center building; and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird that briefly perched on a railing right outside our room during the compilation.

It was also a pretty good morning for wood-warblers, with a total of 18 species seen and heard. Highlights were Nashville, Magnolia, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, both expected Waterthrush species, and American Redstart.

Thanks to the many birders that turned out this morning, and to the volunteer group leaders. The participants were also generous in donating funds to the 'social committee' which provided food and drink. We hope to see you again in the near future, we have a full schedule of field trips over the next four weeks. We also extend our gratitude to Gina, Drew and the staff at Five Rivers for accommodating our needs on such a busy May morning.

## Field Trip Reports *(cont....)*

**May 8, 2022, Vischer's Ferry Mother's Day Field Trip**

**Coordinators: Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen**

Nearly 30 birders covered VF mainly south and east of the Whipple Bridge for over 4 hours this morning. It was cool, but sunny, with some modest north breeze building during the morning. Collectively the group tallied about 60 species. Migrant activity was not very prominent, but we were eventually able to find a dozen wood warblers, with highlights including black-throated-blue, black-throated-green, northern waterthrush, northern parula, and a single wilson's seen by a few folks. Other good finds included several white-crowned sparrows, and a few bank swallows mixed in with large flocks of tree, rough-winged, and barn. We had some distant views of spotted and solitary sandpipers along the edge of the Mohawk river, and then several much better views of several solitaires along one section of towpath trail. There were plenty of summer residents present such as virginia rail, rose-breasted grosbeak, baltimore oriole, and warbling vireo. Perhaps the most unexpected observation of the morning was a weasel running along the bank of one pond right at our feet (ID somewhat uncertain, but several thought it was a long-tailed).

## Upcoming HMBC Programs

**Date and Time:** Monday, June 6, 2022, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

**Location:** In Person, Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Delmar. Also available on Zoom.

**Topic:** Digital Darkroom Workshop: Getting More Out of Your Photos

**Presenter:** Gregg Recer

*his event will be held in-person at Five Rivers in Delmar, and will also be available live via Zoom.*

Digital technology has revolutionized photography in a lot of ways. One of the most striking examples is that now practically anybody with a computer or smart phone can re-touch their own photos in a matter of minutes -- something that, in the film era, might have taken weeks through a lab, and was only realistically available to professional photographers. This workshop will provide numerous examples of simple computer tools (primarily Adobe Lightroom) to help adjust and improve many aspects of digital images such as framing, exposure, contrast, shadows, sharpening, noise, white balance, etc. The emphasis will be on getting the most information out of bird photos, but will also touch on landscapes and "animal-in-habitat" images.

Gregg Recer is a former HMBC president. He considers himself a "birding photographer" rather than an artist, using the camera primarily as a birding tool. He and his wife, Cathy Graichen, have been HMBC members since 1989.

**Date and Time:** September 12, 2022, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

**Location:** Via Zoom. Watch for email with link

**Topic:** American Woodcock Ecology and Management in the Northeast USA

**Presenter:** Dr. Roger J. Masse

The American woodcock, or Timberdoodle, is an upland shorebird that thrives in young forests of the Northeast, USA. During the last decade, much research and management has been conducted to better understand aspects of woodcock ecology and to help conserve declining woodcock populations. On Monday, September 12th 2022, Dr. Roger J. Masse will provide an overview of woodcock ecology and management to the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club starting at 6:30 p.m. Among other things, this virtual presentation will outline studies he has been involved with related to behavior and management of these peculiar birds. He will also discuss the benefit of woodcock habitat management for other young forest birds.

Dr. Masse currently works as an Associate Professor of Wildlife Management at SUNY Cobleskill. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in wildlife biology from University of Vermont (2007), a Master of Science degree in natural resources from Delaware State University (2009), and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in environmental science from University of Rhode Island (URI; 2014). During these years, a common theme of his education was applied, field-studies of birds. He conducted extensive studies related to American woodcock ecology while at URI and has maintained an interest in this species ever since. Dr. Masse routinely incorporates woodcock capture and banding activities into the courses he teaches at SUNY Cobleskill, and he works with interested undergraduates to conduct Independent Projects related to woodcock and other species.



**WSB** *(continued)*

We quickly heard Sora and American Woodcock. Another spot at the Great Swamp yielded Eastern Screech-Owl (Jackson and David do excellent imitations). We left the Great Swamp at around 1:10 a.m. and headed to Liberty Marsh in northern NJ. Part of Liberty Marsh is actually in New York, but as long as we observe a bird while we are in NJ, we can count the bird (even if the bird is in NY).

Liberty Marsh was solid—we picked up Common Gallinule, Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, and an unexpected Common Nighthawk. We had parked on the NY side because it's actually closer to the good habitat in NJ than parking on the NJ side. As we were walking out, after we crossed the border into NY, we heard a Virginia Rail call. We all simultaneously and excitedly said "Virginia Rail!" We then looked at each other, and without another word, we started sprinting back into NJ so we could hear the bird from NJ and count it. Fortunately, after we got back into NJ, we could still hear the Virginia Rail calling over our heavy breathing from our 4:30 a.m. sprint. And we got a bonus Alder Flycatcher while listening to the Virginia Rail. Sometimes sprinting on a big day pays off.

We picked up Grasshopper Sparrow and Willow Flycatcher on our way up to the first high elevation spot in the north. We got many of our expected birds—a good array of warblers and woodpeckers, the Broad-winged and Cooper's Hawks were right near their nests we had scouted, and we had Common Raven, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Brown Creeper (three birds that can be surprisingly difficult on the WSB). We got to the Winter Wren spot a little late (7:50 a.m.) and were slightly nervous it had stopped singing by then, but after a few minutes we heard that beautifully high-pitched and complex song (in our minds, Winter Wren is the one wren that rules them all). We then hit a few spots for migrants and other birds we were missing. We finally had our first (and what would turn out to be our only) migrant flock of the day at around 8:30 a.m., where we picked up Blackpoll and Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. We had a few good finds in the remaining hours in the north, including Green Heron, Hooded Merganser, Solitary Sandpiper, and Black-throated Blue Warbler (the last of which we were getting especially nervous about).

We left the north around 11:40 a.m. It was a slow morning. Many of our scouted birds just weren't singing. Jackson consistently had Blue-headed Vireos during scout week, but we missed it on the day. Same with Golden-crowned Kinglet. There were virtually no Purple Finches, Canada Warblers, or Ruffed Grouse anywhere near our route on the day or during scout week. We tallied up our count. 108 species. Not bad considering, but not where we wanted to be. At that point 200 was essentially out of the question, but we weren't giving up. We made sandwiches (no lunch stops allowed on the big day) and started our drive south. We managed to pick up a few species on the drive, bringing our total to 115. Unfortunately, our bad luck continued—it started raining hard on the way south.

We arrived to our first spot in the south (Dividing Creek area for southern passerines) at around 2:10 p.m. It was still raining hard. We rolled down our windows at the first few stops and heard nothing but rain hitting the roof of our car. The rain then let up slightly and we finally started hearing the birds. Summer Tanager was in the expected spot with a bonus Carolina Chickadee. We very quickly picked up Prothonotary and Yellow-throated Warblers, Blue Grosbeak, Brown Thrasher, and White-eyed Vireo, all of which were right where David and I left them the day before. We then went further south into Cape May for shorebirds and seabirds. And the bad luck continued—the rain subsided but was followed by huge amounts of fog and low visibility. Not ideal conditions for a sea watch.

**WSB** *(continued)*

We arrived to the South Cape May Meadows at 4:45 p.m. We didn't update our count beforehand so we weren't sure how many we had. In a bit of an exciting twist, the HBO show Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel is doing a piece on competitive birding and contacted a number of teams before the event and requested to interview and record teams during the event. The HBO crew contacted us since Jackson and Steve are the only father-son team that has been competing for so long and HBO wanted to interview them during the event. We met the HBO crew at the parking lot at the Meadows, they quickly put mics on Jackson and Steve, and then we headed off to the trail. It was slightly distracting to have a camera crew recording and interviewing us while we birded (don't misidentify anything!), but we figured educating the world on competitive birding could only be a good thing.

We picked up Stilt Sandpiper, Gull-billed Tern, and Bank Swallow at the Meadows. We then stopped at a few places along Cape May Point. There has been a large number of Wilson's Storm-Petrels observed from the shore in Cape May this spring, and while that bird wasn't a target going into the WSB, it was definitely on our minds (and would be a lifer for me and David). After scanning for about 30 seconds, Jackson says the words we all wanted to hear: "Wilson's Storm-Petrel flying right to left!" I put my bins down and see a bird flying right to left. I get on the bird in my bins hoping for a lifer. Forster's Tern. Then Jackson says he lost it. David didn't see it either. We decided to scan for another minute. The fog was still intense. Just as we're about to give up, I saw two small, dark birds with a flight pattern somewhat similar to Purple Martins with an extensive white rump and short, squared-off tail. "Two Wilson's Storm-Petrels flying low over the water right to left," I shouted, hoping everyone could get on them this time. And everyone got on them. Bird of the day for me!

We stopped at a few more spots on our way up to Brig, where we would end our "day" birding. The fog was still bad. We were scanning at one of the spots and getting expected birds (we added Brant), when Jackson said, "I think I have a Marbled Godwit." He got us on the bird, and it was one of those times where I had no idea how he even realized there was a bird there. At the time it was facing away from us, but it turned its head toward us within a few seconds, and sure enough, it had a very long, slightly upturned bill. A great find by Jackson. We also picked up nesting Yellow-crowned Night-Herons which Steve had scouted. We started our trip to Brig and tallied up our count. 162 species. Not terrible given the conditions. We all agreed the new target was 170, but it will be tough with these conditions.

After arriving at Brig, we got Caspian and Royal Terns, the latter picked out by David very distantly in his scope from a viewing platform. We very quickly added a number of birds, including Snow Goose, Gadwall, Ruddy Duck, and Black-crowned Night-Heron. We added birds so quickly that we crossed 170 and none of us can remember which bird was actually our 170<sup>th</sup>. We ran out of daylight at Brig with 173 species. We still had two more potential birds to add: Eastern Whip-poor-will and Chuck-will's-widow. We arrived at the first nightjar spot (also at Brig). After a few short seconds, we heard a bird repeatedly singing its name: "Chuck-will's-widow, Chuck-will's-widow." 174! We then checked a few more spots for Whips, and ended up near the finish line in Cape May at around 11:30 p.m. without a Whip. With the conditions as they were, and having run out of spots to check for the bird in the immediate area, we decided to call it a day. 174 species in one day.

**WSB** *(continued)*

We didn't hit our goal of 200 species. Of course, a lot of factors outside of our control (namely weather) led to us missing out on a lot of species. And we were unlucky to only run into one migrant flock all day. The winning adult team had 205 species, and the winning youth team had 207. We came in fifth place in the adult division. But my takeaway from the day is not that we failed. It was an incredibly fun and rewarding day and getting 174 species in a single day is no easy feat. The feeling of a scouted bird showing up on the big day is wonderful. The feeling of an un-scouted rarity showing up is even better. But most importantly, there's nothing quite like spending a whole day (or week) chasing birds with your friends.

***Feathers***

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