



THE SANDPIPER



Bald Eagles are Raising Their Young in Nests The Size of Hot Tubs

FROM PETE THOMAS, USA TODAY

Photo: *Forest Park Nature Center*, January 21, 2021

Bald eagles around the country are raising young this spring and people watching them, in person or via live-cams, might wonder just how large are those nests?

An answer is provided in a photograph making the rounds via social media, showing a ranger sitting in a replica nest measuring five feet wide and three feet deep. Those are the approximate dimensions of a four-person hot tub.

The photo was originally shared last year by Forest Park Nature Center in Illinois. The Facebook post states that the replica nest is housed at Hueston Woods State Park in Ohio.

But bald eagle nests can be much larger. The Forest Park Nature Center explained that the largest recorded nest “measured 9.5 feet in diameter, 20 feet deep, and weighed almost 6,000 pounds!”

That nest, according to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, was constructed by eagles in St. Petersburg, Fla. The lab’s “All About Birds” website states: “Another famous nest — in Vermilion, Ohio — was shaped like a wine glass and weighed almost two metric tons. It was used for 34 years until the tree blew down.”

Nests are typically built in the tallest conifers near their sturdy trunks. While both parents construct a nest, the female is said to perform most of the placement of branches, twigs, and soft materials.

Eaglets, after they fledge, generally spend about four years in “nomadic exploration of vast territories” and can fly hundreds of miles per day. Immature bald eagles born in California, for example, have traveled as far north as Alaska.

President's Message

A MESSAGE FROM GSBAS PRESIDENT JODY BANASZAK

Hello my little birding friends! Hope this newsletter finds you well and enjoying the birds. I've had quite a few different birds at my feeder this winter and a Coopers hawk swarms by a few times a week. All the birds disappear! In the middle of January, I had about 25 or more Robins flying around my yard eating the holly berries. It's a big tree and a lot of berries. My son's boat, which is in the driveway for the winter, and our full of poop trucks were a testament as to just how many berries the Robins were eating! They came and went in one day and not a berry left! Supposedly, they are the Robins from the north that come down when ours go down south. It has been warm so maybe they are ours too. They were also scavenging for bugs under the leaves in my flower garden.

Remember I told you in the last newsletter not to rake your gardens in the fall so the birds had some food in the winter? I noticed on our bird walk to Connetquot State Park this winter that we had some young birders! Nice to see and hope they continue. That same trip Ken pointed out a tree that was bent at the bottom of the trunk and then went

straight up. He said the Native American Indians would put a big rock at the base so it would bend and use that tree as a marker. Of course the tree was much older now and it was easier and thinner to do back then. Still don't know how they did it but ingenious!

I enjoyed seeing the winter birds and ducks this winter, but now it's spring and time for other colorful ducks and birds to be here and all our spring flowering bulbs to come up. I always put a brick over the tulip bulbs after I plant them so the squirrels don't dig them up. They don't like to eat daffodil bulbs. I always try to plant perennial flowers that make seeds that the birds like too, like thistle and cone flowers. Some people feel we shouldn't feed the birds that much in the summer because they will depend on the seed and won't eat other things like bugs and flowers. Use your own discretion.

We will have our May dinner event at Captain Bills and our summer wildlife event at Brookside. It's finally nice not to have to worry so much about Covid even though it's still around. Enjoy the spring and summer and happy birding!

The Northern Harrier

BY STEVE D'AMATO

The Northern Harrier, *Circus hudsonius*, is a species of raptor which inhabits both inland and coastal marshlands. When I first started birding back in the late 1960's, it was called the Marsh Hawk, *Circus cyaneus*. This bird could be seen flying low over marshes or fields with a very distinctive dihedral and the white rump made it stand out. All three stages of this species, ages and sex, have different color plumages.

The male has a gray back, head and upper breast and the rest of the breast and underwings is white, with rufous spotting in the white breast and dark ends to the primaries and secondaries.

The female is completely different. Her plumage is basically brown where the male is gray, and the barring on the upper and under view of the wings are significantly more noticeable. The breast is somewhat creamy below, with longitudinal streaking.

The immature bird is different from both adults' plumages. It is most similar to the female with respect to the dorsal coloration being brown and the same type of wing and tail markings, but the breast is completely different. The breast of the immature Northern Harrier is uniform rufous in Fall and creamy in Spring.



Photo by Imre Karafiath

Now this species was considered conspecific with the Hen Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*, of Eurasia. So, in 1982, the American Ornithologist Union changed the name of Marsh Hawk to Northern Harrier. Some European ornithologists did as well, but many kept the common name Hen Harrier.

Nature Walks

MARCH WALKS

Tuesday Mar 21, 9:30 Sunken Meadow SP

Meet in the main parking lot in front of the main pavilion near the traffic circle.

Tuesday Mar 28, 9:30 Heckscher SP

Meet in Field 5 western end

APRIL WALKS

Tuesday April 4, 9:30 Jones Beach WE SP

Meet in the parking lot at the Marina near Coast Guard Station.

Tuesday April 11, 9:30 Robert Moses SP

Meet in Field 5 at the northeast corner.

Saturday April 15 8:30 am, Connetquot River SPP

Leaders Bob Grover (516-318-8536), Ken Thompson (631-612-8028), John Gluth (631-827-0120)
Meet in parking field. Entrance is on the westbound side of Sunrise Highway (Rte. 27) west of Pond Road. If coming from west to east, Take exit 47A and go to the next overpass, Oakdale Bohemia Rd. to cross over bridge, then head westbound and stay in right lane to entrance.

Tuesday April 18, 9:30 Norman Levy & Jones Beach WE

Southern State Pkwy. to Meadowbrook Pkwy. south to Merrick Road (27A). Go east on Merrick Road approximately 1/8 mile and turn right into the Norman J. Levy Park.

Saturday April 22, 8:00 am, Valley Stream SP & Jones Beach West End

Leaders John Gluth (631-827-0120), Bob Grover (516-318-8536)
Southern State Parkway to exit 15S, North Corona Ave. No Corona Ave to Hendrickson Ave (.07 mi) turn right at Hendrickson Ave. Hendrickson Ave. to Fletcher Ave (.3 mi) turn right on Fletcher Ave. Fletcher Ave North to Valley Stream State Park entrance on right (.2 mi). Park at far end of lot.

Tuesday April 25, 9:30 St Joseph Campus

Take Sunrise Highway to Brentwood Rd. north approximately 2.5 mi look for the main entrance. Meet in the parking lot in front of building 4.

ANNUAL DINNER MAY 8TH

Our speaker will be from **Quogue Wildlife Refuge**, sharing its rich history of environmental protection.

APRIL MEETING APRIL 20 | 7PM

Seatuck Environmental Center - John Turner will give a talk about "Reflections on a Transparent Problem": The Window/Bird Strike Issue and what you can do.

MAY WALKS

Tuesday May 2, 9:30 Belmont SP

Exit 38 off the Southern State Pkwy. Meet in the parking lot on the east side of the lake.

Sunday May 7, 7:00 am, Central Park

Leaders John Gluth (631-827-0120), Ken Thompson (631-612-8028) Meet at 7 a.m. on Central Park West at 77th Street (opposite the Museum of Natural History).

Tuesday May 9, 9:30 Hempstead SP

Southern State Pkwy. to Exit 18 (Eagle Ave.) Proceed south to the second parking lot, turn right and then left into parking lot 3.

Saturday May 13, 7:00 am, Alley Pond Park

Leaders Mike Cooper (516-523-2369) Bob Grover (516-318-8536)
Northern State Pkwy to Exit 23, which reads: Cross Island Parkway, Union Turnpike and Alley Pond Park. Go to Union Turnpike (NOT Alley Pond Park). At the signal light, turn right onto Union Turnpike. Proceed to the next signal light which is Springfield Blvd and turn right. Go about 4 blocks to 76th Ave. Turn right onto 76th Ave. and proceed to Alley Pond Parking lot on your left.

Sunday May 14, Connetquot River SPP, 8:30 Bird at The Preserve

Leaders Edith Wilson, Ken Thompson, Helga Merryman, Jack Carlson. Reservations required \$4 - Reservations at Eventbrite.com search #NatureAdventure. Registration fee, plus 8\$ parking fee per car - unless you have yearly Empire pass.

Tuesday May 16, 9:30 Oceanside & Jones Beach

Southern State Pkwy. to Meadowbrook Pkwy. South to Merrick Road (27A). Go west on Merrick Road a short distance and turn left on Mill Road and bear left (on Main Street) turn right on Atlantic Avenue to Waukena Ave. left to Park Avenue to Golf Drive (brown signs from Atlantic to Oceanside. Marine EC)

Sat & Sun May 20, 21 7:00 am, Sterling Forest and Bashkill

Leaders John Gluth (631-827-0120) Ken Thompson (631-612-8028) From Tappan Zee Bridge, take I-87 to Sloatsburg exit 15A, take the exit for Rte 72 (Sterling Mine Rd.), 1-mile up Rte 17. Continue west on Rte 72 for 3 Miles until you reach Rte 84, Long Meadow Rd. Continue up long Meadow Rd to Sterling Lake Rd (Mi). Turn left there and continue to Park Visitors Center parking lot on Old Forge Rd. Overnight at Wurtsboro Days Inn (845-888-8727). Note, last year this trip was shortened to one day only, stay tuned for updates.

Tuesday May 23, 9:30 Shinnecock

Sunrise Hwy. East to Exit 65 South to Montauk Highway. Go east and follow signs to Ocean Beaches. Cross Ponquogue Bridge and turn left at the traffic light. Go to end of road to parking lot at inlet. We meet at the ocean overlook parking area south of the road.

Tuesday May 30, 9:30 Suffolk County Farm

350 Yaphank Avenue Yaphank NY.
Take Sunrise Highway to exit 57N, Horseblock Rd. Bear right onto County Road 21, Yaphank Ave. Travel approximately one mile to the Cornell Cooperative Extension on left. Turn left onto the entrance road. Take your first right and follow down and meet at the visitors parking area on your left.

Chickadees

BY ANNETTE BROWNELL

Photo: *Lillian Derwelis*, Audubon Photography Awards

I have often lamented in these pages of my sad loss of backyard birds when my neighbor destroyed the wonderful habitat of the half acre yard next door to me by cutting down all the trees. It was a great loss. (see this month's "Letter to an Environmental Assassin")

One of the birds that frequents my yard only sporadically now is the Black-capped Chickadee. Probably one of the cutest birds in the world, this little high-energy winged creature seems to be fearless of humans – or just friendly. Here are some fun Chickadee facts:

There are 7 species of Chickadee in North America (see pictures), with the Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees the most-widespread and well known. They all share a similar body style with a round head, short pointed bill, short rounded wings and mostly black, gray and white plumage. There are about 35 subspecies of Chickadee, being separated by slight differences in physical attributes, behavior of molecular structure. Chickadees live in forested areas (which is why mine disappeared), but will frequent backyard feeders, eating suet and black oil sunflower seeds. Chickadees love a variety of insects, seeds and fruit.

Being cavity feeders, they will store food in nooks and crannies of trees to save for a sparse day. The tiny birds will wedge food into bark crevices or hold it in place with chickadee saliva (sounds adorable) or spider webs.

When looking for a nesting site, Boreal Chickadees don't care what kind of tree they use, as long as the wood is soft and easy to excavate – like a dead and decaying tree – yes, the value of a dead tree (called a crag). Boreal Chickadee will store food on branches where it is visible from below so they can see it when the upper side of the branches are covered with snow.

Black-capped Chickadees love the cold weather. They fill up on berries and fatty seeds, suet and even fat from animal carcasses. To stay warm, they puff up their feathers and lower their metabolism to a shallow form of hibernation. During winter, they form flocks to defend their territory from neighboring flocks, ensuring enough food to make it through the winter.

Carolina Chickadee and Black-capped Chickadee are very similar except that the cheek stripe of the Black-capped is whiter. They often interbreed and can sing the song of either species.

The Gray-headed Chickadee is the only species of Chickadee to be found in both the Old and New World. It lives in the boreal forest from Norway, across northern Europe and Asia into

Alaska. Feathers account for 7.2% of its body mass – one of the largest proportions among small birds.

Female Chestnut-backed Chickadees build their nest with no help from the male. The base is moss with strips of bark woven in. The upper portion is made of animal hair – deer, coyote and most often rabbit. They also use horses, cattle, cats or skunks. At the top, the female creates a hair blanket to cover her eggs.

The Mexican Chickadee's song is very different from other chickadees and, although it is throughout the western mountains of Mexico, it is found just over the border high in just 2 mountain ranges.

The Mountain Chickadee has a white stripe above the eye (or eyebrows) that sets it apart from most others. To protect its nest, it mimics a snake – living its head and bringing it down rapidly, as if to strike, while making a hiss sound and slapping its wings against the inside wall of the nest cavity.

On a side note – there is a wonderful article in the Winter 2023 volume of *Living Bird* on the cognitive abilities research of the Mountain Chickadee.

Annie & Audubon

BY PAMELA HUNTER

Annie McIntyre retired on December 14, 2022, from the New York State Parks Long Island Regional Environmental Office after over 20 years of service. She belonged to the Southshore Audubon and was a supporter of many Audubon projects. She is an avid birder and naturalist, inside and outside of State Parks.

During her career, she has always advocated for the wellbeing of wildlife. When there were concerns regarding the holiday lights display at Jones Beach State Park being dangerous to migrating birds, she and her staff would check every day to make sure all birds were safe. Annie managed the Piping Plover Protection Program, which has been very successful in continuing the protection and growth of the population. She was also involved with getting bluebird boxes installed and monitored at Connetquot River State Park Preserve.

Thank you, Annie, for many years of dedication and happy retirement!

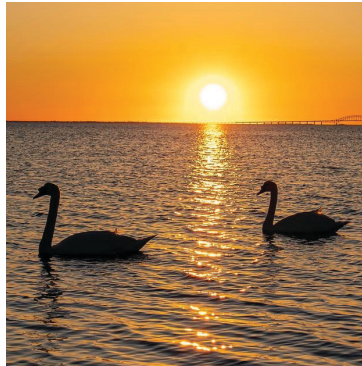


Art & Photography

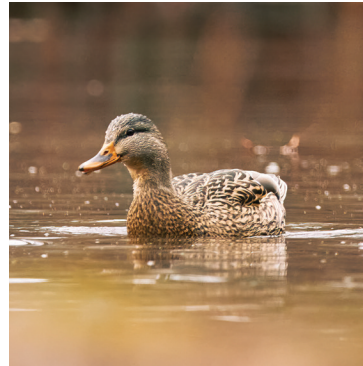
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Black-crowned Night-Heron
Joe Abraham



Swans
Chris Braut



Mallard
Rich Hull



American Oystercatcher
Kristen Cooney

Feeder Survey

NOV/DEC 2022 • COMPILED BY HELGA MERRYMAN

The Yellow-shafted Flicker, a large member of the woodpecker family is one of my favorite birds and it made January 1, 2023 a great start to my new year when I had a rare (for me) sight of one scarfing down the suet at my feeder. The Yellow-shafted Flicker is one of two subspecies of the Northern Flicker: Yellow-shafted Flicker of the east and far north and the Red-shafted Flicker of western North America.

In the wild, flickers can most commonly be seen around standing trees that are dead or dying. Flickers use these 'snags' for feeding on tree-dwelling and wood-boring insects also for excavating nest sites. Since Starlings were introduced and have become invasive, they compete with the flickers for newly excavated nesting sites, contributing to the decline of the species.

If you contact "The Cornell Lab of Ornithology" you can get plans for building a Flicker bird house (might be a nice winter project). When I was just starting to become a birder and someone shouted "Flicker" I would search vainly in the nearest tree until it was pointed out to be on the grass eating ants,

strange activity for a woodpecker and making it easy prey for Cooper's Hawks. Ants are the favorite food of Flickers that is why they are mostly viewed on the ground. Seen from the back a Yellow Shafted Flicker appears to be just another large plain brown bird with black barring on its back, the magic begins when it takes flight, flashing bright golden yellow under the wings and tail and a white rump. Underneath it has a striking speckled belly and black bib, both sexes have a red crescent on their nape while only the male sports a black whisker.

Their call is a high keew while its song is a long stretch of kwikwikwikwikwi...They lay 5-8 white eggs and maybe more, both parents participate in incubating the eggs for 11-16 days and feeding the young until they leave the nest at about 4 weeks, then they are fed by parents at first, until they can forage on their own, usually 1 brood per year, or 2 in south. To our delight many years ago a group of Flicker fledglings alighted in the crabapple tree in our backyard just long enough for us to enjoy the sight (one of the pleasures of being aware of our natural surroundings).

Red-tailed Hawk 1 / 1
Sharp-shinned Hawk 0 / 0
Cooper's hawk 2 / 1
Rock pigeon 0 / 6
Mourning Dove 51 / 72
Monk Parakeet 0 / 6
Red-bellied Woodpecker 7 / 4
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 3 / 0
Downy Woodpecker 6 / 9
Hairy Woodpecker 1 / 2
Northern Flicker 1 / 0

Blue Jay 17 / 15
American Crow 4 / 0
Black-capped Chickadee 11 / 17
Tufted Titmouse 8 / 8
Red-breasted Nuthatch 3 / 4
White-breasted Nuthatch 7 / 8
Carolina Wren 3 / 5
American Robin 13 / 6
Northern Mockingbird 2 / 3
Brown Thrasher 0 / 0
European Starling 20 / 36

Towhee 0 / 0
Fox Sparrow 0 / 1
Song Sparrow 0 / 1
White-throated Sparrow 12 / 13
Dark-eyed Junco 7 / 9
Northern Cardinal 8 / 15
Red-winged Blackbird 0 / 0
Common Grackle 6 / 2
Brown-headed Cowbird 1 / 0
House Finch 14 / 30
American Goldfinch 7 / 12

House Sparrow 12 / 48
OTHER SPECIES
Brown Creeper 1 / 0
Purple Finch 1 / 0
Pine Siskin 1 / 0
Myrtle Warbler 1 / 0
Catbird 2 / 0
Raven 3 / 0
Turkey Vulture 2 / 1
Great Blue Heron 0 / 1



Woodpeckers

BY JODY BANASZAK

Photo: *Eugene Becks*/Flickr

I'm not much of a book reader, but I will read articles in the newspaper and magazines if they catch my interest. Well, one did! It was an article about woodpeckers in the Bird Watching magazine. As you all know, woodpeckers are always pecking in trees, and sometimes the wood on your house, (ugh) looking for food or making a hole in a tree for a nest. How do they peck so fast and for so long? Doesn't that hurt their heads or damage their brains? In 2013, the late Eldon Greij wrote an article about how the woodpeckers' anatomy protects the brain. He wrote another one in 2021 about the study of football players, their head injuries and woodpeckers. It's called chronic traumatic encephalopathy.

The football players would suffer from repeated traumatic brain injuries. Greij looked at a study and found eight out of ten woodpeckers tested positive for the protein which has non-reversible conditions in humans such as dementia, Parkinson's, and Alzheimer's. Another study showed that a woodpecker's bill and skull are made to work together like a hammer. They did a CT scan of a woodpecker's skull. There was a "spongy bone at the frontal region of the skull" between the skull and the bill to absorb shocks! Some "engineers have incorporated this kind of cushioning in football helmets to protect the players from damage to their skulls." Motorcycle riders and other sports use this type of cushioning in their helmets too. What a great find in woodpeckers and in protecting athletes and others from brain injuries. Yup, nature is amazing! And a big thank you to all that study them.

Letter to an Environmental Assassin

BY ANNETTE BROWNELL

To the man who rents next door:

I have lived in my house in Bay Shore for 39 years. My house is 112 years old and the trees surrounding my neighborhood filled the sky with color and life. From my backyard, I didn't even know I had neighbors – no inkling that there was a development behind me. Sadly, little by little the neighborhood changed to a people that are environmentally clueless. Many of the trees were cut down, leaving gaping holes in the sky. But, at least my southern neighbor loved his trees nearly as much as I loved mine – or at least he respected

them and everything that lived in them. That is until you moved in. You were not in the neighborhood a month. I came home from work one day to see a tree cutting whore destroying the huge red oak in your front yard. We all know the type – doesn't care for the health of the tree, the environment, permits or the land clearing ordinances. Just show him the cash. I believe Cheap Joe is the name. The sickening thud of beautiful live branches hitting the street below.



Evidently you have no clue as to the damage you have done to the environment without cause. Did you know that an oak tree supports over 4000 different variety of insects and wildlife? Did you care that as winter was approaching, you just made a host of squirrels and birds homeless? Did you think about how you just changed the wind dynamics on our street? Did you consider the noise barrier that you just removed? Did you give a thought to how you just adversely affected my view?

Do you know that as the pollinators disappear, so does our food growing ability? Did you know that the little bats that live under the bark of those trees are pollinators? Did you know that topping an oak tree doesn't make it a small tree -it kills it?

Signed, The tax payer next door!

TREES by Joyce Kilmer

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree;
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree in summer that may wear
A nest of robins in her hair.
Upon whose bosom snow has lain,
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

Become a Member!

Join the GSBAS for only **\$20/YEAR.**

The primary mission of the Great South Bay Audubon Society is to advocate for the conservation of habitats for native birds and other native wildlife on Long Island. As a member of the Great South Bay Audubon Society you will receive our award-winning, bi-monthly newsletter “The Sandpiper”, and new members will have the opportunity to review a 2023-24 custom calendar with photographs and artwork of current members!

Membership also includes access to the beautiful Brookside County Park, with 8 acres of trails for guided nature walks, ponds and waterways, wildlife including deer, foxes, and wild turkey, and the unique opportunity to connect with a community of like-minded individuals with a wealth of knowledge on Long Island’s native species. Your membership dues will also go directly to our local conservation and educational endeavors and support our work at Brookside County Park.



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THE SANDPIPER

SAVE THE DATE! ANNUAL DINNER • MAY 8TH

Life circles around fast! We are already planning the May dinner. The date is altered a little this year. We historically hold the dinner the first Monday in May. This year the first is the first. Due to some conflicts, the dinner will be May 8th, the second Monday.

Our speaker will be from **Quogue Wildlife Refuge**, sharing its rich history of environmental protection.

In 1934, the Quogue Wildlife Refuge was founded by a group of duck hunters turned conservationists to protect waterfowl populations that were on a precipitous decline across the nation. Many factors led to the decline of wild ducks on Long Island in the 1930s. Join Cara Fernandes, Program Director and avid birder, as she presents the history of the Quogue Wildlife Refuge with historic photos and videos. The efforts of these pioneers to band, breed, and protect ducks will be discussed, as well as other interesting history. I hope you join us! Details to follow in a separate mailing.

