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Cayuga Bird Club Newsletter - April 2016

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# Cayuga Bird Club

## April 2016

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## Calendar

**Apr. 2 Macaulay Library Video Showcase**, 4:30 pm, Cinemapolis Theatre

**Apr. 8 Stewart Park is for the Birds**, 7:00 pm, Cinemapolis Theatre

## Cayuga Bird Club Meeting, April 11

Speaker: Jillian Liner, Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon New York

## Audubon New York's Important Bird Areas Program: Protection for Critical Sites



New York's Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program strives to identify the most critical sites in the state for birds and then works towards their protection and proper management. To date, 12,000 IBAs have been identified on six continents and in 156 countries. The IBA network in NY has provided a solid foundation upon which to build conservation efforts aimed at protecting the full diversity of avian species in New York state. Jillian Liner, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon NY, based at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in Ithaca, will discuss recent conservation projects to protect priority birds at Important Bird Areas.

Jillian Liner has 20 years' experience in the conservation field and has been with Audubon since 2001. At Audubon, Jillian oversees the Important Bird Area (IBA) program and assists with implementing habitat management, advocacy, outreach and other land protection efforts. She co-authored *Important Bird Areas of New York: Habitats Worth Protecting* and works closely with state and federal partners, other NGOs, and Audubon Chapters to increase the protection of IBAs and other critical habitat areas.

**Apr. 10 *The Messenger*** movie, with special guests Bill Evans, Andrew Farnsworth, and Christopher Guglielmo 4:30 pm, Cornell Cinema

**Apr. 11 Cayuga Bird Club Meeting**  
7:30 pm, Lab of Ornithology  
Speaker: Jillian Liner, Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon New York

**Apr. 23 Field Trip to Derby Hill**, 7:00 am - 4:00 pm, Meet at Lab of O. [north](#) parking lot.  
Leader: Gladys Birdsall

**Apr. 30 Local Field Trip**, 2:00 pm - 8:00 pm, Meet at Lab of O. parking lot  
Leader: Meena Haribal

**May 8 Field Trip to Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve**, 7:00 am - noon. Meet at Wegmans parking lot at 7:00 am or at the preserve at 7:15 am.  
Leaders: Ann Mitchell and Wes Blauvelt

**May 9 Cayuga Bird Club Meeting**  
7:30 pm, Lab of Ornithology  
Speaker: Rick Manning, Director of Friends of Stewart Park, Landscape Architect and Coordinator, Cayuga Waterfront Trail Initiative

See our [Web Calendar](#) for more events and field trips.

## **First-of-Year Birds Reported during March 2016 for the Cayuga Lake Basin**

Listed below are Cayuga Lake Basin 2016 first records reported during the month of March, 2016. Some birds are arriving earlier than their average arrival date. You can compare this year's arrival dates with previous years on the [CBC website](#).

Mar. 1 American Woodcock  
Mar. 5 Osprey  
Mar. 7 Eastern Meadowlark  
Mar. 10 Tree Swallow  
Mar. 12 Blue-winged Teal  
Mar. 19 Greater Yellowlegs  
Mar. 20 Wilson's Snipe  
Mar. 20 Red Crossbill  
Mar. 22 Eastern Towhee  
Mar. 24 Purple Martin  
Mar. 25 Barn Swallow

The meeting will be held at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The evening will begin with cookies and conversation at 7:15 pm. Cayuga Bird Club business begins at 7:30 pm, followed by the speaker's presentation. All are welcome.

## **From the President**

Hello Cayuga Bird Club!



April is an exciting month. Bird migration is underway in earnest. Waterfowl have been on the move in large numbers. Blackbirds of several species and other short-distance migrants like Gray Catbird, Song Sparrow, and Brown Creeper have been popping up in the Cayuga Lake Basin. Please check out your Club website calendar for information about field trips in which you can participate to enjoy the annual spectacle of spring migration.

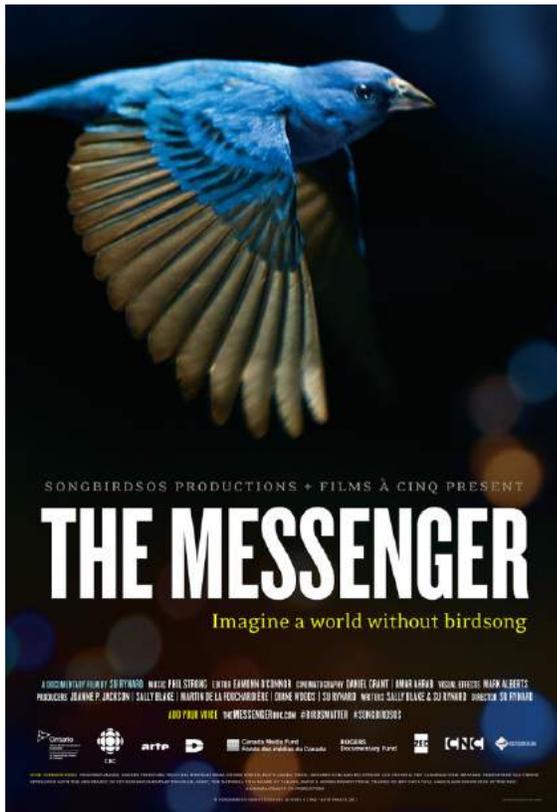
The remainder of this newsletter is chock-full of reports of exciting things that already have occurred and many activities that are soon coming up. I want to especially draw your attention to two important events. One is a benefit fund-raiser called *Stewart Park is for the Birds* that will be on Friday April 8<sup>th</sup>, and the other is a showing of an important film about bird migration, *The Messenger*, hosted by your very own Cayuga Bird Club on Sunday April 10<sup>th</sup>. Details for both events are posted elsewhere in the newsletter.

Those of you who were at the March Club meeting heard about some plans being put in front of the Ithaca City Council to address a number of negative impacts being caused by the growing population of "resident," non-migratory Canada geese occurring at the southern end of Cayuga Lake. According to public records from City Council meetings earlier this year, negative impacts (summarized here) range from decreased water quality, interference with public use of ball fields, the golf course, and other public areas due to an abundance of goose droppings and overly aggressive geese that have become habituated to close human contact. City Council is interested in working with a variety of stakeholders, including the Cayuga Bird Club, to develop a long-term, comprehensive plan for addressing

Mar. 25 Chipping Sparrow  
 Mar. 26 Glossy Ibis  
 Mar. 26 Lesser Yellowlegs  
 Mar. 26 Northern Rough-winged Swallow  
 Mar. 27 Virginia Rail  
 Mar. 28 Vesper Sparrow  
 Mar. 28 Yellow-headed Blackbird  
 Mar. 29 Pine Warbler  
 Mar. 30 Dunlin

### 2016 count to date: 154 species

Thanks to Dave Nutter for compiling these records for the club. Details are available on the [CBC website](#).



## [The Messenger comes to Cornell](#)

### Cinema

*The Messenger*, a documentary by award-winning filmmaker Su Rynard, chronicles the struggle of songbirds worldwide to survive in turbulent environmental conditions brought about by humans. *The Messenger* explores our deep-seated connection to birds and warns that the uncertain fate of songbirds might mirror our own. Moving from the northern reaches of the Boreal Forest to the base of Mount Ararat to the urban streets of New York *The Messenger* brings us face-to-face with a remarkable variety

both these negative impacts and assuring that beneficial interactions with geese can continue to occur.

One of the immediate actions proposed by the City is an ordinance banning the feeding of geese on city-owned property, including Stewart Park. As we heard at the March Club meeting, some members oppose a feeding ban. The discussion that night in March got me thinking a lot about our Club, what we do, and how we interact with birds. Of course birding is fun, but for many of us it is an important passion and a huge part of who we are.

That passion was apparent in the discussion that unfolded at our meeting. If the Cayuga Bird Club is to provide the best possible input to City Council about the goose management issue, we need to make sure our input is well-thought-out and informed by a deep understanding of the issues and proposals for addressing those issues. We should not be afraid to reflect our passion for birds and birding. We should definitely express our passion in ways that reflect thoughtful consideration and as much information as possible about the issues behind the feeding ban proposal and what the effects of a ban might be on our interaction with birds, particularly at Stewart Park.

One of the things that I have been thinking about a lot since our last Club meeting is how much we all enjoy observing wild birds in their various habitats. I don't recall our Club taking field trips to places where we make stops to hand-feed habituated birds. We are not the Caged-bird Bird Club or the Domestic Bird Club. Instead, we pride ourselves on interacting with wild birds, and understanding how those birds thrive in their natural habitats. We value native nature in its natural form as much as possible. We sell a book called "*Native Plants for Native Birds*." Yes, we birders are certainly part of nature, not separate from nature, but isn't it important to do what we can to keep the wild in wildlife?

Hand-feeding birds diminishes their wildness. It habituates them and sometimes leads them to aggressively seek hand-outs from park visitors who don't like being surrounded by large, noisy animals. Hand-feeding birds can lead to congregations of birds in places where their droppings degrade water quality and diminish the experience for park visitors and local athletes. Many birders, including me, love to be in close proximity to birds. We love to observe them,

of human-made perils that have devastated thrushes, warblers, orioles, tanagers, grosbeaks and many other airborne music-makers.

In collaboration between Cornell University and the Cayuga Bird Club, *The Messenger* will be shown at Cornell Cinema, Willard Straight Hall, on **Sunday, April 10, 4:30 pm**. Ornithologists Bill Evans, expert in the study of nocturnal bird migration, Andy Farnsworth, bird migration expert with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Christopher Guglielmo, a physical ecologist based in Ontario, Canada will join us for a post-film discussion of issues raised in the film.

Tickets are \$5.50 at the door, or \$4.50 if you participate in the group rate. To get a group-rate ticket, contact Meena Haribal before April 10 at [mmh3@cornell.edu](mailto:mmh3@cornell.edu). Group participants should arrive early to purchase their tickets.

Many thanks to Meena Haribal for her efforts to bring this documentary to Ithaca.

## Stewart Park is for the Birds **BENEFIT** FRIDAY APRIL 8 7PM CINEMAPOLIS for Stewart Park Revitalization & Fuertes Bird Sanctuary Overlook Restoration

A **Benefit** for the revitalization of Stewart Park and Fuertes Bird Sanctuary Overlook restoration will take place at **Cinemapolis** on **Friday, April 8, at 7 pm**.

Join us for a screening of beautiful bird, wildlife and landscape photographs by **Sarah Blodgett** and **Marie Read** projected on the big screen in theatre 5, accompanied by live string music performed by Hope Grietzer, Tom Hodgson and Rick Manning. This unique collaboration will support the Friends of Stewart Park's revitalization efforts and the restoration of the stone overlook in Stewart Park near the Cascadilla Boathouse. The overlook was constructed in 1934 by the Cayuga Bird Club in honor of CBC founding member and past

to listen to them, to feel their wings as they fly past us, even to feel their breath as their lives interact with ours. As birders, we love these experiences with wild birds and I don't seek out the same kind of experiences with domestic birds. I support a ban on feeding waterfowl on city-owned lands for all these reasons.

Good Birding,



## **Field Trip Report - Around the Lake, March 5**

By John Confer

Bob Horn, Ruth Yarrow, Susan Soboroff, Jae Sullivan and I had a very enjoyable trip around the lake on Saturday, March 5. I did some scouting up to the lock on Friday. Every place that was good on Friday iced over during the night and the waterfowl were way out there. So much for the close looks at Ruddy Duck and numerous other species seen on Friday. By the way, there were several **Fish Crow** near the tip of Farley's Point on Friday, and during Saturday we had a pair of **Raven** fly over near Twin Oaks.

We did see thousands of waterfowl including several distant rafts of **Snow Geese**. Several **Bald Eagle** nests had white heads on the top, including the Aurora nest. (One of us did see several white heads while some others remained skeptical casting aspersions about someone's imagination.) Bob picked out a **Northern Pintail**. (I didn't say I doubted his pintail.) We saw several **Northern Harrier**, including an adult male, several first winter birds and one bird close enough to be certain that it was an adult female: a nice day for seeing plumages of harriers. Near Cayuga State Park, we watched 3 Bald Eagles fighting over a Snow Goose carcass. Perhaps it was a cripple from the hunting season, which I think goes until 1 April. Four crows hung around the perimeter trying to steal little pieces of goose. Seybolt Rd. did not yield any Snowy Owl.

We saw a few **Horned Lark** and quite a few **Red-tailed Hawks**.

We did solve several of the world's pressing problems,

president Louis Agassiz Fuertes.

Suggested donation is \$20 with a sliding scale from \$10 – 50. Buy your tickets in advance to reserve your seat! Tickets are available through Cinemapolis [online](#).

## Upcoming Field Trips

Gladys Birdsall will lead a full-day field trip on Saturday, **April 23**, to **Derby Hill Bird Observatory** on the shore of Lake Ontario. This spot is one of the premier hawk watch sites in the United States-- 40,000 raptors are counted here each spring as they make their way northwards. This is also a good spot for watching other migrating species, including waterfowl.

Please meet at the **north parking lot** at the Lab of Ornithology at **7:00 am**; we plan to return at 4:00 pm. It can be windy at Derby Hill; dress warmly, with extra layers, for standing out in the cold. Bring snacks and/or lunch and something to drink. A stop will also be made so that people can purchase food. Bring a scope if you have one. Carpools will be arranged when the group gathers for the trip; passengers should offer to contribute toward the cost of gas. Contact Gladys Birdsall at [gjb5@cornell.edu](mailto:gjb5@cornell.edu) if you have questions about this trip.

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On Saturday, **April 30**, Meena Haribal will lead a local trip to "**where the birds are**". Meet at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at **2:00 pm**; return time is 8:00 pm. Dress for the weather and bring snacks and something to drink. Contact Meena at [mmh3@cornell.edu](mailto:mmh3@cornell.edu) if you have questions about the trip.

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On Sunday, **May 8**, Ann Mitchell and Wes Blauvelt will lead a birding trip to Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve. Meet at Wegmans parking lot (west end, near the inlet) at **7:00 am** or at the preserve at **7:15 am**. The trip will last until approximately noon.

These trips are open to all.

including a unanimous agreement about global climate change in the context of political positions.



## Field Trip Report: Around the Lake, March 13

By Suan Hsi Yong

On Sunday, March 13, I led a CBC full day around-the-lake field trip, joined by 8 others (2 staying only for the morning portion). The birding on the way up the lake was pretty sparse numbers-wise though reasonable species-wise, but mostly at scope distances. Thankfully, our scope-to-participant ratio was quite high.

At East Shore Park was a close group of **American Coots** accompanied by a lone male **Redhead**, and some relatively close **Buffleheads** (the one species that tended to stay close all day). At scoping distance were **Scaups** and **Horned Grebes** to the north, and towards Stewart Park many **Ruddy Ducks** plus **Ring-necked Duck** and possibly others I fail to remember.

From the Myers spit the lake was quite empty, though scoping found way out near Taughannock Point a pair of **Wood Ducks**, which took much squinting to recognize. **Northern Flickers** were calling (FOY for me), and continued to call almost everywhere we stopped.

At Ladoga were some backlit American Coots and **American Wigeons**, while at scoping distance was a **Common Loon**. Just as we were ready to leave 2-3 FOY **Tree Swallows** flew by close, prompting Ann's ambiguous post of the year candidate: "Three Tree Swallows flying close to shore."

**March Cayuga Bird Club meeting minutes** recorded by Becky Hansen are available at the [CBC website](#).

At the March 14 meeting, Dave Nutter initiated a discussion of the City of Ithaca's plans for management of the **Canada Goose** population. Below is a summary of Dave's proposal for a Cayuga Bird Club response to the city (excerpted from the meeting minutes).

Dave Nutter brought up the subject of the city's plan for goose management for the southern end of Cayuga Lake which includes hazing geese and oiling eggs. He had a proposal to ask the city not to ban the feeding of geese, not to haze the geese, not to oil the eggs or disrupt the nests and to offer education and research. Sandy Wold seconded the proposal. There was a lot of discussion and most people felt that there was not enough information at this time to support a proposal endorsed by the whole club. One person suggested she could send a petition to the city but that would not have the backing of the club as a whole. The club voted on the proposal : 7, yes; 16, no. Jody suggested that he and Dave and others who were interested get together after the meeting to discuss further action. The concern is that any action must be timely because the city will meet again soon and is likely to go ahead with its plan.

A draft of Dave's resolution to address the city's plans for Canada Goose management can be read on the ABA Cayuga Birds [listserv archives](#).

We stopped by Sweazey Road to find an empty screech owl cavity, and got some exercise walking up the steep road, to be rewarded at the top by **Eastern Bluebirds** checking out a nestbox: first a female(-type), then a male, then two more F-types following the male. We wondered whether these last two were last year's fledges, or females involved in some flavor of "open relationship".

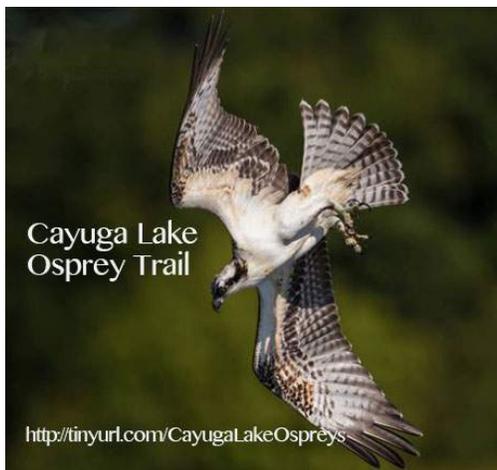
In the fields around Long Point Winery we heard, then found, an **Eastern Meadowlark**, sporting a remarkably uncamouflaged dark brown against the golden field. A **Northern Mockingbird** complained from the power line before flying off, and a distant **Northern Harrier** quickly disappeared. Long Point State Park was "Long disap-Point" (as Ken described it), though we did scope some distant **Red-Breasted Mergansers** and flushed a flock of waxwings from a juniper tree, circling the sky and never to return for us to look for possible Bohemians. We may have had a **Pied-Billed Grebe** too (don't remember if that was here).

Entering Aurora we pulled over to check out an adult **Bald Eagle** in the nest, then decided to skip the boathouse for a snack break at Dorie's. Union Spring's Frontenac Park did not have much; the Mill Pond was better with a few Redheads and Buffleheads and Ring-necked Ducks, while in the sky behind the pond, a fair-sized formation of **Snow Geese** drifted northward. Meanwhile, an adult medium-sized accipiter sat atop a roadside tree giving us nice but inconclusive side profile looks in scope; most decided it was a **Cooper's Hawk** based on largish head.

In the village of Cayuga we skipped Harris Park to stop at Towpath Machine, where everyone excitedly jumped out of their cars to look at a lone prematurely-declared Ross's goose that scrutiny couldn't help but rule as "just a" Snow Goose.

At the Montezuma visitor center was a nice gathering of birders enjoying the good number of **Northern Pintails** and **Green-Winged Teals** at moderate distance. Farther out were a good number of partly-obscured **Tundra Swans**, and 3-4 juvenile Bald Eagles perched variously on muskrat mounds and in the far distant woods. Many were misidentifying juvenile eagles as ospreys -- an interesting switcharoo of the more usual misidentification of osprey as

## Cayuga Lake Osprey Trail



**Ospreys** have recently arrived back to the Cayuga Lake Basin to begin nesting! The

numbers of nesting ospreys along Cayuga Lake has grown very rapidly over the last decade. The first successful Cayuga Lake Basin osprey nest in more than a century was at Montezuma NWR in 1980. Later, refuge workers built artificial platforms, which were used by both eagles and ospreys. Now there are more than 60 nests around Cayuga Lake, the densest concentration of Ospreys in the Finger Lakes. The Cayuga Lake Osprey Trail is a project begun by Candace Cornell to help track these nests and also to help the public to enjoy these magnificent birds. Read more about the history of Osprey population renewal in our area on the Osprey Trail [web page](#).

An detailed [interactive map](#) of Cayuga Lake Osprey nests, created by Karen Edelstein, allows the user to zoom in for precise locations of each of the 69 nest sites on the Cayuga Lake Osprey Trail. By clicking on a marked spot on the map, you can see both an address and GPS coordinates for a given nest, and you can also zoom in to see detailed landscape views of its location. Just playing with the map is a lot of fun—but even better is to get out there and use the map to find some nesting Ospreys!

Nests included in the Cayuga Lake Osprey Trail are on structures visible from public roads; people wishing to view the nests should use caution when parking along the highways. It is best to view the Osprey nests with binoculars or scopes rather than disturbing the nesting birds by approaching too closely.

If you find an Osprey nest that is not on the map, please report its location to [cec222@gmail.com](mailto:cec222@gmail.com).

## Woodcock Skydance

**American Woodcocks** are back and have been performing their evening skydances. Suan Yong has been making digital movies of their amazing aerial displays using his infrared camera. You can view (and listen!) to a woodcock skydance movie Suan posted to the Cayuga Bird Club Facebook page [here](#). It is amazing how high a bird will go in a

eagle.

We were caught up by Stuart, who reported all the good stuff at spots we decided to skip: White-winged Scoters at the Aurora boathouse, large Aythya rafts from Harris Park (albeit on the far shore)...

At the mucklands we drove passed decent numbers of ducks at the east end; when we reached the Potatoes building the surrounding pools were relatively empty. Four Snow Geese worked a near berm; beyond were Northern Pintails and further yet we found a hidden stash of American Wigeons, no Eurasian. A **Horned Lark** occasionally made itself visible above the berm line for a distant scope view.

We drove back to the east end of the mucklands, where the ducks we'd seen earlier seem to have disappeared. Scanning the north side, however, we found the best gathering of waterfowl so far, with zones of Ring-Necked Duck, Redhead, **Canvasback**, Northern Pintail, probably some others I forget. The earlier secret stash of wigeons, which by all geographic calculation should've been visible from here, was nowhere to be found.

On to Knox-Marsellus with a nice spread of Snow Geese: many blue geese (some foraging individually far from the flock), but no Ross's. An adult Bald Eagle was picking at a dead snow goose, with some anxious **American Crows** impatiently trying to steal bits. A buteo made a pass then watched from a small tree, showing just enough ambiguous field marks to prevent our wishful rough-legged call to be definitively confirmed. Presently the eagle tired of its meal and made a beeline across the marsh, sending up the impressive swirl of squawking snow geese.

Returning down the west shore, we drove along Lower Lake road looking at the good numbers of Aythya on the water and bemoaning the lack of public parking and access; the Aythya numbers decreased and eventually disappeared by the time we got to Cayuga Lake State Park. From there we scoped north at the scattering of dots on the water, while the sky filled with many more dots flushed by a passing train. We drove back north, parked at the corner of Lake and Lower Lake Roads and walked down to the nearby cemetery from which we scoped the Aythya flock. Good numbers, but nothing new or unusual.

single flight!

Included below are community announcements that may be of interest to Cayuga Bird Club members.

**Beginning April 1, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Visitor Center will have new hours:**

Monday through Sunday (daily):  
10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

These hours also apply to the Wild Birds Unlimited Store located in the Visitor Center.

## Macaulay Library Video Showcase at Cinemapolis

As part of the Ithaca College Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival (FLEFF), seven short films from the **Macaulay Library** will be shown at Cinemapolis on Sunday, **April 2**.

The Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology is the world's largest archive of wildlife sounds and videos. Their mission is to collect, preserve, and facilitate the use of wildlife recordings for science, education, conservation and the arts. In this series of films highlighting the work of the Macaulay Library, listen to the sounds of Ruffed Grouse drumming, hear a mystery bird from the jungles of Borneo, and travel with scientists and photographers to the Cape York region of Australia and the Canadian Arctic to record and photograph some of the most beautiful and elusive birds in the world. Tickets are \$8.

With guests: Ornithologists Dr. David Winkler and Dr. Edwin Scholes, audio archivist Martha Fischer, audio engineer Bill McQuay, and student scientists Teresa Pagan and Eric Gulson.

At Dean's Cove, we quickly found the **Lesser Black-Backed Gull**, who presently began moaning as it got chased and harassed by two juvenile **Herring Gulls**, flying back and forth over us before settling back down near the pier south of the cove.

At Wyers Point Road, we pulled over to scope a suspected Golden Eagle the other car had noticed on the highway; we found it soaring over the distant trees, flying with a clear dihedral and long wings and no teetering. Further down Wyers Point road, just before reaching the lake shore, we looked across the field to the north at Pete's suspected Bald Eagle's nest, but saw no discernible occupant, though we didn't look very hard.

Finally just north of Glenwood Pines, Ann showed us the inconvenient vantage of the Bald Eagle nest, with a single occupant within and a second unseen eagle presently initiating a sequence of complaints.



Thanks to all who made this trip so much fun that it got drawn out almost two hours longer than I intended.

## More than 10000 birds flew over my head this fall at night!

By Meena Haribal

I learned what "a million" (birds) means in Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge (MNWR). About 14 years ago in late August, I was up at May's Point Pool. I saw thousands of swallows of all kinds, but mainly Tree Swallows, congregating over Tschache pool. As the daylight faded they started forming a huge tight ball and just about dusk they all came down like a waterfall in the center of the pool in a cattail marsh. It reminded me of the Taughannock waterfall.

Later, I produced a documentary called "Million Birds Flyby" (through the Finger Lakes region) for a class, when I witnessed and video-recorded millions of blackbirds and

## Inns of Aurora Birding Retreat April 9-11, 2016

For novice birders and wildlife enthusiasts alike, this retreat features guided excursions to birding sites, hands-on workshops, and personal discussions with retreat guides, including Andrea Van Beusichem, Visitor Services Manager for the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, Chris Lajewski, Center Director for the Montezuma Audubon Center, John Rogers, co-founder of the NYS Bluebird Society, and Marie Read, wildlife photographer and former photography editor at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Visit the [website](#) for the full schedule and registration information.

snow geese congregating at MNWR for a few days in early fall and spring. But this happened during daylight hours.

What about those several million birds that sneak in and out of our region without us seeing them?

I had read David Lack's book on Radar Ornithology and knew that many species, including some species of insects, flew at night. But nowhere did I read or remember reading that birds gave contact calls when they flew at night. Only on coming to the US in the mid-1990's, from Bill Evans, I learned that thousands of birds in the US migrate at night. During their flight they gave call notes, what is known as contact calls. Over the next several years Bill Evans and Michael O'Brien studied the night flight calls and compared them with the calls given by the species during the day time or just before the dusk and came up with a guide to night flight calls. I had access to a tape made by Bill Evans in the late 1990's, which for the first time I used to identify birds by night flight calls during our first ever Muckrace in 1998. Since then I have been listening to night flight calls and in 2000, I started recording a few calls using my shotgun microphone.

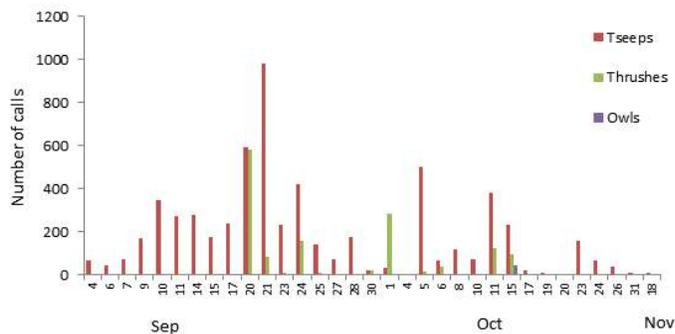
Then, for the first time in Fall 2015, with the help of Bill, we set up Bill's microphone device on top of my chimney to record night flight calls using software linked directly to my computer. (Here is a link to the microphone: <http://oldbird.org/21c.htm>). A sensitive microphone is set up in a bucket that points to the sky. This has the capacity to record bird calls in the range of about a 100 ft. radius from the microphone.

This has opened my eyes, or rather ears and eyes, to understand what really flies over my head when I am asleep or awake in the wee dark hours of the night. It is addicting and exhilarating to see what is flying over you in real time. So I have spent several hours in front of the computer observing spectrograms of the flight calls as they were being recorded.

Overall, in just 33 days out of three months I recorded



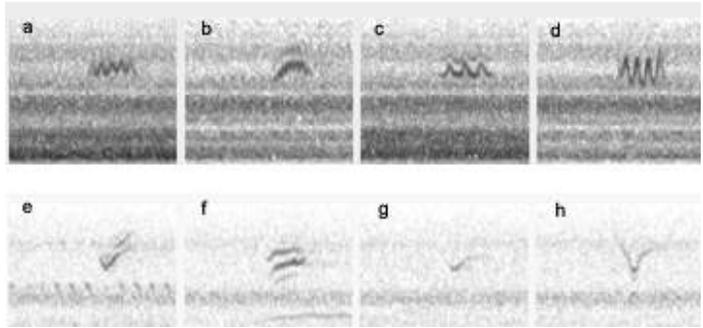
almost 10,000 calls. The calls are detected as “tseeps” and “thrushes” by the software based on the frequencies. Tseeps include all high frequency calls of warblers and sparrows, while thrushes include any low frequency calls such as thrushes and many other species including shorebirds etc. The graph below shows the number of each type of calls my software recorded for that particular date. Initially, I did not have my thrush software on. So I missed the thrush-type calls until Sept 19, 2015.



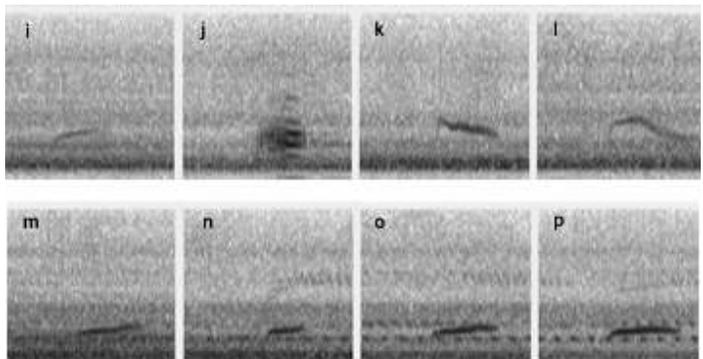
I am analyzing the data; I am a still newcomer to recognizing the call types as some of them are very difficult to distinguish for untrained ears. It was interesting to note on September 20, both tseeps and thrushes were recorded in almost the same numbers while on September 21, tseeps dominated over my house. On Oct 1, thrush-like calls were most dominant and on October 5, tseeps were dominant. In September mainly warblers were recorded and in October the main species of tseeps were sparrows. For example, on the night of September 7-8, I recorded 56 calls between 9:12 pm to 12:37 am. The main species were Magnolia Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Common Yellowthroat and one of each Black and White Warbler, American Redstart and Ovenbird. On Sept 20, from 9:00 pm to 10:00 pm I recorded 42 calls, of which many were Black-throated Green types, but two calls probably of Canada Warblers, one Black-throated Blue and a few Ovenbirds besides other calls. On the same night at the same time, of the 42 calls of thrushes that were recorded most were Swainson’s Thrush types except one which looked like Grey-cheeked Thrush and another probably a Wood Thrush.

How do I know what species were flying on a given night? Bill Evans and Michael O’Brien in their guide have a guide to spectrograms of the species. By comparing with the examples in the guide you can determine which possible species were flying that night. Examples of different known

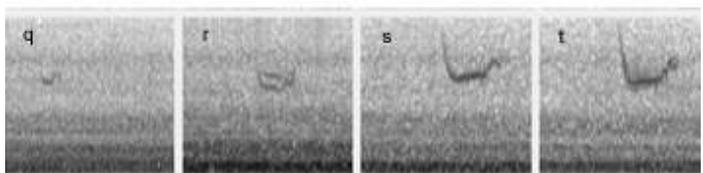
and unknown calls I recorded are shown in the following figures.



*Spectrograms of warbler (tseep) calls recorded on September 10 2015. a) Magnolia Warbler, b) Ovenbird, c) Blackburnian Warbler, d) unidentified, e) American Redstart, f) Nashville or Black-throated Green Warbler, g) unidentified and h) probably Canada Warbler.*



*Spectrograms of the thrush calls recorded on October 10-11 2015- i) Swainson's Thrush, j) a heron, k-l) Gray-cheeked Thrush and m-p) Swainson's Thrush.*



*Spectrograms of sparrow calls recorded on October 10-11, 2015 – q) unidentified, r) Chipping Sparrow and s-t) unidentified.*

During the day it is hard to find many warblers on the ground. Occasionally, you come across a mixed flock with a few varieties. At night you hear lot more species and numbers. I have so many questions regarding the night flights.

- Where are they coming from as you hear them all through the night?

- Do they form groups or do they just take off and fly randomly?
- How do they know they have reached their destination?
- Different species have different destinations so where do they split their ways?
- Is the flight pattern the same all over America or do the patterns depend on some geographical features? For example, do they like to fly over mountain ridges or do they follow the valleys?
- Why was one group of species more common than the other group on a particular day? Was it anything to do with the winds or weather?

My brain can go on with many questions and there are no answers to them yet. The whole process of migration is very complex and fascinating. Geo-tagging is one way of knowing their flight pattern, but it is too expensive. Ebird data can be helpful showing patterns such as how quickly a species moves from one location to another if they land on the ground, but the data are for fewer numbers and not in thousands.

So I keep wondering what happens if, for example, in Ithaca some hundreds of such microphones were recording data over a range of geographical terrains, what kind of information we could get when we compare our data? What fun if we have chain of microphones all along the birds' paths and listen to them. I recorded only those birds which called over my house. So what about silent birds and how many were there? For example what about catbirds? Do they fly silently? Why were so few tanagers heard at night?

Nevertheless, whether we compare with other locations or not, it is just intoxicating to know that so many birds fly over your own head at night. But the habitats are fast changing in their world and climatic changes are causing more problems to their migratory habits. We already know this mild winter that we have had some individuals of some species of birds that did not migrate or some species that returned several days early. I do hope birds learn to adjust to all these changes and yet manage to survive! And I hope we will record similar numbers of calls, if not more, 20 years from now!

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## Cayuga Bird Club

***Educating and inspiring the birding community of the Cayuga Lake Basin and Central New York since 1914***

The Cayuga Bird Club meets on the second Monday of each month, September through June, beginning with refreshments at 7:15 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Johnson Center on Sapsucker Woods Road. All meetings and most field trips are free and open to the public. Membership costs \$15 annually per household, \$10 for students, payable in September. To join, send a check (made out to "Cayuga Bird Club") to Cayuga Bird Club Treasurer, c/o Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850. [Online payment option](#) is available at the Cayuga Bird Club website.

Members receive via email the monthly Cayuga Bird Club Newsletter, from September through June. Newsletter submissions may be sent to Diane Morton, [cbceditor1@gmail.com](mailto:cbceditor1@gmail.com). Of particular interest are articles about local bird sightings, bird behavior, birding hot spots, book reviews, and original poetry, art, and photos.

Cayuga Bird Club Officer Contact Information is available on the [Cayuga Bird Club website](#).

*Chickadee illustration in masthead by Karen Allaben-Confer*

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