



Cayuga Bird Club

May 2020

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Calendar

Club events remain cancelled with the ongoing COVID-19 situation.

May 9 (Sat): eBird's annual Global Big Day. ebird.org/globalbigday.

June 8 (Mon): Date for CBC Meeting and Annual Potluck Dinner. Status uncertain at this time.

Nov 2020: CBC Trip to Colombia. FMI: jodyenck@gmail.com

Cayuga Lake Basin First-of-Year Birds Reported

April, 2020

- 4/1 Dunlin
- 4/1 Pectoral Sandpiper
- 4/1 American Bittern
- 4/4 Northern Rough-winged

From the President

Diane Morton



It's May — an exciting time of year to go out birding, especially with the wonderful variety of migrating warblers that come through. I grew up on the west coast; it was a revelation to me to discover a new world of

spring warblers when I came east. On a spring visit to Ithaca in the early 1980's, I was wowed by the sight of a Hooded Warbler - so gorgeous and exotic! I still get a heart-quickenning thrill each spring when I spot one of these birds. I've found that Lindsay-Parsons Preserve and Ford Hill are both good places to find Hooded Warblers, though my first sighting was in Cornell's Mundy Wildflower Garden.

We have many great hotspots for spring migrants. Cayuga Bird Club's book, *Birding the Cayuga Lake Basin*, edited by Bob McGuire, is an excellent guide, and is especially helpful for noting what might be seen in different seasons at different sites. Our Cayuga Bird Club website also has descriptions of good area birding locations:

cayugabirdclub.org/where-to-bird

In this time of social distancing, remember to wear a mask and give other people on the trails plenty of room if you do head out to bird in one of these public areas.

Of course spring is also a great time watch birds in your yard or at a favorite birding spot close to home. Many people enjoy having a "Big Day" in the spring, trying to find as many birds as they can on a

Swallow
 4/4 Brown Thrasher
 4/5 Little Gull
 4/5 Red-throated Loon
 4/5 Cliff Swallow
 4/5 Black-and-white Warbler
 4/6 Blue-headed Vireo
 4/6 Purple Martin
 4/6 Louisiana Waterthrush
 4/7 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
 4/8 Great Egret
 4/10 Palm Warbler
 4/11 Common Gallinule
 4/11 Black-crowned Night-Heron
 4/11 Bank Swallow
 4/16 Solitary Sandpiper
 4/18 Common Tern
 4/18 Green Heron
 4/19 Chimney Swift
 4/19 Spotted Sandpiper
 4/20 Upland Sandpiper
 4/20 Willet
 4/22 Northern Waterthrush
 4/24 Yellow-throated Vireo
 4/24 Yellow Warbler
 4/25 Surf Scoter
 4/25 Black Scoter
 4/25 Least Sandpiper
 4/25 Ovenbird
 4/25 Black-throated Green Warbler
 4/28 Rose-breasted Grosbeak
 4/29 Short-billed Dowitcher
 4/29 Wilson's Phalarope
 4/29 Black Tern
 4/29 Forster's Tern
 4/29 Warbling Vireo
 4/29 Wood Thrush
 4/29 Bobolink
 4/29 Orchard Oriole
 4/29 Nashville Warbler
 4/29 American Redstart
 4/30 Least Flycatcher
 4/30 Blackburnian Warbler
 4/30 Black-throated Blue Warbler

2020 year count: 199 species

Thanks to Dave Nutter for compiling these records. Complete lists can be found on the [CBC website](#).

Birding Stories

With Cayuga Bird Club and New York State still on pause, I put out a

single day. How about trying a birding Big Day in your yard or a "Big Sit", to see as many birds as you can from a single location?

May 9 is eBird's annual Global Big Day. We can contribute by submitting checklists of the birds that we find on that date. I encourage each of you to plan do your own birding Big Day on May 9th - right in the middle of spring migration! The bird lists provided by recreational birders to eBird have been enormously useful for building detailed maps of distribution and abundance for bird species all over the world, a critical resource for conservation planning. For more information on how to participate in Global Big Day, see ebird.org/globalbigday. While we can't yet be out birding in groups, our combined individual efforts can still have a big impact.

Witnessing the amazing beauty of our spring birds in a single focused day can be a truly memorable experience. Share your day with pictures! Post photos from your Big Day (even if it is only for an hour) on our Cayuga Bird Club Facebook page or send them to Cayuga Bird Club newsletter editor Suan Hsi Yong for our June issue.

And I hope you'll enjoy in this issue some of stories that our members have shared about birds and the lasting impressions that they make on us.

Good birding!

Diane

Conservation near and far

Jody Enck

Birdwatching is an activity that seems tailor-made at this time when COVID-19 has led to most of the country being under stay-at-home orders. You can do it close to home. Looking at birds is fun! Being in nature – even your backyard – has many health-related benefits as described in numerous scientific studies.

BUT, migratory birds in particular are in dire trouble. They face many threats in their wintering areas, breeding areas, and in the stop-over areas along their migratory pathways.

The Conservation Action Committee has been working hard to improve habitat for migratory birds

call to area birders to share their birding stories from past and present. Enjoy!

—Suan Yong, editor.

Surprising (to us) Pigeon Behavior

Betsy (and Dick) Darlington

On June 9, 1984, my husband and I observed some odd pigeon behavior. We were sitting next to a pond on what is now the Logan Hill Nature Preserve, in Candor, NY. Here's what Dick wrote about the event:

"Today, Betsy and I witnessed the following behavior about 10 times in a flock of 9-12 pigeons. The first couple of times, we were too astonished to observe closely, but we observed the later incidents very closely.

"A pigeon would fly low over our pond, then drop onto the water, feet first, hold its wings still and outstretched with its wingtips just touching the water, stick its head under water, stay there for up to 5 seconds, then take off.

"After they took off, they flew around the surface of the pond for a few minutes, mostly gaining in height but sometimes descending to the water surface. Seven pigeons stayed for several minutes, but after about 5 minutes, all had disappeared.

"Most of the alightings occurred within a few feet of the pond's edge, but in almost every case, we know the water was at least 9 inches deep, so the birds could not possibly have been standing.

"We have been there many hundreds of times in the last 10 years, and we have never seen pigeons anywhere around there before. In a straight line, the spot is about 0.6 miles from the nearest houses in the village of Candor."

It was a hot day—about 85 or 90 degrees, and the sun was shining, but not intensely. Pigeons, unlike most birds, can swallow without tipping their heads back. So our theory is that they were overheated and getting good long drinks with

nearby at the south end of Cayuga Lake. You've read about many of those activities in this space previously. We also have been encouraging all local birdwatchers to take action right now to make the space around their homes more beneficial as bird habitat. This stay-at-home time gives up plenty of opportunity to take action where we live. Please let us know what you are doing so we can highlight those activities to other club members.

If there's blank space below, it has been clipped by gmail. [Click here to view the full newsletter on the web.](#)

How do the club's international trips contribute to bird conservation?

One simple answer is that birding tourism provides jobs and income for local people. This reduces the need to convert forest into commodity crops (e.g., coffee, palm oil, livestock grazing). The idea is that when local people benefit from protecting the forest, it gives them added incentive to learn about birds that birdwatchers want to see, and to protect the habitat on which those birds depend.



When several of us recently visited southwestern Costa Rica, we worked with Holbrook Travel to make sure we could stay at lodging establishments that benefit local residents and local communities as directly as possible. For example, we stayed two nights at Las Esquinas Rainforest Lodge, which sits on 37 acres of private land very near the Piedras Blancas National Park. Since 1994, the lodge and nearby La Gamba tropical field station (all owned and operated by the same group) is the largest employer in the La Gamba area. These employees no longer have to cut the forest to clear land to grow crops for sale or as their only food source. In addition, the lodge ownership group works locally to support solar energy operations so people don't have to cut the forest to obtain wood for cooking, coffee-drying operations, or other fuel needs. You

their heads in the water.

That is the only time we have ever seen pigeons on or above this preserve, a place we have known well since 1972. And we have never again seen pigeons acting like water fowl.

Eastern Screech Owls

Memories from March 12, 2012

Mark Chao

At about 6:35 on Monday evening, I watched two EASTERN SCREECH-OWLS switch places at the opening of our (their) nest box on Simsbury Drive in northeast Ithaca. Then at 7:15, one owl plunged out of the box to the ground, whereupon the other immediately took its place at the hole. This is the sixth day since I first saw the two together in the box. One owl at a time has remained regularly in view daily over this period, but I haven't reconfirmed the presence of two owls till now.



Over the past 19 years, I've experienced more than my share of wonderful encounters with birds, including many pairs at nests. But somehow nothing I've ever experienced in birding matches the feeling of knowing that these owls' lives have intersected with each other, and in a tangential way, with ours too. This feeling goes far beyond aesthetic pleasure. It surpasses the fulfillment of a successful chase, or the rush of finding some total surprise, or the bogglement of the mind upon seeing some remarkable behavior. It is joy, it is excitement, it is profound happiness, but it is something more.

can read the full story about Las Esquinas Lodge here:

esquinaslodge.com/more/our-story



We also used our trip to Costa Rica to connect with a local bird club in the small village of San Vito (sanvitobirdclub.org) in the middle elevations of the Talamanca Mountain range. In addition to going birding with them, we also learned how they have supported bird conservation in their local area. For example, they have worked with dozens of local schools to teach kids about birds, and they have participated in banding studies of birds.



CBC group meeting the San Vito Bird Club at Finca Cantaros.

The San Vito Club also has been instrumental in supporting the efforts Dr. Lilly Briggs at nearby Finca Cántaros. Lilly, whom some of you may know from her time working at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, has established the Children's Forest of Coto Brus (name of the county that contains San Vito). We were fortunate to visit with Lilly and to walk through the Children's Forest. We got to see how each tree planted by a child is mapped using GPS, and important information about the tree and the youth are recorded. These kids will be able to

The feeling, of course, is love. I like other birds, and I care deeply about birds in general, but I LOVE every individual owl in that box. Now I love two owls, and I like to think they love each other too (even when one is stepping on the other's head to get back into the box).

Now, if you'll excuse me for a moment, I need to go hug someone.



Every morning, a few Blue Jays come by and relentlessly scream around the nest hole upon seeing an owl there. Cardinals, nuthatches, and chickadees join in too. In the past, the usual response of owls here has been either to retreat into the box or to freeze in the hole with a cryptic squinting expression. Today, however, throughout several minutes of mobbing, one owl sat there blinking and winking and winking and blinking, repeating and alternating eyelids in rapid and complexly varied succession, as if trying frantically but still surreptitiously to flash a code. Even a single owl blink is something wonderful -- smooth and liquid and slow, with velvety brown eyelids drawing and withdrawing over big round eyes.

Going 'Loonatic' over the Loons at Taughannock State Park

Meena Haribal
April 26, 2020

come back throughout their lives to show their family members how they helped to expand the forest and give a helping hand to birds.

As soon as international travel is possible again, the Cayuga Bird Club will be gearing up for more trips to see first-hand some of the conservation efforts being undertaken in other countries to benefit the migratory birds we share.

Spring Ornithology with Steve Kress



We are a little more than half-way through Cayuga Bird Club's new course for 2020, Spring Ornithology with Steve Kress. While we had planned to have an in-person course this spring, in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic we quickly adapted to holding the weekly lectures by Zoom webinar. Very few registrants chose to opt out of the online course and others signed up in their places. We are pleased to have 76 participants taking this online course.

Steve Kress's newly revised lectures have been wonderfully informative and new images and sound recordings are bringing the birds to life. Topics have ranged from waterfowl identification to understanding bird migration. Participants are able to submit questions during a question and answer session at the end of each lecture, and webinars are recorded for participants to watch later if they missed one or if they want to review a topic.

Many thanks to Laura Stenzler, Phil McNeil, Sandy Podulka and Diane Morton for managing the Spring Ornithology course for the club this spring, and to the photographers and sound recordists who contributed material for Dr. Kress's new presentations.

We may try to hold an in-person Spring Ornithology course next spring. If you would like to be added to a list of interested people to be contacted when registration for a 2021 course opens, please contact Sandy Podulka at spodul@frontier.com.



Of all the rainy days this week Saturday April 25th was supposed to be partly sunny, so I decided to dedicate the day for birding. In the morning, I went to Connecticut Hills WMA area to photograph and record birds. Right at the junction of Boylan and Connecticut Hill roads, I came across a group of birds, most of them were singing. There was a [Purple Finch \(audio link\)](#) pouring out his melodious song, a warbling Pine Warbler, a chattering Belted Kingfisher, and a flicking [Northern Flicker \(audio link\)](#). I spent some time trying to record them. After that everything was downhill. I hardly saw anything. Disappointed I headed home.

After lunch I thought I would give try to Finger Lakes National Forest. After spending about three hours in the quiet forest, I headed back home. On the way home just on a whim I decided I would like to do some walking exercise at Taughannock State Park. So headed in that direction. I parked my car at the southern end and just with a binocular in my hand I began my walk. As soon as I had walked 200 feet I came across a Common Loon fishing close to the shore. So I went back to fetch my camera. I got a few shots at a fairly close distance, this the closest picture I had ever gotten in my life. So pleased with myself, I continued the walk along the edge of the lake. There were five more loons all in black suits at some distance away and I was eyeing them feed hoping they would come closer.

A Small Therapeutic Landscape with Big Rewards

Myers makes a Point

Jane Bain

Often one of the first stops on a birding trip around the lake is the Myers Point (Park) and Salt Point area on the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake. My initiation into becoming a beginning birder was due to occasions of serendipity when I captured photos of birds...and then finding I was fascinated with the detail I could see once I uploaded and zoomed in on them on the computer. A photo of a brilliant-colored Yellow Warbler against a rich blue sky taken at Salt Point got me on the birding track. Over the years I've been more inclined to be looking down into the water rather than up into the sky since I was trained in fisheries, but it is actually possible to do both. People are attracted to birding for many reasons, one of them being "affiliative"; that is, enjoying being in the company of other birders. During this pandemic I miss that opportunity, as I'm sure do many others.

The Myers/Salt Point area is a good birding location in part due to the orientation of the lake and the gravel bar at the mouth of Salmon Creek. I have seen birders/photographers, known for their superb photography of birds, down there on the spit intense with concentration and camouflaged behind their tripods. Since I have oddly resisted setting up a tripod and instead keep challenging myself with just handheld shots and lack of expertise, I have had only sporadic success with images of avian life. However, I find I have massive amounts of photos of the view across Salmon Creek from the perspective of Myers Park over to Salt Point. And by sheer number I have managed to get some photos I feel confident in sharing. Perhaps this view should be named "two trees", as they appear in every one, and yes I do enhance my photos using Photoshop even if it's just re-sizing them. I can only assume that my obsession with this view is manifold: (1) it's a convenient location for me since I live nearby; (2) I am viscerally attracted to the reflective light of water in this often cloudy section of central New York; and, (3) when I am at this spot in Myers Park I am relishing the joy of anticipation regarding the next stop on my looking tour: Salt Point.

I recently saw a quote from Joan Davidson regarding the Hudson River Valley where I grew up, and it applies perfectly to my feelings not only of the Hudson River but also of this Salmon Creek area of Cayuga Lake. Her words are something like "this place belongs to all citizens, and to me alone" ... a good description of what it feels like to have a



I was distracted by a Great Blue Heron, which landed on a bare tree. I spent some time getting his pictures. Then a Yellow-rumped Warbler flitted in the nearby maple. Just managed to get one good photo. A pair of Ospreys were also calling and circling overhead to distract my attention to take their pictures. Then I saw the loons coming somewhat closer to shore. So I decided to sit on a bench and wait for them. While I was waiting for the loons, I watched the Common Merganser fly across the lake back and forth as if he was on an important errand. I don't know if it was the same merganser or they were different male mergansers.



Then the magic happened, they came pretty close to where I was sitting and started fishing. Then I became "loonatic" and took so many pictures of them doing things. I noticed their bill was more like a spear head of native hunters. Mostly they swam with their head inside the water to see the fish. Some times they were so low on the water that no white of their breast was visible and other times they would show off their brilliant white breast. Then they would dunk themselves in the water but not like *Aythias* or Coots, but a simple dive,

personal attachment to a place. Paradoxically, the feeling of belonging to, or in, a place often comes from the aesthetic or transcendent experience of losing your sense of self in its presence. And to state the obvious, birders who practice patience know that the more one looks, the more one sees. It would probably help if in my case if I got a better handle on the use of equipment and how to photograph birds instead of placing so much faith in serendipity. But either way, I'm having fun.



barely they would raise their butt above the water.



Sometimes they were under the water more than ten minutes. When they came out of the water they were at all distances and directions from the point of diving. So it was hard to predict where they would come up. But to my delight they often came out close to where I was sitting. So my camera shutter whirred when they were on the surface. I spent a delightful hour watching their tactics and photographing. Then it was getting late and light was fading. I decided I had enough and started walking back to my car. As I came to my first loon spot, I saw him/her fishing in the same location. So I spent some more time trying to get his picture against the dark shadowed water. He slowly started drifting away from me. Then it was beyond the capacity of my camera to capture any images, I decided to call it a day. Overall it turned out to be a great lovely day! As I am sitting and writing this it is raining and today it is going to be a dark day as 99-100% rain has been predicted by Weather Underground. I don't know how they can say difference between 99% and 100% chance 😊.



Wily Fish Crows

By Donna Scott

I have gone to Florida's coastal areas for many decades, so I have

seen and heard a lot of Fish Crows! I also hear and see them at Lansing's Myers Park and Salt Point.

I was on Sanibel Island in the Gulf of Mexico with my parents years ago and went out from the motel to spend a few hours on the beach. I set up my lounge chair and beach stuff and sat down to read. The lounge nearby was full of somebody's belongings, but was unattended - they probably had gone for a beach walk. On the sand next to the chair was a little brick pack of fruit juice, unopened.

Soon a Fish Crow landed on the chair back, then flew down on the sand by the juice box.

It walked around it briefly and very shortly purposely pecked the little shiny, round aluminum place where one sticks in the straw. Then it purposely, it seemed, knocked the box on its side and the juice started to run out the hole -- and the Fish Crow began drinking it!

Clearly, this was not the first time he/she had done that bit of larceny!

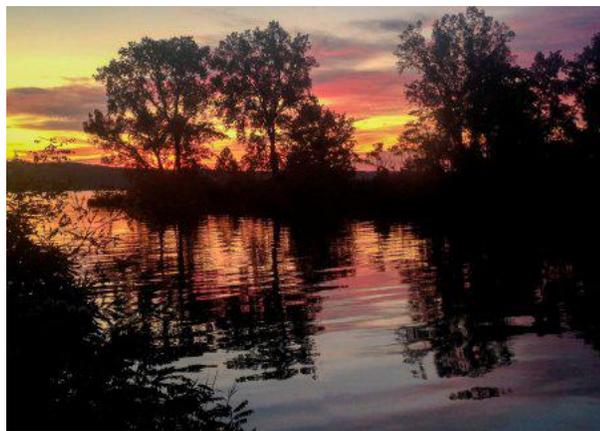
During the same visit, my father and I were walking through the motel parking area right below the 2nd floor rooms' outside balcony. All of a sudden a bunch of coffee supplies (sugars, stirrers, cream packets) fell on our heads! We looked up to see a Fish Crow rifling thru the coffee condiments on the maid's service cart parked on the balcony above!

Curiously, even though I live right by Cayuga Lake 4 miles north of Myers Park, I don't recall ever having heard or seen a Fish Crow here by Lansing Station Road.

Adorable Downy

Barbara Clise, King Ferry, NY

During a bitter cold January snow storm, I noticed a male Downy Woodpecker clinging for dear life to a tree just outside my door. He was trying desperately to brace itself against the high winds, but seemed to be wobbling back and forth. It wasn't until it landed on my suet feeder that I realized this little guy had use of only one leg - the other



And for the sake of birding...



Jane Bain, 2020

Heron Story

Betsy Darlington

April 14, 2020: The most surprising and exciting event of the day was the show put on by two great

leg was hanging lifeless. My heart utterly sank. What can I do for this little guy? I researched local bird rehabilitators, and to my surprise, found one in Tompkins county. But what would I tell her? He could fly. He could eat. In fact, he was getting along pretty well.

After a few weeks, it disappeared and I secretly wished him well. A few weeks ago, "My Guy" as I came to call him, reappeared at the suet feeder and has been here ever since. The second leg is no longer there, but he is actually thriving. Instead of hopping up trees, he flutters. Instead of perching on the edge of the seed feeder, he nestles himself on the tray. And lo and behold, a female Downy seems to be present alongside. I'm calling this story a happy ending. It wasn't until I read Suan's request for stories, that I decided to document this, and this morning took my first photo of this adorable Downy.



Don't miss an issue of the newsletter: add newsletter@cayugabirdclub.org to your email contacts.

Stay in touch with the Cayuga Bird Club through our [Facebook](#) page and [Webpage \(cayugabirdclub.org\)](http://www.cayugabirdclub.org).



Facebook



CBC Website

blue herons. As we were standing south of Big Pond, at the Logan Hill Preserve, the herons flew in low over the pond and then rose, higher and higher, spiraling around and around each other, sometimes nearly touching. They got so high that Ruth and I both finally lost sight of them, when we momentarily stopped using our binocs. We figure it had to have been a courtship dance.

The Owl

Claire A. Perez

last night an owl came to chant
across the woods so still and quiet
through the air so crisp and clear
hunting to round out its diet

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 pm 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. Payment may be made via Paypal at cayugabirdclub.org/membership or by mailing a check to: Cayuga Bird Club, c/o Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca NY 14850. Please include your email address (or addresses for family memberships) with your membership application to receive the club newsletter. Members receive the monthly Cayuga Bird Club eNewsletter, from September through June. To make sure you don't miss an issue, add newsletter@cayugabirdclub.org to your email contacts.

Send newsletter submissions to cbceditor1@gmail.com by the 25th to be included in the next issue. Please contribute sightings, news, announcements, book reviews, original poetry, art, photos, and anything else that might be of interest to the local birding community.

Cayuga Bird Club Officer contact Information is available at www.cayugabirdclub.org/about-us.

Chickadee illustration in masthead by Karen Allaben-Confer.



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