



# Cayuga Bird Club

## November 2015

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## Calendar

### Nov. 7 Owling Field Trip

led by Wes Blauvelt and Meena Haribal,  
Meet at Lab of O parking lot, 6:30 pm

## Cayuga Bird Club Meeting, November 9



Matthew Studebaker

**Speaker: Marie Read, Wildlife Photographer**

### Alaska's Pribilof Islands: Bucket list trip!

Alaska's Pribilof Islands, in the middle of the Bering Sea, have long been known as a wildlife photographers' paradise. Colonies of photogenic seabirds at close range—Tufted and Horned Puffins, Crested and Parakeet Auklets, Northern Fulmars and Red-faced Cormorants among others—as well as Northern Fur Seals and adorable Arctic Foxes beckon photographers in summer, while the promise of rarities from Asia draws birders during spring and fall migration. Marie Read will share photos and experiences from her recent trip.

Marie Read is a professional wildlife photographer and author, who specializes in birds and bird behavior. Her work is regularly featured in *Birds & Blooms*, *Living Bird* and numerous other magazines, calendars, and books worldwide. During her 25+ years as a photographer, she's traveled throughout North America as well as to Australia, East Africa, and Central America in search of subjects, but has taken many of her most memorable images in her own backyard. She is the author of many articles about birds and

### **Nov. 9 Cayuga Bird Club Meeting**

Lab of O, 7:30 pm

Speaker: Marie Read, wildlife photographer

*Alaska's Pribilof Islands: Bucket List Trip!*

### **Nov. 14 Loon Watch**

led by Wes Blauvelt,

Meet at Taughannock State Park, 7:00 am - 9:00 am

### **Dec. 5-6 Niagara Falls Field Trip**

led by Jay McGowan

Meet at Lab of O parking lot, 7:00 am

Dec 5

([Sign up ahead](#) for this overnight trip)

### **Dec. 12 Short-eared Owls Field Trip**

led by Ann Mitchell,

Meet at Lab of O parking lot, 3:00 pm

### **Dec. 14 Cayuga Bird Club Meeting**

Lab of O, 7:30 pm

Speakers: Bob McGuire and Wes Blauvelt

*North to Alaska: In Search of Bird Songs*

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

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## **First-of-Year Birds Reported during October 2015 for the Cayuga Lake Basin**

10/8 Nelson's Sparrow

10/11 Greater White-fronted Goose

**2015 count to date: 279 species**

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

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## **Merlin Photo ID Testing**

Can the Merlin bird photo ID program identify your bird pictures? Under development by the Lab of Ornithology in cooperation with researchers at Cornell Tech and Caltech, this app will identify 400 North American bird species from photographic images. It will require many

bird photography, as well as four books, most recently *Sierra Wings: Birds of the Mono Lake Basin* and *Into The Nest* (co-authored with Laura Erickson).

The meeting will be held at the Cornell Laboratory 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.

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## **From the President**



Hello Cayuga Birders!

In this first column as your new president, I want to tell you a little bit about myself and my thoughts about this great Bird Club of ours.

I started birding when I was a young kid growing up on a farm in south-central Pennsylvania, although I didn't know at the time that I was going to be a birder or even that I was birding. When I wasn't busy with farm chores, I was off exploring the local fields and woods. One of my favorite places was a brushy, unused corner just off our meadow. It was bounded on one side by a small stream lined by tall trees. During heavy rain storms or in spring when snowmelt overflowed the banks and filled the adjacent marsh, we'd get all sorts of waterfowl and waterbirds. It was a great place to watch nature and to learn from it. Those experiences set me on a life-long journey as a naturalist and birder.

Now, all these years later, I've been thinking a lot about why I call myself a birder. I've become most interested in how I've changed over the years. Here, I'm not talking about my motivations for watching birds although those have probably changed too. Instead, I'm referring to the way that I have developed – over a long period of time – particular characteristics that I now associate with me being a birder: having confidence in my ability to identify birds, being a good observer, discovering birds on my own, and trying to maintain a high level of integrity with respect to what I claim to have identified. Like I mentioned, it took a long time for me to develop these characteristics to a level where I feel like I “made it” as a birder. Maybe before that I was just an

trials to develop accuracy; you can help by testing it with your known bird photos. Don't try this with rare birds, which are not included in the set, but for more common birds that are currently included it can be fun to see whether Merlin gets it right.

<http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/photo-id/>.

## **Birders of All Skill Levels Needed for Perception Study**

Our laboratory at Vanderbilt University is looking for birders of all levels of experience to participate in a project examining how perception and memory for birds differs between beginners and experts. We really do mean all levels of experience, from the true beginner to the expert with decades of study, and everything in-between.

These experiments are online on the web. They measure your ability to remember and identify birds and sometimes other animals or objects. Many experiments are fairly short. They can be done on any computer, wherever and whenever you decide to do them.

One of our current experiments is a bird identification test. Go online and test your birding skills. This is the web site for our experiments: <http://expertise.psy.vanderbilt.edu>.

Once you register your own login id and password on the site, and complete a short survey of your birding expertise, you will be able to participate in any experiments that are available. We expect to add new experiments over time.

“apprentice birder” and now I am finally a full-fledged birder (no pun intended – really!).

Other birders may have a similar set of characteristics, or different ones. I know that some sense of sharing observations is vitally important to some folks although it's not one of the “do-or-die” characteristics for me personally. On the other hand, there are some “die-if-I-do” characteristics that really can detract from (maybe extinguish?) my perception that I am a birder. When I was an “apprentice birder,” I would anticipate a high level of frustration if I encountered a bird that I thought was going to be difficult to identify (Empidonax anyone?) If that frustration got too high, I knew that I would fail to become a birder – so I would walk away from the hard ones and look for something easier to identify. That approach kept my frustration to a tolerable, less than identity-threatening level, but it also kept me mired in apprentice mode.

Slowly, over time, my abilities and confidence grew to the point where I was willing to tackle some of those hard ones. Believe me, I've had some real character-building experiences trying to identify female wintering ducks in frigid weather or trying to figure out silent Empids while being feasted on by what seemed to be millions of blood-sucking insects. Eventually, those experiences did exactly what they were supposed to do: make me a better observer, allowed me to discover birds on my own, and help me develop a personal sense of integrity in what I claim. Along the way, I've also been able to transform that sense of frustration (or maybe I've been transformed) when encountering difficult-to-identify species into an eagerly anticipated challenge. After all, by working out the tough identification it allows me experience and demonstrate the characteristics that are so necessary for me to continue thinking of myself as a birder.

One of the points in sharing my story with you is that I realize each of you has your own story and your own set of characteristic traits that make you the birder that you are. Our Club is made up of lots of different individuals with different ideas of what it means to be a birder. I look forward to talking with as many of you as possible to understand better what kind of birder you are, and most importantly, how

Some future experiments may include modest compensation.

If you have questions, please contact Professor Thomas Palmeri (thomas.j.palmeri@vanderbilt.edu) at Vanderbilt University.

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CBC Website

your Club can provide you with the kinds of experiences and support you want.

Before I end my first column, I also want to shout out a big Thank You to Paul Anderson for leading our Club as president the last two years. A special thanks also goes out to Wes Blauvelt who is staying on as vice president. Lots of others deserve thanks, too, like Bob Maguire and Linda Orkin, who have stepped down as co-coordinators of the Christmas Bird Count. So, if you are looking for a way to give back to your Club, please consider taking on this important role! Many others deserve thanks for all the work they do behind the scenes. And, thanks to each of you reading this column for all you do to make the Club what it is.

As your new president, all I can promise is that you'll have a bird in every scope!

Good birding.



Suan Hsi Yong

## **Field Trip Report- Freese Road Garden**

### **Plots**

*by Mark Chao*

Every year, I feel determined to appreciate sparrows in the first half of October– so abundant, diverse, and subtly beautiful, but present all too briefly before winter sweeps most of them away. And this urge to cherish them became all the more acute this year, because of the news of the big coming changes at the Cornell Community Gardens along Freese Road.

The weeds and withering crops in these gardens have provided an annual autumn bonanza for many dozens of sparrows and other field birds, who often pose on fences and flower heads for unusually rewarding viewing. But Cornell has announced that in 2016, the site will be closed to community gardening because it has become a reservoir for disease spores afflicting nearby research plots. The intent is that after a couple of years of cover cropping, the site could be reopened. Regrettably, attempts to find an alternative site for 2016 have proven unsuccessful so far.

So I felt that this October's Cayuga Bird Club walks had kind of a grand, escalating, unifying theme. Seize the moment. Seize the day. Seize the weekend. Seize the week. Seize the month. Seize the year. (We even managed literally to seize one bird – or, more accurately, Paul Anderson did, gently taking one Song Sparrow in his hand to free it from entanglement in a folded section of plastic mesh fence.)



*Savannah Sparrow by Mark Chao*

We found all nine expected sparrow species over three field trips, on October 3, 10, and 11 – **Lincoln's, Savannah, Swamp, Song, Chipping, Field, White-crowned, White-throated, and Dark-eyed Junco.**

Viewing of Lincoln's was as good as I've ever experienced, particularly on the final Sunday. If you divided the site into a 3 x 3 grid, we had excellent views of Lincoln's in all nine zones.



*Lincoln's Sparrow by Suan Hsi Yong*

We learned to locate Lincoln's Sparrows by their dull "thgk" notes. We also had good practice in identifying Swamp Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, and **Indigo Buntings** based on differences in their cardinal-like chip notes – Swamp a little sweeter (somewhat like a phoebe), Indigo Bunting much sharper with a spitting quality, and White-

throated plain and clear, not too hard but not too sweet.

Probably our biggest surprise was a **Dickcissel** that Paul Anderson spotted on October 10. This rare migrant, far more often heard than seen around Ithaca, was spotted again later that morning and the next day. Regrettably, however, we never managed to get more than a couple of field-trip participants on it at once. So on the whole, the glass feels half empty with that bird, despite how exciting it is that it was here at all.

But we all enjoyed other rewards, including a first-year Bald Eagle perched in the distant lone tree in the field across the road, and a **Cooper's Hawk** chasing a **Red-tailed Hawk**. **Eastern Bluebirds** regularly flew overhead and called from the roadside power lines, once coming down for a brief pause on a garden fence. Both days of the second weekend, we also saw a single **Eastern Phoebe**, cherishing those too as if they might be our last for a while.

Among our 38+ participants over the three days was my mother Johanna Chao, who saw what I believe must have been her life Lincoln's Sparrows on the final Sunday. It was a special pleasure for me to hear her expressing a fresh and youthful wonder about these birds. She remarked later like a pro about the differences between them and Song Sparrows, aptly calling Lincoln's "the princes and princesses of the sparrows."

It was gratifying indeed to cherish the waning days of this site with her, with you, and with so many birds. Let's hope that someday in a future October, we'll all be able to share this amazing place again!

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## **CBC Trip to Ferd's Bog and Sabattis Bog**

***by Carl Steckler***

On Saturday, October 24, Ann Mitchell, Marty Borko, Judith Thurber, Robyn Bailey, Lea Callan and I made the 4 hour drive to the Adirondacks to find, hopefully, Gray Jays. After a stop in Old Forge for lunch/breakfast we drove to Ferd's Bog. We spent almost a half hour looking and calling with absolutely no results. We didn't hear a thing.

Then moving back into the woods a bit we began hearing **Ravens** and **Blue Jays**. Ann Mitchell tried calling Gray Jays and lo, one answered.

Soon, success, we saw our first **Gray Jay**, a life bird for three of the group. The bird flitted in the low underbrush then flew away. We



called again and the Jay returned and was plainly visible to all. I managed to get one good photo of the bird and could add it to my life list. I only add a bird to my list if I have taken a recognizable photo of the bird.

Our excitement also attracted a **Downy Woodpecker** which we all had good views of. After the Jay and the Woodpecker left, Ann tried playing a Screech Owl call and the results were amazing. I have seen birds come to mob an Owl call, but nothing like this. We were soon surrounded by a cacophony of bird calls. The trees above were alive with dozens of birds. There were **Black-capped Chickadees**, **Brown Creepers**, **White-breasted Nuthatch**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Dark-eyed Junco**, **Tufted Titmouse**, **Pine Siskin** and an unidentified species of **Kinglet**. Wow!

We left Ferd's Bog and headed to Sabattis bog, stopping along the way to look for rare flowers and Porcupines. We found Fringed Gentian, but no Porcupines (sorry Robyn). Arriving at Sabattis Bog as identified by eBird we were disappointed to find nothing, all was quiet. Since we were so close to the end of the day and to Tupper Lake, we decided to drive there for supper. Along the way we were startled by a **Ruffed Grouse** crossing in front of us. Further along we stopped to look at what we thought were Song Sparrows, but were pleasantly surprised by **Common Redpolls** (a life bird for some of us) and **White-crowned Sparrows**.

After a delicious meal in Tupper Lake we drove back home satisfied with our successes for the day.

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**[Owling and Loon Watch Field Trips in](#)**

## **November**

Field trips scheduled for the month of November include an evening trip to look for Owls on November 7 and a Loon Watch at Taughannock State Park on November 14.

The **Owling** field trip on **November 7** will be led by Wes Blauvelt and Meena Haribal. Participants should meet at the Lab of Ornithology parking lot at **6:30 pm**. Wes and Meena will then lead the group to various locations to look for owls, including Great Horned, Barred, Eastern Screech and Saw-whet Owls. Included in this trip will be a stop at John Confer's Hammond Hill Owl Site (HHOWLS) to see how Northern Saw-whet Owls are banded. If we are lucky, we might get one close enough to see in hand. Participants should bring a headlamp or flashlight and dress warmly, with gloves and hats, for standing in the cold listening for owls. This trip will be canceled if it is raining. We will return to the Lab of O at approximately 10:30 pm.

The following weekend, on Saturday, **November 14**, Wes Blauvelt will lead a **Loon Watch** at Taughannock State Park, from **7 am to 9 am**. Every year, thousands of migrating Common Loons pass over Cayuga Lake on their way south. The numbers are especially concentrated shortly after dawn during the month of November. We will meet at the north end of Taughannock State Park, where Taughannock Creek enters the lake (we'll watch from south of the creek). If coming from Ithaca, enter the park (lake side) before crossing the bridge over Taughannock Creek and park at the north parking lot near the point. Other migrating waterfowl, including Brant, Long-tailed Ducks and scoters may also be seen from this location. Participants should dress very warmly, as standing by the lake with a North breeze can be very cold.

For more information about these field trips, contact Wes Blauvelt at [wwblauvelt@gmail.com](mailto:wwblauvelt@gmail.com) or Meena Haribal at [mmh3@cornell.edu](mailto:mmh3@cornell.edu). Both field trips are open to all.

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## **Sign up Now for Field Trip to Niagara Falls December 5-6**

Join renowned local birder Jay McGowan on an overnight trip to Niagara Falls December 5-6 to look for rare gulls and other

species. This trip will provide an opportunity to learn tips for gull identification and to see other birds that congregate along the cold waters of the Niagara River. Many species of gulls in a variety of plumages can be found here and may include Little Gull and Black-legged Kittiwake. There is also a chance for finding uncommon waterfowl such as Harlequin Duck.

We are looking into renting a van for up to 10 people, and plan to leave the Lab of Ornithology at 7 am on Saturday, December 5th, and to return at approximately 8 pm on Sunday, December 6th. We will be crossing into Canada and will stay at a hotel on the Canadian side of the river, so remember to bring a passport or enhanced drivers license for the border crossing. The weather may be very cold; participants should wear very warm clothing, warm boots, gloves, and jackets and hats that provide protection against wind and possible snow. Bring snacks and/or lunch, but there will be stops on the way to Niagara Falls to purchase food.

The trip cost is anticipated to be \$130 per person for transportation and one night's accommodation (this is for a shared room, the cost will be somewhat more if you request a private room).

If you are interested in signing up for this field trip, please contact both Jay McGowan, [jwm57@cornell.edu](mailto:jwm57@cornell.edu), and Field Trip Coordinator Meena Haribal, [mmh3@cornell.edu](mailto:mmh3@cornell.edu), **by November 5** so that we can make room reservations and plan transportation. In your email, please include a phone number and whether you prefer a shared or single room. This trip is limited to Cayuga Bird Club Members (membership is \$15 per family per year or \$10 for students).

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## **Bob McGuire contributes 2000 recordings to Macaulay Library!**

Long time Cayuga Bird Club member and avid sound recordist Bob McGuire recently achieved a milestone—more than 2000 of his recordings have been archived in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Macaulay Library. Bob is among a select group of recordists who have contributed such a high number of recordings to the library.

Matt Medler, Collections Management Leader, notes that “What is especially impressive about this total is that we just began archiving Bob's recordings at ML in November 2013. So, we have archived a very large number of his recordings in less than two years. This is a testament to Bob's hard work and persistence in making field recordings, organizing them at home, and then working with an ML archivist to create data records and archive the sound files. In addition to the quantity of recordings that Bob has archived, the quality of most of his recordings is good to excellent. He has also made a special point to try to capture rare and unusual vocalizations that are not currently represented in the archive.”

Recording number 2000 in the Macaulay Library, archived in late September by Martha Fischer during one of Bob's studio archival visits, is this one of a Snow Bunting: <http://macaulaylibrary.org/audio/207738>. You can browse through many more of Bob's recordings in the Macaulay Library [here](#).



## **New York State Birders Conference and NYSOA 68<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting** *by Jane Graves*

165 participants attended the New York State Birders Conference and NYSOA 68<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting which took place at the Radisson Hotel in Albany, October 2-4. I went, not as a delegate, but as a birder who is always delighted to meet up with friends from all over the state.

The conference this year had many highlights, not the least of which took place on the first afternoon and evening at the New York State Museum. During the afternoon, state Curator of Birds Jeremy Kirchman and volunteer Alison Van Keuren led behind-the-scenes tours of Museum's operations,

which included the prep lab and the climate-controlled collections area with specimens collected by noted figures in NYS ornithology. Especially appreciated by tour participants were looks at skins and mounts of extinct birds, including Heath Hen, Carolina Parakeet, Labrador Duck, and bones identified as those of a Great Auk.

After the tours, Jeremy hosted a reception in the Birds of NY Exhibit Hall, catered by Nicole's, one of Albany's finest restaurants. I particularly enjoyed the pumpkin ravioli and the quinoa salad, but there were many other treats as well. The weekend's honored guest and speaker, Jon Dunn, was present to sign books. After the reception, there were six workshops, three featuring Ithaca birders, titled "Golden Eagle Research in Upstate NY," "Volunteering: Birding on a Shoestring Budget," "Bird-friendly Gardening," "Parsing Plovers and Separating Shorebirds: Tips for Shorebird ID," "eBird Demystified," and "Becoming a Birder in New York."

Field trips were held Friday afternoon as well as Saturday and Sunday mornings to several of the Capital District's hotspots. Birders enjoyed Wilson's Snipe, a late Philadelphia Vireo, as well as late Nashville and Cape May Warblers at Vischer's Ferry Nature and Historical Preserve; both Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, Swainson's Thrush, as well as Tennessee and Blackpoll Warblers at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center; Black Vulture at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve; Black-throated Blue, Palm, Pine, Yellow-rumped, and Black-throated Green Warblers at the Landis Arboretum; and Peregrine Falcon, Winter Wren, Northern Parula, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, and Wilson's Warblers, as well as Lincoln's Sparrow at Schodack Island State Park.

The delegate's meeting took place on Saturday morning but I know nothing of the business conducted there. I assume that our delegate will report about this to the club at some point.

The paper session took place on Saturday afternoon. The eight papers were the most interesting I remember in many years of attending NYSOA meetings. They were: "Timing of the Fall Migration of Selected Warbler and Sparrow Species in Albany County, New York"; "Unraveling the Antagonistic

Coevolution of Birds and their Parasites”; “Using First-recorded/First-arrival Data for Assessing Climate Change: A Cautionary Tale” (compares CBC and NYSOA Region 3 data); “Enhancement of Spruce Grouse Habitat and Supplementation of Populations in New York”; “Altitudinal Range Shifts of Adirondack Birds over the Past Forty Years”; “Niche Differences between the Breeding Habitats of Bicknell’s and Gray-Cheeked Thrush”; “Estimating Golden Eagle Populations Wintering in Delaware, Otsego, and Madison Counties, New York”; and “Conservation Through the Lives of Adirondack Loons.”

Late Saturday afternoon was a reception at the hotel and an informal taxonomy discussion presented by Jon Dunn. It was a real pleasure to have Jon present for the entire weekend mingling with the conference attendees. Later in the evening the banquet, presentations, and keynote address took place. During the banquet, the annual birders’ quiz was inflicted on diners. Presented by the irrepressible George Steele, it involved things that birders see and hear when they’re out in the field that aren’t birds. Included were close-ups of raccoon scat, an abandoned tire (so closely photographed that it was virtually impossible to identify), a steamy window on a lovers’ lane, and amphibian vocalizations. Much hilarity was involved and it made the mediocre food experience not so noticeable.

The Lillian C. Stoner Award, which fosters promising young peoples’ interest in birds and ornithology by offering the education and experience of the fall conference, was given to NYS Young Birders Club president Joe Hernandez. An all-round nature lover, Joe gave a delightful thank-you speech. The Emanuel Levine Memorial Award for the best article of the year in “*Kingbird*” went to the late Guy Baldassarre and Joshua Stiller for “Habitat use and migration chronology of waterfowl on the upper Hudson River, New York.” *Kingbird* 64(2):90-101.

Keynote speaker Jon Dunn spoke on Wood Warblers of Eastern North America, looking at the distribution and migration routes of all 38 species of eastern warblers as well as discussing some of the most challenging warbler identification problems.

Thanks to the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club for hosting a conference full of energy, friendship, and good birds. Next year's conference will be hosted by the Chemung Valley Audubon Society and will take place in Elmira the weekend of September 9-11.

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## **Club Officers and Contacts**

Jody Enck, *President*  
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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, or birding hot spots, as well as 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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