



Cayuga Bird Club

September 2015

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From the President



Summer is almost over and fall is right around the corner. The fall migration is well under way as has been observed by many of the visitors to the Knox-Marsellus Marsh and Puddler's Marsh at the

Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge over the past few weeks. For most of the year, viewing is difficult at these locations, but for the past few years, the park authorities have opened the normally off-limits dikes to organized bird-viewing walks in the fall. I went on two of these walks a couple of weeks ago and I, along with dozens of other birders, were very happy to enjoy many of the migrating shorebirds that stop over there.

During breeding season these areas are closed off to the public for good reasons. However, in the fall there is little risk to the birds by allowing us birdwatchers to get a little closer. Although some of the ducks seem understandably nervous, the shorebirds seem mostly oblivious to the presence of humans. For many of the birdwatchers, this is a unique opportunity to see many otherwise hard-to-find species. It is especially helpful for novice birders to see the different species relatively closely and to be able to compare them against each other.

This is a sensible policy for the park, and is much appreciated by birdwatchers. Thanks are due especially to the Visitor Services Manager Andrea VanBeusichem for enabling this. I encourage members to purchase the

Sept 12 Migration Celebration,
Lab of O, 10 am-3 pm

Sept 14 CBC Meeting,
Lab of O, 7:30 pm
Speaker: John Fitzpatrick,
Director, Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Sept 18-19 Montezuma Muckrace

Oct 2-4 NYSOA Meeting,
Albany, NY

Oct 14 CBC Meeting,
Lab of O, 7:30 pm
Speaker: Bill Evans,
Director of Old Bird, Inc.

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

Migration Celebration
September 12

Cornell Lab of Ornithology
10 am - 3 pm

Especially for families!

Live Bird Banding Station

Raptor Exhibits

Behind the Scenes at the Lab

Bird Walks by Cayuga Bird Club volunteers

and [More!](#)

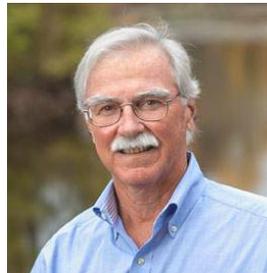
Montezuma Muckrace

duck stamp, as this is one way we can help fund the ongoing preservation of this important area.

Finally, I would like to welcome our new newsletter editor, Diane Morton. This is Diane's first edition of the newsletter. As you can see, we are using an entirely different email-oriented approach. Diane independently researched the various options and put a lot of effort into figuring out how to make it work. She shared an early version of the newsletter with me and I was very pleased to see how great it looked. Thank you, Diane, for your hard work.



Cayuga Bird Club Meeting, September 14



**Speaker: John W. Fitzpatrick,
Louis Agassiz Fuertes Director,
Cornell Lab of Ornithology**

To Interpret and Conserve: After 100 years, What Has the Banner "Laboratory of Ornithology" Come to Mean?

On the Centennial of Arthur Allen's hiring at Cornell University, we will explore what has changed, what has flourished, and what's to come within the unique Lab that Allen and his colleagues founded. This is not just an eclectic history lesson filled with self-congratulation, but rather a challenge for today's and tomorrow's faculty, staff, friends of the Lab, and University. We must regard our first hundred years as a "trial run" – an experiment that has proven itself worthy of another hundred year run, but this time the expectations -- our measures of success -- will be far more stringent, and the stakes are far higher.

John W. Fitzpatrick is Director of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and professor in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Cornell University. From 1988-1995 he was

September 18-19

The 19th Annual Montezuma Muckrace, organized by [Friends of the Montezuma Wetlands Complex](#), is a friendly competition to identify as many bird species as possible within a 24-hour period (7 pm to 7 pm) inside the 242-square mile Montezuma Area. Teams can [register](#) under several categories: competitive, recreational, family/mentor, youth, low-carbon, or photo. Funds raised support restoration of wetlands and wildlife habitat and expansion of environmental education and public-use facilities. You can join this effort by organizing a team or by [pledging](#) to make a donation.

NYSOA Meeting October 2-4 in Albany

The NYSOA 68th Annual Meeting and New York State Birder's Conference will be hosted by the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club and held in Albany NY on October 2-4, 2015. The Saturday keynote presentation will be *Wood Warblers of North America* by [Jon Dunn](#), noted author and tour leader. Additional details and registration information are

Executive Director of the Archbold Biological Station in central Florida, and before that served for twelve years as Curator of Birds and Chairman of the Department of Zoology at the Field Museum in Chicago. He is Fellow and past President of the American Ornithologists' Union, and in 1985 received its highest research award for his book *Florida Scrub-Jay: Ecology and Demography of a Cooperative Breeding Bird*, co-authored with G.E. Woolfenden. He has served on national governing boards of The Nature Conservancy and the National Audubon Society, on three Endangered Species Recovery Teams, and on numerous scientific and conservation panels. He has authored over 150 scientific papers, discovered and described seven bird species, and is co-inventor of eBird, one of the world's largest and most rapidly growing citizen-science projects.

The meeting will be held at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Doors open at 7 pm. The meeting will begin at 7:30 pm with Cayuga Bird Club business, followed by the speaker's presentation. Seating is limited, so come early!

Officer Nominations for 2015 Elections

At the Cayuga Bird Club Meeting on October 12, we will be voting for Club Officers and one Director. Nominated officers are listed below. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor, but if you'd like to nominate someone, please make sure that person wishes to be nominated!

President: Jody Enck



Jody Enck started birding about 50 years ago as a wee lad growing up on a farm in Pennsylvania. Since then, he's been learning more and more about birds and birders. Jody especially loves watching birds in his back yard and learning what the local residents are up to. He also has been known to be a closet lister with more than 500 species seen in the U.S. He has a background in both wildlife biology and social science and enjoys meeting birders of all types. He hopes to continue the great Club tradition of welcoming all birders no matter what their interests and helping them feel like they really belong in the Cayuga Bird Club.

available at
hmbc.net/nysoa.

Time to Renew Your Membership

September is membership renewal month for the Cayuga Bird Club. Dues are \$15 per family or \$10 per student. Payment may be made via Paypal at cayugabirdclub.org 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 renewal to keep your newsletter subscription address current.

First-of-Year Birds Reported June- August for the Cayuga Lake Basin

- 6/1 Sanderling
- 6/2 Arctic Tern
- 6/5 Brown Pelican
- 6/5 Least Bittern
- 6/8 Northern Bobwhite
- 7/13 Stilt Sandpiper
- 7/18 Red-necked Phalarope
- 8/1 Long-billed Dowitcher
- 8/11 Buff-breasted Sandpiper
- 8/13 Laughing Gull
- 8/18 Olive-sided Flycatcher

Vice President: Wes Blauvelt



Wes has been a member of the Cayuga Bird Club for about 15 years and has actively participated in the Christmas Bird Count. Wes's interests in birding began as a boy and he has been fortunate to travel around the world chasing birds. In retirement, Wes hopes to become a more active and productive member of the bird club.

Treasurer: Susan Danskin



Susan has been club treasurer since October 2009, after stepping down from her position as club president. She is looking forward to continuing her work. She has been a club member for a number of years, working on various committees and leading many field trips.

Recording Secretary: Becky Hansen



Becky moved to Ithaca fairly recently, after nearly 40 years in the NYC area, hoping to take advantage of the opportunities here to learn more about birds. She enjoys participating in the bird club meetings, field trips, the Christmas bird count, and going to Monday Night Seminars. She leads some of the weekend bird walks at the Lab of Ornithology. She also loves traveling all over the world to get to see wonderful birds and places. Becky is happy to have the chance to serve as recording secretary for the Cayuga Bird Club.

Corresponding Secretary: Colleen Richards



Colleen is willing to continue as corresponding secretary. Besides occasional volunteer acknowledgements, etc., she corresponds with our program speakers each month to assure they have all they need for their engagement. She also organizes

8/21 Willet
8/28 Baird's Sandpiper
8/31 Dickcissel

2015 count to date:
269 species

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

Duck Stamp
Available from
ABA



When you buy a Duck Stamp through the [American Birding Association](#), you benefit the National Wildlife Refuge System and at the same time make your purchase count as a birder. 98 cents out of every dollar generated by the sale of Duck Stamps goes directly to purchase or lease habitat for protection. Since the inception of the Duck Stamp in 1934, over six million acres of wetland and grassland habitat have been protected.

Osprey updates

Keep up with the latest news on the

the club dinner which honors the speaker and encourages member interaction.

Director: Paul Anderson



Paul got hooked on birding when he took the Lab of O's Spring Field Ornithology course eight years ago and has been a member of the club since then. He contributed photos to Birding in the Cayuga Lake Basin, and he became the club webmaster and overhauled the website. Paul is also a docent for the Lab of Ornithology, leading beginner bird walks there on weekends, and has been a field trip leader for the club on many occasions. Paul is the current president of the club and is now stepping down after his two-year term.

Cayuga Bird Club Annual Picnic



The annual Cayuga Bird Club picnic was held at Myers Point on June 11, 2015. The weather was fine, after being postponed from its earlier date due to hurricane warnings! The potluck dinner was a great success with many delicious choices. The picnic provided a very pleasant way to meet new club members and renew old acquaintances. A short bird walk was organized after the meal; sightings included an Orchard Oriole across the creek and nesting Eastern Kingbirds and Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers within the park.

Salt Point Ospreys through Candace Cornell's blog, [On Osprey Time](#).

USA's Oldest Bald Eagle, Reared at Montezuma NWR

In June, 2015, the oldest Bald Eagle in America died at age 38 in Henrietta, NY. This eagle was removed from its nest in Minnesota in 1977 and reared at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge as part of the effort to restore the Bald Eagle population in New York State. At that time there was just a single breeding pair of Bald Eagles remaining in New York. For more on Eagle # 629-03142, see the [article](#) in this month's Audubon magazine.

Stay in touch through our [Facebook](#) page and [Cayuga Bird Club Website](#)!



Facebook



CBC Website



Montezuma Shorebird Walks

Guided shorebird walks have been offered during the month of August at the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge. Led by experienced birders, these walks have been a great way to get closer to the “peeps” and larger shorebirds and to learn identification tips for distinguishing between similar species, especially when they appear side-by-side.



I attended several of these walks, including one led by Dave Nutter and one by Dave Nicosia for the Cayuga Bird Club. In each case the guides pointed out field marks and behaviors characteristic of different birds. We scrutinized young dowitchers for differences in the profile of their backs and especially their tertial wing feather pattern: plain gray on the Long-billed and tiger-striped on the Short-billed. The light this past weekend was especially good for seeing these differences. On August 9 we watched a Red-necked Phalarope busily feeding and had a brief look at an Upland Sandpiper that flew over and landed at the grassy edge of the marsh. Last weekend, thanks to a tip from Dave Nutter and Ann

Mitchell, we had a chance to study two new shorebirds that had just recently arrived: Buff-breasted and Baird's sandpipers. On each trip, Black-crowned Night-Herons and Sandhill Cranes were also close, providing good viewing opportunities for these birds as well.

In all, twenty different shorebird species have been seen on these walks and everyone who participated had a terrific opportunity to practice their identification. Thanks to the trip leaders and to other experienced birders who helped with identification, and to Linda Ziemba and Andrea Van Beusichem of the Montezuma NWR for making these special dike walks possible. Information on upcoming walks will be posted on the [Cayugabirds-list](#) or at [this site](#).

-Diane Morton

*Photos of Red-Necked Phalarope and Black-crowned Night-Heron
by Becky Hansen*



Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding

For the last five years I have had the pleasure of working with numerous volunteers to band fall, migratory saw-whets, surely the cutest birds ever in a mist net. The work is fun and interesting with over 50 birds caught each year. I take the work as meaningful research that has inspired two published articles with another on the influence of lunar illumination on migration still in review. This fall I will continue this



banding project carried out at my house on the south end of Hammond Hill near Slaterville Springs. I am asking for volunteers to join the project. For the safety of the owls and accuracy of the data , inexperienced volunteers require time-consuming supervision, and the project won't work with lots of people coming out only one or two times. If you can make a commitment to helping about once a week (or more) for 3 to 5 hours each night (or maybe 6 or 7 hours for the few nights with exceptionally large numbers) from the end of September to mid-November, I would love to have old owl banders and new banders help again this fall. Please email [<confer@ithaca.edu>](mailto:confer@ithaca.edu) for full information.

-John Confer



photo - Jay McGowan

Brown Pelican - A New Record!

On June 5, 2015, Mike Duttweiler reported a Brown Pelican off Poplar Beach, cruising and diving into the water. The bird made its way to Ithaca the next morning, where it was seen from Stewart Park and other locations near the south end of the lake. The pelican was found resting in a tree along Cayuga Inlet later in the day, providing a great opportunity for many people to see it. This is the first record for Brown Pelican in the Cayuga Lake Basin!



photo - Diane Morton

Nesting Merlin in and near Ithaca, NY, 2015

By John L. Confer, Assistance by Madeline Ulinski, Mark Witmer, and Ann Herzog. A full account of this study will be in an upcoming edition of *The Kingbird*.

Bull's birds of New York state (1998, Levine, Ed.) summarizes the first fully credible evidence of Merlins nesting in New York. By 1996, over 10 instances of nests or fledged young were confirmed, all of which were recently observed and either in or near the Adirondack Mountains. Observations for the *Second Atlas of the Breeding Birds of New York* (2008, McGowan and Corwin, Eds.) showed an explosive expansion in nesting Merlin with 47 confirmed nestings plus 84 possible or probable nestings. Several reports were south of the Adirondack Mountains.

This spring, 2015, five nests were located by use of comments on the <Cayugabirds-L> list serve. The very active and informative participation by so many made this survey possible, for which we are so grateful. Two additional nests were found by detection of calls and observation of birds in flight (JLC). Five nests were within Ithaca, i.e., the City of Ithaca plus the Town of Ithaca. Another nest was in Dryden, NY and a seventh nest was on Wells College campus in Aurora, NY. Images relating to this study are on CANON iMAGE GATEWAY, and can be accessed by emailing confer@ithaca.edu.

Attributes of nest and landscape. At least two of the nests in our study were built by American Crows (pers. com. Clark and McGowan). Another nest was built this



year by Fish Crow but taken over by Merlin shortly after construction. Kevin McGowan estimates there are 300 crow nests in Ithaca yearly and this provides hundreds of potential nests. It is interesting that all nest trees were in urban environments. Nests were

either in or near large areas with little or no underbrush. Frequently occurring disturbances such as children leaving a school, people walking, jogging, or using skateboards, or moving cars were common in the immediate vicinity of several nests and were largely ignored.

Chronology of nesting. Among all six nests, courtship and copulation were first reported on 3 April, and the last fledging occurred on 28 July, a span of about 117 days. For an individual nest, egg-laying, incubation, and the nestling stage require ~70 days (BNA).

Nest success rates. Three of the seven nests were predated. The nest success rate was 57%. Other, more extensive studies report greater than 90% nest success and did not find predation as a major cause of nest failures.

Prey Species. With 123 hours of observation at nests, we identified 29 prey items of 8 species. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) was by far the most common prey, as reported for other studies of urban Merlin. The tally of three swallows attests to the maneuverability of the Merlin.



Thoughts on this population increase. The Merlin population in Ontario has been increasing at ~3.5%/yr. for the last ~50 years according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey (Sauer et al. 2014) (hereafter BBS). Young that dispersed from an increasing Ontario population may well be the source of birds that arrived in

northern New York. The following factors could potentially influence the Merlin population in New York. FOOD AVAILABILITY. The House Sparrow declined at 2.5%/yr. for New York for 1966 to 2013 (BBS), a decline that started two decades before the arrival of Merlin. Certainly a decline in the most common prey item does not explain the recent increase in Merlin. CLIMATE WARMING. The expansion southward does not fit with global climate change, which appears to have caused the northward expansion of many other species. HABITAT AVAILABILITY. The park-like landscape used by urban nesters, e.g., East Hill Cemetery, Dryden school grounds, Wells College campus, does not seem to have changed in availability or condition by our recollection. PREDATORS ON MERLIN. The population of Red-tailed Hawks in New York has increased significantly at 0.85%/yr. for the last half-century (BBS), while the New York population of Great Horned Owl declined significantly at 3.5%/yr. (BBS). The net impact of Red-tailed Hawk increase and Great Horned Owl decline on the expansion of Merlin in New York is not known. We emphasize that none of these speculations are based on strong evidence, but they do raise interesting ideas.

Acknowledgements: Sam Ayers generously allowed us to incorporate his nest success data for the Wells College nest. We are particularly lucky to have information on nest history provided by Ann Clark and Kevin McGowan, and appreciate their help. We discovered nests thanks to information generously provided by Ann Clark, David Nutter, Bob McGuire, Ken Kempfues, and Brad Walker.

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Linda Orkin (2017)
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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.

Bird club members receive via email the Cayuga Bird Club Newsletter monthly from September through June. Send newsletter submissions to Diane Morton, 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.

Chickadee illustration in masthead by Karen Allaben-Confer



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