



The Bedford Audubon Society Newsletter

Volume 53, Number 2, Summer 2003

Celebrating 90 Years of Conservation 1913-2003

BEDFORD AUDUBON SOCIETY TURNS 90! NOTES FROM THE PAST

By John Askildsen, President

Bedford Audubon Society was founded in February 1913, and was undoubtedly Westchester's first environmental organization. Beset with the task of creating a "Culture of Conservation," from the ground up, the leadership wasted no time in recruiting as many of Bedford's citizenry as possible. Right from the start, preservation of the local birdlife was central to Bedford Audubon's mission.

In the first Annual Report dated 1914, the Society's first President, **Dr. Henry M. Howe** of Bedford, reported that, "Nine hundred seventy gourds and seven hundred four bird nesting boxes had been sold to more than forty different buyers." Dr. Howe went on to say that, "Bedford's returning birds will find an embarrassment of riches that may well help them to decide to return to Bedford next year, as well." By 1915, BAS members were already traveling to Albany and Washington to lobby elected officials on wildlife conservation issues.

In its first two years of operation, Bedford Audubon leadership recruited almost three hundred members. The membership role read like the "Who's Who" of Bedford. Here are just a few names that may be recalled even today.

As of 1914, membership included: **Mrs. Gordon Bell, Miss Mary A. Clark, Mr. William Fahnestock, Mr. Charles Haines, Mr. And Mrs. C.W. Wheeler, Mr. And Mrs. Henry Lounsbury, Eugene and Agnes Meyer, Mrs. James Wood, Mrs. Joseph Lapsley, Mrs. William Sloane, Miss Delia Marble and Miss Eloise Luquer.**

The following names were taken from the newsletter at a later date, May, 1949: **Mrs. E.D. Appleby, Mrs. Charles Darlington, Miss Tallulah Bankhead, Dr. and Mrs. Robert Patterson, Miss Helen Clay Frick, Rev. Arthur Ketchum, Dr. And Mrs. Nicholas A. Shoumatoff and their sons, Alex and Nick Shoumatoff, Mrs. John E. Lockwood, Norman J. Marsh, Mrs. Carll (Brady) Tucker, Carll Tucker, Jr., H.B. (Bregy) Van Cleve, Dewitt and Lila Wallace, Mrs. Thomas Waller, Mrs. Harold C. Whitman.**

The first Friday of the month quickly became known as "Audubon Night" across Bedford and neighboring towns, the social event that seemingly few would ever want to miss. Former BAS President **Ralph Odell** described Bedford Audubon as having become somewhat of an institution among Bedfordites in the 40's, 50's and 60's. Dinner parties were held all over town on the first Friday. Then, following dinner and cordials, everyone would adjourn to the Bedford Hills Memorial House for "Audubon Night."

Some of the early notable visiting guest lecturers are considered conservation giants by today's measure: **Dr. Arthur Allen**, founder of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology; **Edward Howe Forbush**, Massachusetts State Ornithologist; **Allen D. Cruikshank**, noted Ornithologist and author; and **Louis Aggazis Fuertes**, renowned wildlife artist and illustrator. The noted ornithologist, author and illustrator **Roger Tory Peterson** spoke to Bedford Audubon Society, as well.

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35 Todd Road, Katonah, NY 10536

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Our Mission

The mission of the Bedford Audubon Society is to promote conservation and protection of wildlife habitats in the northern Westchester and eastern Putnam region through education, advocacy, nature study and birdwatching.

BAS CALENDAR OF EVENTS

6/7	11:00 am	The Last Ancient Forests of Southern New York
6/14	3 pm	Babes in the Woods / Westmoreland Sanctuary
6/14 & 15		Westchester Summer Bird Count
6/22	9:30 am	Butterflies! At Ward Pound Ridge Reservation
7/12	9:30 am	More Butterflies! North American Butterfly Association Butterfly Count
7/12	9:00 pm	Moths in the Moonlight
8/9	9:30 am	And Still More Butterflies!
8/23	6:00 am	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge

BAS Summer Kids

6/21	10:30 am	The Nature Detectives
7/12	10:30 am	Bug Safari



Barn Swallow by Steven D'Amato

New Email List

Bedford Audubon has a new email list for notices regarding **local conservation issues and alerts**. Join this new listserv to receive notices regarding local conservation issues, as well as notices about state or national issues that may affect our region. Many of the notices will inform you of local hearings or public comment periods on issues that you can participate in as a member of the general public and as a member of Bedford Audubon Society. To join, go to www.bedfordaudubon.org and click on BAS Conservation Email List.

Bylane Nature Notes

By Tait Johansson

Spring came slowly and reluctantly to Bylane, the headquarters of Bedford Audubon in Lewisboro. In March and April, snowstorms halted the season's progress frequently, forcing the budding trees to bow, but could only postpone the inevitable victory of green over brown and white.

The first spring migrant birds to return, starting in early March, were Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and Brown-headed Cowbirds, often in noisy mixed flocks. A Pine Warbler showed up briefly on March 17 to mark St. Patrick's Day, but the biggest event of March here was the host of Hooded Mergansers at the two ponds for about two weeks. Perhaps because so many lakes and reservoirs in the area stayed frozen so late, there was at one point a flock of Hoodeds on the tiny lower pond that numbered 21 birds. The drakes were often seen displaying for the hens in between foraging sessions where the birds caught tremendous numbers of bright orange goldfish. The display involves the drake throwing its head back several times and then bringing it down almost to the water as it emits a two-part snore something like the call of a Pickerel Frog

Two Ring-necked Ducks visited the upper pond briefly one morning in late March for a first for the Hunt/Parker Sanctuary bird list, and single Wood Ducks showed up on two different occasions in early April to complete the waterfowl show. March also saw a tom Wild Turkey displaying in the fields, and the resident Great Horned Owls calling often at night and sometimes even in the afternoon in broad daylight. March wound down with some non-avian signs of spring; on March 26, the first Mourning Cloak butterfly awoke from its winter stupor to sail around above the sunny forest floor on the hillside just north of the house, and a rain on March 27 brought at least three Spotted Salamanders to a vernal pool in the sanctuary already filled with calling Wood Frogs and Spring Peepers.

The reappearance of butterflies in April has been slow and leisurely, with a Compton Tortoiseshell on April 16, and the first Eastern Tiger Swallowtail on Apr. 28. The most exciting butterfly news this spring here, though, concerned last fall. Monarch Watch recently informed Bedford Audubon that the tagged Monarch butterfly captured and re-released at Bylane on Sept. 19 last year (and mentioned in this column in the winter newsletter) had been tagged the previous day in Milford, Connecticut. This is a distance of about 24 miles, an impressive distance for a butterfly to travel in short a time, but only a tiny fraction of the full journey they make each fall to the mountains of Mexico.

April saw many migrant birds, some coming back to breeding territories here and some just passing through on their way farther north. In the latter category were a Palm Warbler singing from the larch tree by the upper pond on April 4 (maybe reminded of its muskeg breeding habitat by the larch); a Winter Wren on the 8th; a Fox Sparrow singing on the 10th; a Northern Harrier cruising north over the fields on the 11th; 20 Broad-winged Hawks on the 25th; Ruby-crowned Kinglets on the 25th and 28th; a flock of 12 Savannah Sparrows on the 29 and many yellow-rumped warblers. An American Woodcock did not stay around on the 3rd, probably because the fields at Bylane are not brushy enough yet. As some areas of the fields are allowed to grow up to shrubs, this species and several birds of old-field habitats with declining populations should start to breed here. Among the others we can hope for are Brown Thrasher, and Prairie and Blue-winged Warblers. There is just enough shrubby cover already in two of the fields to attract at least one Eastern Towhee, which arrived on the 24th.

As April ended, the trickle of returning species finally turned into a torrent: Barn and Northern Rough-winged Swallows on the 22nd; Green Heron, Warbling Vireo, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Baltimore Oriole, all on the 29th; Yellow Warbler and Rose-breasted Grosbeak on the 30th; and Wood Thrush, Black-throated Green and Blue-winged Warblers on the first of May, all tropical species who spend most of the year in Latin America and visit us to take advantage of the abundant insect life in North America's brief, luxuriant summer.

President's Message

By John Askildsen, President

2003 marks Bedford Audubon Society's 90th birthday. It also marks the conclusion of my three-year term as its President. At this time there is much cause for celebration. As Teddy Roosevelt once said, "This is our crowded hour!" BAS has grown in many different ways during the last several years, some ways with pain, some ways with happiness. Either way, BAS is better off for it.

Audubon in the Community

When called upon, BAS contributes to community preservation efforts by conducting ornithological research surveys based on sound science. Such was the case with the now secured Houlihan property in Waccubuc in 2002. BAS aided local citizenry's preservation efforts when we were called upon to conduct a survey of the bird species that use the 100 acre fielded property, catalogue what habitats exist on the property today, and make recommendations on maintaining these precious natural resources. Our final report turned out to be a substantial piece of scientific documentation, aiding in the successful efforts to preserve this fabulous piece of land.

The Parker gift of Bylane Farm in November 2001, continues to be a project that is very central to our activities, and no doubt will remain so. It is a marvelous gift, and one which is a tremendous asset to the community as well as to our Society. In time, members will be informed about the plans that the Board and its committees have been working on so hard for quite some time now. What is key about this gift is the fact that 100 acres of land has been preserved, including Bylane Farm, with its 300 year-old farmstead.

The Community in Audubon

There is no doubt in my mind that our Board of Directors, along with a group of dedicated volunteers, is making good on our mission and goals. We have increased the number of monthly programs and field trips, which continue to be high quality and are well attended. We continue to make improvements at our sanctuaries by upgrading and replacing our boardwalks and bridges.

During my tenure, BAS hired its first employee as Property Manager. Board Members and volunteers continued to produce a well-written and timely newsletter on a quarterly basis. Our electronic communications, through our website and e-mail list, has become a very important arm of communication for us, and for our membership. These are just some of the areas where we are doing great things.

I want to take this opportunity to thank each Board and Committee member for their steady commitment to the work of Bedford Audubon Society.

Finally, I would like to recognize the most important segment of the Bedford Audubon community—our members. Without our faithful members supporting BAS's activities through donations of money, time, and

enthusiasm, BAS and its commitment to conservation clearly would not exist. I thank you all for giving me the opportunity to lead, and to know such a fantastic group of people. In closing I light a candle for BAS on her 90th birthday, and I raise my glass to all those who have served so faithfully.

Congratulations

The Board of Directors of Bedford Audubon Society recently sent a letter of congratulations to its sister Chapter, **Saw Mill River Audubon Society** of Chappaqua, in commemoration of its 50th anniversary year in 2003. Saw Mill River Audubon was formed in 1953 when 24 members of the Bedford Audubon Society, under the leadership of William Fenner, asked to form a separate Chapter in order to perform more local conservation work in the Chappaqua/Pleasantville area. Happy 50th Saw Mill River Audubon!

BAS Thanks You!

Many thanks to all of you who have responded to our outreach requests. As a result, we welcome Tirtsa Malavenda, Del Bashko, Barlow and Tricia Humphreys, Jane Peters and Jodi Brodsky, all of whom have recently stepped forward to volunteer in various areas for BAS. Of course, there's always room for one more!

Twink Wood of Bedford Corners read our "Wish List" this past winter, and came to the rescue. Mrs. Wood donated some very nice antique wicker terrace furniture for the terrace at Bylane, where it will soon take its place.

Recently Bedford Audubon Society was named recipient organization for donations made in memory of the late Florence Maron of Pound Ridge, mother of Mrs. Beattie Banfield. To date the Society has received over \$900 in donations. We are very grateful to the friends and relatives of Ms. Maron who chose to honor her memory in that way.

Gerety Painting and Contracting made a generous donation of \$750 which enabled us to proceed with one of our key conservation projects.

The Annual Membership Appeal that was conducted this winter realized about ten thousand dollars. These donations are used in all areas of our work including educational programs, the production of this newsletter, and maintenance of our sanctuaries. Thanks to all who responded to our request.

Our current wish list includes a digital camera and volunteers willing to serve on our committees. Can you help? Call 914-232-1999 and leave a message for John.



About Birds: The Cedar Waxwing

By Tait Johansson

In a time when the populations of many songbird species in our part of the world are declining, one happy exception to this is the elegant Cedar Waxwing (*Bombicilla cedrorum*). One of a family consisting of only three species worldwide, our waxwing is a common breeding species at the edges of woods, and in many other habitats with scattered trees, often near water.

The smooth, sleek plumage of the Cedar Waxwing, which seems not to have a single feather out of place, ranges from a warm tannish-brown on its upperparts to a honey-yellow on the bird's belly, and gray on its wings, tail and uppertail coverts. The head is adorned with a crest of feathers, similar in shape to the crest of a cardinal or titmouse, and a small black "mask" in the area of the eye. The bill is black and relatively thin, with a slight downward hook at the end of the upper mandible. The tail has a colorful band at its end, usually yellow.

But the most striking feature of its plumage is a series of small, bright red waxy blobs at the ends of the secondary flight feathers (hence the name "waxwing"). Their purpose is unknown, but biologists speculate they may play a role of some sort in mate selection, which seems to be the generic fallback explanation of the biologist for any puzzling characteristic of any organism. The waxwing call, heard year-round, is a quiet, high-pitched, insect-like "zeeee", often given in flight as well as from a perch.

Waxwings spend most of the year in flocks, roaming around nomadically in search of berries. While watching a feeding flock, one

can often observe their rather charming habit of passing berries to one another, bill to bill. Their breeding biology is closely tied to their frugivorous habits. Though present in the Northeastern U.S. year-round, waxwings do not start to nest until about early June, timing the hatching of their young to coincide with summer-ripening berries.

Their diet may be one reason Cedar Waxwings have increased considerably in the past forty years or so. One of the few good ecological effects of increasing suburbanization is that the planted ornamental fruit-bearing shrubs and trees it often brings with it, provide an abundant food source for waxwings.

This species was named for its close association with the Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), whose small bluish fruits are still a major food source for waxwings, especially in winter. But small crabapples and the fruits of other ornamentals are increasingly becoming important parts of this bird's foraging routine. One strange effect of this has been a change in the plumage of some Cedar Waxwings. Normally, there is a yellow band at the end of the tail, but some waxwings now have bright orange tailbands instead. This plumage variant, unrecorded before 1950, is apparently caused by eating the berries of the Morrow Honeysuckle (*Lonicera morrowii*), an exotic shrub often planted as an ornamental.

If you are fortunate enough to observe this bird in your wanderings, you will find that the Cedar Waxwing's whispered, peaceful calls and the understated beauty of its attire make a refined, subtle counterpoint to the showier plumages and bolder sounds of other bird species vying for the birder's attention at this time of year.



Photo courtesy of Bill Wallace

**BAS birds the Redden Forest in Delaware.
L to R. Anne Vajsabel, Jackie Jones, Bill Wallace,
Peter Becker, John Askildsen, Jill Fojtlin**

Living Oceans

By Jackie Bruskin

You've heard eating fish is good for you. Well sometimes, we're not good for the fish!

The problem is a worldwide one. Many nationalities are guilty of over fishing—leaving breeding populations of the more popular varieties at levels dangerously low for their survival. "Living Oceans" is Audubon's marine conservation program. Its mission is to "protect and restore the living communities and special places of the seas for seabirds, fish, and other marine life..." The program aims to educate you, the consumer, about what choices you can make to encourage sustainable marine resources. In other words, your wallet talks.

A major feature of the program is the Seafood Wallet Card—popular food fish are listed on a card you can take with you to the fishmonger or restaurant. The list is printed on a colored background, shaded from green to red. Fish on the green end are relatively abundant and well managed. A yellow background indicates some concerns while a species listed on the red end of the scale has a lot of problems.

For example, you'll find Alaska salmon and halibut on the green end, while shrimp, snappers, and Atlantic cod are printed on red. Sharks, too, are 'redlined', as well as being known to have high levels of mercury (along with king mackerel, swordfish and tilefish.) Did you know that Lobster was once so abundant it was considered a trash food? Not anymore—in spite of regulations, lobsters are a species of concern. Of note: farm-raised fish are not automatically given the green light: fish farming practices vary widely and poor management can leave a farm-raised species on the red end of the scale.

To learn more about the program, what you can do and to download the Seafood Wallet Card, log on to <http://seafood.audubon.org>.



Canada Warbler by Steven D'Amato

PROGRAMS

The Last Ancient Forests of Southern New York Trailside Nature Museum @ Ward Pound Ridge Reservation

Saturday, June 7, 11 am

Bruce Kershner will take us on a visually mouthwatering slide tour of the inspiring primeval forests that he has recently discovered in our region. See 400-year-old trees, champion trees so big it takes 3 person's arm spreads to reach around their trunks. Even an ancient forest just confirmed in Manhattan! Learn how to recognize the age of a tree from its bark. You will never "see" forests the same after this!

Forest ecologist, Bruce Kershner, is a national authority on ancient forests. Following the program he will be signing his new book "**Guide to Ancient Forests in the Vicinity of New York City.**" Please note that this program is in lieu of our monthly Wednesday night program, and will be followed by a hike through the Reservation. Come to one or both.

**PROGRAMS WILL RESUME IN THE FALL ON
SEPTEMBER 10TH. THE SCHEDULE WILL
APPEAR IN THE FALL NEWSLETTER.**

"BAS SUMMER KIDS" PROGRAMS

Join "Ranger Rick" and Diana Lee of the Morning Star Nature School for two exceptional children's programs that are appropriate for kids and their parents! Both programs will take place at Bedford Audubon's Bylane Farm, located at 35 Todd Road, Katonah. **Reservations may be made with the Registrar at 914 764-4320. A fee of \$5.00 per registrant/\$10.00 for two or more will be collected at the time of the program.**

The Nature Detectives

Saturday, June 21, 10:30 am

Come, explore, discover and have lots of fun entering forest and field, learning the basics of the ancient art of animal tracking. We'll use our senses as we get some cool and rewarding insights into animal behavior by becoming sleuths searching for the clues and signs that wildlife leave behind. Who was here? What made that? Come and find out!

Bug Safari!

Saturday, July 12, 10:30 am

A program focusing on the exploration of the incredible world of insects. Take a guided tour of BAS's Bylane Farm and walk field, meadows, woodlands, pond and stream. What is a bug condo? What do they eat? Do they bite? How can we help them? Meet and hold some really cool spiders, millipedes and other insects from the Morning Star Nature School collection!

FIELD TRIPS

Registration: Please call Ginny Powers at (914) 764-4320 to register for all field trips unless otherwise noted.

Old Growth Trees in Westchester

Saturday, June 7, 11:00 am

This field walk follows a slide show program at the Trailside Nature Museum at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation. Bruce Kershner will lead a walk in the Reservation as we try our newly learned skill of recognizing the age of a tree from its bark. There will be lots to enjoy on this hike, which is co-sponsored by Westchester County Parks Department.

Babes in the Woods @ Westmoreland Sanctuary

June 14, 3 pm

Registration: 666-8448

This program is co-sponsored by Westmoreland Sanctuary. Director Steve Ricker will lead a leisurely hike to show us the secret places where the young animals, birds, and even plants are hiding. This is the time of year when the woods are truly alive! All ages are welcome.

Westchester Summer Bird Count

Saturday and Sunday, June 14 and 15

Join with other birders as they census our local breeding birds. This is an annual count much like the Christmas Bird Count. Call John Askildsen for more information at (914) 232-1999.

Butterflies! At Ward Pound Ridge Reservation

Sunday, June 22, 9:30 am

Hone your skills. This is prime time for the big ones: Monarchs, Swallowtails and Fritillaries. Bill Wallace knows his butterflies and is a patient teacher.

More Butterflies! North American Butterfly Association

Butterfly Count

Saturday, July 12, 9:30am

Join Bill Wallace as he covers Bedford Audubon Sanctuaries, including the fields of Bylane Farm and vicinity, while conducting the NABA Count.

Moths in the Moonlight

Saturday, July 12th, 9pm

Join Steve Walter to get an inside and close up look into the World of Moths at Bylane Farm. Last year we were treated to a spectacular Luna Moth during this same program.

And Still More Butterflies!

Saturday, August 9, 9:30 am

Join Bill Wallace as we search the fields of Bylane for late season butterflies. We know we'll see plenty of Monarchs, but there will be a variety of other species, as well.

Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, August 23rd, 6:00 am

We'll get an early start in order to arrive at the refuge before most people do, and when the wildlife is most active. This day will be spent searching for shorebirds, early fall migrant landbirds, butterflies and more. Please bring lunch.

A Letter to BAS: Project Feederwatch

The oohs and ahhs that resonate through the classroom anytime a new bird is spotted by one of the students are fantastic. Since receiving the Classroom Feederwatch Program, a generous gift from the Bedford Audubon Society, my class has been learning about the wonderful world of birds.

Students began by learning the basics in bird identification. For third graders this was an excellent lesson in using their senses, especially the ability to observe details and listen quietly. No small task for an eight-year-old child.

We currently have five feeders set up outside our classroom windows. It took several weeks for the birds to discover them. Once the feeders became established the class began to compile a daily list of visiting birds. After months of collecting data, the students submitted their information to the Cornell Ornithology Lab via the Internet.

I take great pride in my class when another teacher comes running into our classroom to ask what kind of bird is in the tree. Without hesitation, one of the students will answer in a matter of fact tone, "Oh that was a downy woodpecker. The red spot on his head means he is a male." I blush.

Most of the birds that wintered here have now gone and the project is finished for the year. But, signs of spring and mating robins are just outside our windows and my students still enjoy learning and reading about birds. My objective was not only to introduce the children to birds, but also to create a life long appreciation for the natural world.

Thank you for your kindness in providing this program for our students.

J. Brodsky
Kent Elementary School
Carmel, NY

Shop On-Line with BAS
go to www.bedfordaudubon.org and
click on "Nature Store".

New Member Application

I would like to join the Bedford Audubon Society (a chapter of National Audubon).

Send this form with a check made out to the
National Audubon Society, Bedford Chapter.

Please check the membership category:

___Introductory \$20, ___Two Year membership \$35, ___Senior Citizen (65+) \$15, ___Student \$15

I wish to make an additional
donation of _____

I do not wish to have my name or contact
information shared with outside organizations.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-Mail _____

Mail to: Bedford Audubon Society
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