



# WINGBEATS

*Newsletter of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region of New York State*

## PREVENTING BEECH LEAF DISEASE

*by Sophie Kilpatrick*

### What is Beech Leaf Disease?

Beech Leaf Disease is a more recently known threat that has quickly spread to over half the counties in New York. This disease is believed to be non-native to North America and was first discovered in Ohio in 2012 and has migrated east since then. This disease is caused by a certain species of nematodes and the fungus and bacteria they carry. These nematodes feed and reproduce within the beech buds, and are mostly likely dispersed to other trees by insects and birds.

### How Does it Impact New York Wildlife?

Beech is a very common tree species found in New York that is essential for a whole host of different species. It is an essential nesting tree for birds like the Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, and many other birds that use Beech trees as their homes. Beech nuts are also an important part of the diet to birds like Wild Turkeys and Blue Jays. Overall, Beeches provide a great deal of support for many bird species and as more start dying there will be a very apparent absence that will have a large effect.

## PREVENTING BEECH LEAF DISEASE, CONT'D.

### What Can You Do to Help?

It is important to identify what Beech Leaf Disease looks like so you can properly report it. If you think you have found a tree being affected by Beech Leaf Disease you can report it to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation by downloading the [iMapInvasives](#) app. Through this app, you can submit a report to help the department monitor Beech Leaf Disease in the state. You can also send photos and location information to an email address or number that is provided on the Department of Environmental Conservation website.

Some telltale signs of Beech Leaf Disease include:

- ♦ Thickening and curling leaves with leathery texture
- ♦ Premature leaf shedding
- ♦ Dark green interveinal banding on leaves



*Some examples of the effects of Beech Leaf Disease*

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### Sources

- \* "Beech Leaf Disease." Department of Environmental Conservation, [dec.ny.gov/nature/forests-trees/forest-health-beech-leaf-disease](https://dec.ny.gov/nature/forests-trees/forest-health-beech-leaf-disease). Accessed 14 Jan. 2024.
- \* Curtis, Paige. "A Fast-Spreading Disease Threatens a Foundational Tree of Eastern Forests." Audubon, 27 Sept. 2023.
- \* Brazee, N. "Beech Leaf Disease." Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment, 14 Dec. 2023, [ag.umass.edu/landscape/fact-sheets/beech-leaf-disease](https://ag.umass.edu/landscape/fact-sheets/beech-leaf-disease).

## NOTES FROM THE BACK WINDOW

by Carol Quantock

With winter hard upon us, we've recently experienced some bitter cold temperatures and wind, which were normal conditions until about 30 years ago, when winters started getting warmer and drier. This, of course, is a result of climate change, and it's an uphill battle that needs to be fought locally as well as globally to try to counteract some of the worst effects.

I haven't seen as many birds at the feeders this winter compared to past years, and I am continuing my observations and trying to develop theories about why this is happening. For the most part, I believe that this is part of the general decline in bird populations in the Western Hemisphere. On the optimistic side, I can only hope that more people are planting native plants and not cutting them down in the fall. Leaving the stems and seed heads helps feed the birds over the winter and may decrease visits to feeders. "Leaving the leaves" also provides ground-feeding birds such as juncos and sparrows with insect larvae that overwinter under the leaf piles.

I haven't seen the Cooper's Hawk that frequents yards in the neighborhood, but I'm sure it's around somewhere. In December I found the carcass of a Cedar Waxwing underneath a juniper tree at the end of the driveway. The land to the east of the tree is part of our yard, so it's wide open, and the hawk likely had a clear shot at the waxwing. It's all a part of nature, no matter how cruel it may seem to us humans.

Speaking of raptors, last Saturday I spotted two immature Bald Eagles searching for fish over the Hudson River in Stillwater. It was an awesome sight, to be sure! Earlier this month while driving I happened to see a very large owl perched in a tree. The traffic pattern made it impossible to pull over and grab a picture, but I'm pretty sure that it was a Great Horned Owl, given its size. Other sightings while running errands were a Northern Harrier and an American Kestrel. These sightings always uplift my mood: I'm observing creatures behaving the way they should in habitats that support them, and that makes me happy.

In this issue, we have a few columns written by new contributors: Maya Niles and Sophie Kilpatrick. Maya is a high school student who has agreed to write a series of articles about birds in art and the artists who paint them. Sophie is a Union College student and is working with ASCR as an intern this year. I welcome them both and hope that you will enjoy their articles.

I thought you might get a good laugh from the photo below. A very curious deer stopped by to check out one of our trail cams. Enjoy!



## UNION COLLEGE ORNITHOLOGY CLUB'S CONSERVATION EFFORTS TOWARDS CHIMNEY SWIFTS

by Sophie Kilpatrick

Union College has put great effort into promoting sustainability and conservation efforts across the campus community. One of the ways that they do this is through the Green Fee, which promotes environmental sustainability projects among students. Union's Ornithology Club President Alicia Cynamon '25 and other members of the club applied for a Green Fee and received \$5,000 for their project. Their winning project was the construction of a makeshift chimney for Chimney Swifts to live and brood in, and also for the construction of bird boxes around campus. Chimney Swifts are a vulnerable species native to the East Coast and would typically nest in old growth forests and tree cavities, but as old forest cover declined, they adapted to using chimneys instead.

Chimney Swifts thrived during European settlement and the building of many habitable chimneys for the birds. The declining use of brick chimneys and the increasing use of chimney caps that are used today make it difficult for Chimney Swifts to access modern chimneys, which has been a large factor in the decrease of their population. The chimney that was constructed with the money from the Green Fee was put up at Union College in 2023. The students are hoping to see Chimney Swifts start to use the chimney more around springtime when it starts getting warmer. There are plans in the works to upgrade the current chimney by decorating it and installing a camera in the chimney. This would allow a view of the inside so students can track the presence of and usage by Chimney Swifts and see how effective this method of conservation is and if it's worth putting more on the Union Campus.



Makeshift Chimney (insta:@birdsofunion)

### CHECK THIS OUT!

Carol Quantock, VP and *Wingbeats* editor, was interviewed for a radio spot Hudson Mohawk Magazine, a radio program of The Sanctuary for Independent Media in Troy, NY about preventing bird collisions. You can listen to the interview by going to either one of these sites:

<https://www.mediasanctuary.org/stories/2023/modifying-your-home-for-bird-safety/> or

<https://soundcloud.com/mediasanctuary/modifying-your-home-for-bird-safety>

# How Do Birds Survive The Winter?

*by Bernd Heinrich. Excerpts taken from this article.*

It seems logical that most birds flee the northern regions to overwinter somewhere warmer, such as the tropics. Their feat of leaving their homes, navigating and negotiating often stupendous distances twice a year, indicates their great necessity of avoiding the alternative—of staying and enduring snowstorms and subzero temperatures.

However, some birds stay and face the dead of winter against seemingly insurmountable odds. That they can and do invites our awe and wonder, for it requires solving two problems simultaneously. The first is maintaining an elevated body temperature—generally about 105°F for birds—in order to stay active. The second problem to be surmounted in winter is finding food. For most birds, food supplies become greatly reduced in winter just when food is most required as fuel for keeping them warm.

They solve the winter survival problem in many ways, often by doing many things at once. Although some species have devised evolutionary solutions, most birds follow a simple formula: maximize calories ingested while minimizing calories spent. Chickadees (like most year-round northern birds) brave the winter in their bare uninsulated legs and feet. Yet their toes remain flexible and functional at all temperatures. Don't they get cold? They do. Their feet cool down to near freezing, close to 30°F.

Every time the bird sends heat (via blood) from the body core to the extremities, it must produce more heat in the core for replacement. Thus, if a chickadee maintained its feet at the same temperature as its body core, it would lose heat very rapidly, and that would be so energetically costly that any bird doing so would quickly be calorie depleted. Birds maintaining warm feet would be unlikely to be able to feed fast enough to stay warm and active.

However, a chickadee's feet are provided with continuous blood flow. The warm arterial blood headed toward the feet from the body runs next to veins of cooled blood returning from the feet to the body.

Birds retain heat in their body core by fluffing out their feathers. Chickadees may appear to be twice as fat in winter as in summer. But they aren't. They are merely puffed up, thickening the insulation around their bodies. At night, they reduce heat loss by seeking shelter in tree holes or other crevices, and by reducing their body temperature—the smaller the difference in temperature between the bird and its environment, the lower the rate of heat loss. Still, the bird may have to shiver all night and burn up most of its fat reserves, which then must be replenished the next day in order to survive the next night.

Nighttime is crunch time for winter survival because no food calories are coming in to replace those being expended. It is a tight energy balance, but by lowering body temperature and turning down heat production at night, chickadees and other small birds of winter spare the cushion of fat accumulated during the day.

While physiology is a key component of surviving the cold by temperature regulation, the more critical factor is food input. That little chickadee's internal furnace must be fed and stoked.

Chickadees in winter travel in groups. Exploring for food, they appear to pick at just about everything, and when one chickadee finds something to eat, its neighbors notice and join in. All the while the chickadee winter flock learns by trial and error, and from each other. Using each other as a heat source, as a means of reducing their own heat loss, is an ingenious strategy, as it alleviated these birds from searching for or returning to a suitable shelter at the end of the day. By traveling as a group and converging to huddle, they were their own shelter instead.

Pileated Woodpeckers and other excavators have two secret weapons for winter survival: the ability to feed on insects deep within a tree, and the power to create their own insulated roost holes.

Woodpeckers have the tools and behavior to stay fed all winter. Their long, drill-bit bills and ability to cling to tree trunks and branches allow woodpeckers to access wood-boring insect larvae (Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers), and also hibernating carpenter ants (Pileated Woodpeckers). As for overnight shelter, woodpeckers do something that few other birds can do: make themselves a shelter specifically for overnighing. Shelter-building is an evolutionary outgrowth from making a nesting cavity in spring, but their winter dens differ substantially. The excavated roosting cavity is usually in a rotting snag. In contrast, nesting holes are excavated in snags with more solid wood. The winter overnight shelters are often within about 6 feet of the ground, at least three times lower than a nesting cavity. The same woodpeckers attend their same roost hole nightly and may use it all winter long. But not necessarily. Sometimes an overnighing hole, which can be excavated in as little as a day, is only used for a few days. Usually, a hole is used by only one woodpecker at a time. I suspect the woodpeckers' shelters are so good, and their food supply so secure, that huddling in groups, as in GC kinglets, is not a necessity.

Every winter crows gather by the thousands in communal roosts where they sleep at night. Come morning they go forth on their daily excursions, but again they return in groups at night. Such roosts are often in an urban area, where masses of crows convene in the same area each winter. Communal roosts serve as information centers. They are where knowledge of food locations is shared, probably unintentionally, as those crows that don't know where there is a dump or a corn field simply follow others, which then becomes the crowd. The presence of many crows together also spreads the risk of predator attack at night, as well as provides a social network for mutual warnings of danger.

Crows, as with other corvids (and chickadees and nuthatches), also capitalize on a temporary abundance of food by caching surpluses. Storing food is an insurance policy against the uncertainty of future food availability during the lean times of snow and cold. Surviving winter is not always survival of the biggest and strongest. It is a matter of mastering the equation of energy input versus output, taking into account all of the variables and always leaving enough calories to live another day.



# UPCOMING EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Below is a list of events and programs from ASCR and other like-minded organizations, along with information on how to register or attend. Events below are subject to change/cancellation; please consult the websites for updates.

## Audubon Society of the Capital Region

- ◆ February 4 — Bird Walk at the Washington County Grasslands, beginning at 10:00 AM. For details and to reserve a spot, please email [capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com).
- ◆ February 12 — Monthly Meeting of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region, 6:30-8:00 PM, via Zoom. Email [capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com) if you would like to attend and you will be sent the link.
- ◆ March 11 — Monthly Meeting of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region, 6:30-8:00 PM, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 510 Albany Shaker Rd, Loudonville, NY 12211. See above for details to attend via Zoom.
- ◆ March 22-24 — Capital Region Flower & Garden Expo, 10:00 AM-5:00 PM, Hudson Valley Community College, 80 Vandenburg Ave, Troy, NY 12180. ASCR and Wild Ones Capital are joining forces on a pollinator education station and information table. If you would like to help, email [capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com).
- ◆ April 5 — Bird Identification Presentation, 10:30-11:30 AM, Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library, 475 Moe Road, Clifton Park, NY 12065, open to the public. Weather permitting, a bird walk will be held at the Vischer Ferry Preserve.
- ◆ April 14, 2024 — Annual Meeting of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region. Bill Combs, the Eagle Man, will be presenting a spectacular PowerPoint slide show titled "Eagle Trail of Schoharie County" that covers his adventures tracking down and photographing eagles in the area. This event will be held at the Kelly Adirondack Center, 897 St David's Lane, Niskayuna, NY 12309. Schedule of events will be announced on Facebook and the ASCR website.

## Wild Ones Capital Region NY

- ◆ January 27 — Meet & Hike, 9:00-11:00 AM, Emma Treadwell Nature Center, 87 Stan Levine Drive, Voorheesville, NY, 12186, open to the public.
- ◆ February 6 — Native Plant Discussion Forum, 6:30-8:00 PM, Online/Virtual, open to the public.
- ◆ February 18 — Ecoregions and Ecological Communities in the Capital Region, 1:30-2:30 PM, online/virtual, free admission, registration required.
- ◆ February 24 — Meet & Hike, 9:00-10:00 AM, Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, 56 Game Farm Rd, Delmar, NY 12054, open to the public.
- ◆ March 19 — "Restoration and Reciprocity: Healing Relationships with the Natural World" with Robin Wall Kimmerer (sponsored by Wild Ones National), 5:00-7:00 PM, online and in person at Reeve Union, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, 748 Algoma Blvd, Oshkosh, WI 54901, free event, public welcome, **live stream available**.
- ◆ March 22-24 — Capital Region Flower & Garden Expo, 10:00 AM-5:00 PM, Hudson Valley Community College, 80 Vandenburg Ave, Troy, NY 12180.

Visit Wild Ones at <https://capitalregionny.wildones.org/> for more information.

## Pine Bush Preserve

- ◆ January 29 — Winter's Eve Nature Journaling, 6:00 PM, 195 New Karner Road, Albany, NY 12205, program suitable for teens and adults.
- ◆ February 22 — Owl Investigation, 1:30 PM. Learn about the owls that live in the Pine Bush Preserve.
- ◆ February 23 — Almost Full Moon Hike, 6:00 PM.
- ◆ February 24 — Discover the Pine Bush at Karner Barrens, 11:00 AM. Short hike through the rare pine barrens dunes.
- ◆ February 25 — Oh, Deer!, 11:00 AM.
- ◆ March 6 — Community Science: FrogWatch Volunteer Training, 6:30 PM. Introduction to FrogWatch, a community science program of the Akron Zoo.

For a list of all events at the Pine Bush Preserve and to make reservations, visit <https://www.albanypinebush.org/visit-calendar> or call 518-456-0655.

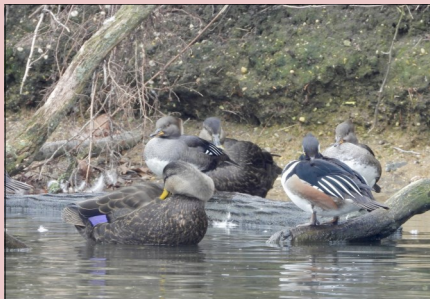
# Photo Gallery



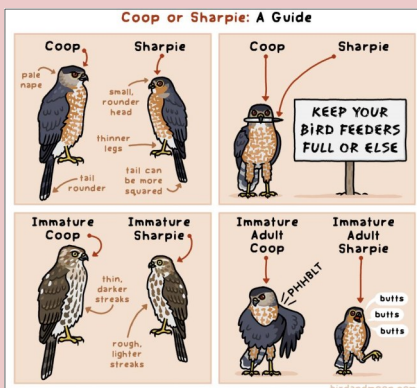
Left: two pair of Mallards; Right: group of Canada Geese  
Photos courtesy of Douglas Rogers



Left: Black-crowned Night Heron, Mountain Bluebird, Hooded Mergansers  
Photos courtesy of Francesca Parisi-Randazzo



Left: male Hooded Merganser-right foreground; male Black Duck—left foreground;  
Background-female Hooded Mergansers and female Black Duck; Right: male Hooded Merganser  
Photos courtesy of Francesca Parisi-Randazzo



## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR HVCC GARDEN SHOW

Once again, ASCR will be helping the Home Earth Alliance with its display at the HVCC Flower & Garden Show from March 22-24. We will be working in conjunction with Wild Ones Capital on a pollinator/bird education display as well as a separate information table.

Volunteers are needed to answer questions, talk to visitors, and hand out information about both organizations.

If you would like to spend a couple of hours working at either table, please email [capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com) for more information. Volunteers will all receive a free pass to the show for each day worked. This is a great way to see the displays and go to the lectures free of charge.





# BIRDS IN ART, PART 1

by Maya Niles

Birds have fascinated us for centuries, even going back to a time before recorded history. We are amazed at the way they soar through the air, and by their beautiful plumage and songs. As we watch them from the ground we think of freedom. We sense the raw and wild power of nature, but also the refined grace of these creatures that are light as air and yet still delicate and beautiful as the petals of a flower. Being human, it is only natural for us to try and capture these feelings in a tangible way, whether that be a dusty relief sculpture on the walls of an ancient tomb, or a grand oil painting in a quiet museum. In this column, I will be exploring birds in artworks throughout the ages.

Imagine you are on a limestone balcony in a beautiful palace. You look out into the wilderness and see papyrus swaying in the wind, and lurking among the fronds are a wide array of ibises, herons, and geese. Above, a shadow flits over the blazing desert sun as a falcon soars overhead, accompanied by a somber yet elegant vulture. These scenes of nature inspired the ancient Egyptians to produce magnificent renderings of different birds in their mythology and writing. They recognized them not only as sources of food, but also as representations of power, majesty, life, and death. Many gods and hieroglyphs include different native birds, and each one had a different meaning. Some of the most powerful and important gods are depicted with the head of a falcon, such as Ra, the sun god, and Horus, the god of war and sky. They also seemed to be inspired by the protective arching of the vulture's wings that they use to guard their food, depicting them hovering over the heads of the gods and shielding them from danger. The mysterious hoot of the owl, to those lucky enough to hear it, often instills feelings of mystery and uncertainty, with its deep, almost human call, and their broad, wide-eyed stares. The Egyptians must have felt similarly, as they used these birds in their hieroglyphics to symbolize death and wisdom. So, the next time you find yourself mesmerized by the seemingly indecipherable inscriptions of the ancient Egyptians, perhaps in a museum or in the depths of the internet, look for the birds in them, and imagine what they may have meant to those people all those many years ago.



*Relief depicting the sun god Ra, entrance to the Tomb of Seti II (KV15).  
New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, ca. 1193 BC. Valley of the Kings, West Thebes.*



*Hieroglyphics Language: the History of Ancient Egypt, Alex Donvour*



*Temple of Esna, Egypt. Courtesy of University of Tübingen*

# Kids' Page

## Guess?!?!?

What is a hummingbird's favorite food?

- A. Hot oatmeal
- B. Sweet nectar
- C. Corn-on-the-cob

(Answer appears at the bottom of this page.)

### For The Birds

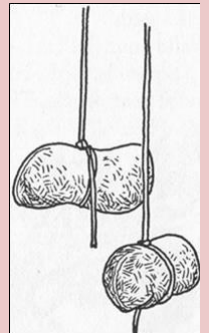
Splash! Ruffle! Splash! Have you ever watched a bird take a bath? It dips in, fluffs itself up, shakes all over, flaps its wings and flaps some more...And it looks like it's having the greatest time. Probably it is!

That's why there are so many birds in yards with birdbaths. Setting up a bath or feeder is a great way to bring birds into your yard.

And when you do, you not only get to enjoy the birds, you also get to help the Earth.

### Did You Know?

- ⇒ Birds are always hungry! They use up so much energy that they need to eat all the time.
- ⇒ Sometimes birds eat 4/5 of their own weight in one day!
- ⇒ What does that mean? Let's say you weigh 100 pounds. If you were a bird, you would have to eat 80 pounds of food between the time you woke up in the morning and the time you went to sleep at night! You can't do it! But birds can.



### What You Can Do

- ⇒ Make a bird feeder for peanuts! Take a bunch of unsalted peanuts still in their shells and tie them on a piece of yarn or string. Hang the string from a tree branch; birds will find it.
- ⇒ Another nutty idea: Spread peanut butter all over a pine cone. Be sure to fill u all the little spaces. Then hang the pine cone outside. Lots of birds like peanut butter.
- ⇒ Hang some orange peels from trees — a great bird snack!

### Make A Birdbath

- ⇒ Find a big ceramic or plastic saucer like the kind under potted plants. (Don't use metal — it will get too hot in the summer and freeze in the winter.) It should have some kind of edge around it for birds to rest on.
- ⇒ Birds don't need the water to be too deep — about two inches is perfect. Keep the bath filled with clean water.
- ⇒ If there are Cats in the neighborhood, you might need to put the birdbath up high or hang it from a tree.



### See For Yourself

For more information on bird feeding and birdbaths, go to the Audubon Society website at <https://www.audubon.org/>.



Answer: Hummingbirds love sweet nectar from flowers or sugar-water mixture in feeders.



**Audubon Society of the Capital Region**

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**for more information**

**Looking to have an impact in your  
community?**

Become an Audubon Society of the Capital Region

**Chapter Supporter!**

As a Chapter Supporter, 100% of your membership dues stay local. This helps us support local conservation efforts, continue to promote birding and bird education, and to support other special initiatives, such as the construction of bird blinds. There are four Chapter Supporter memberships available:

**Individual: \$20.00**

**Student: \$15.00**

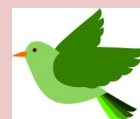
**Couple (two persons residing in same home): \$35.00**

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In return, you get:

- An official ASCR Chapter Supporter Membership card
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**Questions?**

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