



WINGBEATS

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

ASCR ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULED

by Carol Quantock

The Annual Meeting of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region will be held on Sunday, April 14, 2024, at the Kelly Adirondack Center, 897 St. David's Lane, Niskayuna, from 11:00 AM—2:00 PM.

As in the past, we will hold our business meeting first, followed by a light lunch at 12 noon. It is our pleasure to have Bill Combs, the "Eagle Guy", presenting his talk and slide show about the Schoharie County Eagle Trail. The talk will begin at approximately 1:00 PM.

Mr. Combs is nationally known for his nature and eagle photographs and has been photographing wildlife for over 30 years. His work in protecting eagle habitats is renowned.

The meeting is open to the public, but registration is required to attend. Please RSVP at <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C094AADA92EA20-48014070-audubon>.

We hope to see you there!

BIRD IDENTIFICATION SKILLS

(To identify an unfamiliar bird, focus first on four keys to identification, Living Bird, April 20, 2009)

With more than 800 species of birds in the U.S. and Canada, it's easy for a beginning bird watcher to feel overwhelmed by possibilities. Field guides seem crammed with similar-looking birds arranged in seemingly haphazard order. We can help you figure out where to begin.

First off: where not to start. Many ID tips focus on very specific details of plumage called field marks—the eyering of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet; the double breast band of a Killdeer. While these tips are useful, they assume you've already narrowed down your search to just a few similar species.

So start by learning to quickly recognize what group a mystery bird belongs to. You do this in two ways: by becoming familiar with the general shape, color, and behavior of birds, and by keeping a running tally in your head of what kinds of birds are most likely to be seen in your location and time of year.

Of course you'll need to look at field marks—a wingbar here, an eyering there—to clinch some IDs. But these four keys will quickly get you to the right group of species, so you'll know exactly which field marks to look for.

Put The 4 Keys Into Practice

Bird watchers can identify many species from just a quick look. They're using the four keys to visual identification: Size & Shape, Color Pattern, Behavior, and Habitat. In this excerpt we cover Size & Shape and Color Pattern.

Size & Shape

The combination of size and shape is one of the most powerful tools to identification. Though you may be drawn to watching birds because of their wonderful colors or fascinating behavior, when it comes to making identifications, size and shape are the first pieces of information you should examine.

With just a little practice and observation, you'll find that differences in size and shape will jump out at you. The first steps are to learn typical bird silhouettes, find reliable ways to gauge the size of a bird, and notice differences in telltale parts of a bird such as the bill, wings, and tail.

Often you don't need to see any color at all to know what kind of bird you're looking at. Silhouettes quickly tell you a bird's size, proportions, and posture, and quickly rule out many groups of birds – even ones of nearly identical overall size. Silhouettes are so useful because they help with the first step in any identification: deciding what kind of bird you've got.

Compare your mystery bird to a bird you know well. It helps just to know that your bird is larger or smaller than a sparrow, a robin, or a crow, and it may help you choose between two similar species, such as Downy and Hairy woodpeckers or Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks.

Your estimate of size gets much more accurate if you can compare one bird directly against another. When you find groups of different species, you can use the ones you recognize to sort out the ones you don't.

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NOTES FROM THE BACK WINDOW

by Carol Quantock

Well, spring is finally here, but you'd never know it by the strange weather we've had across the entire nation and worldwide. I realize that I'm "preaching to the choir", but we ignore climate change at our peril.

I've taken down my winter feeders in anticipation of putting out the hummingbird feeders at the end of April. They were thoroughly cleaned last fall and stored in critter-proof containers in our pool/garden shed. I'll do the same for the winter feeders and suet feeder this week. I continue to be somewhat baffled by the fact that I didn't have to purchase more sunflower seed, woodpecker mix, and shelled peanuts as I have in the past. I believe that this is due to the much milder winter, which resulted in fewer birds visiting, because they had ample natural food in the surrounding landscape. There's also the obvious decline in bird populations, which we can (and should) combat by planting native plants, recycling, composting, and other sustainable practices available to us.

I still haven't seen "our" Cooper's Hawk around, but have seen the results of its occasional raids. Because we have so many trees and shrubs around, small birds have hiding places available. However, every once in a while I find a little pile of feathers that probably means the Coop ate well.

ASCR has been pretty active of late, and we have lots of plans for this spring and summer, with presentations, bird walks, the annual meeting, and tabling events at various venues already scheduled. Details are on page 7. We've also been contacted by different organizations that Teresa and I are still catching up with after the Capital District Flower and Garden Show at HVCC last weekend.

In this issue, Maya Niles continues her series about birds in art. Her contributions are informative and much appreciated. She's a delight to have as a youth member of ASCR and we look forward to her active participation as time goes by.

We welcome a new intern from Union College. Her name is Genevieve Goldstein, and she is an environmental policy major with a focus on environmental problems and responses. Genevieve will be helping us at our annual meeting, so please take the time to introduce yourselves and chat with her about her exciting studies.

I hope to see you at the annual meeting! Bill Combs will be our speaker; his photos of Bald Eagles in the Schoharie area are simply breathtaking. He has been taking these photos for several years and is very knowledgeable about eagles, their nesting habits, and nest locations in the area.

PROJECT FEEDERWATCH ENDS APRIL 30

(Excerpted from *Project FeederWatch News*, April 3, 2024)

The FeederWatch season ends April 30, which means April 29 is the last day to start a two-day count.

You May Have to Confirm More Counts in April

Since this is only the fifth season that FeederWatch has run through the end of April, many species that start arriving in April are uncommon in the FeederWatch database, and it will take some time for Project FeederWatch's filters to catch up. As more participants submit reports of spring species, requests to confirm those species will decline.

Help Monitor Nesting Birds

If you spot nesting birds, you can submit your observations to NestWatch at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (<https://nestwatch.org/>) or Project NestWatch at Birds Canada, free citizen-science projects focused on breeding birds. Project participants report the location of a nest, the species using it, the number of eggs laid, and other important milestones as the adult birds incubate eggs and raise nestlings. You'll need to take a short quiz and follow common-sense guidelines in order to participate. Participants are invited to find out more about the project, sign up, learn how to safely monitor nests, and report their nest observations on the NestWatch website or the NestWatch app.

What To Do If You Find a Baby Bird

As the nesting season ramps up, so do encounters with baby birds. If you find a baby bird, the first thing to do is to determine if it is a nestling or a fledgling. If the bird is fully feathered and alert, it is probably a fledgling and should be left alone. Most baby birds people find are fledglings that have left the nest but haven't quite gotten the hang of flying yet and are still under their parents' care. Move away from the bird, and if you wish, watch from a distance to see that an adult is in the vicinity and caring for the bird.

If you find a bird that is unable to hop or walk and has areas of bare skin, it could be a nestling, in which case you can try to find a nest in the vicinity. If you can find the nest, you can place the bird back into the nest and then move away to watch from a distance.

When in doubt, your best course of action is to contact a wildlife rehabilitator. The Humane Society of the United States has a website that lists wildlife rehabilitators by state. In North America, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act prohibits handling or possessing most wild birds without a federal permit, so do not keep or attempt to raise any wild birds that you find. Learn more about the best way to respond to a baby bird on the Cornell Lab's NestWatch website.



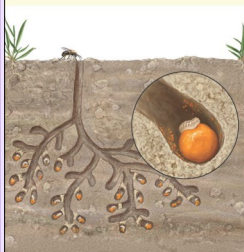
American Robin Nest by "FeederWatcher" Gary Muller, Rolla, MO

Ground Nesting Bees

Community Science Project



The **Ground Nesting Bees** Community Science Project needs your help to collect data on native bee populations and nesting sites. Your contributions will help us to better understand the importance of native bees and how to protect them in our local environments.



What to look for:
Many bees nest in large aggregations. Monitor flight activity in the early spring through late summer. Entrances in grass and soil are indicators of bee activity.



We need your help to report nesting aggregations by uploading a photo of a bee entering or exiting its nest to **iNaturalist (GNBee)**. Learn more at GNBee.org



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Bird ID Tips

(Continued from page 1)

For instance, if you're looking at a gull you don't recognize, it's a start to notice that it's larger than a more familiar bird, such as a Ring-billed Gull, that's standing right next to it. For some groups of birds, including shorebirds, seabirds, and waterfowl, using a known bird as a ruler is a crucial identification technique.

Color Pattern

A picture – even a fleeting glimpse – can be worth a thousand words. As soon as you spot a bird, your eyes take in the overall pattern of light and dark. And if the light allows, you'll probably glimpse the main colors as well. This is all you need to start your identification.

Use these quick glimpses to build a hunch about what your mystery bird is, even if you just saw it flash across a path and vanish into the underbrush. Then, if the bird is kind enough to hop back into view, you'll know what else to look for to settle the identification.

When you're trying to make an ID, focus on overall color pattern instead of matching every detail to the pictures in your field guide. Remember that birds molt and their feathers wear. Their appearance can vary if the bird is old or young, or by how well it had been eating last time it molted. And of course, the light the bird is sitting in can have a huge effect on the colors you see.

It helps to familiarize yourself with common patterns. For example, American White Pelicans are large white birds with black trailing edges to their wings. Snow Geese are similarly shaped and colored, but the black in their wings is confined to the wingtips.

Other birds seem to be trying to call attention to themselves by wearing bright patches of color in prominent places. Male Red-winged Blackbirds use their vivid shoulder patches to intimidate their rivals (notice how they cover up the patches when sneaking around off their territory). American Redstarts flick bright orange patches in their wings and tail, perhaps to scare insects out of their hiding places.

Many birds, including Dark-eyed Juncos, Spotted and Eastern towhees, American Robins, and several hummingbirds, flash white in the tail when they fly, possibly as a way of confusing predators. White flashes in the wings are common, too: look for them in Northern Mockingbirds, Red-bellied woodpeckers, and Common nighthawks.

There are some confusing bird species that sit side by side in your field guide, wearing what seems like the exact same markings and defying you to identify them. Experienced birders can find clues to these tricky identifications by noticing how boldly or finely patterned their bird is. These differences can take a trained eye to detect, but the good news is that there's a great trial case right outside at your backyard feeder. House Finches are common backyard birds across most of North America. Much of the continent also gets visits from the very similar Purple Finch. Males of the two species are red on the head and chest and brown and streaky elsewhere. The females are both brown and streaky. So how do you tell them apart? Look at how strongly they're marked.

Some birds flash by in such splendid color that they can only be one of a very few things.

These are some of the gratuitous pleasures of being a bird watcher: a blazing-orange male oriole; a scarlet cardinal or tanager; a Mountain Bluebird as pale as a winter sky. All-out assaults on your eyes like the Painted Bunting and Green Jay, or a Gulf Coast oak tree dripping with spring warblers.

Colors like these are high on the list of reasons many of us started bird watching – you probably don't need a tip from us to notice them. But we do encourage you to use those colors for a near-instant identification. Then sit back and enjoy the view.

Next issue of *Wingbeats*: **Behavior and Habitat**

STEM-NESTING BEES

How to Create Habitat for Stem-nesting Bees



LOONS AND LEAD

(Excerpted from the Native Fish Coalition website, <https://nativefishcoalition.org/>)

Lead poisoning is the leading cause of death for adult Common Loons in the Northeast, accounting for hundreds of adult loon deaths over the last 25 years. These deaths are completely preventable by using non-lead fishing tackle.

HOW DO LOONS INGEST LEAD TACKLE?

- * Eating a fish that has ingested a lead jig or sinker
- * Striking at a line being trolled or retrieved through the water with lead tackle attached
- * Picking small split-shot sinkers off the bottom of the lake, mistaking them for a pebble they normally ingest to aid in digestion

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- * Switch to lead-free tackle made from non-toxic materials such as bismuth, tin, tungsten, steel, and ceramics (please note that zinc-containing tackle is not recommended because it is also toxic to wildlife!)
- * Go through your tackle box and dispose of old lead tackle properly
- * Ask your local sporting goods store to carry lead-free fishing tackle
- * Reel in around loons
- * Educate others about the dangers of lead fishing tackle and ask them to use non-lead alternatives (and see the Fish Coalition's page of Online Retailers)
- * Attend or host a presentation or a lead tackle exchange event

HOW DOES LEAD POISONING AFFECT LOONS?

- * Ingested lead tackle is fatal to loons
- * Early signs of lead poisoning include abnormal behavior, but progress to include diarrhea, weakness, tremors, gasping and muscle paralysis.
- * Loons with late stage lead poisoning will exhibit tremors, gasping, inability to fly, and will eventually pull themselves up on shore
- * A loon will die within 2-4 weeks of ingesting lead fishing tackle
- * Adult fatality can also result from loons becoming easy targets for predators
- * Parental care of chicks decreases with adult lead poisoning and leads to increased chick mortality.

OTHER SPECIES AFFECTED BY LEAD POISONING

Although lead is toxic to all wildlife, birds are particularly at risk of lead poisoning because they often hold lead objects in the gizzard rather than passing them through their digestive systems. According to the US EPA, there are 75 species of birds at risk from lead tackle. The species on the list below are known to have died from ingested lead fishing tackle.

- * Bald Eagle
- * Waterfowl (including Common Merganser, Mallard, American Black Duck, Canada Goose)
- * Swans (including Trumpeter Swan, Tundra Swan)
- * Herons (including Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Green Heron)
- * Gulls & Terns (including Herring Gull, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern)

(Ed. Note: Lead sinkers and other fishing equipment containing lead were outlawed in New York State in 2022.)

A Tale of A Bluebird Pair

By CaptBLI for *Backyard Science*, February 23, 2024

The excited tiny chirps that Bluebirds make when they have chosen a mate and are looking for a place to raise chicks is a delightful sound that clarifies Spring's arrival. When I heard those happy sounds, the author grabbed his camera to witness the process of site selection for the "new couple" (in the title photo, *right*).

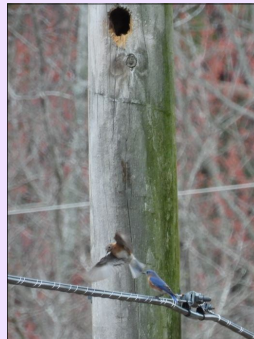


The female popped up to the hole and took a look around while the male watched.

Visit Backyard Science's website; it will keep you informed as to the couple's progress. Typically, if the Red-headed Woodpeckers return early, they will run the Bluebirds away. We hope this time there will be an exception rather than the rule.



Her inspection was tentative and she soon returned to the male. After a brief chat, it was his time to explore the hole.



He flew up and looked in. He entered and brought out some loose debris. He repeated the task of removing "trash" as the female searched the area for suitable feeding areas.

The Daily Bucket is a nature refuge. We amicably discuss animals, weather, climate, soil, plants, waters and note life's patterns. We invite you to note what you are seeing around you in your own part of the world, and to share your observations in the comments below. Each note is a record that we can refer to in the future as we try to understand the phenological patterns that are quietly unwinding around us. To have the Daily Bucket in your Activity Stream, visit Backyard Science's profile page and click on "follow".

BIRDS IN ART, PART 2

by Maya Niles

Previously, in the Winter issue of *Wingbeats* magazine, we explored art from ancient history that depicted birds, and delved into the different meanings, stories, and significance that surrounded it. This spring we will look into the Medieval era (c. 470-1500 AD) in which birds were used in various forms of art such as heraldry, tapestries, mosaics, illuminated manuscripts, and stained glass. With the rise of Christianity came the increase of religious art, and oftentimes these works featured birds as the center of the piece. When young monks would undertake their apprenticeship, one of the many tasks they performed was illuminating bibles with lush images of scripture passages, incorporating various plants, along with other designs, into the margins. These drawings frequently contained birds, sometimes perched in a stylized vine at the edge of the page, or in the form of a dove representing the Holy Spirit. Birds were also a popular choice of images in heraldry, a system that was used to distinguish different families or nations from one another using coats of arms. These crests frequently had various avian species depicted on them, and different birds had different meanings. For example, an eagle would represent strength and honor, whereas an owl often symbolized wisdom. In fact, one of the most well-known polities (a state as a political entity) in history, the Holy Roman Empire (800 to 1806 AD), used a two-headed eagle as the central aspect of their coat of arms.

Another well-known form of art from the medieval era is tapestry. Large pieces of fabric were created from dyed wool and woven into intricate designs that depicted various stories and myths. A famous tapestry that you have likely heard of or seen before is "Hunt of the Unicorn" which is actually a series of seven individual works that are shrouded in mystery, as much remains unknown about the artist and the history of these pieces. Although not the main subject of these tapestries, birds do play a key role in the art, lending the scenes a lively appearance and filling the foliage with movement.



At left: Heraldry of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, 1211 – 1250 AD



In the above image, various birds can be seen drinking from the fountain in this famous tapestry, including a goldfinch, pheasants, and other small birds. Tapestry series *The Hunt of the Unicorn*: "The Unicorn Purifies Water", c.1495-1505 AD. The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City



Book of Hours, "The Hours of the Earls of Ormond", Written in Latin, The Annunciation, c. 1300 – 1500 AD. The Harley Manuscripts, the British Library in London.

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

Hello *Wingbeats* readers, my name is Maya, and I am the author of the *Birds in Art* column in this wonderful magazine. I am a junior at the Academy of the Holy Names where I am currently studying Algebra and Chemistry, along with various other courses. Some things that I enjoy doing (besides birdwatching, of course) are playing lacrosse, skiing, and playing my viola. I also love playing with my amazing puppy Phoebe, the chocolate labrador.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Below is a list of events and programs from ASCR along with information on how to register or attend. Events below are subject to change/cancellation; please consult our website for updates.

- ◆ April 5 — Bird Identification Presentation, 10:30-11:30 AM, Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library, 475 Moe Road, Clifton Park, NY, open to the public.
- ◆ April 12 — ASCR Tabling event at Great Flats Brewing Company's Outdoor Expo, 5:00 PM, Great Flats Brewing Company, 151 Lafayette Street, Schenectady, NY, open to the public.
- ◆ April 14 — 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. Registration information can be found on page 1, the website, and our FaceBook page.
- ◆ April 21 — ASCR tabling event at Schenectady Farmers' Market, 10:00 AM-2:00 PM, 105 Jay Street, Schenectady, NY.
- ◆ April 21 — Bird Walk at Pine Hollow Arboretum, 9:00-11:00 AM, 34 Pine Hollow Road, Slingerlands, NY.
- ◆ May 4 — Bird Walk at Tivoli Preserve, 9:30-11:30 AM, Livingston Avenue & Judson Street, Albany, NY.
- ◆ May 11 — ASCR tabling event at the Troy Farmers' Market, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM, Troy Atrium, Troy, NY.
- ◆ May 12 — Bird Walk at St. Agnes Cemetery, 9:00-11:00 AM, 48 Cemetery Avenue, Menands, NY.
- ◆ May 18 — ASCR tabling event at the Thacher Park Native Plant Sale, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM, the Overlook at Thacher Park, New Scotland, NY.
- ◆ June 1 — Bird Walk at Tivoli Preserve, 9:30-11:30 AM, Livingston Avenue & Judson Street, Albany, NY.
- ◆ June 8 — ASCR tabling event at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center Get Outdoors Day, 10:00 AM-2:00 PM, 56 Game Farm Road, Delmar, NY.
- ◆ June 8 — Bird Walk at Pine Hollow Arboretum, 9:00-11:00 AM, 34 Pine Hollow Road, Slingerlands, NY.
- ◆ July 20 — Program for Children/Bird Walk at Ten Broeck Mansion, 10:30-11:30, 9 Ten Broeck Place, Albany, NY.

As of this publication, we're still looking for volunteers to assist with several of these events as well as future happenings such as fall bird walks and presentations. Email us at capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com to sign up, volunteer or find out more about our future plans.

DETAILS ABOUT THE ECLIPSE

The 2024 total solar eclipse is set to be a major event. Totality can last twice as long as in 2017, depending on the observer's location. It's also set to be the longest totality on land for over a decade, so expect eclipse-chasers from around the world to visit the path of totality.

As a bonus, the sun's corona during totality is expected to be huge. That's because the sun is close to solar maximum — when it's most active during its 11 years (or so) solar cycle.

During totality, two planets will be visible. Venus will be very bright and shine 15° from the sun even before totality begins while dimmer Jupiter, 30° from the sun, will appear during totality.

As with all eclipses, it's important to be close to the center of the path of the moon's shadow if you want to experience as long a spectacle as possible. In practical terms that means avoiding the edges of the path of totality, where its length drastically reduces. Aiming for close to the centerline is wise, but there's no need to obsess about it. Besides, a clear sky remains the most important thing.

For those after geographic oddities, the 2017 and 2024 paths cross in southern Illinois, Missouri and Kentucky, with locations such as Makanda, Carbondale and Cape Girardeau set to experience totality for the second time in seven years. For a small area of the Texas Hill Country (Uvalde, Concan, Vanderpool, Bandera and Kerrville) it will be possible to see both a 'ring of fire' annular solar eclipse's totality on April 8, 2024.



Audubon Society of the Capital Region

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**Board Meetings are held on the second
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**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

**Family (three or more adults/children residing in same home):
\$50.00**

In return, you get:

- An official ASCR Chapter Supporter Membership card
- An ASCR Chapter Supporter window cling to prevent window strikes
- The satisfaction of knowing you are supporting local birds and their habitats

Click [here](#) for more information on how you can become an ASCR Chapter Supporter!!



Questions?

Email: capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com