SUMMER 2024

WINGBEATS

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

Birders Sought For Study

ASCR received an email from **Isabel Cooke**, a researcher at the University of Toronto in Canada. Below is a description of the study plus contact information (please contact Carol Quantock for Isabel's email address):

"Our lab studies how the brain changes as we learn about the natural world. Our lab's current study is part of our wider project of connecting birding and citizen science activities with research on cognitive health and brain function.

I am emailing to ask if you would share our short online study with your members, as we are looking for bird-interested folk to participate. The study involves identification of different bird species, but is open to everyone regardless of birding background/experience. We thought some of your members might be interested in our research and want to participate in our study. If you think they would, I am attaching a graphic with the study information that we have been sending out to other groups, so you could share the graphic on your social media or through a newsletter! I'm also happy to write a custom post on our behalf. We would be so grateful for your help in getting our message out.

There's a link to the study as well as articles about this research (in Audubon Magazine, National Geographic, etc.) on our website, www.birdingstudies.com."

In This Issue...

ASCR Schedules Summer/Fall Events

by Carol Quantock

ASCR has several events in the works for this summer. Through the suggestions and recommendations of our administration, collaborations with other local groups, and inquiries from various organizations, we are keeping busy with educational projects and programs. We're also beginning to receive requests for talks and presentations into the fall. Below is a list of what events have already been scheduled, along with others that are still in the works:

- June 29 — Tabling at the Troy Farmers' Market, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM, River Street, Troy, NY 12180.
- July 1 — Beginning Birding Presentation,9:30-10:30, Bethlehem Public Library Community Room, 451 Delaware Avenue, Delmar, NY 12054.
- July 3 — Beginning Birding Bird Walk, 9:30-10:30, Five Rivers Environmental Center, 56 Game Farm Road, Delmar, NY 12054
- July 20 — Program for Children/Bird Walk at Ten Broeck Mansion,10:30-11:30, 9 Ten Broeck Place, Albany, NY.
- September, date and time TBD — Bird Walk at Most Holy Redeemer Cemetery, 48 Cemetery Avenue, Menands, NY 12204.
- September, date, time and location TBD — Annual Bird Seed Sale fundraiser for ASCR. Details will be posted as available on the ASCR website.
- October 11 — Bird Walk, 8:30-10:00 AM at Vischer Ferry Nature & Historic Preserve, Riverview Road, Vischer Ferry, NY 12148.

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.

Notes From The Back Window

by Carol Quantock

As of this writing, we have just experienced one of the hottest weeks for the month of June in recent memory. It's been much too hot for me to spend any "quality time" in the garden beds, but early morning and early evening forays have at least been productive. Among the new plants this year are 10 more spicebushes, a few wild columbines, some red maple seedlings, tamarack, red spruce, white spruce, foamflower, and green coneflower. The tree seedlings are being raided by chipmunks and squirrels, so the survivors will be relocated to containers until the fall.

It was a highly successful Eastern Black Swallowtail butterfly season on the fennel plants. At one point I counted 32 caterpillars in different larval stages (instars), all feeding happily on the fennel plants, including the bronze fennel. I didn't think they'd feed on the bronze, but sure enough they did. Of course, the caterpillars form their chrysalides in safer places, so I don't think I'll see any eclose, but I'll keep my eyes open. I did have the thrill of seeing one of the butterflies that laid all those eggs. It was a sunny morning and the last thing I expected to see on my way back from the mailbox. She was busy, landing on a few of the fennel plants.

Even though I have planted spicebushes for the last few years, the lack of Spicebush Swallowtail butterflies occupying their leaves is disappointing. That being said, this spring I noticed that some of the bushes produced flowers, meaning I have both male and female plants. That in itself is a success, even if the butterflies go elsewhere. Spicebushes are lovely all year around, but their leaves turn a bright red in the fall, and their berries provide natural food for the birds during the winter. In case you weren't aware, the Spicebush is considered the best replacement for the non-native, invasive Burning Bush.

Last week was Pollinator Week (June 17-24). I hope you had a chance to participate in some of the excellent programs offered by NYSDEC and other organizations.

Left: Spicebush Swallowtail butterfly; Below: male and female Eastern Black Swallowtail butterflies.

Union College Students Followup

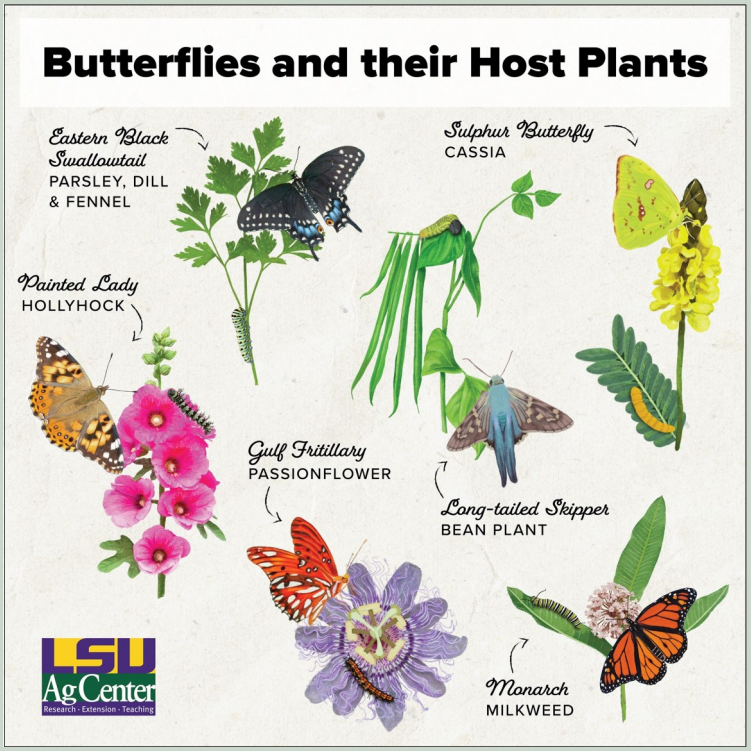
Bonnie Hoag

Creek restoration work continues

A crew from Union College visit Dionondehowa Wildlife Sanctuary and School for the annual creek restoration work day at a Battenkill tributary on April 27.

• Would you like to see your photo in the Times Union? Send JPEGs of at least 2 MB to yourbestshot@timesunion.com. Please add names, hometowns and an explanation of what's pictured. (We can't always run every photo sent to us)

A group of students from Union College worked tirelessly at a creek cleanup project at Dionondehowa Wildlife Sanctuary and School for creek restoration work day on April 27. The Sanctuary is located along the Battenkill. At far right, holding the loppers, is Alicia Cynamon, president of the Union College Ornithology Club. The students, most of whom are in environmentally-oriented majors, Their work not only benefits local environmental organizations and preserves, but provides the students with college credit and community service credit. Photo by Bonnie Hoag of the Albany *Times Union*.



Bird Identification Skills, Part 2

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

Putting 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 Behavior.

Behavior

Bird species don't just look unique, they have unique ways of acting, moving, sitting, and flying. When you learn these habits, you can recognize many birds the same way you notice a friend walking through a crowd of strangers. Chances are, you'll never see a Cedar Waxwing poking through the underbrush for seeds – or a Wood Thrush zigzagging over a summer pond catching insects. But similar-sized birds such as towhees and swallows do this all the time. Behavior is one key way these birds differ.

Because so much of a bird's identity is evident in how it acts, behavior can lead you to an ID in the blink of an eye, in bad light, or from a quarter-mile away. Before you even pick up your binoculars, notice how your bird is sitting, how it's feeding or moving, whether it's in a flock, and if it has any nervous habits like flicking its wings or bobbing its tail.

And remember that to get good at recognizing birds by their behavior, you must spend time watching them. It's tempting to put down your binoculars and grab your field guide as soon as you see a field mark. Or, after identifying a common bird, you might feel rushed to move on and find something more unusual. Resist these urges. Relax, and watch the bird for as long as it will let you. This is how you become used to the way a bird acts, how you discover it doing something new – and let's face it, it's probably why you went out bird watching in the first place.

Posture

The most basic aspect of behavior is posture, or how a bird presents itself. You can learn to distinguish many similarly proportioned birds just from the poses they assume. It's a skill that includes recognizing a bird's size and shape, and adds in the impression of the bird's habits and attitude.

Horizontal versus vertical posture is the first step. Next, get an impression of the bird: Does it seem inquisitive like a chickadee or placid, like a thrush? Does it lean forward, ready for mischief, like a crow? Or is it assertive and stiff, like a robin? Do the bird's eyes dart around after targets, like a flycatcher – or methodically scan the foliage like a vireo? Is the bird constantly on alert, like a finch in the open? Nervous and skittish like a kinglet?

Movement

As soon as a sitting bird starts to move, it gives you a new set of clues about what it is. You'll see not only different parts of the bird and new postures, but you'll also sense more of the bird's attitude through the rhythm of its movements. There's a huge difference between the bold way a robin bounces up to a perch, a mockingbird's showy, fluttering arrival, and the meekness of a towhee skulking around.

You can also tell a lot from the way the bird moves: notice whether it hops, like many sparrows, or walks like a pipit; whether it always hitches upward like a woodpecker or scurries around like a nuthatch seemingly unaware of gravity.

On the water, some ducks, such as Mallard and Northern Pintail, tip up (or "dabble") to reach submerged vegetation. Others, including Scaup and Redhead, disappear from view as they dive for shellfish and other prey. Among the divers, you'll notice that some species, such as eiders, open their wings just before they dive. These ducks flap their wings for propulsion underwater, and they almost always begin a dive this way.

Flight Pattern

Certain birds have flight patterns that give them away. Almost nothing flaps as slowly as a Great Blue Heron – you can see this from miles away. Learn the long swooping flight of most woodpeckers and you'll be able to pick them out before they've even landed.

Many small birds, particularly finches, have bouncy, roller-coaster trajectories caused by fluttering their wings and then actually folding them shut for a split second. Other little birds, including wrens, warblers, and many sparrows, fly in a straight path with a blur of little wings.

Birds of prey have their own distinct styles. Red-tailed Hawks and other buteos fly with deep, regular wingbeats or soar in circles on broad wings. Accipiters like the Sharp-shinned Hawk give just a few stiff flaps and then glide. Falcons fly with powerful beats of their sharply pointed wings. The White-tailed Kite often hovers, wings beating, pointed into the wind.

Feeding Style

Much of the time that you watch birds on the move, you'll be watching them feed, so it pays to become familiar with foraging styles. Some are obvious: the patient stalking of a heron; the continual up-and-back sprints of Sanderlings; the plunge of a kingfisher. But you can develop a surprisingly specific impression of almost any bird just from a few seconds of watching it forage.

For example, swallows, flycatchers, vireos, finches, and thrushes are all roughly the same size, but they feed in totally different manners. Swallows eat on the wing; flycatchers dart out from perches at flying bugs; vireos creep through leaves; finches sit still and crush seeds; and thrushes hop low to the ground eating insects and fruit.

Experts take this skill to incredible lengths – identifying distant seabirds on a choppy ocean just from the way they hold their wings, for example. But just as there are dozens of different ways for a person to eat an ear of corn, even closely related birds have developed their own telltale foraging habits. All it takes to discover them is time, practice, and your own powers of observation.

Flocking

A flock of kingfishers? A single starling all on its own? Some species seem to be born loners, and others are never found solo. Even among flocking birds, there are those content to travel in threes and fours, and others that gather by the dozens and hundreds.

A noisy group of yellow birds in a treetop is much more likely to be a flock of American Goldfinches than a group of Yellow Warblers. A visit to northern coasts in winter might net you several thousand Brant, but you'll probably only see Harlequin Ducks by the handful. Learning the tendencies of birds to flock – and their tolerance for crowding – is one more aspect of behavior you can use.

Just remember that many species get more sociable as summer draws to a close. After nesting is over and young are feeding themselves, adults can relax and stop defending their territories. Still, some birds stay in large groups even in summer, sometimes even nesting cooperatively. Scientists have learned this often happens when a species' food source is scattered and unpredictable, as with gulls and other seabirds, or when suitable nesting sites are hard to come by, as with many swallows.

PHOTO GALLERY

From left: Gray Catbird; Sharp-shinned Hawk; and Canada Goose with goslings at Old Westbury Gardens, Westbury, Long Island, NY.
Photos courtesy of Gerry Woulfin.

From left: Albert's Towhee; Red-tailed Hawk; Gambel's Quail; and Curve-billed Thrasher at the Phoenix Zoo, Phoenix, AZ.
Photos courtesy of Gerry Woulfin.

From left: Male Eastern Bluebird; Red-tailed Hawk; and a different view of a male Eastern Bluebird.
Photos courtesy of Tony Mawad.

Red Tail Hawk at Norman Bird Sanctuary in Middletown, RI.
Photo courtesy of Douglas Rogers.

Interested in bird photography, or on vacation and spotted an amazing bird? If so, we're interested in your photos! Experienced and beginner shutterbugs alike should submit JPEG or PNG photos capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com. Please include as much information as possible about the bird: place where the photo was taken, species if known, date and time of day, and any other helpful data.

Look Out for Giant Hogweed

(Excerpted from NYSDEC website)

Giant hogweed plants are beginning to bloom across many parts of the state, making it a prime time to spot this harmful invasive species. Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is a VERY LARGE, invasive, flowering plant from Eurasia with sap that can cause painful burns and scarring. Brushing against or breaking the plant releases sap that, combined with sunlight and moisture, can cause a severe burn within 24 to 48 hours. Giant hogweed is a Federally listed noxious weed and NYS law prohibits its possession with the intent to sell, import, purchase, transport, introduce or propagate.

Adult giant hogweed plants tend to be 7-14 feet tall with an umbrella-shaped cluster of white flowers up to 2.5 feet wide. The stem is green with purple splotches and coarse white hairs, and leaves are large (up to 5 feet across), incised, and deeply lobed. The most common lookalike found in NY is our native cow parsnip, which flowers earlier and does not have the purple splotches on the stem (but can also cause burns). You can find more identification tips, including a table of other lookalikes, on the DEC website, https://dec.ny.gov/nature/animals-fish-plants/plants/harmful-plants/giant-hogweed.

Giant hogweed is a biennial or perennial herb in the carrot family (*Apiaceae*) which can grow to 14 feet or more. Its hollow, ridged stems grow 2-4 inches in diameter and have dark reddish-purple blotches. Its large compound leaves can grow up to 5 feet wide. Its white flower heads can grow up to 2 1/2 feet in diameter. Some other plants look very similar.

Giant hogweed lookalikes:

- Cow Parsnip
- Angelica
- Wild Parsnip
- Queen Anne's Lace
- Poison Hemlock
- Common Elderberry
- Pokeweed

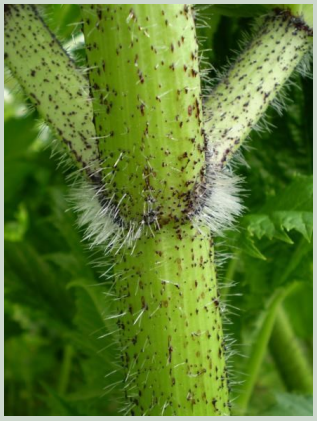
For more information and photos of lookalikes, visit the DEC website at the address above..

If you think you have found giant hogweed:

- Do not touch it.
- From a safe distance, take photos of the plant's stem, leaves, flower, seeds, and the whole plant.

Report your sighting to DEC by emailing photos and location information to ghogweed@dec.ny.gov or by calling (845) 256-3111. DEC staff will help you identify whether the plant is giant hogweed and provide you with information about giant hogweed control methods and DEC's control program.

If the plant is confirmed to be giant hogweed, DEC will seek permission from the landowner for a field crew to visit and perform giant hogweed control at no cost.

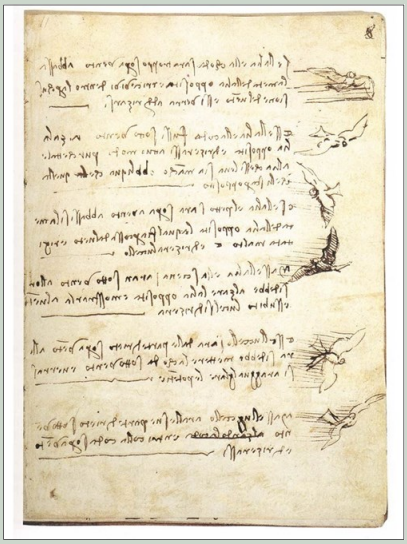


Left: hogweed leaf; Center: hogweed stem; Right: hogweed flower cluster

Birds In Art, Part 3

by Maya Niles

This summer, as we progress through the ages, we will discover the symbolism and scientific discoveries of birds in art from the Renaissance era. Taking place primarily in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Renaissance was an age of rebirth and renewal, during which classical philosophy from the ancient Greeks returned, and art and science, along with many other fields, made rapid progress. Paintings became more realistic, and the use of perspective with a vanishing point added to the three dimensionality of this new art. Birds in particular played an important role in religious art, and one of the most prominent species found in works from this time is the goldfinch. According to stories and legend, the goldfinch is said to have plucked a thorn from Jesus' forehead during the Passion, hence the permanent red mark on its forehead from the divine blood of Christ. One example of this can be found in *The Madonna of the Goldfinch*, a painting by Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio) which features the Christ Child and the infant St. John who is presenting him a goldfinch.



Above and below: Codex on the Flight of Birds, Leonardo da Vinci, ca. 1505/1506

Another bird that was favored by Renaissance painters was the peacock, who symbolized the resurrection because of the way its feathers molt, and then come back in full glory. A famous painting called *The Adoration of the Magi* by Fra Angelico features a larger-than-life peacock chasing a red pheasant, which is thought to symbolize the triumph of good over evil. Other than philosophical and religious roles, birds were also involved in the scientific developments that were occurring at the time. For example, in Leonardo da Vinci's *Codex on the Flight of Birds*, he made groundbreaking discoveries and observations about flight, in particular that of avian creatures. These developments include his creation and illustration of lines that represent invisible air flow around birds as they fly, and various contraptions he designed in an attempt to allow for human flight. The special thing about these studies is that not only are they intriguing to look at and explore, but many of the ideas presented in them hold true to this day. This is just a glimpse into the world of birds from the Renaissance era, and it just scratches the surface of the impact that they had on this period in time.

Left: The Adoration of the Magi, Fra Angelico, ca. 1440-1460; right: The Madonna of the Goldfinch, Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio), ca. 1506

KIDS' PAGE

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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:

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