



Editor's Note

The Clapper Rail is back after a short vacation, just in time for spring migration, the natural headliner of this issue. You can put aside the Warbler Guide for a few minutes, pause the birdsong playlist you were listening to. This issue came together quickly, but not without conviction: we hope there is something in it for everyone as you look ahead to the most thrilling stretch on the calendar.

Although the newsletter staff has changed, the goal is the same: a publication that reflects the knowledge and passion of this club's members. Our goal is to be topical and timely, to educate and entertain. We encourage you to write for us. Send us your photos, sketches, and drawings. We want to showcase your work. Contact us at newsletter@brooklynbirdclub.org.

Within these pages, you'll find Lotus Winnie Lee's pivotal photo of the Northern goshawk that set off a month of memorable sightings; Angie Co's customized Prospect Park map highlighting its spring hotspots; and an homage to Green-Wood from Jennifer Kepler. Plus, a preview of April, a recap of March, naturalist Nancy Tim's look at the Tulip tree, Dennis Hrehowsik's favorite birds of April, the upcoming roster of citywide birding walks and classes, and the return of the *Sparks!* column.

Enjoy, and happy birding.

— Ryan Goldberg

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April hotspots in Prospect Park

By Ryan Goldberg



For a full map of April's Prospect Park hotspots, see p.10.

Asking a Brooklyn birder to choose a favorite part of Prospect Park is bound to elicit different answers on different days. Partly it depends on where one lives relative to the park, but with spring migration already underway – the first pine warbler was reported on March 9 and Eastern phoebes are flooding the park – now is the time for a refresher on the park's various habitats and hotspots.

To Prospect denizen Peter Dorosh, four places stand above the rest: Lookout Hill, Vale of Cashmere, Quaker Ridge/Ravine, and the Peninsula. At this early stage, the highest activity concentrates around the south shore of the lake, where insects hatch and migrating birds begin feeding after grueling overnight flights. Being there at daybreak increases the odds of memorable sightings.

"All the gems of the mid-April birds are found along the waterways," says Dennis Hrehowsik, who will again be leading the club's Saturday morning walks beginning on April 15.

The golden-yellow Prothonotary warbler tends to be in low-brush overhanging the lake; Blue-winged teal huddle in quiet pockets near West

Island; and swallows begin carving flight patterns over the lake. In the fast-running creeks of the Ravine and Nethermead Arches, the first Louisiana waterthrush often surfaces, says park veteran Kathy Toomey.

As the sun rises, the birds begin pushing up Lookout Hill; the tallest point in the park, it acts like a butterfly net. Many say the best hour to visit Lookout is 7. Its butterfly meadow fills up with Common yellowthroat and the switchback trail from the Maryland Monument presents magnolia warblers at eye level and Blackburnian, bay-breasted, and Cape May warblers signing in the tops of the trees. Oak trees, Peter says, offer the greatest variety of insects and thus are a magnet for the likes of warblers.

Fallouts – when birds are so hungry that they start dropping down en masse, almost oblivious to their human observers – are most likely to occur on the south slope of Lookout Hill, according to Dennis, and especially during the beginning of May. Predicting them is another matter.



Yellow warbler. Credit: Tom Stephenson

During spring migration, the optimal overnight wind is from the south-southwest. Warblers, to use a favorite group, have an uncanny sense of when to fly north: about an hour after sunset when their eyes catch the southern sun. But where they arrive, and when, depends on a

number of variables like the wind and the insects they eat.

“It’s all a matter of survival, economizing their fat content, and rushing against time to get to their breeding grounds,” Peter says.

April concocts a heady brew of departing waterfowl and tropical arrivals. Hooded and Prairie warblers usually arrive in mid-April, as well as Yellow, Worm-Eating and Northern parula. Other members of the vanguard include: Blue-gray gnatcatcher and Eastern kingbirds, hermit and wood thrush, orioles, select sparrows, migrating raptors and, at the end of the month, tanagers and cuckoos.



Baltimore Oriole. Credit: Tom Stephenson

Around nine, birders may want to consider the Peninsula – surrounded by water on all sides and flush with native trees like the cluster of pines at its tip – or a northward swing along Quaker Ridge to the Ravine and its pools. The often-overlooked perimeter of West Drive, from Third Street to Grand Army Plaza, is a promising row of Oak, American sweetgum, and Tulip trees.

Despite spending so much time gazing into trees, “remember to always look up,” says Bobbi Manian, the leader of the club’s Tuesday migration walks. “Maybe you will see a Mississippi kite or Little blue heron” – two previous rare local sightings – “flying over the lake.”

Still, she adds, “You can’t go wrong following the water.” The back paths of the Upper and Lower Pool are outstanding spots for finding herons and the likes of Canada warbler or an unforgettable golden-winged warbler. By noon, birds may have reached the Ambergill Creek, which one can survey from the Esdale Bridge. The Ambergill also tends to attract birds in the late afternoon – for bathing or drinking – which in turn draws birders who miss the early-morning outings.

That is, unless an alert comes in on Twitter sending one hustling to the Vale of Cashmere. After all, spring migration is like the playoffs of birdwatching: short and dramatic. As club member Chris Laskowski put it to me, “We live for this time, right?”

Wish you were a better birder? Now is the time to work on your skills!

By Janet Schumacher

Spring migration is about to begin. Tens of thousands of birds will pass through NYC – some to stay and nest and others just to refuel on their way to breeding grounds. Birders are up early, eager to see these visitors when they are most hungry and active. You too can join the fun.

You now are able to identify all the winter feeder birds, but what about warblers? So small, high up in the leaves and moving quickly. Just brief snatches of color; last spring you struggled. Beginner or middling, there are plenty of free or low cost opportunities to learn to identify birds and their most common songs.

For starters, Tom Stephenson is giving an introduction to birdwatching and the birds of Prospect Park on Tuesday, April 25 at 7 PM in the Park Slope Food Coop’s meeting room. Tom is an expert birder with amazing hearing, a

musician and the author of the Warbler Guide. He will present an overview on what birds you can expect to see and hear in the coming weeks, including scarlet tanagers, orioles, hawks and those warblers.



No, I'm not a member, I'm here for the Introduction to People-watching talk.

Follow that up with free morning walks offered by the Brooklyn Bird Club every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings in Prospect Park. Walks begin around 7 and generally last until noon. Please bring binoculars. Check the website for additional trips: <http://brooklynbirdclub.org>. But if you'd prefer to sleep later, Michelle Dreger leads a free introductory walk on Saturdays at noon from the boathouse Audubon Center. Binoculars are provided or bring your own.

Joe Giunta teaches an excellent introductory birding course offered by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden beginning April 22. To register: 718-623-7200. Historic Green-Wood Cemetery, with its entrance arches full of nesting Monk parakeets, is a great birding spot. Rob Jett leads weekly low-cost walks there: citybirder@blogspot.com.

In Manhattan, Gabriel Willow leads free short walks before and after work in Bryant Park: <http://www.bryantpark.org/plan-your-visit/birds.html>. The Linnaean Society, based at the Museum of Natural History, offers a free Central Park walk every Tuesday morning in

April and May at 7:30, meeting at 72nd and Central Park West: <http://linnaeannewyork.org/>. The Society also hosts a monthly evening lecture series.

NYC Audubon offers trips, lectures, and activities including hands-on service projects such as Safe Flight: <http://www.nycaudubon.org>. Volunteers are trained to rescue birds injured during peak migration. The Urban Park Rangers has an extensive program in city parks. And there are free birding walks in both the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the NY Botanical Garden.

Children with their keen eyesight are welcome on most walks if accompanied by an adult. Birding is a great excuse to explore the world and NYC. Recently a bald eagle was spotted flying over Prospect Park. A trip to the Rockaways may yield the endangered Piping Plover and even jam-packed Coney Island has hosted rare seabirds. Hope to see you out there.

My three favorite birds of April

By Dennis Hrehowsik

Ryan asked me to kick off this new column about favorite birds and locations during each month of the year. Be warned I will probably ask you to write one soon. April, when a young birder's fancy turns from thoughts of gulls and winter waterfowl to early neo-tropical migrants. The waterways of Prospect Park (of course) are the perfect place to embrace this special season. I'll give you three of my favorite birds to look for during the month of April. Sometimes I refer to these species as my "hobby within the hobby" on my walks.

Blue-winged teal: This diminutive duck is a semi-annual visitor to the park and can be found almost anywhere on Prospect's waterways. Pay special attention to the area around West Island. They also like vegetation

and brush along the water's edge and in recent years have taken a shine to the Upper Pool.

Bank swallow: Look for this little collared cutie mixed in with the larger Barn and Rough-winged over Prospect Lake. This annual visitor can often be found naked-eye by their flight style: periodically, the Bank swallow will rise sharply, roll and glide, sometimes spiraling down a few feet. The Peninsula thumb has offered me some of the best views of this species over the years.



Prothonotary warbler. Credit: Tom Stephenson

Prothonotary warbler: This papal overshoot can be found foraging in brush overhanging the water, typically belt-buckle high or lower. Favorite haunts of this golden swamp warbler include Duck Island, the Lower Pool and sometimes in transit between the two along the Lullwater.

See you in the field.

The March roundup: a goshawk takes Brooklyn

By Ryan Goldberg

I only met one birder in March who wasn't fussed about the immature Northern goshawk that attracted observers from all over the city to Prospect Park. He was from Norway, and he

had other species to check off his life list.

"We get them all the time in Norway," he said. "I'm here to see a Northern *cardinal*."

Our Scandinavian visitor aside, last month in birdwatching Brooklyn turned into an all-day stakeout of Terrace Bridge and the Breeze Hill feeders for this majestic raptor, happy to stay here for two months at the southern edge of its range. "Have you seen the goshawk?" became a familiar refrain in the park. Peter Dorosh said he hadn't seen one perched here in 25 years.

The secretive goshawk had been around since early February, eluding Prospect's old-timers while being photographed by a few beginners who couldn't identify it at the time; that is, until the end of February, when Kathy Toomey and Lotus Winnie Lee, who had been photographing the bird for several weeks, found it perched above the feeders. Kathy sounded the call, and a cast of raptor specialists confirmed the identification. But then the goshawk didn't turn up for days, and the chance was apparently lost.



Lotus Winnie Lee's photos of the Northern goshawk sparked a month-long (and counting) stakeout at the Terrace Bridge.

After a week or so, sightings began trickling in again, the goshawk dragged a frantic group around the Nethermead on a few flyovers, and finally, on March 13 – a Monday – it began settling around Terrace Bridge with near-regularity for the next two weeks.

It might have been encouraged to stay by the pickings that second week of March: an American woodcock fallout following a late-winter snowstorm. The Nerf-like shorebirds, as one person described them, had to come out from their camouflaged hideouts in search of worms in the few unfrozen patches they could find.



American woodcock in Prospect Park. Credit: Heidi Clevén

They turned up in streets and backyards and parks big and small, often dazed and malnourished; the Wild Bird Fund rescued three dozen, and the numbers between Central and Prospect Parks alone tallied over 100. Even the New York Times reported on the unusual scene. It was a grisly one, too, as red-tailed hawks preyed on them; Prospect's goshawk joined in. After two days, the snow began to melt and the remaining woodcock could tuck themselves away again.

If the pine warbler is an indication, spring migration started a month ahead of schedule this year. On March 9, Angie Co spotted the park's first in a pine sapling, opposite the zoo's back gate in the North Midwood. Peter Dorosh was quickly on the scene. "Son of a gun," he said, training his binoculars on the yellow-and-

olive warbler.

Checking his records later, he found that the earliest report in the park was 20 days later – in 1968. Whether it had come from South Brooklyn – there was an overwintering pine warbler at Dreier-Offerman Park – or the southern United States, it was a migrant.

Among many other standouts in Brooklyn, a pair of Red-necked grebes turned up in Coney Island and an Eared grebe in Gravesend Bay (courtesy of Doug Gochfeld); a pair of Black-headed gulls were seen on the Bay Ridge coast (thanks to Tripper and Daisy Paul), as well as by Dennis Hrehowsik on his lunch break in Red Hook; the wintering Eurasian wigeon in Marine Park was joined by a second at Coney Island Creek (found by Linda Ewing on a BBC walk); and by the end of the month, a number of Wilson's snipe (one seen by Kristin Costello at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden) and osprey had returned to the marshes and beaches.

It was finally spring, but Prospect Park, often quiet during the seasonal transition, stole the show in March.

Naturalist's column: the Tulip Tree

By Nancy Tim



Spring heralds a kaleidoscope of flowers and colors: pinks, reds, yellows, purples and shades in-between. But one of the loveliest of spring flowers often goes unnoticed as the blossoms sit 40-50 feet high on the tall, stately, tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*).

The greenish-orange flower is, as the name implies tulip-like in shape; the blooms are most often borne at the tops of the uppermost branches and are not readily admired by us humans until they fall from the tree.

The flowers produce an abundance of nectar that attracts bees and other insects, which in turn attract birds of the upper canopy like grosbeaks, orioles, tanagers, and even hummingbirds.

The flowers and the mitten-shaped leaves usually start to appear mid-to-late spring just around the time that the grosbeaks, orioles, and tanagers begin arriving. These birds in particular are often seen nipping at the young flower buds or feasting on the insects attracted to the nectar.

After the bright canary-gold foliage of autumn has fallen, the cone-like fruits are very visible and provide many months of winter interest. Their papery seeds provide food for finches, cardinals, and other bird species, along with small mammals such as chipmunks, squirrels, and mice.

There are a number of tulip trees planted throughout Prospect Park. Their height and gray-fissured bark and stateliness add beauty to the landscape, not to mention their tulip-like flowers, brilliant autumn foliage, and their cone-like fruits of winter.

Can't find one? Look in the Vale for some orioles and tanagers. They will ID the tree for you!

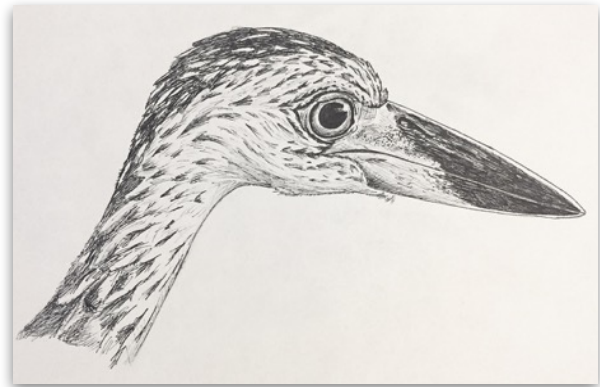
My local patch: The Dell Water at Green-Wood Cemetery

By Jennifer Kepler

Living around the block from the Fort Hamilton entrance to Green-Wood Cemetery, I often find myself wandering around the place. I've fallen in love with Green-Wood due to its quiet and

shortage of people – well, living ones that is. And its Dell Water is a place I always aim to visit.

It was part of a once-larger existing kettle-pond, formed at the end of the glacier that once edged up through Green-Wood and across Brooklyn more than 11,000 years ago. Now it's edged with brick that tends to be constantly dripping into the water itself, which attracts insects and the birds that eat them.



Yellow-crown night-heron, ink on paper drawing by Jennifer Kepler.

In spring, the pool boasts armies of green frogs that come out from their overwintering, and large common snapping turtles that evoke thoughts of dinosaurs. But what brings me there are the migrating birds: warblers and other passerines buzzing through the air to capture insects. In 2014, I spotted a Mississippi kite soaring high up above the water, forever etching this place into my memory.

On my most recent walk there, the water level was low, and the exposed mud allowed our group to find a Rusty blackbird turning over leaves as it foraged. Slowly, through the spring and summer, Spotted and Solitary sandpipers arrive on its muddy slope. In the summer, Great blue herons, Great egrets, and Green herons turn up here; you are guaranteed to see at least one on a visit. A number of Green herons called it home last summer and nested over its waters.

Come fall, the apple trees on its banks attract the local Green-Wood whistling pigs that fatten up on the fallen fruit. It turns quieter in the

Our first stop in the park was the Vale of Cashmere. This secret garden called to mind Paris in the 19th century, a world apart from the nearby Long Meadow. I wrote down every bird we saw, and the names alone were delightful, each a picture: Worm-eating warbler, catbird, Blue-gray gnatcatcher, Tufted titmouse, Ovenbird, Solitary sandpiper.

I saw my first veery, and, inspired by my literary list, I tried my own hand at detail, noting its *reddish-brown chest hair*. It wasn't very scientific, but it's a description I will always remember (and perhaps also those few who heard me call it out—apologies).



Before long we were at the Boulder Bridge, deep in the Ravine. I'd never seen these parts of the park before. After craning our necks all morning, the bridge allowed us to catch birds at eye level. From there, fifty feet away, the group spied a male Scarlet tanager sitting on a tiny branch. Its lipstick-red body was set off by obsidian wings and tail. He seemed like a visitor from another planet, and in a sense he was: from the Amazon rainforest to urban tangle of Flatbush Avenue.

As I stood there, mesmerized, another bird alighted alongside him. This one was slightly larger, with a black head and black-and-white marks on his wings, tail, and back. He turned his body and showed a dripping shield of red. It was the male Rose-breasted grosbeak, and the juxtaposition of colors on this tiny perch was spectacular.

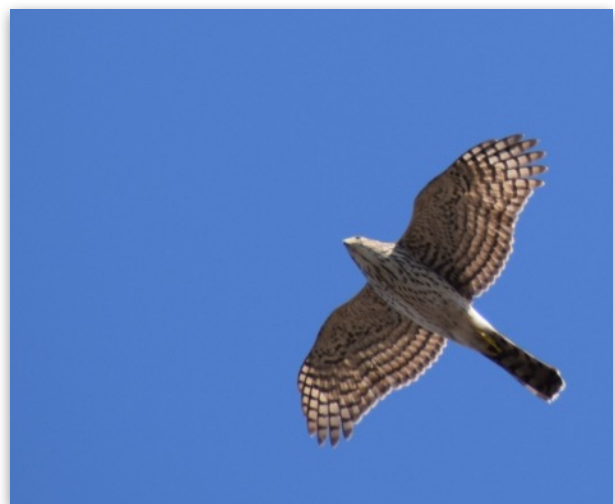
In time, I'd rack up dozens of reasons why I love birding, and maybe one day I'll collect them all in one place. But at that moment, in woods as far as away from the city as possible, this sight alone was enough.



Club Gallery



At a club meeting on March 21, Tom Stephenson and Rob Bate spoke about their recent expedition to Antarctica. To see photos from their trip, visit: <http://www.tombirdphotos.com/Nature/Antarctica>.



One of several Cooper's hawks seen on the club's Great Backyard Bird Count in Prospect Park on February 18. Credit: Adam Nashban

PROSPECT PARK APRIL PREVIEW SPOTS

5 VALE OF CASHMERE
ALL DAY

**4 QUAKER RIDGE
& RAVINE**
9 AM - 12 PM

2 LOOKOUT HILL
7 - 9 AM

3 PENINSULA
9 AM - 12 PM

1 SOUTH SIDE OF LAKE
DAWN - 7 AM

Credit: BBC & Prospect Park Alliance maps,
edited with additional information by Angie Co

