

May 2017

Brooklyn Bird Club's

CLAPPER RAIL

THE MIGRATION ISSUE



Editor's note



Clapper rail at Plumb Beach (above) and yellow-throated warbler (cover). Credit: Marc Brawer

You may not recognize the publication you're holding in your hands, and I don't blame you. The Clapper Rail returned last month after a hiatus, and the response was overwhelmingly positive and gratifying. Several club members volunteered to join in the fun, and you'll see their bylines and credits in the following pages. But a special mention goes to Tina Alleva, whose graphic-design wizardry helped shape the "Migration Issue." We believed that the last issue read like a magazine, and now it looks like one, too. Tina and Angie Co collaborated on a design that delightfully pairs a mix of art to our articles. The Clapper Rail is a work-in-progress, and we hope you will stay with us and share your feedback.

I wish I could say that the issue's additional theme of bird rescue was premeditated, but it came together in delightful happenstance. First Jennifer Kepler offered to write about her rescue of a common loon at Marine Park, and then a bird many local birders chased after—a prothonotary warbler at the same place—found itself in need of helping hands after a run-in with a bivalve. Additionally, the BBC announced that its Birdathon beneficiary would be Manhattan's Wild Bird Fund, which has saved so many injured birds. Adelia Honeywood profiled the WBF for our feature story.

Befitting the greatest month of the year, there's much more: Tom Stephenson on helping others get on a bird; Michele Dreger on her favorite birds of May; Molly Adams on the Feminist Bird Club; Gus Keri on his introduction to birdwatching; and Heather Wolf on Brooklyn Bridge Park.

As before, we encourage you to write for us or send us ideas. Submit your photos, sketches, and drawings. Our next issue is scheduled for some time in June. Contact us at newsletter@brooklynbirdclub.org.

– Ryan Goldberg

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A visit to the...



WILD BIRD FUND

By Adelia Honeywood

Over the past few years, I have probably taken half a dozen sick or injured birds to the Wild Bird Fund, a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation center in Manhattan. All of my rescues were named Adelia since the WBF names the birds after the people who bring them in. The first time I went there I brought in a small sparrow (I don't remember the species) and was greeted by a veterinarian aptly named Robin, who examined the bird right there in front of me, gently spreading each wing and searching its tiny body for wounds or lesions. I've also brought in a number of city pigeons, including a young bird with a broken wing that I found at Costco and that accompanied me in a box on the bottom rack of my shopping cart while I quickly finished my shopping. Fortunately, Costco didn't charge me for him.

WBF is the beneficiary of this year's BBC Birdathon, no doubt inspired by the organization's care of dozens of American woodcocks brought to them after New York City's mid-March blizzard which impeded the woodcocks' migration and left them starving because their food was buried in snow. WBF received 39 woodcocks on one day and 15 the next, nearly as many as in all of 2016.

WBF's Director Rita McMahon explained to me that woodcocks—two-thirds of whom usually die of their injuries upon arrival—are notoriously difficult to rehabilitate.

"They won't eat on their own,"

McMahon said, "so they have to be picked up and tube-fed six times a day just to

maintain their weight, but they also die of stress easily because they are so unaccustomed to human contact."

They also have a defense response of leaping straight up into the air to surprise their attacker and will do this against the walls of a carrier or box. Therefore, McMahon cautions rescuers to put them in a paper bag so they don't arrive with their "scalp torn open." At WBF, crazed woodcocks get their own padded rooms for safety: soft-sided human infant travel beds sold under the name Pea Pods.

Because of the stress of handling, WBF has to make a calculation that the birds can survive slightly below their optimal target weight for release. They released several on the South Fork of Long Island which had not been hit by snow and from where the birds could continue their migration. Upon release half of the group flew off and the other half immediately started foraging nonchalantly at the feet of their former captors.

"We're going to treat them all because it's just to make New Yorkers value their wildlife."

When I arrived at the WBF recently to take a tour, there was a pair of Muscovy ducks lounging on gym mats in the middle of the floor. The large male was suffering from a congenital deformity that made his feathers spiny. Nearby were two domestic ducks that were the result of drunken online duck ordering and a friend who intervened. (Remember: friends never let friends order ducks drunk). A pair of roosters strutted around crowing, and more domestic ducks swam in a nearby tank, near a Canada goose with an injured neck. A handwritten sign was taped above the duck tank: "Do Not Talk to the Ducklings," so that wild ducklings won't imprint on visitors.

In the basement, scrubs-clad staff bustled about in a room crammed with pet carriers and kennels filled with recovering pigeons, while other pigeons roamed the room freely. McMahon took me into a small room in the back called The Flyway, where songbirds can exercise



their flight muscles before release. In The Flyway robins and cardinals hopped about around our heads while a pair of rescued coturnix quail, raised for meat, pecked around at our feet.

Last year WBF took in 4,775 individual birds and small mammals for medical care and rehabilitation. Just over half were pigeons but also included were 100 species of other birds including owls (one year a snowy was shot at JFK), raptors, ducks, geese, egrets, songbirds, woodpeckers, and small mammals. McMahon has wonderful stories, such as about a red-tailed hawk named Darienne, who was rescued from the window well in the home of her namesake by the city-contracted Animal Care Centers of New York City (ACC). Darienne couldn't open her talons because they were covered in tar. Staff wrapped her in a towel and cleaned her feet with Q-tips and mayonnaise and tried to massage them open. The next day when they laid her on her side in the towel, out came her two feet. She was ready for her foot massage!

WBF has trained staff at ACC to rescue large wild birds such as Darienne, and in turn WBF takes rescued barnyard fowl such as the ducks and roosters because no city agency is equipped to work with them. At WBF, there is no hierarchy saying this bird or animal species is more valuable than that one, and common or invasive species are not turned away.

"This was a very conscious decision," McMahon told me, noting that most of the public does not know the difference between native and non-native species. "They are just trying to help an injured animal and they cared enough to find this place and to come here. . . . We're going to treat them all because it's just to make New Yorkers value their wildlife. They don't know the difference and it will have a positive effect on all species if we change people's attitudes."

As for pigeons, WBF has a special fondness for them. "It's the people who bring in the pigeons who pay for this place," said McMahon. "They are the most accessible wildlife for people in New York City, for the kids, the elderly, everyone. We think they're fabulous birds."

You can read more stories about WBF rescues: a supposedly crippled turkey vulture that flies off with his wild companions; an escape-artist screech owl; a thuggish ruddy duck; and many more at <https://www.wildbirdfund.org/success-stories/>.



HOW TO HELP AN INJURED BIRD

For more information, visit: <https://www.wildbirdfund.org/how-to-help/rescue/>

Baby Birds

- May not need rescue. See additional instructions and flow chart at the end of this issue.

Window Strikes

- Don't assume a bird is dead. Prod its legs gently and if they move freely it may recover.
- Keep the bird warm. McMahon suggests putting it in your pocket to warm it up.
- Then place it in a paper bag or box: To prevent escape from a bag, use your free hand to close the top of the bag around your wrist as you withdraw your hand from the bag. Fold over the top of the bag once or twice and clip it shut with a clothespin or binder clip.
- Put the bag or box in a dark, quiet spot, and let the bird rest for an hour. Do not open the bag – the bird could escape and hurt itself again.
- After an hour, carefully peek into the bag or listen for signs of activity. If the bird is alert, it can be safely released.
- Release in a park with a water source away from buildings and traffic. Prospect Park is a good place.
- If it has not recovered but is still alive, take it to the Wild Bird Fund. They do take walk-ins during open hours but if possible call ahead at 646-306-2862 or use the online contact form at <https://www.wildbirdfund.org/contact/>.

Pigeons

- Read how to pick up and temporarily house a pigeon at <https://www.wildbirdfund.org/how-to-help/rescue/>.
- Or report it to the New York City Pigeon Rescue Committee through their online form.

Other Situations

- If it is a bird that you cannot pick up yourself, call 311. Animal Care Centers of NYC have been trained to rescue wild birds and they will take it to the Wild Bird Fund.
- New York City Audubon can also help with transporting injured birds to rehabilitators: 212-691-7483

BIRDATHON!

By Rob Bate

May 13—Birdathon Saturday—is almost here. The Brooklyn Bird Club’s designated beneficiary this year is the heroic Wild Bird Fund, which just rescued 100 or more American woodcocks during the recent snowstorm that coincided with their peak migration. The WBF is the go-to organization in the metro area for rescuing, rehabbing, and releasing wild birds that have suffered an injury or are in need of medical care.

The idea of the Birdathon is to form or join a team and go out and count bird species. Typically participants hit up friends and family for donations, usually a set amount per bird species counted during the course of the day.

Bobbi Manian has graciously agreed to organize teams for us again this year; if you have a team or would like to join a team, please let her know: roberta.manian@gmail.com. (She could also use a co-director if anyone would be willing to give her a hand and lessen her burden.)

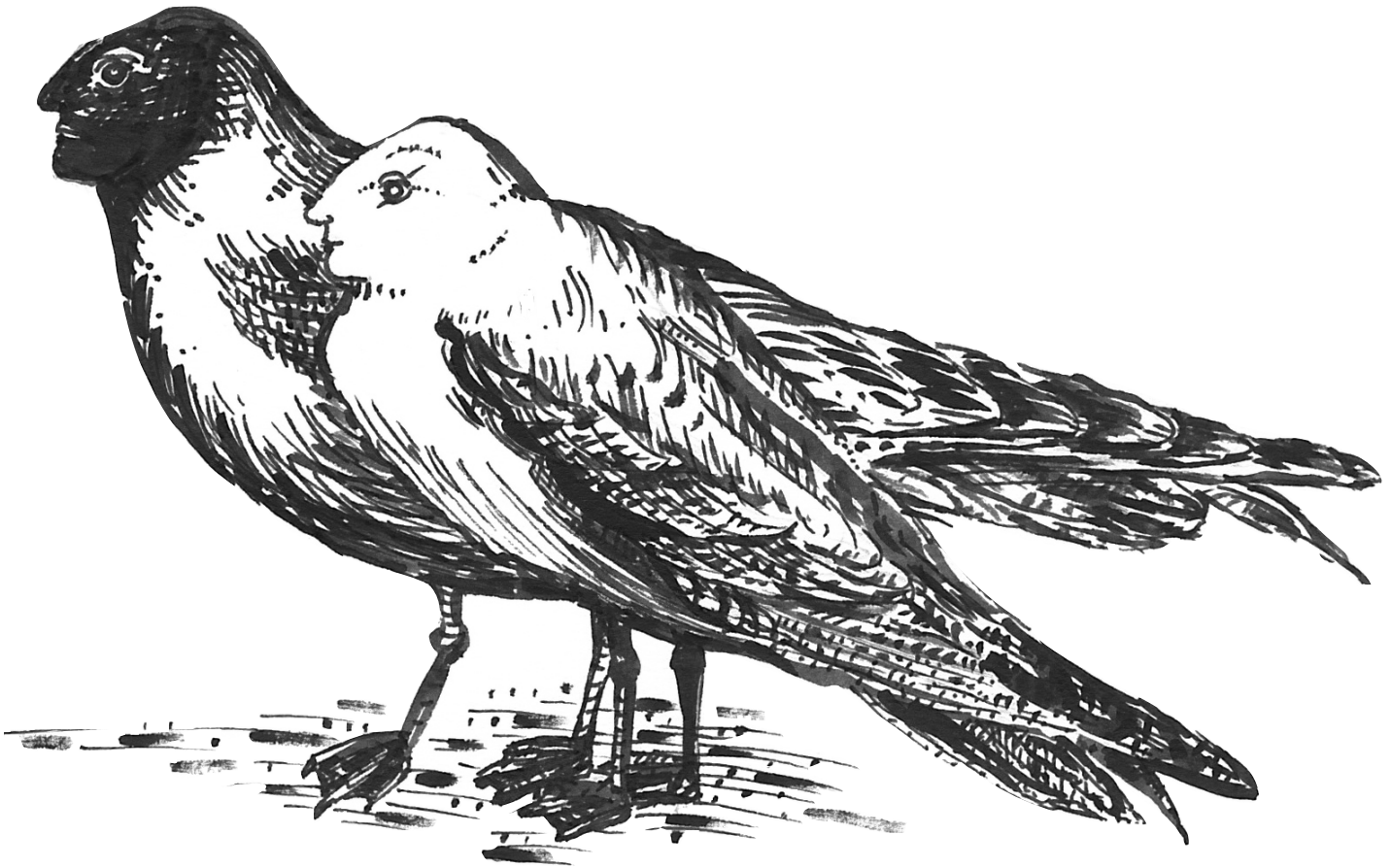
Please feel free to participate at any level you wish. Some of us like to have a leisurely cup of coffee before setting out for the day, and other teams (you know, the fanatics) get up before dawn to try and bag an owl or two before the sun comes up – it’s your call.

For those not up for a full day of birding, Michele Dreger’s introduction to birdwatching group will meet at noon at the boathouse in Prospect Park and go out for a few hours. All are welcome here without reservation, but bring binoculars!

The mission of the Birdathon is to have fun and raise money for a worthy cause on International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD). This year’s official theme is “Stopover Sites: Helping Birds Along the Way,” and Prospect Park and Green-wood Cemetery are world-class migrant traps, providing food and cover for songbirds flying over our vast city. Let’s go out and have some fun now that spring is finally here!



You don’t have to be an expert to join a team!



A Rare Species, ink and paper drawing by Toni Simon.

My three favorite birds of May

by Michele Dreger

I know Dennis wrote this column last month, but come on, how do you pick your favorite birds of spring and narrow it down to three? Almost every bird is my favorite bird in May. Instead, here are my three favorite birding adventures for May: early-morning birding, International migratory bird day, and Mother's Day.

In early May, when the leaves are all filled in and the migrants are passing through, I like to take a solitary walk through Prospect Park. Just close your eyes and listen to the sounds. I walk to the highest point in the park. The trails on Lookout Hill are full of them: yellow, red, blue and green. You don't need to know what they are! If you get the chance to see a black-throated blue warbler in the right sunlight, it is amazing. If you are in the right place at the right time, an explosion of termites is a bird-feeding frenzy. One

year, the Brooklyn Bird Club held a "sit" at the top of Lookout. It was like going to church on Sunday—the birds, decked out in their finest, came to see the birdwatchers.

International migratory bird day, on the other hand, is like a parade. Always the second Saturday, this year it's the 14th. The big day is fun. Competing with yourself or another team makes it a game. Woodpecker Bingo or 26 Warblers are two favorites. Seeing a yellow-billed cuckoo or a line of birders climbing the switchback trail up Lookout stir up the same enthusiasm in me.

Mother's Day, the following day, is my bird day. It's personal! I drag my family out to the park or Green-wood Cemetery. I'm on a mission: They must see a scarlet tanager. That is what I ask for every Mother's Day. Early on, my daughter didn't want to go birdwatching. But she did enjoy going to the park and having a picnic. She's learned to love it over the years. Every once in a while she'd catch a glimpse of an American redstart with its red and black flashing. You can't really be disappointed that it's not a scarlet tanager. If you see a bright yellow warbler or a goldfinch, is it any less beautiful?

How to help others find a bird

by Tom Stephenson

Ed. note: This classic was published in the Clapper Rail in 2009, and again in 2014, but with new members and new readers as spring migration reaches its peak, we think it's worth reprinting. Thanks to Tom for the permission.

"We're sorry, sir, your plane just left..." Those few words strike fear and panic in the heart of any traveler.

For birders, the same effect can be caused by this sentence: "Don't you see it; it's over there, right in that tree....oops, it just flew." In fact, statements like this, especially when involving potential life birds, have undoubtedly broken up friendships, caused nice, friendly people to turn into maniacs and no doubt even precipitated a divorce or two. In the old days, it wasn't such a big deal. You just shot the bird and passed it around. But today things are different.

Why is it that some people just can't seem to get you "on" a bird no matter how hard they try, and others can magically help a whole group instantly find an otherwise invisible avian treasure? This article offers answers to this question, along with some basic tips on how to help your fellow birders find a bird as quickly as possible...and keep your friendships and

marriages intact!

First of all, let's start with a short list of what NOT to do when trying to help someone find a bird you have spotted.

At the top of the list is this suggestion: don't repeatedly state: "Can't you see it, it's over there!" This is like shouting to your birding mates: "Are you blind, or just idiots?" It's a bit like throwing gasoline on a fire. Trust me, it never produces any positive results.

Avoid phrases like: "It's right in the Eustacia eruditia, behind the ." Unless you are traveling with the chief gardener of the Queen's estates, don't assume anyone knows the scientific or even common names of the trees and shrubs of the local area. Find some other way to enhance your reputation. Showing others you know what the names of the local plants are won't keep you from getting tossed off the cliff if they can't find the bird!

Don't hog the "window." If you are looking at a thrush or a warbler through a small gap in the foliage, you may have to relinquish your spot so others can see the bird. And no directions, no matter how accurate, will help them see it if they are blocked from the only good viewpoint.

Don't scrutinize a possibly rare species for a long time, check your book, and call the local bird club president from your cell phone just to be sure you won't be embarrassed when you call out a bird. If it has even the most remote possibility of being a good species, let everybody know. They will forgive you if it's only a European starling, but could easily tie you up and leave you in the woods for the ants if it turns out to be a really good bird and you waited too long to tell everybody.

Don't assume that just because you have seen a bird many times others in your group have also seen it. Saying, after the fact, "Let's head on over there where the sage sparrow was sitting" might be just as inflammatory as any of the other scenarios above if sage sparrow is a special bird to one of your travel mates.

Don't say: "It's flying over there, above the Turkey Vulture." This won't do any good unless



everybody else knows where the TV was last seen.

Don't flap your arms, scream mightily, or throw things in the general direction of the bird. You are trying to find the bird for your friend, not reveal your friend to the bird. Frustration on your part because someone else can't find a bird is like blaming your car for running out of gas. You know where the bird is. The other people don't. It's up to you to figure out how to show it to them. They are already frustrated, and adding your frustration to the mess will only add to the pain and waste time and energy.

If a bird is flying, don't say, "In the clouds." Unless there is only one tiny cloud in the sky, saying it is in the clouds is about as good as saying, "It's in the trees."

Don't use feet, meters, yards or other standard units of measure unless the distances are very small and will be clear to everyone. Unless everybody in your group is a surveyor, saying a hawk is perched 300 meters away is next to useless. One person's meter is another person's foot. And that foot might be coming in your direction. Trust me...



Kentucky warbler--right in the leaves by the Eustacia Eruditia, 30 cubits from the squirrel. Photo: Janet Zinn

So what can you do to really help people get on a bird quickly? Here are several tips that, when used properly, should really help you become that "magic" person who can quickly help other birders find a bird.

Tip number one: Begin your directions with a point everybody can definitely locate. It must be something so obvious and unique that there can be no confusion at all about what the starting point is for your directions. Whereas this might seem obvious, this is very important step is probably the most neglected when helping someone else find a bird.

“Let people know right away if the bird is flying or perched.”

For example, let's assume you are looking at a rare sparrow perched in the middle of a group of yellow flowers. It might be tempting to say: "Right there in the middle of that group of yellow flowers." However, if there are several other groups of yellow flowers around, and you might not even see them if you are just focusing on the bird, then others may not find the right spot.

It will be much more effective for you to say: "The group of yellow flowers just above the stop sign." Now there is no chance for confusion.

In fact, it is often best to start with something ridiculously close to the viewers and work out from there. This is particularly true if there are members of your party who really have a tough time finding birds. Once someone is looking for the bird in the wrong group of yellow flowers, they will never find the bird.

If you can start from an object that is very obvious to them, and then work your way out to the bird using objects equally clear, you will almost always have success.

Tip number two: Let people know right away if the bird is flying or perched. Although obvious to you, it might not be so obvious to others. A hawk or a hummingbird could easily be either perched or moving around. And especially for a seasoned birder, the techniques and instincts for finding a perched bird are quite different than those for finding a flying bird.

Tip number three: Clock analogies can be useful if employed carefully. Of course on a pelagic trip, using the "hands" of a clock to indicate which part of the boat to look out from is very natural. There is no mistaking 3:00. It's midship on the starboard side, right off the beam.

But saying a bird is 3:00 in a wooded setting can be confusing unless everybody knows where the center of the clock is. If you are looking at a single, large oak tree, for example, 3:00 might make sense. But if there are several trees around, you must first be sure that everyone is looking at the same tree. And of course let everybody know if the bird is on the circumference of the clock or in from the edge. Those clock hands can seem mighty long or short, depending on the individual's perspective.

Tip number four: Set up landmarks in advance if you are going to be birding in one spot for a while. Everybody who has manned a hawk watch knows the tried and true method for referring to any incoming bird by the names of familiar landmarks. By the way, if you are at a hawk watch or using this tip, be sure everybody knows where "bent towers" or "Gumpy's Meadow" are located. Otherwise those not in the know may be too embarrassed to ask and will undoubtedly miss some birds.

If you are setting up to look at birds in a group of flowering trees, it might be very useful to quickly set some reference points so that as people find birds they can refer to them by these predetermined locations. The same is true for shorebird watching or other forms of stationary birding. Identify portions of the shore by houses opposite, pieces of driftwood, or other very obvious markers. This can really help later as you find interesting birds.

If you are looking for a skulker, like a Swainson's warbler, it's important not to make any noise. Try using your fingers to indicate three or four pre-determined locations to get people on a

bird. Holding up one or two fingers can be done very discretely, without flushing the bird when speaking is not possible.

Tip number five: If you are sure you can find the bird again, put your binocs down before you try to tell someone where it is. You will have a better perspective on how to describe its location, and you can avoid the problem that occurs when people start looking in the wrong place, which can be hard to "undo." It also helps you see if the other person is blocked from view.

Tip number six: If you are afraid you won't be able to find the bird again, then use the "bobbing" binocs technique for finding a landmark to help others locate it. Here's how: Move your binocs one field down, and then back to the bird, making sure that you can find it again. Then do this movement of one binoc field up, down, right and left. You may find a landmark you can describe without having to put your binocs down. You can expand to two or three fields if necessary and you're fast.



The ivory-billed woodpecker is two binocular fields to the right and one up from the unicorn.

Tip number seven: Watch out for obstructions that might keep another person from seeing the bird you can see from your position. If a person is blocked from view of the bird, no amount of description will get them on the bird. See tip eight.

“If you are working with only one or two people, bring them right in front of you.”

Tip number eight: If you are working with only one or two people, bring them right in front of you. It actually can be a very effective way to get them on the bird. (And you might even be able to use your finger to point the bird out!)

Tip number nine: You will need special care to help others find a flying bird. The sky is a very amorphous space! As mentioned before, first of all let everybody know the bird is flying. “I think I might have a Swainson’s hawk” is too vague. Swainson’s hawks very often hang out on the ground, so it would be reasonable to start searching the field for this bird. Let everybody know that the bird is flying.

Also, be sure to mention which direction it is moving. “Flying right to left” can be very helpful, as your friends can move their binocs to the far left and then scan back to the right, hopefully running into the bird. Try pinpointing some obvious landmark that is below it. Bobbing your binoculars can help with this, as mentioned above. With a flying bird you may have to “bob” your binoculars a field or two before you find a good landmark. If you do it quickly this can be a very effective technique. Also, if the bird is flying fairly quickly, then “bob” ahead of the bird. If you find a boat or building, then you can tell everybody that it is approaching that object. You can also use the horizon as one coordinate, letting everyone know if it is below or above the tree line or ocean.

You can use the size of your binocular field as a rough gauge of distance. One field of your binoculars is the distance covered by the whole visible area you see in your binocs. So if you were looking at a distant yardstick, and could see the numbers 1-6 in your binoculars, then lowering the binocs so that you

could see 7-12 would put them exactly one field down. “Mississippi kite, flying left to right, one field over the red barn” can help get someone on a flying bird very quickly.

And finally, it is possible to use various optical devices to help others find a bird. Small hand mirrors can be used to reflect light so a beam falls in the location of a sought after bird. Likewise, especially in dark locations such as deep forests, a laser pointer can be quite useful, as long as its beam isn’t blocked by leaves. New 50 milliwatt green lasers are very powerful. And even if they can’t reach the bird you can use them to define your reference point and then use other methods to find the bird. Just be careful, because shining a laser right in front of a bird can scare it!

In summary, developing your ability to help others locate a good bird can make your group birding experiences much more fun. And those skills will ensure that everybody returns home with marriages and friendships intact!



American robin, watercolor on paper by Jennifer Kepler.



By Jennifer Kepler

Photos of common loon rescue by Jennifer Kepler.

From time to time, my past wildlife experiences come in handy even on a leisurely birding walk. In working with Audubon, I learned how to restrain raptors for medical care; my work involved handling, caring for, and giving educational presentations with non-releasable birds at the Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary in Oyster Bay. As a wild animal keeper for four years at Prospect Park Zoo, I know how to MacGyver a bird capture. And from the last decade working with the Wildlife Conservation Society, I can read the signs of an animal in distress, which is often most subtle in the avian world.

So in late March, on an evening trip to the Salt Marsh nature center in Marine Park, I knew I had to act quickly after I spotted a common loon near the golf-course path. It was sitting on dry ground, which told me it was either level with or above the high-tide line. The bird didn't attempt to flee when I walked up the path toward it. I wanted to help this bird if I could.

This was troubling for obvious reasons: common loons visit our area in winter, but they don't come on land and spend all of their time in the water diving, feeding, and resting. It was nearly 50 feet from the creek and not even on soggy marsh. I dropped my birding and began calling my network of birders, drivers, and rehabbers.

But the time of day was working against me. It

was almost 6 as the sun was beginning to drop beyond the west side of Gerritsen Creek. The rangers at the nature center had left for the day, and my local shelter with rehabber ties was closed. Manhattan's Wild Bird Fund doesn't do pickups and they closed at 8. Fearing the worst, I didn't have the heart to leave this loon here overnight.

I called one of my friends who knows rehabbers and she urged me to just grab the bird and hop in an Uber. But it wasn't so easy. I know what birds do when they're upset, and I didn't want to get hit with a mess of fees for backseat spills. As time passed and my calls to friends, my husband, and NYC Audubon's bird transfer volunteers went unanswered, I figured I'd have to capture the bird and at least take it home, put it in my own car, and somehow get to the Wild Bird Fund before it closed.

At that moment, a local wildlife rehabber, contacted by my friend, agreed to take the bird for the night. Incredibly, she had capelin on hand – a small smelt fish – which is a perfect snack for a loon. The rehabber agreed to meet me at a nearby veterinary clinic, and my friend called a car for me. But now, it was my job to restrain the loon and somehow sneak it into a cab.

An aside: I would never recommend catching wildlife if this is new to you and you are unfamiliar



with how animals act when stressed. For example, birds with pointy beaks are jabbers, and the longer their neck – like a common loon – the more dangerous they are (think about your eyes and face). Assessing the situation, I decided the area was dry enough to safely move around and I could catch the bird if I covered its head and eyes.

I decided to use my jacket, which was thick and dark, as a cover. As expected, when the bird jabbed its beak I tossed my jacket over it. After a couple of tries and some fancy dancing – I wonder if anyone watched

this strange comedy – I was able to cover the bird, restraining its head and wings safely. Astonishingly light, no more than three or four pounds, I carried my bundle out of the Salt Marsh trail without a single crazy look from any bystanders.

In preparation for my car ride to the clinic, I used an extra shirt that I had happened to pack to fashion a “loon diaper” of sorts. The taxi ride from Marine Park to Kensington was a painfully long 45 minutes; the driver took the most ridiculous route of side streets through Midwood, but when we arrived at the vet clinic the rehabber was still waiting for me.

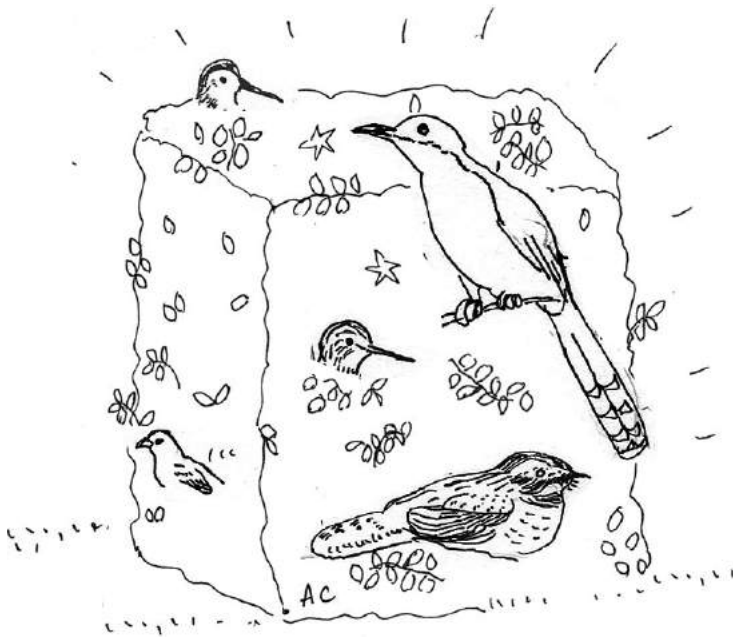
The initial fear was lead poisoning; others were aspergillosis, a fungal respiratory infection that is often fatal. The vet and rehabber administered preventative injections and fluids and took the bird from me. The next morning, it was still feisty and eating fish on its own; later that day it was transported to the Wild Bird Fund. I hope it will recover and in time return to the wild – and back to its regularly scheduled program of diving for fish.



Blue grosbeak in Prospect Park. Credit: Janet Zinn

Birding the Magic Hedge

by Janet Schumacher



After entering Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary on the north side of Chicago, my friend and I had to choose: circle a small stretch of trees for the whip-poor-will resting on a log, or go to the beach for the piping plover. Meanwhile, the warblers flitting above made it hard to leave the entrance, especially since a Kirtland's had been seen there the day before.

Whatever we decided, we would be able to do both this morning, for the sanctuary, which sits on a landfill peninsula that curls into Lake Michigan, is all of 13 acres. As my trip there in the middle of May showed, its stop-over location makes it one of the most fruitful patches in the country during spring and fall migration.

On the west side of the sanctuary, birders (affectionately) call the stretch of low-lying bushes and scrubby trees the Magic Hedge for its magnet-like effect on exhausted migrants stopping there on their north or south flights. More than 300 species have been recorded there, and among its impressive list of vagrants and rarities are the magnificent frigatebird and Grace's warbler.

We opted for the whip-poor-will before the scrum of photographers disturbed it, and then onto the small beach area. A black-billed cuckoo flew across our path, and we stopped for a quick check of a yellow-throated vireo and a pair of indigo buntings. The

piping plover was feeding near some white-rumped and semipalmated sandpipers, sanderlings and dunlins. Caspian terns are common at the lakefront as are purple martins from the well-maintained colony at the edge of the park.

Back at the entrance, birders were circling the area for a mourning warbler, but we didn't find it. A Lincoln sparrow popped up, and a number of white-crowned sparrows were feeding nearby. We did another round of the hedge and the whip-poor-will remained, while a female black-throated blue warbler generated interest among local birders because it's an uncommon migrant in Chicago unlike in the east.

Red-winged blackbirds were attacking and one drew blood – don't forget to wear a hat when birding the Magic Hedge during nesting season! We walked on to the grassy wetland area, where a marsh wren was displaying, but we were unable to relocate the sedge wren that had just been seen.

It was an incredible collection of birds. In addition to the excitement of seeing rarities, Montrose Point was a pleasure to visit because of the number of habitats in such a small area: woodland, prairie, wetland, and shore. Street parking was easy. Dogs were prohibited. The park was safe. For baseball-loving birders, it's only a short walk from Wrigley Field.

My friend lives in Chicago and knew many of the local birders, who were friendly and eager to share their finds. Chicago has a number of wildlife sanctuaries, and later that day, we found a golden-winged warbler in the parking lot of another. It was a reminder of the gifts of urban birdwatching: sometimes you don't have to go far for the extraordinary.



Magnificent frigatebird, detail of print by J. J. Audubon.

Feminist Bird Club

By Molly Adams

To me, birdwatching is a form of active meditation. It requires patience and stillness, but also an alert and attentive eye. As you spend more time in your outdoor environment, you get to know different species, what habitats they prefer, and what times of the year you can and can't see them. This encourages a deeper understanding of the seasons and local landscapes that continues to unfold overtime. Even if you don't like birds, this practice of active looking can allow you to stumble upon secrets that not all New Yorkers stop to see.

If you're reading this as a member of the Brooklyn Bird Club (or any similar club), you're probably well aware of the long list of benefits of birdwatching. I wrote the paragraph above after a close friend told me, "I don't understand how anyone could think going out and looking at birds is fun." Fortunately, most of my other friends didn't share this same sentiment and were curious to learn more about this life-changing hobby.

I founded the Feminist Bird Club in October 2016—after more friends expressed interest in joining me on bird walks in beautiful corners of the city they had never seen, and two months after Karina Vetrano was murdered while jogging near a waterfront park in Queens, just miles from where I'd often gone birding alone. Shortly after, this concern for safety resurfaced when I was harassed in the woods of a public park in Brooklyn.

The Feminist Bird Club is an inclusive birdwatching group dedicated to getting outside in and around NYC and having an ongoing conversation about intersectionality, activism, and the rights of all women, transgender, and non-binary folks. The group's goal is to share knowledge and compassion for birds and birdwatching in order to use birding as a tool for social change.

After last year's presidential election, an increased sense of urgency forced the Feminist Bird

Club to evolve. As many New Yorkers saw their stress levels skyrocket, participation in relaxing activities outdoors, like birdwatching, became even more important. Sharing the joys of birding can also be beneficial for birds, as long as it is done responsibly, by inspiring a love that encourages conservation action – a mission we need to fight for more than ever.

I made patches for the club in October with plans to use the proceeds to provide nature education for young girls, but once our country was faced with an administration that wants to strip women and trans-folks of their rights, I decided that all proceeds from their sales would go to an organization that aims to protect human rights. The patches quickly sold out and we raised \$300 for Planned Parenthood in one month.

This year, a new design raised one-thousand dollars for the New York Abortion Access Fund in just over two months. In addition, our members began participating in other forms of activism as a response to the shift in the political climate.

Members of the club receive an email approximately every week with the highlights from the weekend's bird walk, information about upcoming walks, and events related to causes important to us, such as environmental justice and access to reproductive rights.

Birders are invited to participate in rallies like the Women's March in D.C. and NYC, volunteer as escorts at women's clinics to protect patients from anti-choice protestors, serve as members of the National Women's Liberation Abortion and Birth Control Access Committee, and more.

As the Feminist Bird Club grows, so too will our events and the issues we organize around, continuing to combine our seriousness about human rights and safety with the same passion for birds and the natural world.

For more information about walks, events, or getting involved in any way, please visit: www.molly-adams.com/feminist-bird-club or contact mollyhadams@gmail.com.





An unlikely flyover at BJ's Wholesale in Gravesend—and for Brooklyn. Shane Blodgett spotted this scissor-tailed flycatcher on Easter Sunday and then found it near Coney Island Creek. Credit: Gus Keri

Sparks!

By Gus Keri

It was a beautiful summer day in my little resort town and sparrows were flying all over the place, jumping from a tree, to a wall, to the roof of a house. I was in my mid-teenage years, sitting on our balcony, enjoying watching them.

Suddenly, a crazy idea hit me and I grabbed the BB gun that was kept at our house. I was a good shot, but I only practiced against matchsticks and the like. I never shot any living creatures.

I loaded the gun and pointed it across the street at a sparrow playing at the edge of the roof of a building. I only wanted to prove to myself how good I was hitting a bird from almost 25 meters away.

I struck the bird with one shot. It fell to the cement sidewalk some 15 meters below, landing with a loud thud that pierced my ear like a knife and shot through my body like an electrical shock. The pain in my heart was so severe I almost cried.

“How could I have done this?” I asked myself. “What did this innocent bird do to deserve this end, and for what?”

Sadness overwhelmed me. I felt severe guilt and shame. It was the first time I ever shot at a living thing—and it was the last. I swore to never hold a gun of any kind again.

For the next three decades, birds became invisible to me. They never existed again in my world. I stopped seeing or hearing them. I imagine now that this was my way of wiping this horrible experience

from my memory. A defense mechanism against guilt. Plus, having a busy life helped.

I was living in this birding wilderness until 2007, when I made a new friend while waiting to buy a ticket to the Tribeca film festival. She and I had many things in common but birding wasn't one of them. She was an avid birder who would travel across the country to see a special bird, whereas I couldn't believe that someone would do such a thing.

The idea of birding itself sounded strange to me. I'm sure she felt similarly when I told her that I spent hours every day watching soccer, and never missed a match involving Liverpool, my favorite club. “Every person has their own idiosyncrasies,” I thought.

One afternoon two years later, we were walking together in the Ramble of Central Park and suddenly, my eyes landed on the most beautiful bird I had ever seen. The bird was within a few feet of the path. I stopped and screamed with excitement.

My friend looked at me, full of surprise. “Is this the first time you've seen this bird?” she asked, amazed that in two decades of living in New York I had never seen a cardinal.

I pulled out my old phone and took a photo of this gorgeous bird. The photo was grainy but I didn't care. I wanted to remember this moment forever. It was



like magic. Until then, I had never thought that such beauty could be so close. At that moment, my love for birds was born again.

I started seeing and hearing birds all around me. They became part of my world. I watched them gather in the garden across from where I live. One morning, I was drinking coffee at home while sitting at my computer, when I heard a beautiful song. I ran to the window and saw a blue-colored bird perched on a tree a few meters away.

When I told my friend about it, she told me that what I was looking at was a blue jay, but it isn't known for the quality of its song. I questioned my taste in birdsong. "Is my taste that bad?" I wondered. "Or could people like different songs?"

A few months later I realized that the song I was hearing was that of a cardinal, in that moment before I gazed upon the blue jay. Now the most gorgeous bird I had ever seen also possessed the most beautiful song I had heard. My adoration for the cardinal was complete.

Even as I spent more time birdwatching, there was still something missing. The memory of that fateful day in my youth lingered, along with its siblings of guilt and shame. My complete entrance into birdwatching was still to come.

A few years later, I was walking alone in the Ramble enjoying an unusually warm winter day. It was a weekday and the Ramble was nearly empty—except, I noticed, for a woman standing by the edge of a small pool holding her hands out.

Suddenly, a bird landed on her hand, picked up something and flew away. For some unknown reason, I got excited watching this. Curiosity drove me to approach her and ask what she was doing. She told me that in the winter, when their food supply is scarce, some birds would come close to humans if they were hungry enough. She was feeding them peanuts.

I asked if I could try, and she happily agreed. She gave me a peanut morsel, but no birds came to my hand to take it. I was disappointed.

I was back in Central Park a few days later. Every time I go to Manhattan I buy my favorite street-food specialty: honey-roasted peanuts. I devour them like a hungry bird, even eating the remnants of the roasted honey at the bottom of the bag. I bought one and walked toward the Ramble. But this time, I decided to leave some nuts and try my luck feeding the birds.

I chose a secluded part of the Ramble because I felt embarrassed. I didn't want anyone to see me. The whole experience felt awkward, but luckily for me, the Ramble was empty that day.

I broke the nuts into small pieces and put them on my hand. I extended my arm and started making very primitive bird sounds that might attract them. Before long, a few birds noticed me and alighted on a small tree in front of me. I stood still with my hand out. Within minutes, a tufted titmouse took heart and decided to give it a try. It flew closer and perched on a



branch above me.

Then, it dropped down and landed on my hand. Its little feet grabbed my finger tightly. A strange sensation traveled through my finger and arm and into my chest. It caused my heart to skip a beat. I felt an excitement that defies any description; it was a mix of joy, appreciation, gratitude, admiration and love. It was magic.

The titmouse stopped for a second to look at me. I looked back in a moment that lasted for eternity. We told each other many stories. We shared jokes and cried together for our sad, miserable lives. I told him how sorry I was for what I had done as a boy. He told me that he forgave me.

Then, as if in a dream, he took a peanut bit and flew to a nearby tree where he perched and ate it. Other titmice and chickadees followed. With each bird landing on my hand, my guilt and shame gradually washed away. By the end of the day, I walked out of the park free of guilt and full of hope.

My love for the world of birds was now eternal.

The unwary warbler and the murderous mussel

by Lisa Scheppke (with help from Eric Miller)

Ed. note: This article was originally published in the Queens County Bird Club's News & Notes. Thank you to Lisa for allowing us to reprint a slightly-edited version.

When I arrived at the Salt Marsh nature center in Marine Park on April 13 to chase a prothonotary warbler that had turned up the previous day, I had no idea that I'd become ensnared in one of the most fulfilling and worthwhile activities that one can find in the field: wildlife rescue. It will go down as one of the most memorable rescues I've ever experienced.



This rare visitor to Brooklyn had attracted large crowds since the previous afternoon. When I arrived with Eric Miller, a flock of birders were watching it flutter around hunting bugs, often within a few feet of its admiring observers. The early-evening sun highlighted its striking golden plumage; my fellow photographers and I happily clicked away. A few of us noted that this habitat wasn't where one normally finds a prothonotary warbler. It was uncanny foreshadowing.

The prothonotary flew down toward the creek to forage in marsh vegetation growing on the rocky slope, partly disappearing from view. Soon Eric noticed that it appeared to be struggling and assumed that it was caught in fishing line. I had encountered the same situation many times and agreed. Eric hopped the

guard rail and asked me if I was coming with him. I didn't need to be asked twice and scrambled down the slope. A departing nature-center employee chastised us for trespassing until we explained our mission.



Once we got close Eric realized that monofilament wasn't the culprit; the toe of the flapping passerine was trapped inside a ribbed mussel. Thinking fast, Eric managed to corral the frightened bird with one hand while extracting the mussel from the mud with the other.

But Eric couldn't extract the bird's foot from this mussel's iron grip. He called to a ranger to ask if the nature center had pliers. Luckily, the ranger returned with one and Eric gave the bird and the mussel to me as he readied for surgery. Eric said the mussel would have to be sacrificed and I agreed.

With a deft squeeze of the needle-nose pliers, Eric crushed the unlucky shellfish and its insides splattered over the both of us. Normally repulsed by seafood, I swallowed the urge to gag. I turned the bird



Photos of the prothonotary's liberation by Lisa Scheppke.



over so its foot could be examined. Although slightly damaged, its toe remained intact.

It was getting late and we knew we couldn't find a vet at this hour, so we decided it was wisest to release the bird before it became even more stressed. I opened my hands and it burst forth and flew to a nearby tree. Tears filled my eyes. It perched briefly before returning to foraging, seemingly none worse for wear. I was thankful that Eric's calmness and clarity had saved the day, and I was happy that we were in the right place at the right time.

Later, I learned that shellfish "attacks" on birds—albeit species that occur regularly in coastal habitats—is not all that uncommon. Herons, rails, oystercatchers, and other shorebirds regularly face this silent danger, but I doubt we'll see a tiny songbird suffering this fate again soon.

Note: Although fishing line wasn't responsible in this case, it's the cause of more injuries and fatalities in wildlife than any other form of marine debris. To any anglers reading this, please remember that the worst thing you can do if your line becomes snagged is cut it loose. The best thing to do is to wind the line around something and tug it loose until it breaks at the weakest point (which is most often at the hook). This method removes far more of the line from the water and reduces the chances of harm to wildlife.

For more on the rescue, you can read Donna Schulman's story, [*"The warbler, the birder, and the bivalve," on the blog 10,000 Birds.*](#)

The line-up: BBC club photos

This reel is from Tom Stephenson's Thursday walks. The photos are his.



My patch: Brooklyn Bridge Park

By Heather Wolf

It's early spring, and the migrants filter into Brooklyn Bridge Park at a much slower pace than in Prospect Park, where over a dozen warbler species have touched down by late April. About this time, in my patch I'm only seeing an occasional hermit thrush and a female yellow-rumped warbler. But I know that one day soon, as mid-May approaches, more migrants will arrive—so many that I can barely keep track. Meanwhile, the Paulownias start to bloom and never fail to attract at least one beautiful male Baltimore oriole. I watch it for as long as possible before racing home to start my day, working remotely as a web developer for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The best birding hotspots in Brooklyn Bridge Park are Pier 1 and Pier 6, and the fact that they are on opposite ends of the park makes for some tough decisions during migration. When I'm on one pier, I'm constantly wondering what I'm missing on the other. I'm often seen running like a maniac from pier 6 to pier 1, then racing a Citi Bike back to pier 6 so I arrive at my apartment (just a block south) in time for work.

But if I had to choose the single best spot to bird during migration, it would be a place I call "the Magical Knoll" on pier 1. It's a meadow that slopes down northward from the top of the Granite Prospect steps, which look out onto lower Manhattan, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Statue of Liberty. On top of the magical knoll sit several Catalpa and Paulownia trees. Their large, broad leaves collect insects on the undersides, attracting warblers, kinglets, and vireos. Woodpeckers and brown creepers scale the trees' trunks. A Philadelphia vireo showed up in these trees one fall, around the same time a grasshopper sparrow edged out into view from the brush below. In the surrounding leaf litter, a strutting ovenbird is a common sight for at least a couple of weeks in spring and fall; if I sit down on the path, one will often strut right next to me.

Looking north from the top of the Magical Knoll, the sloping meadow below is full of migration surprises. The Dawn Redwood trees at its foot are a popular location for hermit and Swainson's thrush; and the view from here gives the neck a welcome rest. But I always make sure to look up in the Catalpas that overlook the meadow, as eastern wood-pewees often

perch here and eye the meadow for flying insects. To make sure no bird is missed, a different perspective of the Magical Knoll is a must. I always go down to the benches next to Vale Lawn at the bottom of the meadow to gaze upward. From here, I've spotted a great-crested flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo peeking out from the Dawn Redwoods, which I surely would have missed if looking from above. Also in front of the benches are more trees that attract American redstart, northern parula, and many other warblers. Just behind the benches, a wood thrush (or another ovenbird) is a possibility.

If you find yourself on Pier 1 and the Magical Knoll seems quiet, check the wooded paths that run north/south close to the main park path. This is also popular for migrating warblers. Gray catbirds nest here and can be observed all summer. In winter, the leaf litter that flanks the paths is full of white-throated sparrows and one or two swamp sparrows. The "Long Pond" below the paths is where a sora spent a couple of days one fall a few years back. Barn swallows frequent this pond in early spring to gather mud for their nests, and throughout summer to graze the pond's surface for a drink.

In winter, some of the best gulling in the city can be had at the marina platforms between piers 4 and 5. Several thousand ring-billed gulls gather here at sunset from December to mid-February. I once found a black-headed gull roosting here on a platform close to shore. Some winter nights I enjoy looking at gulls well after sunset, when the platforms are illuminated by the bright lights of the adjacent soccer fields.

When I'm not in my patch, I wonder what birds and behaviors I'm missing. Whether I'm adding a new species to my park list (currently at 142), or witnessing a rock pigeon fight a house sparrow over a piece of a waffle cone, I am ecstatic when birding in Brooklyn Bridge Park.



View of pier 1 from the Brooklyn Bridge. Credit: Heather Wolf



Marsh wren. Credit: Adam Nashban



American redstart. Credit: Marvin Baptiste



Above: Black-and-white warbler. Credit: Tom Stephenson
Left: Northern flicker. Credit: Tom Stephenson

How to Rescue Baby Birds

(Only adults should rescue baby birds. Before rescuing adult birds, seek guidance from a wildlife rehabilitator.)

1. **Prepare a container.** Place a clean, soft cloth with no strings or loops on the bottom of a cardboard box or cat/dog carrier with a lid. If it doesn't have air holes, make some. For smaller birds, you can use a paper sack with air holes..
2. **Protect yourself.** Wear gloves, if possible. Some birds may stab with their beaks, slice with their *talons* (claws) and slap with their wings, to protect themselves, even if sick; birds commonly have parasites (fleas, lice, ticks) and carry diseases.
3. **Cover the bird with a light sheet or towel.**
4. **Gently pick up the bird and put it in the prepared container.**
5. **Warm the animal if it's cold out or if the animal is chilled.** Put one end of the container on a heating pad set on low. Or fill a zip-top plastic bag, plastic soft drink container with a screw lid, or a rubber glove with hot water; wrap warm container with cloth, and put it next to the animal. Make sure the container doesn't leak, or the animal will get wet and chilled.
6. **Tape the box shut or roll the top of the paper bag closed.**
7. **Note exactly where you found the bird.** This will be very important for release.
8. **Keep the bird in a warm, dark, quiet place.**
Don't give it food or water.
Leave the bird alone; don't handle or bother it.
Keep children and pets away.
9. **Contact a wildlife rehabilitator, state wildlife agency, or wildlife veterinarian as soon as possible.**
Don't keep the bird at your home longer than necessary.
Keep the bird in a container; don't let it loose in your house or car.
10. **Wash your hands after contact with the bird.**
Wash anything the bird was in contact with — towel, jacket, blanket, pet carrier — to prevent the spread of diseases and/or parasites to you or your pets.
11. **Get the bird to a wildlife rehabilitator as soon as possible.**

It's against the law in most states to keep wild animals if you don't have permits, even if you plan to release them.

*From Healers of the Wild: People Who Care
for Injured and Orphaned Wildlife*

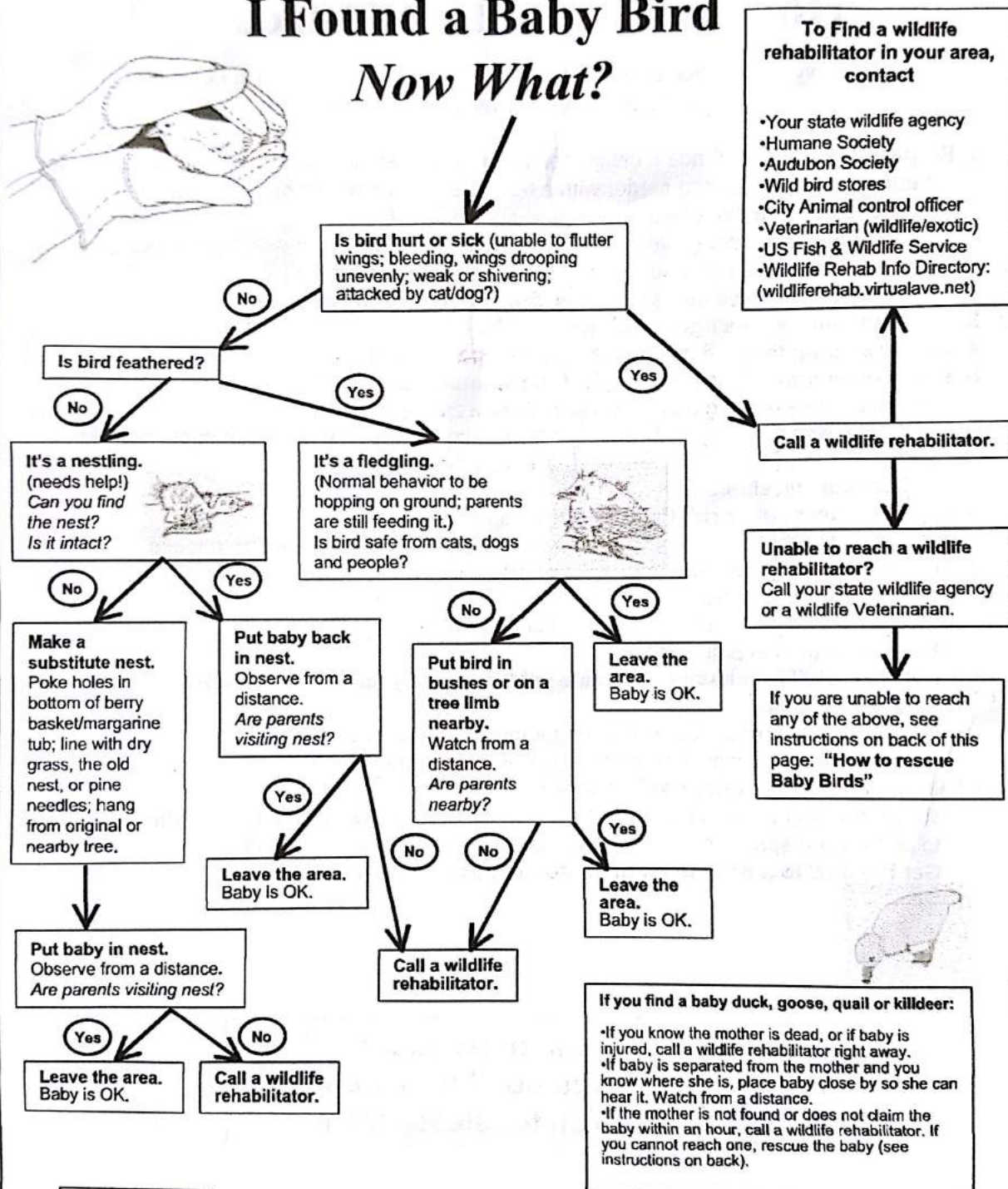
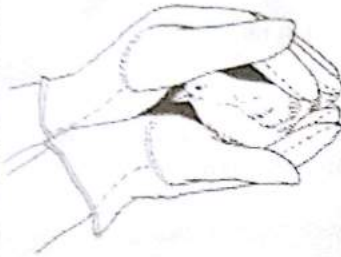
By Shannon K. Jacobs

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I Found a Baby Bird Now What?



A baby's best chance for survival is its mother

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