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## President's Message

Rob Bate

Lately, there have been some personnel changes in our local park and birding communities. The big news in Prospect Park is that the Prospect Park Alliance has a new President and Park Administrator. Sue Donoghue, former director of PlaNYC and the million trees program, is set to start work on October 6<sup>th</sup>. Let's hope that the park's wild areas and birds have a new ally when decisions are made that affect their well being, and that we in the Brooklyn Bird Club develop a strong working relationship with the new PPA President. The PPA has been without a permanent leader since February, when Emily Lloyd stepped down to go work at NYC-DEP, and several policy decisions have been deferred pending a new administrator.

More close to home there have been some changes to the board of the Brooklyn Bird Club itself. In an effort to bring in some of the new and active voices of our local birding community, the board has invited three BBC members to join them in the ongoing board planning and guidance activities. Congratulations to Monica Berger, Stanley Greenberg and Dennis Hrehowsik; they have all accepted and will be joining us at our fall 2014 meeting.

Dennis, besides being a ubiquitous birder in and around the area and a borough-famous finder of perched Nighthawks, is currently chairing the Speakers Committee, which invites and hosts incoming speakers for our monthly get-togethers. Stanley recently became the BBC's "CommComm" representative at the PPAlliance's monthly meetings of representatives of community organizations. He will be the frequent face of the BBC there and will be the first to get to know the new President and PP Administrator. Monica has been a key part of the Clapper Rail committee since she stepped up to fill the breach created when Peter Dorosh stepped down from most of his Brooklyn Bird Club duties a year and a half ago. Thanks to all and welcome new board members!

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### **The Brooklyn Bird Club**

**President:** Rob Bate

### **The Clapper Rail**

**Editorial:** Monica Berger, Bobbi Manian,  
Tracy Meade, Ann Murray  
**Production:** Janet Zinn

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On a sad note, Mary Eyster has tendered her resignation to the board because she plans on spending a significant portion of the year at her new home in Florida. Mary has been an integral part of the club for many years, helping with Christmas Counts, Birdathons as well as serving on the board. Don't worry, Mary is not abandoning Brooklyn, and she will continue to help with the Christmas Count dinner to be held this year on December 20<sup>th</sup>. Thanks for everything, Mary, and we hope you will let us know about the best birding spots in Florida!

On a final note, and in order to involve the wider membership in club activities, the board proposes to hold short membership meetings in conjunction with the monthly speakers events starting with this fall's first event, featuring our own Tom Stephenson, on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. These meetings promise to be short so as not to interfere with the main event. The events start at 7:00 PM and we'd like to convene the informal membership meeting at 6:45 PM and see how that works out. This month's meeting takes place at the larger presentation room at the Brooklyn Public Library – the BBC@BPL.

I would like to invite club members to contact me at [robsbate@gmail.com](mailto:robsbate@gmail.com) or write the BBC at our address, [info@brooklynbirdclub.org](mailto:info@brooklynbirdclub.org) if you have any suggestions for possible club activities or any comments regarding the BBC or ongoing club activities.

Thanks for your part in sustaining a great bird club, and enjoy fall migration.

Rob Bate  
President

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## In Memoriam: Jean Bourque

*By Peter Dorosh*

She was a modest, quiet birder, and yet, she was a star in the annals of Brooklyn Bird Club history. Faithful birding companion and loving spouse to famed Brooklyn birder and nature activist Ron Bourque, Jean Bourque was one of a kind. Her passing this past spring left a void in Brooklyn birding circles and New York City nature organizations: a marvelous birdwatcher and a strong conservation voice has left us. Among her birding and gardening friends who knew her best, Jean was humane, kind-hearted, gracious to all, and always

helpful dispensing information about birds, but especially ecology and plant life. To everyone who knew her, Jean was a joy to be with, particularly during birding walks or encounters in the field. A truly gentle spirit, Jean will be missed.

I first met Jean about 1978. It was my inaugural Brooklyn Bird Club trip, now so long ago. Led by her renown club icon husband Ron, my birding trip to High Tor State Park was a memorable one. I was honored that it was led by the Bourques. Jean was quite knowledgeable about not only birds but also flora and habitats; her knowledge of plants was extensive and impressive. It was their generosity and kindness that made me—a hearing impaired teenager shy and apprehensive with public affairs back then—feel at ease. I felt comfortable that day, thanks to Jean and the other birders in that party. Jean even shared her lunch with me when I forgot mine (excusable because it was my first club trip and I had many things to learn yet). Through the years, I would run into the Bourques at birding sites and Jean was always there accompanying her husband Ron. She had conscientious loyalty and devotion to Ron, and it was always my great pleasure running into them. Most times it was at their favorite preserve, Floyd Bennett Field.



Jean, though quiet, had passion and resolve in her dedication to native habitats and birds as well as to her native gardening projects. Through the many coastal Brooklyn garden projects (mostly at her beloved Floyd Bennett Field or Marine Park) that the Bourques were involved with, Jean displayed feistiness in combating non-native weeds to make her garden grow. She instilled enthusiasm and inspiration in her endeavors,

and she eagerly dispensed her knowledge to others who wanted to know more about nature, plants and gardens.

That same determination and passion applied to any task. As former editors of the Clapper Rail newsletter, my predecessors, the Bourques, put out the best newsletters back in the late 1960's. When I planned and created new trips for the club, on the day of his trip, leader Ron Bourque always had great support and help from Jean, who was gifted with incredible vision and acute intuition about birds. Jean was particularly good finding owls in wintertime.

The same passion Jean showed surfaced again and again during the Christmas Bird Counts, where Floyd Bennett always came through with one or two owl species, oftentimes "save" birds, the only place having the species in Kings County. It was, as I always believed, because Jean was on the scene, coming through with the great bird, especially those elusive, well-hidden owls. At every Christmas Bird Count dinner, the Bourques were there. Jean was dedicated, as always, not missing the beat, loving—I'm sure—hearing Floyd Bennett in the limelight.

Personable, humble, modest, generous, kind, compassionate, sweet: these are just some of the qualities that described Jean. For long-time birders, we will remember Jean with great affection. But younger birders and those who never met her certainly would have been blessed beneficiaries if they ever met Jean. She impressed everyone she met. Jean was a role model who inspired all. Those are the traits I remember best. I pay Jean Bourque a fitting tribute by offering you Jean's own words for her beloved Floyd Bennett Field; you will hear her vibrant conservation voice in this 2007 article she wrote for the Linnaean Society of New York about birds, nature, ecology, plants and habitats.

*Requiescat in pace.*

*The following article is reprinted with the permission of the Linnaean Society of New York. It appeared as a chapter from their 2007 Transactions publication, "Natural History of New York City's Parks and Great Gull Island " Vol. X. We extend our grateful thanks to the Linnaean Society and President Angus Wilson.*

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## Changes in Wildlife at Floyd Bennett Field over 20 Years with Emphasis on Birds

Jean Bourque  
2250 Brigham St. Apt 3K  
Brooklyn NY 11229  
[ron.jean1@verizon.net](mailto:ron.jean1@verizon.net)

Floyd Bennett Field, New York City's former municipal airport, became part of Gateway National Recreation Area in 1972. In the 30 odd years since then the Field has seen great changes, and not for the better, from the point of view of those who care about wildlife. Yet these changes reflect trends in our entire region.

In 1979, when I first came to know Floyd Bennett Field, it gave an impression of being a place which had been abandoned by people and where wildlife had taken over. The Field was not then open to the general public except for special use permits, mostly for model airplane flying and community gardening. People went directly to the place of their activities and remained there so that there was little traffic. Once in a great while a Park Service vehicle would go by. Finding a Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) nest was the reason for going there, and indeed the Northern Harrier nest was found, but there was also a Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) nest. Turning a corner one would see an owl teetering along far down a runway, hunting in daylight.

One had an impression of tremendous open space, and overhead the weather systems could be seen marching across the sky from one horizon to the other. In those days practically the whole Field was grassland. It seemed there was always an Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*) singing, and Grasshopper Sparrows (*Ammodramus saviannarum*) were ticking and buzzing everywhere. Where there was bare ground and sparse weeds, Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) tinkled overhead. American Kestrels went by carrying food. Early in that spring, at places in the North 40, a sweet smell seemed to rise from the ground, vegetation of some sort, I suppose. I never found out what it was.

What has brought about the change to the drab aspect Floyd Bennett Field presents now, with its endlessly circling traffic and wildlife scarcely to be seen? Probably not even maintaining the entire field as airport habitat, which was once proposed, could have retained the grassland birds in the swelling sea of development which has overtaken New Jersey, where the migrants come from, as well as Long Island.

### Vegetation

I believe no recent surveys have been done on the vegetation of Floyd Bennett Field. To casual observation it



is obvious that a large part of the Field, which comprises 579 hectares, is now shrubland, with many trees. A comparatively small area, 52 hectares, has been maintained as grassland, in the hope of retaining grassland birds. Airports, where grassland conditions are maintained, are the last refuge of grassland birds as their habitat is eliminated elsewhere. Species present at Floyd Bennett Field in 1979 were Upland Sandpipers (*Bartramia longicauda*), Eastern Meadowlarks, Horned Larks, Grasshopper Sparrows, besides such open country birds as Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*), Shorteared Owls, American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*), and Ring-necked Pheasants (*Phasianus colchicus*). These were breeding birds. Other species might be seen in migration.

In the 52 hectares reserved as grassland shrubs and woody vegetation were cleared during the winters from 1985 to 1990. The whole grassland area has been mowed at least once a year since then, and a few experimental burns were done. (It is worth mentioning that according to a study by Peter Vickery (Vickery et al. 1997), there is a 50% chance of finding Upland Sandpipers in grassland of 200 hectares,, a 50% chance of finding Grasshopper Sparrows in 100 hectares, and a 50% chance of finding Savannah Sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) in 10 hectares. Thus the grassland at Floyd Bennett Field is scarcely adequate, although the birds were there at one time.

Since the grassland was established, the vegetation has changed greatly, in particular in the density of growth. Litter from the yearly mowing has built up year after year. There is no longer the bare ground among the grass clumps which some grassland birds, particularly Grasshopper Sparrows, are attracted by. There are widely spreading areas of a South African lovegrass, (*Eragrostis curvula*), which is a species said to have little value for birds (Bock and Bock 1988). Species of grasses have changed as many grasses which normally flower in late summer are hindered from sending up inflorescences by the yearly mowing, which begins the first of August. This makes those species, particularly little bluestem, less conspicuous and probably less prevalent. Since experimental burns present great difficulties it is necessary to manage for species which tolerate, or prefer, dense vegetation, such as Savannah Sparrows, Meadowlarks, Bobolinks (*Dolichonyx orizivorus*), or perhaps even Dickcissels (*Spiza americana*). (The last two are not yet known as breeding birds). In the North 40, an area where natural processes are left unchecked, a plague of Asian Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) covers every tree and shrub.

## Lepidoptera

Again, there are no data allowing insect life 20 years ago

to be compared with the present. Casual observation suggests that there has been a general decrease. Cecropia (*Hyalophora cecropia*) cocoons used to be seen often as well as Polyphemus (*Anthera polyphemus*) cocoons. Io moth (*Automeris io*) caterpillars were once commonly seen, and skippers were on every patch of thistles. Even American Copper butterflies (*Lycaena phlaeas*), once very abundant, have declined as has their host plant, Sheep Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*), a plant which likes rather barren conditions. The yearly mowing must be harmful to insects, considering that most skippers use grasses as their host plants. Of course in the case of the silk moths, Cecropia, Polyphemus, Io, it is known that from Massachusetts through New Jersey and Pennsylvania native silk moths have declined. The culprit assumed to be responsible for this decline is the parasitic fly *Compsilura concinnata* introduced from Europe to control gypsy moths. (Yoon 2001).

## Reptiles and Amphibians

Robert P. Cook, Wildlife Biologist for the National Park Service at Gateway for years, took a special interest in amphibians and reptiles. When an area on Long Island was about to be developed, he rescued as many of the amphibians and reptiles as he could find and introduced them to favorable habitats at Gateway. According to his records, Eastern Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) and Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*) were originally at Floyd Bennett Field, before any introductions occurred. Fowler's Toad (*Bufo woodhousii fowleri*) was there but was wiped out when its habitat was altered. The following species were successfully introduced: Fowler's Toad, Spring Peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*), Grey Treefrog (*Hyla versicolor*) and Northern Brown Snake (*Storeria dekayi dekayi*). Probable successful introductions included Eastern Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum*), Black Racer (*Coluber constrictor*), eastern Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta picta*) and Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*) (Cook, pers. comm.). In spring, Spring Peepers, Fowler's Toads and Grey Treefrogs may all be heard calling at Returna-Gift Pond.

## Mammals

There are no recent studies on mammals at Floyd Bennett Field. A summary of early studies compiled by Robert Cook (Cook 1987) listed the following species: Cottontail Rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), Meadow Vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*), House Mouse (*Mus musculus*), and Norway Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), besides feral cats and dogs. Raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) were present but at that time were not thought to be established as a breeding species. White-

footed Mice (*Peromyscus leucopus*) have appeared since then and have increased and multiplied as the woody habitat they prefer has increased. Raccoons and Opossums (*Didelphis marsupialis*) are now plague species. These animals are repeatedly introduced by exterminators who trap them elsewhere and release them in parks in the city, including Floyd Bennett Field. (This practice is illegal, of course. Transporting such animals from one place to another creates the possibility of transporting rabies from one place to another.) The Raccoon population is thought to be many times that present in undisturbed natural areas and the effect of these predators on ground-nesting birds can be imagined.

## **Birds**

Floyd Bennett Field was never a birding hot spot but was visited mainly for certain specialties, grassland birds in the summer and raptors in the winter. Our greatest defeat is that most of the grassland birds are gone. Upland Sandpipers nested until 1978, then disappeared, except for one eccentric pair which nested in 1992. Formerly there was a thriving colony of nesting Upland Sandpipers at Kennedy Airport (just across Jamaica Bay), where Sam Chevalier banded the young every year. Having been sued for the loss of an airplane engine destroyed by Canada geese, Kennedy Airport has now taken stringent measures to eliminate bird populations, all bird populations. Gulls over the airport are shot if they are not frightened away by the birds which the falconers fly there. Vegetation is heavily doused with pesticides so that there will be no insects available to attract birds. The Upland Sandpipers are now gone.

Short-eared Owls have not nested since 1981 and they have also withdrawn from their breeding sites in New Jersey and Long Island. There is one isolated report of a pair with 4 juveniles on Tuckernuck Island, Massachusetts, in 2005 (Petersen 2006), but Short-eared Owls have essentially disappeared from eastern North America (BBS trend Map 1966-2003). They are still doing well in some parts of the west. The Northern Harrier, although a threatened species, maintains a slender presence at Floyd Bennett Field and last nested successfully in 2000.

Why Northern Harriers should, as it seems, fare better than Short-eared Owls is a bit of a mystery. Northern Harriers hunt the same prey (mostly Meadow Voles) over the same terrain as Short-eared Owls, but by day, while the Short-eared Owls hunt by night. Horned Larks are not recorded as nesting after 1992. There is usually a flock of 30 or so birds in the winter on the runways or short grass areas, but they are gone by the nesting season. Eastern Meadowlarks bred at Floyd Bennett Field for the last time in 1988 but are usually still found on the Christmas Count. The habitat is still perfectly

suitable for Meadowlarks, but this species, along with other grassland birds, has suffered a decline of 80%-90% or more because of changing agricultural practices (Smith 1991). For 40 years, farmers have been converting pastures into alfalfa fields with new, fast-growing varieties that can be cut early and often. The date of first mowing has moved from about July 1 to June 1, the height of the nesting season. The effect on the nests of grassland birds has been disastrous (Thompson 1992, Paxton et al. 1984). Grasshopper Sparrows nested for the last time in Floyd Bennett Field in 1995. They do not care for dense vegetation nor for dense ground litter, both of which now prevail in the grassland because of repeated mowing and the absence of fire.

A new grassland bird, the Savannah Sparrow, made its appearance as a nester in 1989. Savannah Sparrows like denser vegetation than do Grasshopper Sparrows and are more likely to be found in comparatively small grassland areas. This sparrow increased and for some years maintained about 30 territories a season, but territories have recently declined to 10 or fewer. It may be thought of as a common bird, but it is now classified as a threatened species in New Jersey.

Other birds that breed in the grassland are Ring-necked Pheasants and American Black Ducks (*Anas rubripes*). In upstate New York, Ring-necked Pheasants are both stocked and hunted. When they have a Ring-necked Pheasant to report, editors of *The Kingbird* and also editors of *Records of New Jersey Birds* usually suggest that these are stocked birds. At Floyd Bennett Field, without stocking or hunting, Ring-necked Pheasants seemed to be doing well, but in the last five years have nearly disappeared. The species is not hunted here, nor is it in competition with wild turkeys, sometimes suggested as a cause of its decline. That leaves Raccoons as the prime suspects.

Other birds which formerly hunted in Floyd Bennett Field, particularly over the grassland, were Barn Owl and American Kestrel. Since Barn Owls are quite nocturnal, they were not often seen hunting by visitors. They roosted in abandoned buildings and in the Pine Grove, where they were unfortunately much harassed by birders. Perhaps for that reason the Barn Owls now prefer to nest on the islands in Jamaica Bay, where they have nest boxes and more privacy.

The American Kestrel presents a sad story. It last nested in Floyd Bennett Field in 1992 but was known to be declining long before that. It was on the National Audubon Society Blue List in 1981 (Tate 1981). Since then there has been a long litany of alarm and mourning in the pages of *American Birds* (covers the U.S.), *The Kingbird* (covers New York State), and *Records of New Jersey Birds* (covers New Jersey).

American Kestrels posted their lowest total of the decade at some hawk watches and were mostly below last fall's already dismal totals (Paxton et al. 1984)

American Kestrel continues to decline at most hawk watches, especially at Sandy Hook, where the 901 counted was the second lowest ever, and continues an almost unbroken downward trend from the high of 3138 in 1984 (Paxton et al. 1991)

American Kestrel numbers continue to slide that steep slope into oblivion (Vernachio1998)

Observers in every part of the Region and most CBC compilers commented on the continuing decline of American Kestrel (Paxton et al. 1998)

Nevertheless, in 2001 American Kestrels were reported breeding in all 5 counties of NYC, and in 2005 there were 7 breeding locations in Manhattan alone (Schiff and Wollin 2001, Mitra, et al. 2005). They did not nest at Floyd Bennett Field.

As with most declining birds, there has been more lamentation than study. Since the kestrel is largely insectivorous, pesticides may appear to be the most likely cause. The Avian Monitoring System lists a number of incidents of kestrel deaths caused by pesticides. Predation by Peregrine Falcons and Cooper's Hawks is possible, but Kestrels have always coexisted with these birds. And Kestrels are not declining everywhere. The American Kestrel BBS Trend Map (1966-2003) is a peculiar patchwork of areas where Kestrels are declining, juxtaposed with areas where they are increasing.

Visiting winter raptors at Floyd Bennett Field include (or included) Rough-legged (*Buteo lagopus*), Red-shouldered (*B. lineatus*), Red-tailed (*B. jamaicensis*), Cooper's (*Accipiter cooperii*), Sharp-shinned Hawks (*A. striatus*) and Merlins (*Falco columbarius*). Except for Rough-legged Hawks, which are a thing of the past, any of these birds might still be seen but are not as regular as they used to be.

### Breeding Bird Atlas Comparisons

A comparison of breeding birds found at Floyd Bennett Field on the most recent Breeding Bird Atlas, 2000-2004 with birds breeding there during the first Atlas, 1980-1985, shows these changes:

The first column shows breeding birds present in 1980-1985, but not found in 2000-2004. The second column shows birds breeding in 2000-2004 which were not found in 1980-1985.

Birds lost as breeders	Birds gained as breeders
American Kestrel	Willet
Spotted Sandpiper	Carolina Wren
Black-billed Cuckoo	Brown-headed Cowbird
Barn Owl	Savannah Sparrow
Short-eared Owl	
Chimney Swift	
Horned Lark	
Eastern Meadowlark	
House Finch	
Grasshopper Sparrow	
Sharp-tailed Sparrow	

Natural changes at the shore have nearly obliterated the small patch of high marsh where the Sharp-tailed Sparrows used to be, and they are not to be expected now. Besides loss of breeding birds some birds still present may be reduced in numbers. A walk along the trails in the North 40 in fall or winter will convince anyone who can make the comparison that there are fewer sparrows than there used to be. A hunting Sharp-shinned Hawk flying ahead down the trail, once a common sight, would be surprising now.

It is obvious that most of the changes which have taken place over the last 20 years have not been for the better. All birders know the expectation that at any moment something marvelous may step out of the woods or drop down from the sky. That is why they are birding. That expectation is less likely to arise these days, in Floyd Bennett Field as in many other places.

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*Club members posing with the newly installed fence on the Peninsula, installed with money raised in this year's Birdathon.*

## International Migratory Bird Day & BBC Birdathon 2014

The Brooklyn Bird Club participated in International Migratory Bird Day by holding a Birdathon on Saturday, May 10, 2014. This year's theme was dedicated to habitat protection in Prospect Park. The conservation goal was to implement fencing along a long-neglected portion of the Peninsula shoreline and woodlands. Bitterns, Connecticut Warblers and other rarities have been seen in this area, and with fencing we hope to see much more bird activity in the coming years.

Eight teams participated in the event. Despite an afternoon deluge that trapped several teams in their cars in Greenwood Cemetery, a total of 129 species were seen during the day, of which 104 were seen in Prospect Park.

In the final tally, the Timberdoodlers (Dennis Hrehowsik, Kristin Costello, & Bobbi Manian) netted the most birds in Brooklyn overall with 119. The Prospect Pittas (Keir Randall and Linda Lam) had the most birds in Prospect Park with 92 species. Together, all the teams and independent donors raised \$3,245.00. The fencing was installed on August 18<sup>th</sup>, so keep an eye out during Fall migration.

## Sparks!

*Eni Falci & Vinnie Falci*

Vinnie and I have always been nature people long before birding became a passion. Vinnie has been climbing mountains since his twenties. While the hike and the mountains were the thing; birds, if they were at hand, were noticed, whether it was a White-throated Sparrow singing in the White Mountains or a Indigo Bunting or Scarlet Tanager right there at a scenic overview stop in the Hudson Highlands.

I've been a professional gardener working the backyards of Brooklyn and the terraces of Manhattan for years. How could I not notice the birds when I was working in their domain? Whether it was a Mockingbird diving at me because I got too close to its nestlings or a Hermit Thrush following me from flower bed to flower bed. Sometimes I felt like the thrush was pointing and saying "dig here, let's see what you can find for me." The most memorable birds were the surprise of a drab warbler resting in a Tribeca terrace I had created and my encounter with Pale Male and his consort on Madison Avenue and 92nd Street. I was bent over a planter on the roof when I heard a call; looking up there was Pale Male eye level with me hovering a yard off the building edge in the air 42 floors above the ground. I watched as he and the other hawk called to each other and then perched on the summit of the high rise building where I was working. How could I not

stop and look at such a close encounter!

Our casual experiences with bird watching—pre binoculars—continued when my family moved to Florida. Delray Beach had many small wetland areas to walk in and there were always birds. The housing section my mom lived in had a retention pond with an island. Every evening we would take my mom for a walk there to see the roosting "white birds." My dad was buried in Florida and the cemetery is literally across the street from one of the best Everglade preserves. So after a graveside visit I would go across to the Loxahatchee Canal and walk the trails. This is where I met the bird that probably converted me into an avid birder. Still no binoculars but the bird was right there. I watched in awe as this chicken-sized purple bird carefully walked from lily pad to lily pad, foraging as he went. I could not believe what I was seeing—he was walking on water—how biblical! Oh yes, I later learned it was a Purple Gallinule.

About a year later Vinnie was recovering from a nasty abdominal surgery that was healing badly. We were taking a walk in the park and he ran out of steam right by the feeders set up on Breeze Hill. He was resting on a well-placed, large downed tree trunk when Michele Dreger and her bird walk came to the feeders. We went over and Michele gave us her classic intro: "Well, if you're interested in birding we lead a beginner's bird walk starting at noon every Saturday. We meet up at the Audubon Center. Come join us." The next Saturday we did. Vinnie was still healing so we would lag at the end of the group with Valerie bringing up the rear—that was us. Michele got to the top of Lookout and kept going. Vinnie, who had struggled up there, said "I just got here, don't leave yet" so we lingered a while up top to catch some other birds.

We have been going on Michele's walks ever since. She was great about making birding accessible. No technical feather names just easy mnemonics for differentiating who was who. Michele also teaches about the behavior of birds, even the commonest, the Robin. She turned us on to books like "How to be a Bad Birder" which emphasized enjoying common birds doing uncommon things. I loved that and still do. We were also lucky that we started learning to bird with a great group of people, whose company we enjoyed. Eddie was one of my favorites and he got my sense of humor. Ann was a yellow magnet; if there was a warbler around she found it.

We and others have stayed with Michele's walk long after we were past being beginner birders because we enjoyed each other's company, and birding was social as well as seeing good birds. Now we help lead the walks and cover when Michele is unavailable. Birders are generous. They want to share their birds, and Brooklyn birders are the most giving of all in my opinion. I only work part-time, so I get into the Park by myself during the week. I would be alone on a woodland trail and another person I did not know would come along. I would see the binoculars and there was instant trust and sharing. "Seen anything good," the universal birder's salutation. Often I would ask can I join you, more because I was a little uncomfortable being alone in a remote area of the Park than hoping for good birds to be spotted with my new companions. They always said yes and would help me get on the birds. I was to learn later many of these people were the best birders around. So, I would like to thank the generosity of Brooklyn birders like Scott Whittle and his four legged side kick, Tom Stephenson and the Robs Bate and Jett for letting a rank beginner tag along with them.

It is great that Vinnie and I both enjoy birding equally and have complementary skills. Vinnie is great at spotting birds and I can figure out what we are seeing. Now that we are empty nesters and tuition dollars are not being spent, we have time and resources to travel. Birding is usually a factor in choosing our destinations. Our first overseas trip was to Costa Rica. It was not a trip with a guide but with our copy of Richard Garrigues' book and the skills we had learned with the Brooklyn Bird Club. We got over 100 new birds, which more than satisfied us.



## Saving Ridgewood Reservoir

by Steve Nanz

Seven years ago, my wife, Heidi, fielded an email addressed to the Brooklyn Bird Club from Jennifer Monson who was the Artistic Director of iLAND—interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature, and Dance. She wanted to conduct a breeding bird survey of the historic Ridgewood Reservoir, located on the Brooklyn/Queens border and decommissioned in 1989, as a part of a project combining art and science. We would soon learn that through Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC program, Queens Community Board 5's



decades old request for a nature preserve had been granted. The only problem was that only two of the three basins which make up the Ridgewood Reservoir would be preserved, while the third basin would be bulldozed and turned into a sports complex. Jennifer's project would raise awareness by bringing citizen science and dance art together via bird survey and dance performance at the reservoir. With this remarkable start, our journey to help save this habitat began.

Heidi invited birders in Brooklyn and Queens to help out with the survey. In the process we became involved with members of the local community. In the course of several meetings, the Ridgewood Reservoir/Highland Park Alliance (RRHPA) was formed, with Heidi as its first president. Fellow Brooklyn birder, Rob Jett, who helped with the survey, created the Save Ridgewood Reservoir blog, <http://ridgewoodreservoir.blogspot.com/>, which he has faithfully kept up to date since 2007, chronicling all that has happened along with historical references, documentation, links, species data, etc. He even created a short history video which can be viewed at: <http://vimeo.com/12384349>

The bird survey was done and this group of dedicated volunteers began an uphill battle to fight the city's plan. The effort paid off in 2008 with then city comptroller, Bill Thompson, killing the sports facility



*Ridgewood reservoir, © Steve Nanz*

part of the project. The plan to renovate the paths and fences was approved and all seemed well until last year when the parks department unveiled the second phase of its modified plan, which it claimed was needed to

comply with New York State DEC requirements. Though not as devastating as the original plan, it would somehow still manage to destroy the same habitat we had fought so hard to preserve.

The Reservoir had been listed by DEC as a dam with high hazard potential. As such, it would require enormously expensive upkeep. Parks decided it would be best to have DEC reclassify it as low or no hazard. To establish the new low/no hazard classification, a plan was developed which called for two large breaches at the north end between each of the three basins and a third breach at the southwest end of the west basin. It also called for the construction of a road from the south west corner to the north east corner of the west basin as well as ramps going into the east and central basins. 470 trees would need to be cut down. The project would cost taxpayers over \$6 million.

The high hazard classification itself was suspect. A storm greater than the annual rainfall (over three feet of precipitation!) would be required to pose a threat, but even in that scenario it was unclear how, or why, that standard was applied.

RRHPA had submitted an application four years ago to have the Reservoir mapped for wetland protection. We were informed that DEC did not have the resources to carry out mapping. DEC told us that it was their opinion that basin 3 contained no wetland habitat and would never be mapped as such. This opinion was not shared by certified wetland delineator, Mickey Cohen, who was hired by RRHPA in 2009. Nor was it shared by Round Mountain Ecological LLC, which was hired by Parks 2007 to prepare a preliminary assessment. The Parks own Natural Resources Group in 2005 and 2014 found wetlands in the southern end of Basin 3.

The current president of RRHPA, Gary Comorau, hired the law firm, Super Law Group. The lead attorney, Edan Rotenberg, expressed to RRHPA that with enough public support, we would have a shot of defeating the plan. We circulated a petition asking DEC to reconsider the hazard rating of the Reservoir while at the same time State Assembly Member, Catherine Nolan, sent a letter, co-signed by several other politicians, to Governor Cuomo.

And it worked! We surpassed our petition goal of 1000 signatures. DEC Commissioner, Joseph Martins, writing on behalf of the Governor, essentially agreed. And not only did they pledge to take the steps to reclassify the

Reservoir, but they also committed to mapping for wetlands as early as this fall!

Much work still needs to be done. DEC has not yet made the reclassification, so we must stay vigilant. Also, we need to make sure that all three basins gets wetland protection. Additionally, we would like to see DEC designate the Reservoir as a "Bird Conservation Area" and add it to the New York Natural Heritage Program database of "significant natural communities" and "habitats for rare and endangered plants and animals". Parks still has several million dollars left over from the original PlaNYC program, which we understand can only be used for the Reservoir, not to mention the millions we saved them by not having to comply with DEC regulations. In 2009, RRHPA created an alternate proposal for Parks to consider which included turning the pump-house into a nature

center/historic educational center and adding nature paths inside the basins. We want Parks to use as much of those funds as is possible toward that end. We want Parks to commit to permanently protecting Ridgewood Reservoir.

To all those people who helped with this fight, I want to extend my thanks. This was truly a group effort involving birders, environmentalists, local politicians, members of the local community, and even a group of crazy artists.

### Fall Bird Club Meetings

**Monday, September 22, 7:00 P.M.**

**How to Improve Your Bird Song Identification skills**

**Presenter: Tom Stephenson**

**NOTE: This program will take place *Monday evening at the Brooklyn Public Library, Central Branch, 10 Grand Army Plaza (718-230-2191)***

There's nothing more satisfying in birding than being able to recognize the birds singing and calling around you. The language for describing visual ID points for birds greatly helps us identify the species of an unknown bird. The lack of this language for songs makes it very difficult to know how to figure out an unknown song.

In this talk we'll cover how to improve your song recognition and learning skills by using memory theory combined with the understanding of song and phrase structure. We'll also discuss an efficient language for describing vocalizations and give examples of how objective analysis of songs makes it much easier to separate similar-sounding species.

Tom Stephenson has been birding since he was a kid. His articles have appeared in many publications, including *Birding*, *Birdwatcher's Digest*, *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, and *Guide to the Birds of SE Brazil*. He has lectured and guided many groups across the US as well as in Asia, where he has trained guides for the government of Bhutan. In 2013, Princeton University Press published *The Warbler Guide*.

**NOTE: October and November meetings are still in the planning stages. Please check our web page at <http://www.brooklynbirdclub.org/meetings.htm> for updated information in the next weeks.**

## Fall 2014 Schedule

### Information and Registration

No registration is required for Prospect Park or Green-Wood Cemetery trips. For all other trips, advance registration is required; exact location and time of meeting will be provided at time of registration. Car pool fees are required for some trips and should be paid directly to your driver.

In noting the need to make trip registrations more manageable and fair, the BBC council has imposed these guidelines:

- • With the exception of Prospect Park and Green-wood Cemetery trips, a TWO-WEEK registration period will precede all trips.
- Club members will be given first-priority for all trips except Prospect and Green-wood Cemetery. Nonmembers and guests are welcome on BBC trips but only if there is available space at the end of the registration period. Drivers, whether members or not, will normally have priority over non-drivers. Full weekend (overnight) trips are reserved for members only.
- **NEW** Children 14 years of age or younger are welcome on trips but must be accompanied by an adult guardian.
- Some trips have limited enrollment, at the discretion of the trip leader. So register early! In addition, most car trips require lunch, water, appropriate clothes for seasonal weather, and all the essentials you require for day trips.
- Please call registrars as early as possible within the registration period, and before 9 p.m. **Please be sure to leave your phone number(s) so that we may contact you in the event of a schedule change.**
- **NEW** Status changes of a trip due to inclement weather will be posted on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/BrooklynBirdClub> and also on Peter Dorosh's blog: <http://prospectsightings.blogspot.com/> Please check before leaving for the trip if the weather looks questionable.

We hope these guidelines will facilitate the registration process in the fairest possible way.

The registrar and information source for each trip is listed at the end of the trip description.

**Prospect Park Bird 2-hour Sunday Walks:** In addition to the trips listed below, the first Sunday of every month the Brooklyn Bird Club participates in the Prospect Park Audubon Center's "First Sunday" two-hour walks. All walks leave from the Prospect Park Audubon Center at the Boathouse at 8 a.m. (10 a.m. in January and February; check <http://www.prospectpark.org/calendar> to confirm times.)





### **Tuesday and Thursday Seasonal Prospect Park Walks**

No registration is required for these weekly walks in Prospect Park during migration season. (**Note:** due to possible scheduling conflicts, leader substitutions may be made for some dates.)

**TUESDAYS: April 8th, April 15th, April 22nd, April 29th, May 6th, May 13th, May 20th**

**September 17th, 24th; October 1st, 8th, 15th.**

Leader: Rob Bate. Meet at Bartel Pritchard Square park entrance at **7:30** a.m.

**THURSDAYS: April 17th, April, 24th, May 1st, May 8th, May 15th, and May 22nd**

**August 21st, 28th, September 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th**

Leader: Tom Stephenson. Meet at the Stranahan Statue, Grand Army Plaza, at **7:15** a.m.

### **Saturday, September 27th, Brooklyn "Wildcard"**

**Leader:** Keir Randall

**Focus:** Best birding activity cluster or rare birds will be determined by the week's listserve reports for Brooklyn area

**Car fee:** TBA by leader

**Registrar:** Dennis Hrehowsik, email [deepseagangster@gmail.com](mailto:deepseagangster@gmail.com)

**Registration period:** Sept 16th - Sept 25th

### **Saturday, October 4th "Leader's Choice"**

**Leader:** Steve Nanz

**Focus:** Best birding activity cluster or rare birds will be determined by the week's listserve reports for Brooklyn area

**Car fee:** TBA by leader

**Registrar:** Heidi Steiner-Nanz, email [heidi.steiner@verizon.net](mailto:heidi.steiner@verizon.net)

**Registration period:** Sept 23rd - Oct 2nd

### **Saturday, October 11th Marine Park's "Brooklyn" Sparrows**

**Meet:** Grand Army Plaza #2/3 train stop at 7:00AM

**Leader:** Dennis Hrehowsik, email [deepseagangster@gmail.com](mailto:deepseagangster@gmail.com)

### **Saturday, October 18th, Greenwood Cemetery**

**Meet:** 8 AM at main entrance 25th St. & 5th Ave.

**Leader:** Tom Preston

**Note:** nearest train line is "R" to 25th Street stop.

### **Saturday, October 25th Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn**

**Leader:** Rob Jett

**Focus:** migration peak sparrows, raptors and grassland species

**Car fee:** \$10.00

**Registrar:** Sandy Paci, email [sandypaci@earthlink.net](mailto:sandypaci@earthlink.net)


**Registration period:** Oct 14th - Oct 23rd

### **Friday, October 31st, Halloween walk in Prospect Park**

**Meet:** 1:00 PM at the picnic tables on Well Drive near the Lake northwest shore (access Vanderbilt St park entrance)

**Leader:** Bobbi Manian

**Note:** Closest subway is F line to Ft Hamilton Parkway, back entrance ; or #68 bus

 **Saturday, November 1st, Birding on Brooklyn's Terminal Moraine ridge: Sunset Park hawk watch and Greenwood Cemetery**  
Meet 8 am at Greenwood Cemetery entrance at 4th Avenue

**Leader:** Peter Dorosh, 1-347-622-3559 (text message only) in case of wet weather

**Focus:** Hawk watching in this first ever BBC visit to Sunset Park at approximately 11:00 after Greenwood Cemetery early birding; migrants will be early winter species

**Note:** bring a small chair.

**Nearest train:** "R" ,"D",or "N" line to 36th St, walk east [www.hopstop.com](http://www.hopstop.com)

 **Saturday, November 8<sup>th</sup>**, Jones Beach, Long Island


**Leader:** Joe Giunta

**Focus:** Coastal winter birds and waterfowl, gulls, raptors

**Car fee:** \$25.00

**Registrar:** Jerry Layton email [lsparrow41@hotmail.com](mailto:lsparrow41@hotmail.com) (preferred) or home phone 718-788-0286 (before 8 pm)

**Registration Period:** Oct 23<sup>th</sup> – Nov 6<sup>th</sup>

 **Sunday, November 16<sup>th</sup>**, Plumb Beach region, Brooklyn coast


**Leader:** Bobbi Manian

**Focus:** Coastal birds and waterfowl, gulls, raptors

**Car fee:** \$10.00

**Registrar:** Dennis Hrehowsik, email [deepseagangster@gmail.com](mailto:deepseagangster@gmail.com)

**Registration Period:** Nov 4<sup>th</sup> – Nov 13<sup>th</sup>

 **Saturday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>**, The great marathon birding hike of western Rockaway

**Leader:** Peter Dorosh

**Focus:** Coastal birds and waterfowl, gulls, raptors, winter passerines

**Itinerary:** This long beach hike will cover Riis Park, heading west along the coastal dunes and beach through Fort Tilden to the Breezy Point tip and back. Approximate walking distance is 9 miles round trip . Wear good shoes, bring *light* scope and lunch. For folks in good condition, steady gait.

**Registrar:** Peter Dorosh, 347-622-3559 text only

**Meet** 8 am at Hillel Place and Flatbush Ave corner.

**Location:**

**<http://tinyurl.com/meetBBCNov22>**

Nearest train IRT "Brooklyn College" station( last stop) or B 41 bus. From here we take the Q 35 bus to the Fort Tilden stop, 1<sup>st</sup> stop after the Marine Park Bridge (opposite the firehouse)

**Resource:**

<http://web.mta.info/nyct/maps/busbkln.pdf>

 **Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>**, Brooklyn Gull Tour

**Leader** Dennis Hrehowsik

**Focus:** primarily gull species, waterfowl, raptor and winter passerines seen during tour

**Car fee:** \$12.00

**Registrar:** Mike Yuan, email (preferred) [mjyuan@gmail.com](mailto:mjyuan@gmail.com)

**Registration Period:** Nov 25<sup>th</sup> – Dec 4<sup>th</sup>

 **Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup>**, Ducks of Kings County

**Leader:** Peter Dorosh

**Focus:** primarily duck species, along with other bird species

**Car pool:** \$12.00

**Registrar:** Peter Dorosh, Email [Prosbird@aol.com](mailto:Prosbird@aol.com) or TEXT Message 347-622-3559

**Registration Period:** Dec 2<sup>nd</sup>- Dec 11<sup>th</sup>

 **Saturday, December 20<sup>th</sup>**, 115<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Census


<http://conservation.audubon.org/programs/christmas-bird-count>

**Teams Coordinator:** Mary Eyster, email [maryjoeyster@gmail.com](mailto:maryjoeyster@gmail.com)

**Compiler:** Rick Cech, Assisted by Paul Keim


**Comments:** Teams Coordinator Mary Eyster assigns trip leaders and participants, assimilating teams and establishing starting points with team leaders. Please email as early as possible for participation in this great event. Time is needed to plan and figure out the details.


The count dinner is held at the Prospect Park Audubon Center (Boathouse). Help and assistance is needed for dinner setup. The coordinator is Heidi Steiner-Nanz, email [heidi.steiner@verizon.net](mailto:heidi.steiner@verizon.net) to get details.

 **Thursday, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015**, A Birdy New Year's Day Celebration in Prospect Park

**Leader:** Peter Dorosh

**Meet** at Bartel Pritchard Square park entrance at 9 am.

 **Saturday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>**, A Coney Island Winter Trek  
**Leader:** Mike Yuan, email mjoyuan@gmail.com  
**Focus:** coastal species, waterbirds, gulls  
**No registration:** Meet 8 am at Dunkin Donuts outside Stillwell Ave subway terminus station

 **Saturday, January 10<sup>th</sup>**, Jones Beach, Long Island  
**Leader:** Steve Nanz  
**Focus:** Coastal winter birds and waterfowl, gulls, raptors  
**Car fee:** \$25.00  
**Registrar:** Heidi Steiner-Nanz email heidi.steiner@verizon.net or call before 8 pm 718- 369-2116  
**Registration Period:** Dec 30th -Jan 8th Mar 4 - Mar 13


 **Saturday January 17th, The NY State Waterfowl count**


<http://www.nybirds.org/ProjWaterfowl.htm>


For more information at end of this year, 2014, contact Region 10 (Long Island) Coordinator: Ron Bourque, email ron.jean11@verizon.net

**Focus:** water birds and ducks survey of Brooklyn and western Queens locations

**Contact for team setup:** Peter Dorosh, Email Prosbird@aol.com or TEXT Message 347-622-3559

 **Saturday, January 24<sup>th</sup>**, Norton Point Sea watch (Seagate, Coney Island)  
**Leader:** Rob Jett  
**Focus:** coastal species, waterbirds, gulls  
**Registrar:** Janet Schumacher, email janets33@optonline.net or cell: 718-594-7480  
**Note:** distance to Norton Pt from Stillwell Ave terminus subway hub is about 1 ½ miles; limit 15 registrants

 **Saturday, January 31<sup>st</sup>**, New Jersey Winter Tour  
**Leader:** Rick Wright  
**Car fee:** \$35.00  
**Registrar:** Sandy Paci, email sandypaci56@gmail.com or cell # 347-834-5881  
**Registration period:** Jan 20<sup>th</sup> – Jan 29<sup>th</sup>

 **February 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>**, Overnight Weekend: Montauk Point and East End, Long Island  
**Leader:** Rob Bate  
**Focus:** Winter birds of various habitats, waterfowl and winter flocks  
**Car fee:** \$100.00  
**Registrar:** Bobbi Manian email Roberta.manian@yahoo.com  
**Registration period:** Jan 2<sup>nd</sup> - Feb 5<sup>th</sup>

### *Renew your membership now for 2015!*

Memberships are up for renewal December 31st. If you are up for renewal, why not send your payment now before the holiday rush, and avoid those bugging renewal notices? Any payment received from now on will extend your membership to December 2015. Remember too, you can now pay via Paypal!

You can renew online via this page:

<http://www.brooklynbirdclub.org/join.htm>

Please indicate "renewal" in the special instructions box.

### *Reminders!*

- Check out our Brooklyn Bird Club shop on CafePress for great gifts for your Brooklyn birding pals.  
<http://www.cafepress.com/brooklynbird>
- Have an interesting story related to birding? We are always looking for contributions for *The Clapper Rail*. Trip reports, book reviews, essays, ID tips—we'd love to hear what you have to say. Please send submissions to [newsletter@brooklynbirdclub.org](mailto:newsletter@brooklynbirdclub.org)