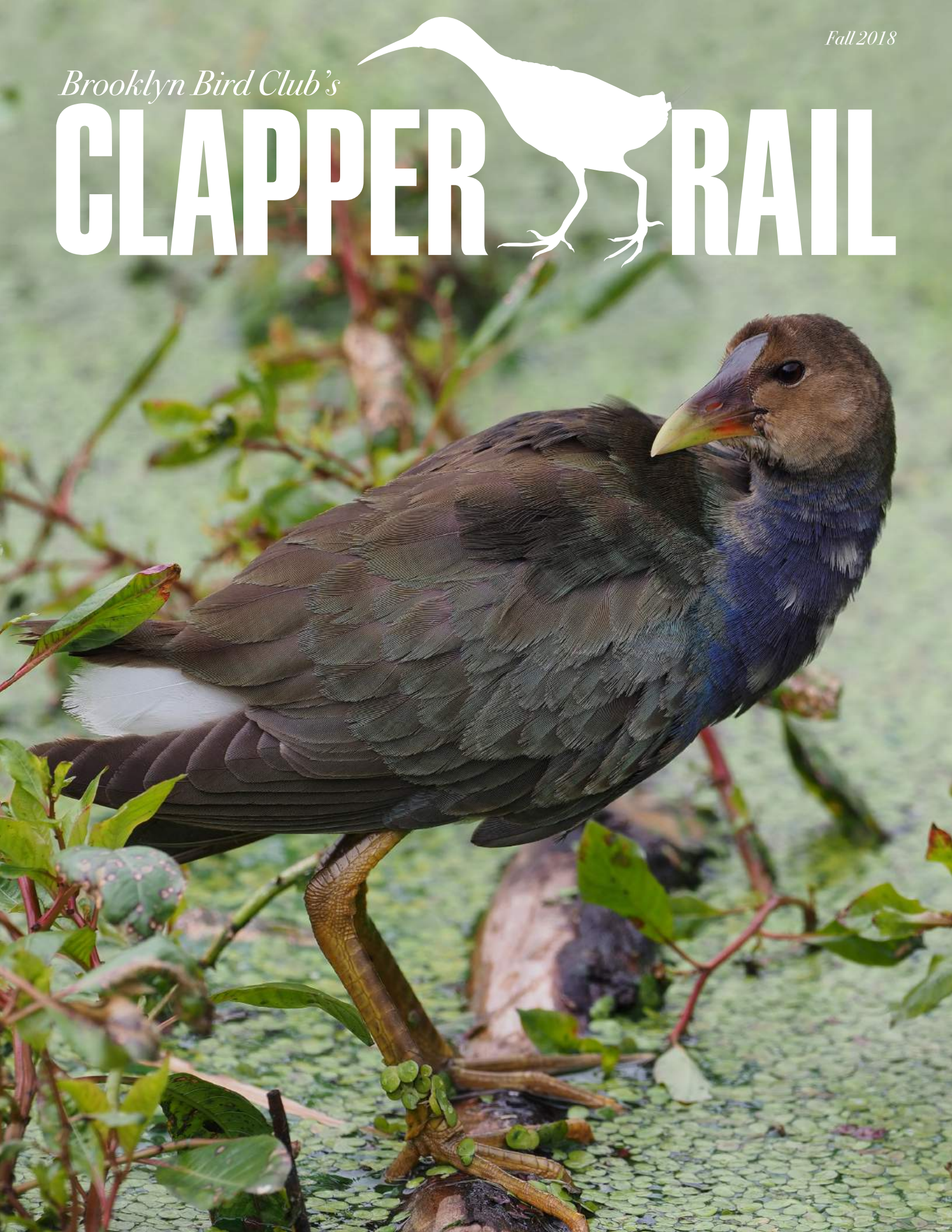
Fall 2018

Brooklyn Bird Club's

CLAPPER RAIL



Editor's note

Clapper Rail at Plumb Beach. Photograph by Marc Brawer.

If we had to name this particular Clapper Rail, we might call it the Travel Issue. In these pages, Brooklyn birders share their European adventures: Adelia Honeywood traveled from southern Germany to Sweden, while Heidi Cleven visited Norway's Svalbard, one of the world's northernmost inhabited places. Back at home, Janet Schumacher spoke to Dale Dyer, who for the last decade has been painting the plates for his newly-published "Birds of Central America" field guide. It's enough to make you consider booking a trip to Belize or Costa Rica.

But we can't overlook the everyday inspiration to be found in our local parks, where many of the birds that appear in Dale's guide turned up this fall on their migration south. It's that inspiration that led August Davidson-Onsgard to start birding in Fort Greene Park, as he tells us in this issue, or, as Chris Laskowski writes in *Sparks*, to make the most of an unemployed stint by discovering bird-rich Prospect Park. The quality of the birds we got this fall also shines through in a multi-part photoseries, not to mention on the cover itself.

We all get different things out of birding, and for me, community is at the top of the list. Which is why I'd like to encourage you to renew your BBC membership and, if you haven't already, sign up for the Christmas Bird Count. From exploring parts unknown to your local patch, it's more fun when you can share stories with your fellow birders back home.

– Ryan Goldberg

Cover: Purple Gallinule in Prospect Park.
Photograph by Paul Chung.

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The Brooklyn Bird Club
President: Dennis Hrehowsik
http://www.brooklynbirdclub.org

The Clapper Rail
Editor: Ryan Goldberg
Deputy Editor: Janet Schumacher
Art & Design: Tina Alleva, Angie Co

Cover art for "Birds of Central America." Painting by Dale Dyer.

Birds of Central America

By Janet Schumacher

Ten years in the making, exhaustively researched and covering 1,200 Central American species, the definitive guide to Central American birds is here! Released by Princeton Press in October, "Birds of Central America" includes 260 beautiful color plates with range maps and notes on distribution, habits and voice on the opposite page spreads.

Brooklyn's own Dale Dyer painted all the illustrations and Andrew Vallely provided the range maps and text. The two authors collaborated closely, sitting side by side at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), which provided access to its extensive specimen collection and library.

Many Brooklyn birders were aware of Dale's work on this project, but it was a pleasant surprise in late September when I found this guide on Amazon while preparing for an upcoming trip to Central America. I immediately preordered a copy, and after it arrived, I arranged to meet Dale in Ditmas Park, near his home in Kensington, copy in hand.

I had briefly met Dale several years ago at the AMNH while on a visit to meet Paul Sweet, the curator of the avian specimen collection. On the Christmas count in Green-Wood Cemetery, our team had discovered a mysterious large raptor wing alongside several dead young raccoons, partially buried in the snow and leaf litter. Possibly it was from a Great Horned Owl, which was missing from our count. But from a photo of a primary feather, Paul determined that, surprisingly, it

Above: One of Dale's favorite plates he created for the field guide.

was from a Northern Harrier, and he offered to show me comparison specimens in the collection.

At the time, Dale was working nearby on one of the swift plates, partially completed. But before painting the next specimen, Dale was using a caliper to measure the length of the wing, tail, leg and bill of the swift specimens, to determine the correct body proportions. Dale emphasized that all his drawings are to scale. And at the top right corner of each plate, in an interesting twist, Dale added the percentage reduction of each bird compared to its actual size. And then each painted plate was reduced 50 percent for printing. This is a unique and welcome feature. More than once, I have been misled by the real size of a bird after having studied the plate.

The accurate sizing is just one example of the precision and care that went into the paintings. Dale said he spent time planning each plate before beginning, so that "a clear design leads your eye through the display." Another striking and pleasing decision was to paint on colored pastel paper. "I don't know why white is the standard. Birds look rather dark and silhouetted on white," he explained. He generally used darker paper for the forest species, which brings out "the signaling features that birds use to identify each other and that we rely on too."

Dale is soft spoken and reserved but justifiably proud of his accomplishment and of "having cleared a certain hurdle." He said, "Birds are what I drew as a kid." He wavered between biology and art and decided to go to art school and pursue a career in fine art. Some years later, he became interested in birding again and began to draw birds to improve his identification skills. This led to commissions for several field guides, including Birds of Peru. But he wanted to pursue a project of his own, and thus began his collaboration with Andrew Vallely.

Dale has traveled to Central America, but not as often as he might have preferred. "It would have been a different book if I had lived there, more about behavior, but then the work wouldn't have gotten done," he noted.

And he was committed to his family life in Brooklyn. "When I started the project, I took my daughter to kindergarten each day. She is 15 now," he added, as another way to measure the time commitment to the project.

Bird by bird, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day, Dale completed 3,000 individual bird paintings, covering almost 1,200 species. The plates illustrate gender and age differences for many species plus a special focus on regional variations. Dale drew from museum specimens and also consulted online photos. He primarily used watercolor with the addition of gouache white. In some cases acrylic white was added as a bottom layer for sparkling effect.

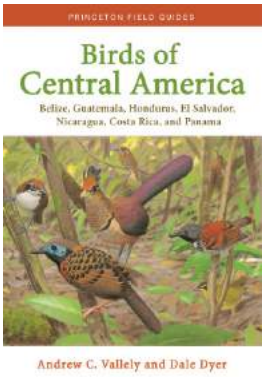
In looking at the illustrations of the plainest of the birds—the swifts—I'm able to see a richness and warmth in the browns, making the birds come alive. In other guides, the swifts may be muddied and crowded on the page, and it's difficult to see the differences. Dale's artistry and well-thought-out technique and design are evident throughout the book. Even on plates where there are many illustrations, such as on the sandpiper pages where there are four drawings per species, there is never a sense of crowding or confusion. The eye is able to follow the information easily. And occasionally Dale has inserted a small vignette, for example, the shiny eyes of a potoo at midnight or Green Ibises perched in a tree at dusk.

Over the decade, new species have been added, there have been changes in the classification of others, and birds have been found to be nesting in Central America that previously were not known there. "And some questions remain to be settled. We measured and compared 56 specimens of Pine Siskins," Dale explained. "There were gray and streaked morphs. It had been hypothesized that the gray birds were hybrids with Black-capped Siskin." He illustrated four representative specimens. Some of these changes required changes in plates that had already been completed. A new Puffbird was recently discovered in the region, too late for inclusion in the book. Dale shrugged, "It is exciting to print information that hasn't been presented before."

Although Princeton Press bills "Birds of Central America" as "handy and compact," it weighs more than a kilo and may be a stretch for some backpacks. But all the information is on the spread facing the illustrations, eliminating page flipping or carrying an extra volume. And it is also a dream book to sink into on the couch over the winter, plotting a future trip. The illustrations are so beautiful, and the birds so inviting. It is easy to get drawn into the book from the cover; it brings up memories of ant swarms I've seen on Pipeline Road in Panama. As the army ants flow through the forest floor, all the insects in their path flee. And these flying insects attract the antbirds, antvireos, antwrens, creepers, and if you are very, very lucky, a Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo.

It is well worth putting this guide on your holiday gift list and elevating Central America to your next birding adventure.

Dale Dyer in Green-Wood Cemetery.



Birds of Central America: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama
By Andrew C. Vallely and Dale Dyer.
Illustrated. 584 pp. Princeton Press.

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Fort Greene Park

By August Davidson-Onsgard

Fort Greene Park is a 30-acre park located in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, between Dekalb and Myrtle Avenues. After being used as a military encampment during the Revolutionary War and War of 1812, the land was opened to the public in 1847 and later redesigned in 1896 by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. Most people in the neighborhood think the only interesting birds in the park are the Red-tailed Hawks that nest in Long Island University's adjacent buildings and frequently come to the park to hunt. However, the park can be a great place to go birding.

I first started birding in Fort Greene Park at about the same time I started birding seriously. I got some of my first lifers there, and to this day, it is (embarrassingly) the only place in the U.S. where I've seen a Golden-crowned Kinglet. As I'm writing this, 117 species have been reported on eBird in the park, and multiple new species are being added almost every month. My highlights from this season so far have been the three Yellow-billed Cuckoos I found perched out in the open on the north side of the park, as well as a Lincoln's Sparrow and a Yellow-breasted Chat—both of which I found among the new native plants at the Willoughby entrance.

Thanks to the park's age, it has quite a few old growth trees that are popular with migrants. In the past couple years, the Fort Greene Park Conservancy has also planted more native flora. These are attracting new species and incentivize warblers to hunt for insects on the ground, or at eye level, which can be great for photography.

Due to the park's off-leash dog hours, it often pays to visit in the afternoon or in the morning after 9 once that window has closed. It can also be fun to visit on very cold or cloudy days, because when fewer people and dogs are in the park, the birds come into the open more often. Two of my favorite places to photograph birds in the park are the fenced-off areas by the Willoughby Avenue and South Portland Avenue entrances. Warblers will come to these spots to look for insects, and you can get photos of them with flowering plants in the background. Another two favorite spots are the lawn just north of the visitor center and the lawn west of the tennis courts. These can be great places to look for sparrows, warblers, and kinglets, especially when areas have been fenced off.

Above: Blue Grosbeak. Title Page: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Photographs by August Davidson-Onsgard.

BIRDING GUIDE: FORT GREENE PARK

Fall Photoseries: Janet Zinn

Title Page: Eastern Meadowlark. Clockwise from top: Golden-crowned Kinglet, White-winged Scoter, Ruby-crowned Kinglet. All photographs taken in Prospect Park.

Goldfinch. Mixed-media illustration by Sam Dean Lynn.

Sparks!

By Chris Laskowski

It's hard for me to pinpoint a spark moment or spark bird that turned me into a dedicated birder. I've had a lifelong interest in birds, so the spark was more like an ember that was kindled over time.

That ember, I guess, was started by my father. Growing up in Connecticut, at the end of a dead-end street in a woodsy blue-collar suburb, we had a feeder at our house that went up every wintertime. I would help my dad premix the seed into coffee cans that he had saved—one coffee can worth of seeds would fill the feeder. He swore by his own special mixture, the secret ingredient being extra thistle seeds since they were good for attracting finches.

"That's how the ember started, but what caused it to burn brighter?"

I still remember snowy winter mornings eating biscuits—the Pillsbury kind that came in a pop-open sleeve—and watching the birds come in to the feeder. I became familiar with cardinals, blue jays, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, Downy woodpeckers, juncos and finches. My dad knew them all (talking to my Mom recently she told me that Evening Grosbeaks and redpolls had come to their feeders too) but I wouldn't call him a birder. He never went out of his way to go see birds, but if he came across one he found interesting, he'd try to figure out its identity. So I think that's where my curiosity about birds began.

That's how the ember started, but what caused it to burn brighter? Throughout the years, there were moments when I realized I knew more about birds than the average person, but I had enough sense to know I wasn't a true birdwatcher. Or was it birder? Then, in 2000, I visited Block Island with some friends. We rented a house for a week in the middle of June, and we had a huge deck surrounded by thickets as far as the eye could see. In the morning, they would light up with lots of activity—birds flitting about and singing from every corner. When we returned the following year, I brought a brand-new pair of binoculars and a field guide that I had been given. Finally, I was ready to become a birdwatcher.

But the result was frustration. There was a flycatcher that favored one tree in the backyard of the house—I think I identified it as about seven different species. Looking back on it, I think it was an Eastern Pewee. There were positives—I learned the Eastern Towhee's call (drink-your-tea) and finally figured out what a grackle was—but mostly I learned how difficult birding is for a beginner. You need a knowledge base. So I chucked the bins into the closet along with the idea of becoming a birder.

The idea remained dormant for only so long. About seven years ago, I was basically given a professional choice: move to New Jersey or get laid off. So after taking a layoff (obvious, right?) I found myself with a lot of time on my hands. How would I spend it?

I would tend to my job search first thing in the morning, then run some errands or pick up groceries, but by late morning the rest of my day was wide open. I decided to give birdwatching another try. I already had the tools, and everything else was free. The price was right for someone who was unemployed.

I went to Prospect Park in the middle of summer, in the middle of the afternoon, and all I saw were people. Very few birds. But this time around I remained determined, so next time I invited a friend to the park who had a very good camera. We managed to get some nice shots of birds I hadn't seen before—one was a Warbling Vireo with a katydid in its bill. I had never heard of a Warbling Vireo. It was like I discovered something! It was an addictive feeling. I began going to Prospect Park almost every other day that fall. I found myself searching the internet and came across the Brooklyn Bird Club's website, which

Warbling Vireo with katydid. Photo by Aric Carroll.

outlined certain routes at the park for good birding. There was one that started at Vanderbilt Playground and went up to something called Lookout Hill and then to the so-called Peninsula. Lookout Hill and the Peninsula—was this a city park? It was eye-opening

when I realized there was a prime spot about 25 minutes from my house via subway. But even so, I could only go birding for an hour or two. It was mentally tiring trying to figure out the identity of that little bird way up in the treetops, severely backlit, with a little bit of yellow. I realized there was homework involved if I wanted to become a good birder or even a decent one. But the knowledge base I worried I might never have began to grow, and birding became much more fun.

I can't say exactly why it grew from there but it did. Before long, I started venturing to other places like Jamaica Bay, cultivating my interest in a peaceful refuge within a blaring city. I thought I'd find a job and birding would become an occasional thing again. Instead, when I did get a job I went out birding more often than in my unemployed days. I think I embraced all the attributes that birding provides: learning, discovery, experiencing nature firsthand, exploring greenspaces in and around the city, spending time outdoors and meeting new birders and making new bird friends.

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Eastern Meadowlark. Gouache and pencil on paper by Toni Simon.

Fall Photoseries: Heydi Lopes

Title Page: Eastern Bluebird (Salt Marsh Nature Center - SMNC). Clockwise from top: Purple Finch (Floyd Bennett Field - FBF), Solitary Sandpiper (FBF), Cape May Warbler (FBF), Lincoln's Sparrow (SMNC), Blackpoll Warbler (FBF).

Falsterbo and the Rhine: Discovering the Birds of Europe

Red-footed Falcon, juvenile. Photograph by Dante Shepherd.

By Adelia Honeywood

This past August I got to go birding for the first time in foreign countries. No, not exotic destinations like Costa Rica, or Belize, or Cuba, or Africa, or Asia. No, I went birding in Europe. More specifically, in Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden. I traveled much of it solo and didn't spend a lot of money. Ninety-three life birds later (and I wasn't even there at the best time of year), I wonder if Europe may be often overlooked as a rather affordable and enjoyable birding destination.

I was going to be in Europe in August anyways, for a family reunion in southern Germany near the Swiss border. Since I was there, I wanted to get in some birding. Frankly, traveling alone as an intermediate-level birder with no experience outside of North America, I was less concerned about safety than about knowing what I was seeing and where to go to see it. I also didn't know if August would be a good time to see anything.

As chance would have it, I was birding in Prospect Park last April when I, and several other Brooklyn Bird Club members, met Nikolaj Noel Christensen from Copenhagen, who was in the park birding with his father. (Nikolaj would end up taking me on a tour of his local patch, the Amager fælled, a 1.5 square-mile natural area on the outskirts of Copenhagen that is under great development pressure, and about which we hope Nikolaj will be contributing an article to these pages.) I asked Nikolaj where was a good place to bird in Europe in August, and his unequivocal answer was Falsterbo, Sweden.

An American might think of Falsterbo as like the Cape May of Europe. Like Cape May, it is a peninsula, in this case at the very southern tip of Sweden bounded by the Baltic Sea and the Strait of Øresund with Denmark across the water. It also has a bird observatory that conducts extensive research and banding (called ringing in European English). In fact, Falsterbo Bird Observatory and Cape May Bird Observatory have a friendship agreement (along with Spurn Bird Observatory in the United Kingdom and Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario). It's also a hotspot for migration, especially in the fall, with raptors being a big draw. Migrating birds heading south to other parts of Europe or sub-Saharan Africa, and trying to stay over land for as long as possible, are funneled into the Falsterbo peninsula.

The count for a typical season from Aug. 1 to Nov. 20 has averaged 1.8 million migrating birds since 1973—a small fraction of the estimated 500 million birds passing through. For the 2018 fall season, as of Nov. 3, over 2 million birds have been counted. This data is all available on the English version of their website, where I also learned that it was very inexpensive to stay at the bird observatory, or fågelstation. As flights within Europe are cheap, I decided to tack onto my trip a six-day solo excursion to Falsterbo.

For a few months prior to my trip I studied the Collins Bird Guide to the birds of Britain and Europe, which I found to be invaluable, chock full of detailed descriptions and identification tips, as well as colorful details about behavior that one doesn't find in Sibley. Difficult groups, such as gulls and shorebirds, are introduced by an in-depth overview of the group. I even consult these sections to help with my North American birding, and the individual North American species included in Collins provide useful identification tips I haven't encountered before.

The Collins app is available for $14.99. It isn't as well designed as the Sibley app. They digitized the plates as they are in the book, with all the plumages on a single image. You can't scroll through different plumages as in Sibley, but rather have to zoom and slide around the single image. The comparison function in Android did not appear to actually let the user compare them side by side; you have to toggle back and forth. It works better on iOS. But, of course the app gives you audio of songs, and one thing I really liked is that you could also download video libraries for about a dollar. They usually require wifi to view, but are great for advance study. Also, the app allows you to switch to several European and Asian languages, more of which are available on iOS than Android.

I also purchased the Kindle edition of Dick Forsman's "Flight Identification of Raptors of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East." It is a very deep dive into raptor identification with pages of descriptions of range, molt, age and plumage, and gorgeous photos. The hardcover is 544 pages, while the Kindle edition on a phone gets to tens of thousands of pages, making it difficult to toggle between photos and descriptions or between comparison species. But for in-depth consultation, it appears to be the Bible of Eurasian raptors.

So as I studied, what were my thoroughly unscientific first impressions of the birds of Europe? Let me translate from American to British. Shorebirds are waders. Loons are divers. Every jaeger is a skua. Hawks are buzzards. (Any American who has ever read the comics or watched a Western knows that buzzards are vultures! But for that matter, there aren't any vultures in Western and Northern Europe outside of Spain and Portugal.) Sparrows are House Sparrows—which are in decline there, I only saw three the whole trip—and three similar-looking relatives, such as the Eurasian Tree Sparrow. What we would call sparrows are called buntings. Chickadees are all called tits and look like ours but also come in colors of blue and yellow. Kinglets are Firecrests or Goldcrests, are different species than ours, and have comical faces. There are two species called redstarts that are more closely related to flycatchers. What they call warblers include families of plain-looking birds that all look the same. Willow Warblers and Chiffchaff were both present on my travels and not only look almost the same—their autumn "hweet" call is also, almost, the same.

There are four different species of harrier, including our *Circus cyaneus* which they call Hen Harrier. Among the accipiter species are two species called Sparrowhawks. The falcons are more diverse than here with two species of kestrel that are different than ours, the same Peregrine and Merlin, and several other falcon species, some of which are vagrants to Western Europe. The corvids include the bi-colored Hooded Crows, Carrion Crows, Rooks and Jackdaws. I first heard of Jackdaws as a kid reading the Oz books by L. Frank Baum, in which they were very scary! Now I know they are comical, medium-sized, bobble-headed birds. There are not a whole lot of jays, only one wren species (with subspecies), and no hummingbirds!

I was going to be in southern Germany for 10 days before going to Falsterbo, so I started my European birding in a relative's garden where everything was a lifer. Hoping for some more serious excursions, I turned to Birdingpal.org, a site where travelers can connect with local birders who will guide them for the cost only of expenses. I paid $10 for a passphrase that would allow me to message local birders listed on the site. I contacted everyone listed in Northern Switzerland and nobody responded, so I wrote to BirdingPal and the site administrator refunded my money. Finally, a biologist and experienced birder named Werner Suter, realizing that he was the only Birding Pal left in the area, contacted me. Werner had hesitated to respond because he was departing for Asia in just a few days, but he generously agreed to take me around Switzerland in his car, and treated me to a full day of birding over which I got 41 new life birds.

Our first stop was the Radolfzeller Aachmündung, a nature reserve on Lower Lake Constance (called the Bodensee in German) between the towns of Moos and Radolfzell. Even in mid-August, the Bodensee was teeming with ducks and shorebirds. We saw Garganey, one juvenile Common Shelduck among several hundred Ruddy Shelducks, a half dozen Red-crested Pochards among a few dozen Common Pochards (a duck related to and very similar to our Canvasback). There was a lovely pair of Ferruginous Ducks, a species of scaup that is all deep purple, tinged with chestnut. Shorebirds in winter plumage included Spotted Redshank and Greenshank, red and green-legged cousins to our Yellowlegs; Wood and Green Sandpipers, similar to our Solitary; and Common Sandpiper which looks very much like our winter Spotted. There were Temminck's Stints, and two Curlew Sandpipers transitioning from rufous to winter grey who precipitated a follow-up with me from the local eBird administrator. And I finally got to see Curlews, which I've never seen in North America. A special treat was four Bearded Reedlings, a small, tawny passerine with a tail that's longer than its body, and the males have black "mutton moustaches" extending from the eye.

Of course the incredibly common birds are also exciting to someone who has never seen them before. Lapwings had always seemed so exotic to me and here they were everywhere. So too, the White Wagtails (one of four wagtail species in Europe), a thrush-sized, black and white passerine that frequents lakes and beaches, always pumping its tail—hence the name. Common Snipe were numerous and I loved watching them since here in North America I have yet to see a Wilson's Snipe.

Probably the most breathtaking site at the Bodensee that morning was nearly 200 White Storks, circling and soaring in the sky. The arc-shape of their black flight feathers, contrasting with their long white necks, pointed orange beaks, and long, orange legs trailing behind, made them look like cross-bows strung with arrows.

From the Bodensee we headed to the agricultural plains of the canton of Zurich which were not quite as productive as the Bodensee but nevertheless yielded some of Werner's target birds: a flock of Stock Doves; Yellowhammers, a very yellow, heavily-streaked sparrow of genus Emberiza; and a glimpse of a few Yellow Wagtails, which I didn't know at the time would be migrating in large numbers when I got to Sweden.

"Of course the incredibly common birds are also exciting to someone who has never seen them before. "

Throughout my stay in southern Germany and Switzerland, I did not go a day, birding or not, without seeing Red Kites which were everywhere in the residential and agricultural areas. They have a fabulous oscillating call that sounds like a firecracker fizzling out. Werner and his wife hosted me for a few hours at their house to see what birds were in the garden, and a pair of neighborhood Red Kites were calling incessantly. Werner said it was unusual to hear them calling so much in August, and we wondered if the fact that Europe had experienced one of the hottest summers on record had anything to do with it.

I returned across the border and did some birding on my own along the Rhine River near where I was staying, crossing in and out of Switzerland along the forest paths. My cousin was the first to stumble upon the Nationales Auengebiet Eggrank-Thurspitz on the Swiss side of the border. Auengebiet means alluvial plain, and this is is the site of a unique restoration and protected natural area at the mouth of the river Thur,

where it flows into the Rhine. With river straightening and draining for agriculture and development, more than 90 percent of Switzerland's original floodplain was destroyed. The project has been restoring a natural riverbed and creating new habitats for wildlife, as well as providing flood protection to residents and farmers, and increased opportunities for tourism.

Werner said the nature reserve was a good place to see Greater-spotted, Middle-spotted and Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers. While I didn't see those, I did see the Black Woodpecker which looks like an all-black version of our Pileated with only a red crown. I saw a pipit that I only knew to be one of five possible species. I also got to see Europe's lovely Common Kingfisher. It's half the size of the Belted with gorgeous aquamarine upper parts and bright orange under parts. I read in Collins that the Common Kingfisher "excavates nest in sandy bank, a good metre-long tunnel leading to next chamber, where young are reared on bed of piled fish bones."

In German the kingfisher is called Eisvogel which means icebird. The only plausible explanation of that I could find on the internet was: "The German name of Eisvogel (icebird) reflects the fact that migrants move south to Germany in response to freezing conditions to the north." Continuing in this vein, I had some fun with literal translations of German names for birds. Wood Ducks are Brautente meaning "bride duck." Canvasback is Riesentafelente, "a giant's blackboard duck," meaning a giant of the Jack and the Beanstalk variety. Flycatchers are Schnäpper or "snappers"; stints and sandpipers are Strandläufer, "beach runners"; and plovers are Regenpfeifer, like "rain piper," although regen as a verb can also mean to stir or move.

I was very grateful that before I attempted to talk to my relatives in German about my plans to spend a week birding in Sweden, that I was cautioned never to use the German word for bird, Vogel, as a verb the way we do in English. Using Vogel as a verb means the same thing as a certain four-letter verb in English. So, if you are a guide translating your advertisements into German and you call your tour "Birding Europe," you may sell out quickly! Just be prepared for a different kind of crowd and plan a stop in Amsterdam.

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To get to Falsterbo, I flew into Copenhagen. From there, it's a short train ride to Malmö, Sweden, where I caught a bus to Falsterbo. The total trip from Copenhagen was about 90 minutes. The bus stop is about a 15-minute walk from the fågelstation, the seasonal quarters for the banding crew, where I would

Fågelstation. Photograph by Adelia Honeywood.

be staying. I had brought a way too large suitcase to accommodate my tripod, since I didn't have a travel tripod, and I dragged it across dirt paths in the forest searching for the fågelstation. It was 3 p.m. when I arrived and all the residents, who keep a strenuous banding schedule, were fast asleep. I was greeted by a visiting Catalan man and tried to chat with him in my extremely rusty Spanish while I waited.

Eventually I was greeted by Tim Micallef, a young bander from Malta who volunteers with BirdLife Malta as a monitor reporting illegal shooting and trapping of migrating birds. Tim showed me my room, which was the size of a closet and I almost wondered if my giant suitcase would fit inside. As it was, it took up most of the floor space. There were two wooden bunks. You book by the bed and if you don't want an unknown roommate you have to pay for both beds, which I did, at the cost of only $44 USD a night. Later, when no other women traveling alone showed up, it occurred to me that they probably wouldn't have put a man in the same room with me...though it is Sweden, and I haven't verified that!

For $44, don't expect a luxury hotel. I found the mattresses a bit thin and so doubled up the two in my room. The shared bathrooms are in a separate building and the rental rooms are right on the common area, which has a kitchen, dining area, and a sitting space. It's often busy in the evenings as well as at 4:30 a.m. when the banders get up, so earplugs are necessary if you don't sleep well through noise.

The kitchen is fully stocked with dishes, utensils and cookware and I was given dedicated space in the

fridge and cupboards—which space there was more of since I was early in the season. There's a grocery store a short walk away. To get around, I rented a bike for $7 a day. I have a carrier that allows me to wear my scope like a backpack. With a large bike-basket on the front, I was set to bike around the peninsula with all my birding gear and provisions.

The best thing about staying at the fågelstation is meeting people. Everyone was incredibly friendly and collegial. The banders who live at the station during the season were all in their twenties and along with Tim from Malta, were from Sweden, Catalonia, and Britain. They keep a rigorous schedule, getting up at 4:30 seven days a week (unless there's bad weather) and occasionally pulling all-nighters doing things like standing in chest-deep water trying to catch shorebirds. There was only one woman bander and I was the only other woman resident at the beginning of my stay. (A regular comment I got from male Swedish and British birders was, "I hear there are a lot of women birders in the U.S." Although I saw plenty of women birders there.)

Other guests came from Sweden, Britain, and the U.S. It was a convivial atmosphere. Guests and banders dined together, we played a Swedish card game, the name of which translates to something roughly like "Dirtbag," talked politics—Trump and the upcoming Swedish election—and of course talked birds. I even got to participate in a quiz for the banders on sight and song identification which I failed quite miserably. The only bird I knew was the Rook, and I was told I didn't know it for the right reason!

Another advantage to staying at the fågelstation was getting word about rare sightings. One day a juvenile Red-footed Falcon was reported. Falsterbo averages just one sighting of Red-footed Falcon a year, so we all rushed out to see it and got fantastic, close views. As a juvenile, its feet weren't red but bright yellow, which could be seen even when it was far away. I got teased about being the American who was "twitching," or chasing the bird, but nobody else stayed back at the residence kicking their feet up!

For my first full day, I hired the Falsterbo guide P-G Bentz, who is a bander, guide, and lecturer at Falsterbo and an ornithologist with an impressive resume. He has worked with the Norwegian and Swedish air forces as an authority on bird strikes with airplanes, he was director of the Malmö Museum of Natural History, and established the Sundre Bird Observatory on the Island of Gotland in the Baltic.

Hiring P-G was my only big splurge on the trip, and at a price of $300 USD for a full day, I hesitated at first. But since I was an intermediate birder traveling alone, new to European birds, didn't have a car, didn't know the area, and didn't know whether I would meet anyone, I decided to do so. Twelve solid hours of birding with P-G's knowledge, contacts, access, and vehicle made it a real value and I got to go to the lake district northeast of Falsterbo which would have been a very long bike ride! I got 25 life species that day.

The peninsula hosts habitat ranging from brackish lagoons, to coastal marshes, to a dry and sandy "heath" where people gather to watch migrating raptors and hold a Honey Buzzard Festival. In a chapter written by P-G for the book "Wings Over Falsterbo," he describes how a now decommissioned rail line from

Spotted Flycatcher. Photograph by Adelia Honeywood.

Malmö turned the area into a fashionable beach resort in the early 20th century and how birdwatchers started arriving in the 1950s. Since the 1970s, as development of luxury, year-round homes expanded, locals have successfully lobbied over the decades for the establishment of new nature reserves and the area has one of the highest concentration of protected areas of any municipality in the country.

We started the day at Nabben, the southern point of the peninsula and the most popular site for observing migration, and where you could also see many species of shorebirds, ducks, and raptors on the lagoon and marshland. I would end up starting my day there many mornings with maybe a dozen other birders. I was told that later in the season there could be as many as a thousand lined up with their scopes along the paths. P-G introduced me to the counter Nils Kjellén, who has held that role there since 2001. From Aug. 1 to Nov. 20, Nils and another counter are out seven days a week

European Honey Buzzards. Photograph by P-G Bentz.

from dawn until 2 p.m., or longer if the raptors keep going. This was an invaluable introduction, as over the next week Nils would generously point out birds I couldn't have seen on my own, identifying seemingly disembodied flight calls or tiny dots on the far horizon that would turn into Honey Buzzards. Among the birds Nils pointed out were a European Stonechat that landed about 20 feet away, and a White-tailed Eagle far off in the distance. At Nabben I would also get a couple of sightings of a Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua in Europe) and a beautiful adult male Montagu's Harrier flying low and furiously over the water. That morning, in just under three hours at Nabben we saw 56 species, including a Broad-billed Sandpiper, Ruffs, and Bar-tailed Godwits.

In "Wings Over Falsterbo," Lennart Karlsson divides the Autumn migration into three periods. In this early period of mid-August to mid-September, Tree Pipits, Yellow Wagtails, Sand Martins (Bank Swallows), Common Martins, and Barn Swallows were migrating in large numbers. Among raptors, Eurasian Sparrowhawks would be on the move throughout the season and in this early period, adult European Honey Buzzards.

Before this trip I had been unaware of Honey Buzzards. Although in flight they can look similar to buteos, they aren't closely related. They feed their young on nests of wasps, which, according to Collins, they "locate by intently watching adult insects returning to their nests, then dig out the wasp nests with their claws. Feathers around bill and eyes are scale-like as protection from wasp stings." As

we traveled into Skanör, north of Falsterbo on the peninsula, we encountered a group of 33 circling quite low. Honey Buzzards are in decline. According to "Wings Over Falsterbo" the record day count was 9,000 in 1971, but nowadays a good day count is around 1,000. In 2017 the total fall count was 4,573, down to 3,770 in 2018. On my last day, before I departed for the Copenhagen airport, I spent a couple of hours watching them float over the fågelstation. That day was the highest count of the 2018 season at 649.

Beneath the Honey Buzzards were a flock of about 30 Barnacle Geese and a short drive from there we picked up 30 Willow Warblers, Spotted Flycatcher, Whinchats, and a single Northern Wheatear, the species that has garnered a big chase on Long Island as of late. Although I don't know to what extent we were taking advantage of it, P-G pointed out to me a sign about Sweden's "freedom to roam" law, or Allemansrätt, which allows access to any lands, including those privately-owned, if not too close to a residence. Swedes are permitted access to any beach, and even to pitch tents, collect plant life, and fish. We spent the later part of the day around the town of Vomb, an hour northeast of Falsterbo where I was able to add 250 Common Cranes, Rooks, Mew Gull, Eurasian Linnet, and Common Redstart to my life list; and photograph a very curious pair—female and juvenile—of Red-backed Shrikes.

One thing that Falsterbo lacks is the large infrastructure of guided walks, classes, and workshops such as provided by New Jersey Audubon in Cape May. However, through the friendship agreement

Above: Red-backed Shrike, female. Below: Red-backed Shrike, juvenile. Photographs by Adelia Honeywood.

I, as a New Jersey Audubon member, was treated to a personal introduction to Falsterbo and tour of the banding stations by Björn Malmhagen, chair of Falsterbo Bird Observatory. In 2014, in the interest of greater cooperation between bird observatories around the world, Falsterbo Bird Observatory's board founded and hosted the first International Bird Observatory Conference. The second IBOC took place in Cape May in 2017 and the third will take place next spring in Israel. Instead of observatories remaining siloed with their local data, IBOC hopes that collaboration and data sharing can help researchers address globally pressing questions such as climate change and habitat destruction.

Falsterbo's banding operation has been in operation since 1947, but was standardized in 1980, since when they have banded nearly a million birds. There are two locations for banding at Falsterbo: the lighthouse garden and the reed beds at Flommen nearby. The fall lighthouse season lasts from July 21 to Nov. 10 while the Flommen season ends Sept. 30. There is also banding in the spring at the Lighthouse. In the fall, banding takes place seven days a week, for six hours beginning at dawn, weather permitting.

We took a tour of the nets and found a single Willow Warbler. That day there would only be six birds banded at the lighthouse: five Willow Warblers and one Tree Pipit. Björn took the Willow Warbler back to the research hut and removed it from the carrying bag. He recorded the species, age, sex, date, and time. He measured the wing length, took the bird's weight, and blew gently on the bird's belly to expose, hopefully, a layer of fat, the amount of which was visually assessed and recorded.

Wood Warbler in hand. Photograph by Adelia Honeywood.

The banding was slow the days I was there. Mid-October would have been an interesting time when they were catching things like Long- and Short-eared Owls and had days like Oct. 16, when 1,683 individuals of 25 species were banded in the Lighthouse Garden, 1,252 of them Goldcrests! The banding picked way up later in the season with over 20,000 birds banded this fall as of Nov. 2, already twice as many as in the fall of 2017, with still a week to go. Passerines have to be banded in large numbers because the recovery rate is less than 1 percent. For larger birds, especially ducks who are hunted, the recovery rate can be near 25 percent, but they are also banded in smaller numbers.

I was at Falsterbo from Aug. 22-28. The advantage of that time period was that it was less crowded with birders. Daily counts that week were under 10,000 individuals, and as luck would have it, I would miss the single Black Stork and single Lesser Spotted Eagle of the season that showed up a few days after I left. I didn't witness a big migration spectacle such as might happen in October when daily counts can exceed 100,000. In "Wings over Falsterbo," Lennart Karlsson

writes of the peak days of Chaffinch and Bramblings in mid-September to mid-October, "a throng of wings and small bodies all heading in the same direction in an endless flow;" or "long, winding flocks" of Common Eider; "glittering swarms" of Wood Pigeons; and several hundred Common Buzzards caught in a thermal updraft until "one bird will break from the group and start gliding towards the south-west, whereupon the others follow suit in a narrow band."

But, it didn't matter that I missed all that because, really, as the book elucidates, any time of year will yield great birding in Falsterbo.

Eurasian Nutcracker. Photograph by P-G Bentz.

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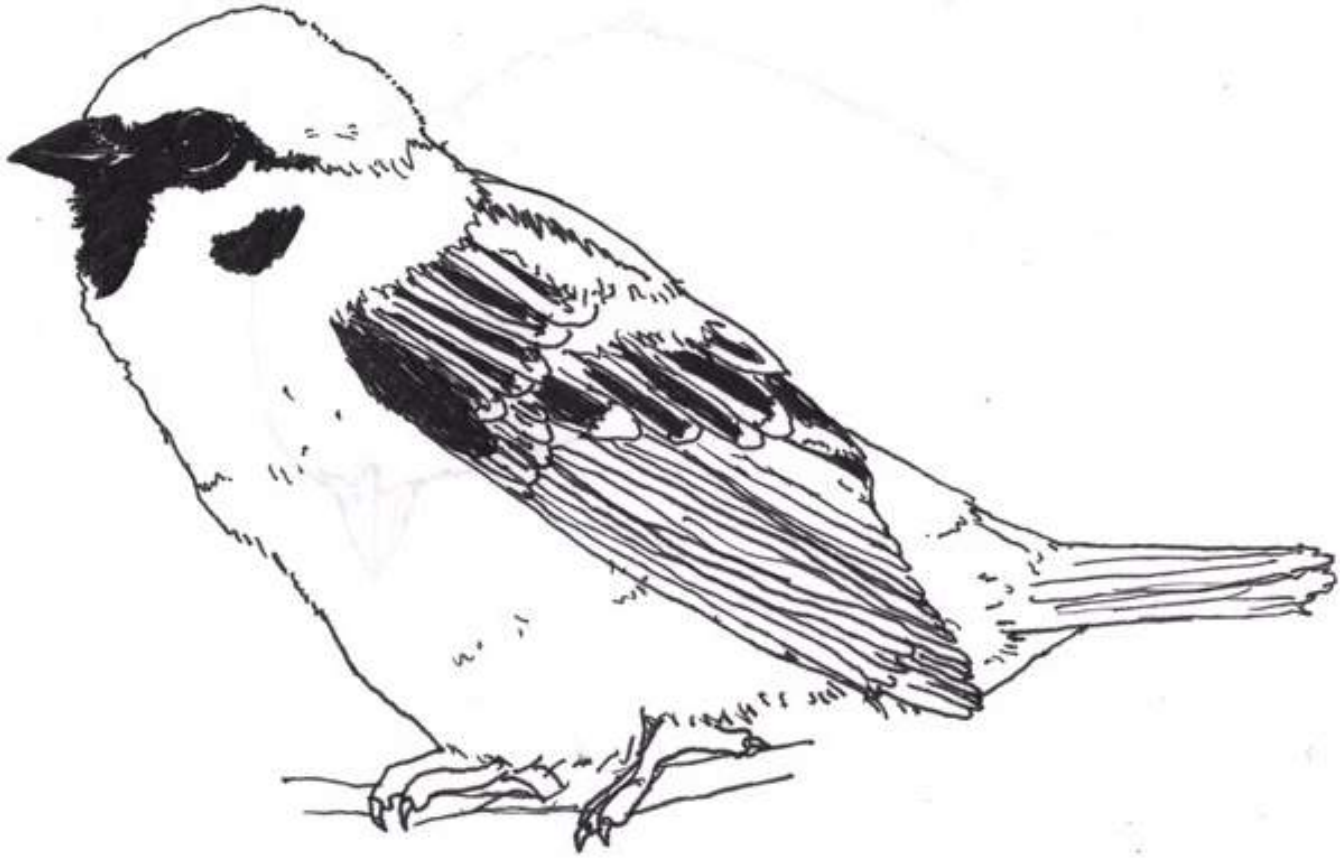

Eurasian Tree Sparrow.
Ink and paper drawing by John Dean.

Fall Photoseries: Charles Tang

Title Page: Great Cormorant at Prospect Park (PP). Clockwise from top: Red-tailed Hawk (PP), Blue Grosbeak at Green-Wood Cemetery, Lincoln's Sparrow (PP).

Tips from Trips: Fall warblers

By Tom Stephenson

Most of these photos were taken in Prospect Park on a Thursday walk in September and are reprinted here in the first installment of "Tips from Trips."

Cape May Warbler

- Very yellow flight feather edgings (great ID point vs. Yellow-rumped Warbler, which can look similar to drab birds)
- Large yellow rump, larger than Yellow-Rumped's and blends more into the back of the bird
- Densest streaking in center of throat
- Medium-length white tail

Pine Warbler

- Dark area in front of eye (lores)
- Light supraloral area (above the lores)
- Dark cheek contrasting with a much lighter throat
- Low contrast wingbars and flight feather edgings with grayish bases to the greater coverts and grayish flight feathers
- Long tail (harder to tell from side view; easiest from below)

Blackpoll Warbler

- Tail length difference compared to similar-looking species
- Greater contrast in the wingbars and also the flight feather edging
- A more blended, less contrasting face to malar area

A Journey to the Arctic

By Heidi Cleven

During summer, where is the best place to avoid hot, muggy weather, and have great birding opportunities at the same time? Why, the Arctic, of course!

Svalbard is a Norwegian archipelago located halfway between North Norway and the North Pole in the Barents Sea. At 78 degrees North, Longyearbyen, the largest settlement in Svalbard, is the northernmost inhabited area in the world. Here, you will find the world's northernmost ATM and church, among other things you wouldn't think twice about in other places. Here everything becomes special because of the latitude.

That said, Svalbard also has unique landscapes: beautiful blue glaciers; bare, rugged slopes; snow-capped mountains; tundra that seems to go on forever; and cliffs adorned with colorful mosses due to guano from cliff-dwelling birds. There is also unique wildlife here such as the Svalbard reindeer, a subspecies found nowhere else. You will also find lots of breeding birds such as Arctic Terns, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Ivory Gulls, Common and King Eiders, Dovkies, Atlantic Puffins, Black Guillemots, and pelagic birds such as petrels, fulmars, and shearwaters. As far as mammals go, there are walruses, beluga whales, and of course, polar bears.

Cover: Svalbard landcape. Above: Sled dog. All photographs by Heidi Cleven.

I'd been to Svalbard two years earlier, and couldn't wait to go back. We'd gone in August, by which time polar bears had hunkered down to save energy, walruses had started migrating north, and many birds had departed for their southern wintering grounds. Still, puffins were on the water then, not in their burrows, and we saw Black-legged Kittiwakes and Long-tailed Skuas. Arctic Terns were still around, and Snow Buntings wore their winter plumage. It was sunny that whole trip.

I returned this past summer in mid-July, with my husband Andrew and our friends Paul and Gloria. We landed in Longyearbyen at 12:30 a.m. with the midnight sun shining behind clouds. The bus from the airport to our hotel passed an interesting landmark: the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. This seed bank was created to protect the biodiversity of the world's most important agricultural seeds: the seeds should, in theory, always remain safe, deep inside the mountain. With climate change, it's unclear what seeds may be needed to grow food in the future. Perhaps the seeds used today won't be able to handle a warming world. The irony, of course, is that a massive flood inside the building last year, caused by permafrost melting, jeopardizing the seeds that were located in the innermost section of the vault.

In the morning, the first thing on our agenda was to go to the sporting goods store in town. If you're going to hike in Svalbard, the governor requires that you carry a loaded rifle outside the town limits because of polar bears. In order to rent a rifle, you first have to get a letter of conduct from your local police station in New York City. If the NYPD doesn't have a criminal record for you, you will probably get permission from the Governor of Svalbard to rent a rifle.

The store's staff instructed us on how to use the rifle and explained the behavioral signs of a polar bear, whether just curious or aggressive. If a polar bear pulls its ears back and comes trotting straight at you, that's aggression and you're required to shoot to kill. We

hoped this wasn't going to happen, and we were told it was unlikely. All the rifles are German Mausers from around 1938—as dependable as they are, they've been known to jam.

The next stop was the visitor center, where we met Merete, a friendly woman who was an enthusiastic birder. She told us there was an Ivory Gull spotted about seven kilometers outside of town at a dog sled farm, where it had been attracted to the dog food on offer. We decided to take our chances and look for it.

The hike there was on a flat, dirt road that went straight through a valley surrounded by beautiful, bare mountains. Freshwater puddles along the way seemed promising for birds. It was cold and rainy, and the wind was so intense it pushed us forward. Studying

Polar bear track.

footprints in the muddy banks around the freshwater puddles, I discovered a few enormous tracks with big claw marks. I was in complete denial; I looked at the paw prints and called the others over. I said, "I bet some kids were here with fake bear feet making prints just to scare us." Of course, we were in the middle of nowhere, with nobody else around. We were shocked. The prints were at least three times larger than my foot, and the claws must have been a few inches long. We slowly backed up, looked at each other, then looked behind us. After that, were on high polar bear alert.

We kept going. It was really getting windy and rainy now. (I have to mention here that Paul and Gloria aren't birders, so they were extremely sporty coming with us, and they had a great time.) Under these conditions, I felt like the hardy birds were so focused on getting enough to eat, they wouldn't care much about us. Scanning the freshwater puddles, I saw a pair of Red-necked Phalaropes, a male and a female. They were so close I couldn't even find them in the frame of my scope without walking back. We also saw a female Red Phalarope, a unique bird with sexual dimorphism in which the females are more colorful than, and

Female Red Phalarope.

compete for, the males. Further down the road, a windblown Red-throated Loon was sitting on its nest in the middle of a pond. What a dedicated parent to sit in that weather, protecting its eggs! We watched the icy rain pelt the bird in my scope as it peered at us, its neck craning forward. Snow Buntings, Purple Sandpipers, Common Eiders, and a lone Common-ringed Plover foraged nearby as well.

Not every bird condoned our presence. Arctic

Red -throated Loon.

Terns nesting in the area soon starting dive-bombing us, and since it was impossible to stay far enough away when walking on the road, we often wouldn't see them until they attacked. As we had learned, in response we would stick one hand in the air and make circular motions and move away as quickly as possible

Arctic Tern.

to avoid hurting the bird, giving it the space it needs. A photo is always tempting, but not worth the extra strain on a bird that is probably already facing enough survival issues. Svalbard officials, too, we were told, are strict about conduct around wild animals: they are fully protected by law and cannot be harassed or killed (unless you acquire a license during hunting season), nor can you take any piece of a protected animal home with you as a souvenir.

Snow Bunting.

We gave up looking for the Ivory Gull, happy with what we had already seen. We had a long walk ahead, and it was time get back to town and figure out where to eat dinner. Most of the restaurants in Longyearbyen serve exceptional food, even if their menus typically include seal or whale meat. The killing of minke whales still occurs in Norway, although the annual number of individuals killed has dropped significantly.

The next day, we decided to hike up the mountains surrounding Longyearbyen. Just getting from our hotel to the base was a bit of a stretch. Snow buntings graced the path, but there was even better to come. Merete, from the visitor center, told us the cliffs here were full of Dovekies. The hike up was very steep and full of flat rocks that kept sliding under my feet. Carrying about 30 pounds of photo and filming equipment, I nearly tipped over more than once. Up and up we went, until finally—we saw hundreds of Dovekies sitting on the cliff edges, peering around for signs of danger. Then Great Black-backed Gulls appeared sending the Dovekies into the air, soaring around the cliffs, swirling around and making their adorable sounds, like tiny Laughing Kookaburras. Then they'd eventually

return to their shelves and hang out again. We watched some parents return with food.

When we reached the top of the mountain, they were out of view, but before us was a vast stretch of moss and lichen-lined ground, with a tall, snow-covered peak in the distance. The ground was wet: I sank deep into the moss that sucked my feet down and felt icy cold water pour over the edges of my hiking boots. Nevertheless, we hiked over to a cairn we saw with a plaque that said "Ninavarden," or the "Nina Cairn." It was a memorial for Nina who'd been mauled by a polar bear at this spot years before. It was time to head back down the mountain. I was excited to get out of my squishy, wet boots, and eat a hot meal with an icy cold Arctic beer from the local Svalbard brewery.

The third day was our last full one. We had a tour scheduled with Better Moments, a fantastic tour operator we had hired on our first trip to Svalbard. They serve champagne and fish soup in thermoses while sailing on closed-rib boats. I'd seen my first puffin with them. So we had high expectations again, with the aim being to see walruses. They picked us up at our hotel and drove us out to the boat. We were told what to do in case of seasickness, but I thought, "Piece of cake!" I'd never been seasick, even on a deep-sea fishing boat, or in the very same boat two years ago.

Above: Dovekies. Below: Mountain landscape and memorial.

I threw my head back and laughed—until, that is, we headed into open ocean.

The wind and rain picked up, intensifying the waves. The captain announced that they were nearly 12-feet high. Next to a tiny boat, they were serious waves. I felt a pang of weirdness and shook it off as nothing. Once the guide started talking about old whalers, however, and how they'd boil blubber, that did it for me. I decided to stay outside for the remainder of the trip in the Crocs they require you to wear on the boat. It was freezing, windy, and the rain pelted me mercilessly. The guide brought me a blanket to huddle under. Still, as awful as I felt, the sight of the walruses made it seem worth it. They swam right up the boat, since as it turns out, they become active in bad weather to keep warm. They were wonderfully curious and intelligent, with a taste for clams and mussels; they forage by using their sensitive whiskers to locate food and will eat mollusks by creating a vacuum to suck the meat right out of the shells.

We were going to disembark to get a closer look at them, when something caught my friend Gloria's eye. I turned around to find a pod of white whales. Belugas! Everybody shouted. A pod of about 20 swam close to the boat. The captain had turned off the engine, and we decided to stay on the boat to watch them. The tour guides had never seen beluga whales either and were as excited as us.

The return trip was less chaotic, but in the fog of my seasickness, I lost my binoculars—I must have left them on board—and all the photos I took were completely overexposed. My brain was clearly not functioning. When I return, I'm going to get an Arctic survival suit and stay outside the whole time and wear rubber boots. That's the only way to do this.

The beauty of Svalbard in summer is the midnight sun. So after our aquatic excursion, I pulled myself together and ate dinner, and then my husband and I decided to go for a midnight hike to look for the Red Phalarope. She wasn't there, but instead we saw a Glaucous Gull chasing a flock of Barnacle Geese. We ran as fast as we could to get closer, because we recognized what was going on. The geese were screaming and running in a panic. Finally the chase stopped and the gull caught a gosling. We stood and watched it shred it for awhile. My heart was pounding. Awful as it was, I find this behavior fascinating to watch, and it gives you an appreciation of the tough living conditions in the Arctic.

King Eiders.

We left the next day. I set my alarm for an early-morning wakeup to see a pair of Arctic Skuas with two babies right in the center of town. One parent would stay behind with the two fluffballs, while the other went out to forage (or steal) fish. This is another bird that will attack if it feels threatened: we stood far away and yet were still bombarded by one. So we moved back even more and lingered awhile.

I've only touched on the wildlife of Svalbard,

but its manmade history is also incredible. You can visit old mining towns that once flourished and now sit abandoned, such as the old Soviet settlement Pyramiden. Today it has a population of eight. A guide will take you around to see the crumbling buildings and finally take you to the only business in town: the local bar, where they serve Russian vodka and beer at the end of the tour. In winter, you can see the Aurora Borealis, and there are endless adventure trips to choose from year-round. No matter what you choose to do, if you go to Svalbard, you will leave wondering when you can return.

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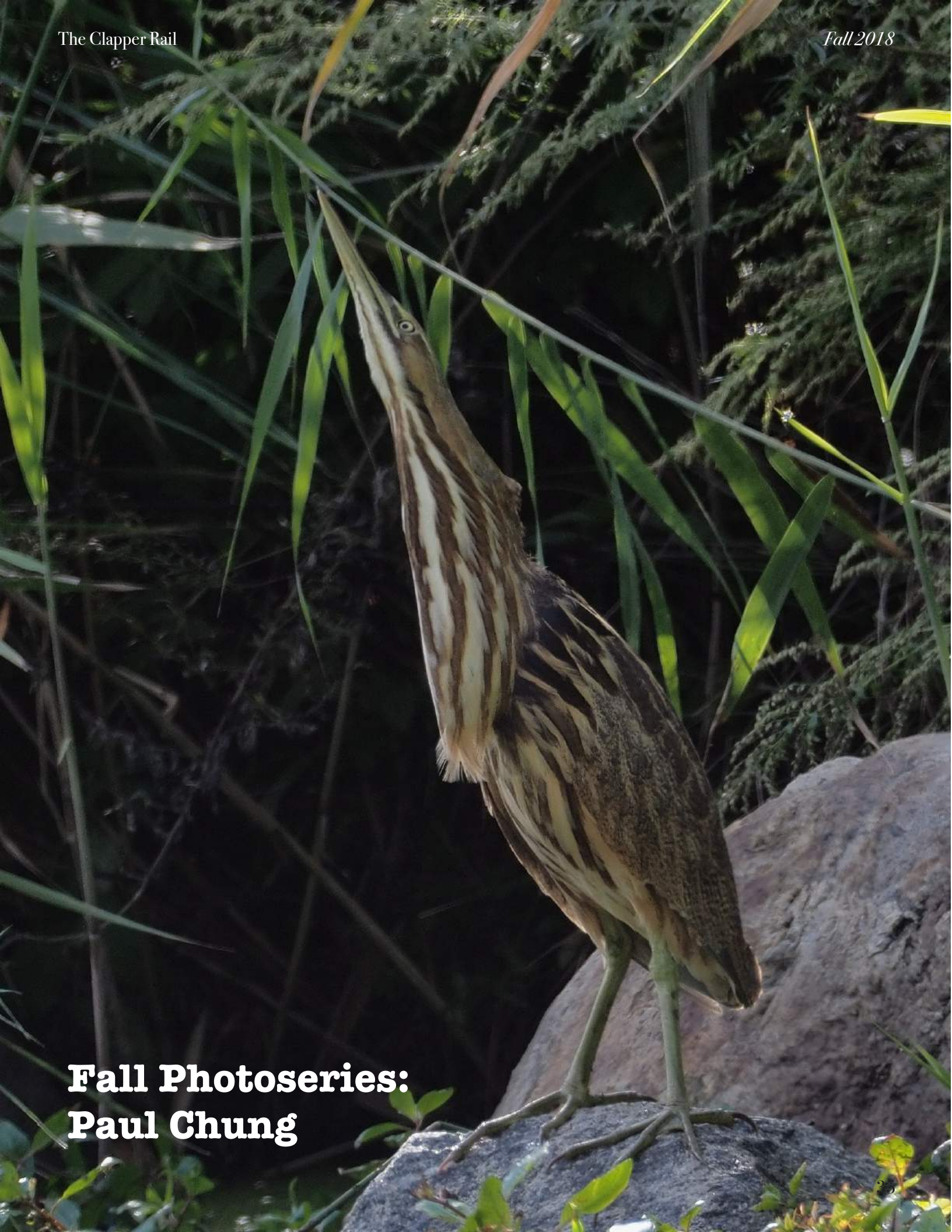
For videos from the trip, visit Heidi's Twitter account and see the posts from July: @heidicleven.

Above: Atlantic Puffin. Below: Svalbard landscape.



Fall Photoseries: Paul Chung

Title Page: American Bittern at Prospect Park (PP). Top: Nelson's Sparrow (PP). Bottom: Marbled Godwit at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge.

Flock Party. Watercolor and acrylic over pencil by Eric Losh.

The Dalliance of the Eagles

Skirting the river road, (my forenoon walk, my rest,)
Skyward in the air a sudden muffled sound, the dalliance of the eagles,
The rushing amorous contact high in space together,
The clinching interlocking claws, a living, fierce, gyrating wheel,
Four beating wings, two beaks, a swirling mass tight grappling,
In tumbling turning clustering loops, straight downward falling,
Till o'er the river pois'd, the twain yet one, a moment's lull,
A motionless still balance in the air, then parting, talons loosing,
Upward again on slow-firm pinions slanting, their separate diverse flight,
She hers, he his, pursuing.

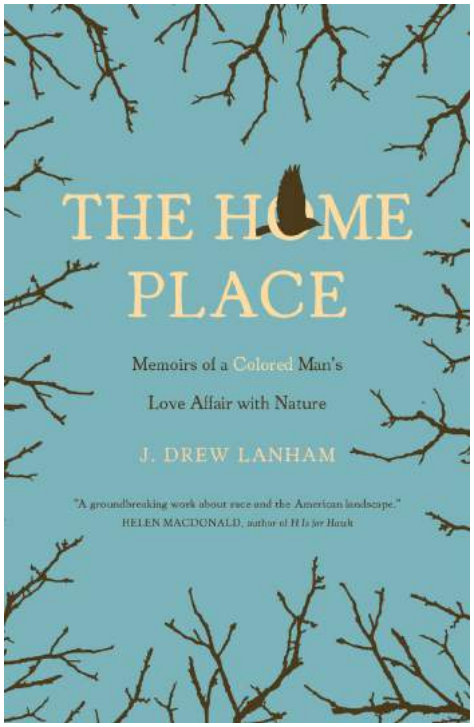
—Walt Whitman, 1880

A Whitmanesque Naturalist

By Tracy Meade

The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature
By J. Drew Lanham
Illustrated. 240 pp. Milkweed Editions.

I don't tend to read memoirs. At bookstores and in libraries, I reach first for novels. Lately, however, I find myself increasingly drawn to American and natural history collections. A recent purchase proves my point: I now have a reading list that includes "Being a Beast," "A House for Mr. Biswas," "The Hidden Life of Trees," "There There," "The Spectator Bird," "American Antislavery Writings," and "What Animals Think and Feel."



"The Home Place," to my delight, is a memoir that combines personal and family history (of course), natural history, and American history, all the while reading like a novel that, in places, is clearly inspired by the free verse of Walt Whitman. On the first page Lanham quickly puts Whitman's stylistic use of "listing" to work as a way to inform the reader of the multitude of perspectives from which he sees and experiences the world.

The three sections of the book—Flock, Fledgling, Flight—take us through Lanham's life as a child, son, grandson, brother, student, husband, father, ornithologist, hunter, professor, genealogist, landowner and conservationist. Through all of these identities, Lanham tells the story of the impact of being black—how each of these identities has been shaped by America's history of racial violence and racism.

In "Birding While Black," the 12th chapter in The Home Place, Lanham uses stream of consciousness to quicken the reader's heartbeat. He recalls the experience of doing a breeding bird survey in Laurel Falls, South Carolina. His account of the experience mixes the joy of tallying bird species and enjoying birdsong with sweating the terror of being black on a survey route that includes a home proudly displaying a Confederate flag. Lanham also recounts having to abandon a grant proposal "on rose-breasted grosbeaks, golden-winged warblers, and forest management in the Southern Appalachians" when a research site in the proposal becomes off-limits due to a white supremacist gathering.

Throughout "The Home Place" Lanham introduces us to those who inspired his love for the natural world, for birds and all wild beings, and for the land. He writes about his kinship with what he calls Aldo Leopold's good: "…an ethic of inclusion, promoting the wholeness of nature and treating the land and the wild things that live on it as fellow citizens to be respected and nurtured." And Lanham recollects attending a talk by E.O. Wilson, who, he writes, "spoke softly of the need to notice nature."

E. O. Wilson's talk that night convinced Lanham that the important work of scientists and college professors does not in and of itself inspire others to action on the conservation front. Lanham writes: "To save wildlife and wild places the traction has to come not from the regurgitation of the bad news data but from the poets, prophets, preachers, professors, and presidents who have always dared to inspire." George Washington Carver, the Tuskegee Airmen, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Buffalo soldiers are examples of those prophets, and they all play a very important role in Lanham's life as touchstones of greatness that could not be undone by racism.

"The Home Place" is a memoir, a field guide full of descriptive treat after descriptive treat. Whether Lanham is describing his grandmother's buttermilk biscuits, his Baptist baptism in "an algae-stained cement pond," or naming the trees, bugs, birds, and reptiles around him, he is always connecting the parts to the whole, singing the praises of the natural world,

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WINORR meets the BBC

By Janet Schumacher

All photographs by author.

Last May, the Brooklyn Bird Club raised $5,052 for Wildlife in Need of Rescue and Rehabilitation (WINORR), the local non-profit, volunteer organization caring for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. Bobby and Cathy Horvath are the founders. As an expression of their appreciation, on Oct. 23 they brought nine birds that are unable be released to their presentation at the Brooklyn Public Library. WINORR continues to care for some of these birds for years and display them for educational purposes.

A few birds live in their home. Like the Peregrine Falcon that screams to be fed as soon as it hears Bobby's truck pull up when he returns from his job as a firefighter. Or the kestrel rescued as a fledgling that still instinctively wants to feed mealworms to orphaned fledglings of other species. But most of the rescued birds and animals live at a local nature center nearby.

The Horvaths' daughter with a Screech Owl.

Cathy, a trained veterinarian assistant, with a Great Horned Owl.

A lot of anticipation—so many covered boxes. We weren't sure what they would pull out next.

The very mellow American Kestrel.

Not so mellow Barn Owl. It gave a harrowing screech. The true screech owl.

The indulged Peregrine Falcon. Bobby explained that it's difficult to rehabilitate an injured Peregrine due to the way it hunts. Only a strong bird can withstand the force of its high-speed chases and dizzying turns. Surprisingly, this peregrine gets carsick! So it hadn't been fed—he hadn't wanted it to lose its daily quail and soil its feathers in the carrying case.

My personal favorite: this stunning Rough-legged Hawk. WINORR received this bird from northern Wisconsin, where they are more common and cannot house all the injured birds.

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Winter Birding, online

By Janet Schumacher

Snowed in this winter? Try these online birding websites.

1) Project Snowstorm continues its operation tracking Snowy Owl movement in the winter. Little data is transmitted during the summer as the owls mainly breed out of reach of cell towers. What is known, however, is that it was a low year for lemmings, likely affecting reproduction and survival rates. For the first time, three chicks were tagged with small transmitters near Utqiagvik (formerly Barrow), Alaska. Snowy Owls have already been spotted as far south as New Jersey. The project's website has blog updates and interactive maps that show tagged owl movement.

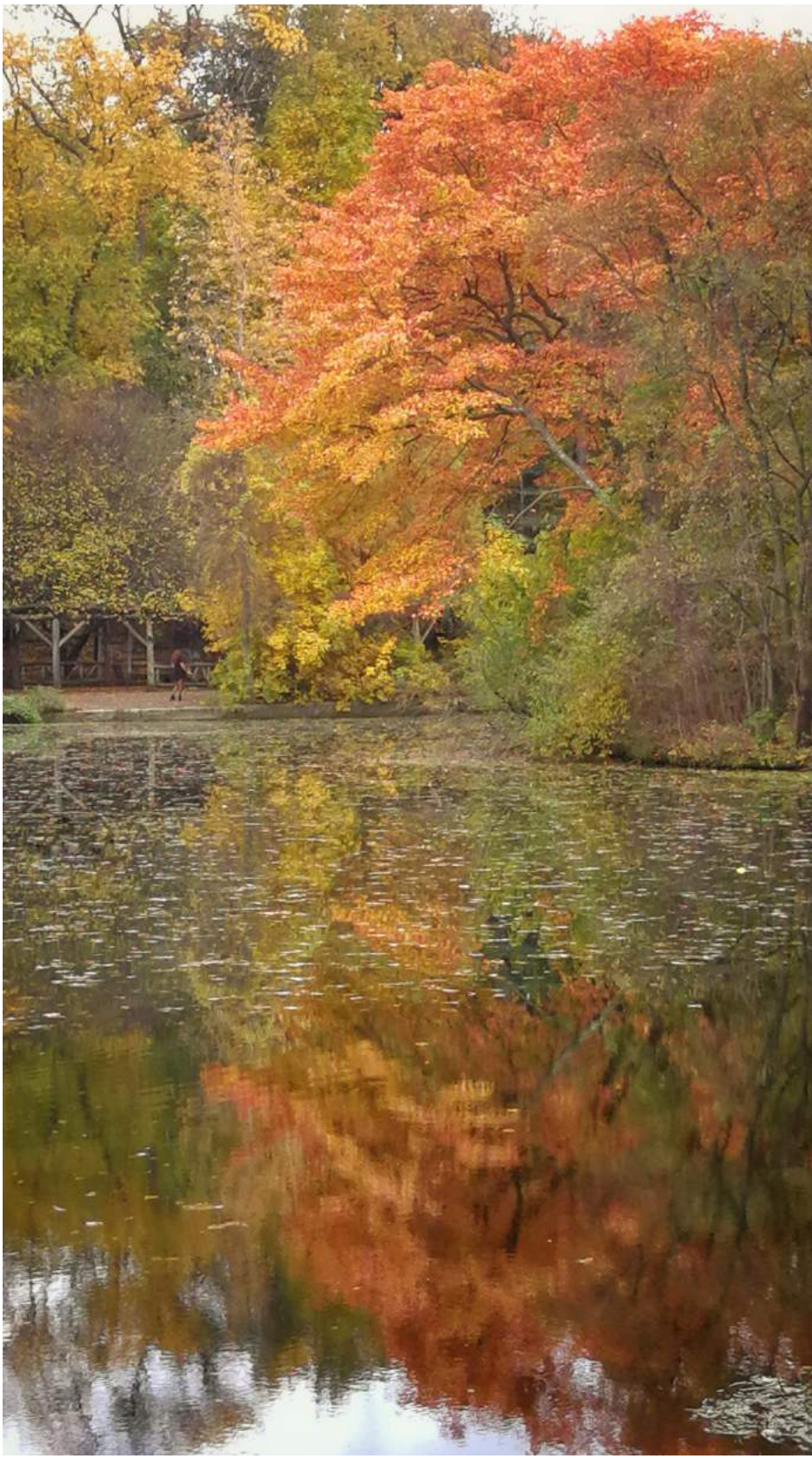
2) Ontario Feeder Watch. If you aren't sure if those cool winter finches and Evening Grosbeaks will turn up in your backyard this winter, tune into a live cam at a feeder in Ontario that has already recorded Evening Grosbeaks and Ruffed Grouse.

3) Cornell Lab is offering a free course on using eBird, including how to find information wherever you may travel. All you need is to sign up for an eBird account, which is also free.

Sharp-shinned Hawk (left) and Merlin (right) at Prospect Park.
Photographs by Ann Feldman.

Fall Photoseries: Who's on First?

Top to bottom: Eastern Bluebird, Savannah Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow in Prospect Park. Photographs by Karen O'Hearn.



Charles Tang: "Besides enjoying the birding at the park, I also appreciate this incredible, beautiful place we have right here in Brooklyn. Enjoying the park is part of my birding!"

Upcoming BBC Programs

Programs are held inside the Information Commons at the Brooklyn Public Central Library at Grand Army Plaza. Please check the BBC website for event updates.

Tuesday, January 22, 2019, at 7 p.m.

The New York Seascape

Speaker: Noah Chesnin

The New York Bight encompasses more than 16,000 square miles of coastal and ocean waters from Montauk, New York, to Cape May, New Jersey. It is an ecological treasure trove, providing critical migration routes for globally threatened species, including sea turtles, whales, and sharks, as well as nursery grounds and critical habitat for hundreds of other marine species. Noah Chesnin, Associate Director of the New York Seascape Program, will describe how the Wildlife Conservation Society's New York Aquarium is engaged in field research, education and policy advocacy in order to help protect marine wildlife and help cultivate an ocean ethic in the region.

Tuesday, February 19, 2019, at 7 p.m.

Quail vs. Ticks

Speaker: Eric Powers

"Ranger Eric" as students know him, is a biologist, teacher, photographer, outdoorsman, and overall nature-lover. He started leading nature hikes in 1987 as a Park Ranger in Colorado until he served two years in the US Peace Corps as an Environmental Education Officer. Since then, he has been running nature centers in Colorado, Alabama and New York. In 2005 he started, "Your Connection to Nature" (YC2N), dedicated to meaningful environmental education programs and eco-tourism, these programs connect classrooms to field studies, and give people a better understanding of their local environment. His ongoing wildlife projects include "Save Our Box Turtles," "Quail vs. Ticks," "Frog Pond Monitoring" and "Owl Nesting Projects."

Eric will provide a presentation about his Quail Project, plus animal artifacts, and some small live animals. Learn how you can get involved and make a positive difference in our local environment.