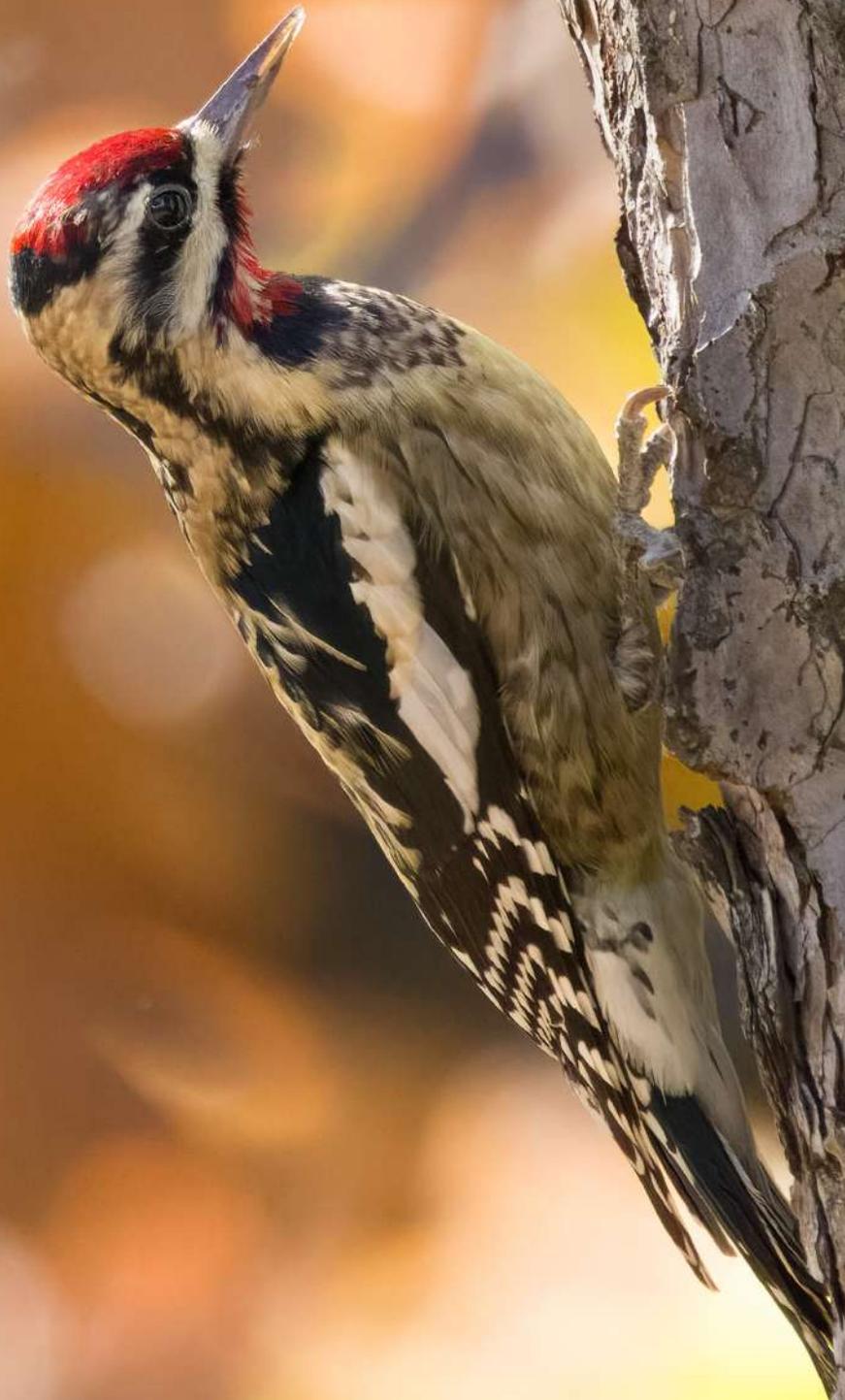


Brooklyn Bird Club's

CLAPPER RAIL



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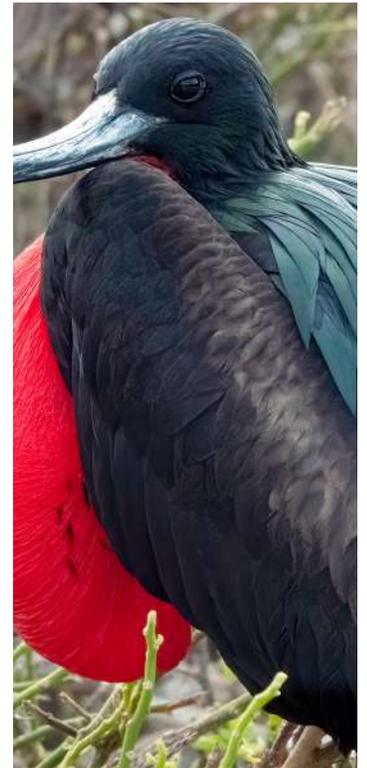


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The Brooklyn Bird Club

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Sea Change: A Lazarus Bird's Arrival in New York

By Sean Sime

In memory of Shane Blodgett, whose friendship and efforts in promoting pelagics in Brooklyn are deeply appreciated and sorely missed. It felt like you were with us out there, Shane!

Our twice-postponed fall overnight pelagic out of Sheepshead Bay aboard the American Princess got the go-ahead on October 16

after an approaching weather system stalled just long enough to allow for a smooth ride out and ample time to set our dawn chum slick.

The forecast at our destination, 120 miles southeast of Brooklyn, was for the wind to pick up from the SSW at 20-25 knots mid-morning with occasional showers throughout the day. While the seas did build as expected, the swell was mostly at our backs making

the ride more tolerable.

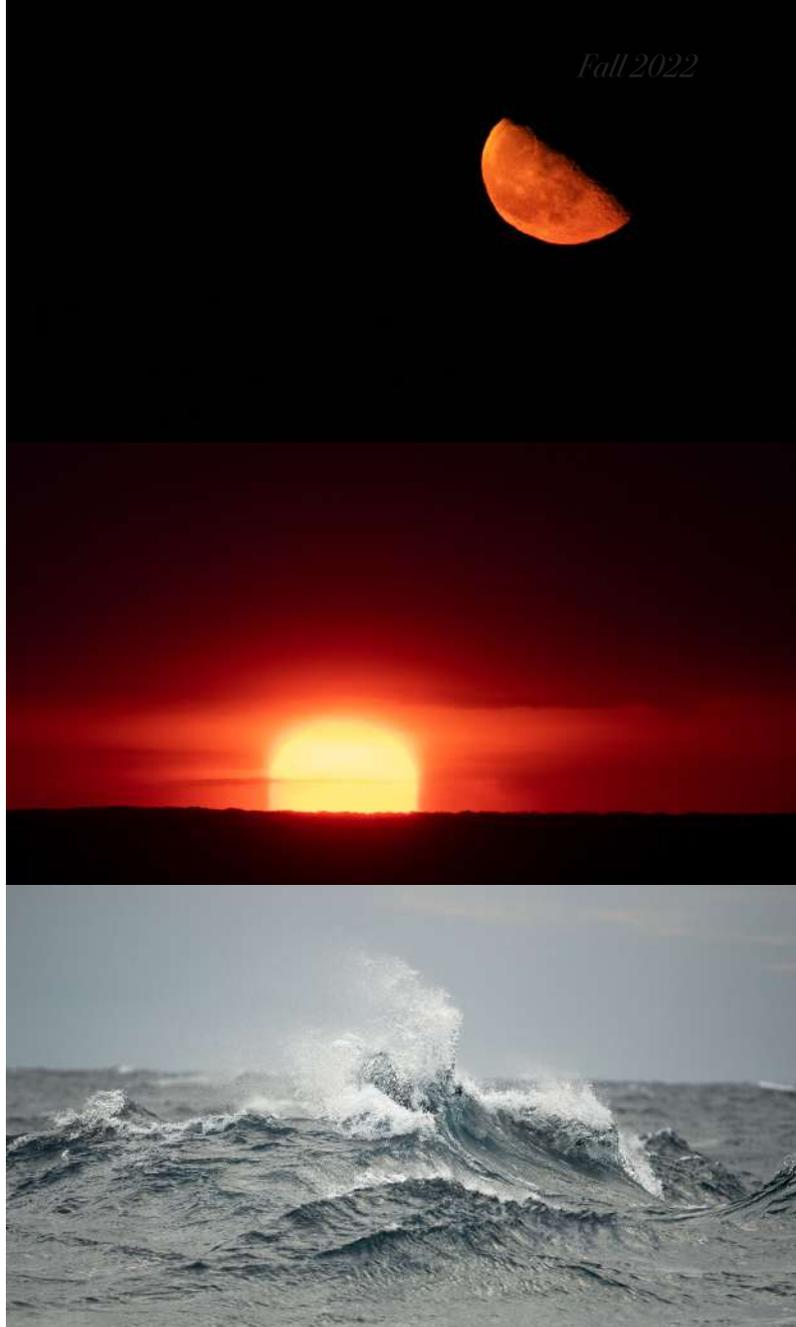
Water temps had been reading low to mid-70s in the days leading up to the trip but cooled somewhat with 68-70 degree water along the western wall of the Hudson Canyon and outside its mouth, with cold tongues of water coming in from the east at various points. Some temperature breaks of up to 5 degrees were noted.

Captain Frank DeSantis was at the helm with Jason Denesevich, Paul Guris, Jay McGowan and myself leading. The mates were Anthony D, Anthony V, Jack, and Thomas with Christine expertly managing the galley.

It was clear from the start this was going to be a tale of two trips. A very calm and starry skied ride out culminated with an orange moon rising out of the ocean to our east, but it wasn't long till we encountered bands of rain and gusty wind associated with the passing front. From a weather perspective, we were going to get the kitchen sink thrown at us.

The action started just after 4 in the morning. Through the light rain passerines were visible flying alongside the boat in its running lights. We picked out Yellow-rumped and Blackpoll Warblers while some larger passerines eluded ID. The research of Marcus Drymon, which documented songbird feathers in Tiger Shark stomachs, was uneasily bouncing around my mind as the skies opened and a band of heavy rain marked the last time I saw passerines pre-dawn.

By 6:30 a.m. we were outside the mouth of the Hudson Canyon (6,200 ft. depth), setting our chum slick in the rain in 68-degree water. The entire scene,



Top to bottom: Moonrise, sunrise, and stormy seas.



sky and water, looked like it was dipped in dark gray paint. The next bird was a Herring Gull (it's October), followed quickly by our first Black-capped Petrel, much to the delight of all save those trying to photograph them with little light to work with. A spectacular sunrise behind us was no match for the clouds and was absorbed in gray almost as quickly as it appeared. We stayed in our drift for ninety minutes, over which time a total of 18 Black-capped Petrels were seen. The maximum, single scan count was of 10 individuals investigating the slick. We ended the trip with a mind boggling 31 Black-capped Petrels – a state record! Singles of Audubon's Shearwater and Leach's Storm-Petrel made brief appearances behind the boat as did Cory's and Great Shearwaters and a small number of Wilson's Storm-Petrels.

The rain and the low cloud deck began to lighten and we decided to pick up and run along the slick. Six minutes later from my position at the stern I could hear pandemonium breaking out from the bow on the upper deck. I heard many things screamed, most of which I



Top and bottom: Black-capped Petrel and Great Shearwater.

can't repeat for decorum's sake. While I awaited word from the other leaders on the radio, one scream rose above the rest. "BERMUDA PETREL!!!!"

So it was, at 8:23 a.m. on October 17, 2022, Jason Denesevich spotted New York State's first Bermuda Petrel approaching the boat from the 1 o'clock direction. The bird made multiple passes along the starboard side. After quickly documenting it, I did my best imitation of Paul Revere running through the galley and around the entire bottom deck shouting for all to get to the starboard side. Bermuda Petrel and Black-capped Petrel look similar, and it was important to make sure everyone was on the correct bird as both species wheeled around the slick. Thankfully, it made multiple passes over the course of three minutes – an eternity at sea.

I don't have the words to adequately describe what it means to see a bird once thought to be extinct. The Bermuda Petrel or Cahow, as it is commonly known in Bermuda, a name derived from its spectral cries, was rediscovered in the 1950s after believed extinct for 300 years. Even with intense conservation efforts, the global population totals 157 breeding pairs. The species only comes to land to breed, making it difficult to estimate how many young birds are out at sea, but experts put the number between 100-200. That's roughly 500 individuals whose home base are two small islands off Bermuda. The 32 birders on this trip reaped the reward, but the record belongs to so many people past and present who have kept pelagic trips alive in New York, and the dedicated conservationists working to ensure this bird's long-term survival.

We took the noticeable increase in wind speed and breaking clouds as a sign to slowly make our way north, up-shelf into the canyon proper. Our first of many Pomarine Jaegers appeared on this leg as did two Fin Whales, a small group of Offshore Bottlenose Dolphin and a few Ocean Sunfish. The weather and sea conditions were the story though. Large swells and opposing winds were in a constant battle, downpours followed by rainbows, and golden sun against darkening skies made for some fantastic victory at sea visuals. Inside the canyon we came upon many fishing



boats and trawlers with hundreds of Great Shearwaters around them and our warmest water of the day at 70.3 degrees.

Along with the numerous warblers seen throughout the trip there were three Mourning Doves visibly out of place 100 miles from shore. As I watched one of the doves try to land on the water multiple times, it was not lost on me that the conditions so productive and advantageous for the dynamic seabirds we were searching for would be the likely demise for others. From the 30,000-foot view many describe nature in terms of a balance with an ebb and flow to it, but on the surface, these individual struggles play out in countless instances each day and there are most certainly winners and losers.

We encountered a few Humpback Whales on the ride in and were able to identify one by fluke as “NYC0148.” The sighting was this whale’s first in 2022. And to acknowledge how far we have come in 15 years, a species that was once a veritable stakeout bird, Lesser Black-backed Gulls were present in five of our eight deep-water, hourly checklists.

The last hours of the trip saw many participants finding their way to benches to collapse, finally without



Top and bottom: Pomarine Jaeger and Mourning Doves.

FOMO. Others gathered over a celebratory drink while the eager checked their phones for cell service in the hopes of being the first to share the news.

Incapable of my typical trip post-mortem number crunching, I found myself tuning into the rhythm of the waves and the sound of the engine. Highs and lows with eyes on the horizon. Everything about this trip was a rollercoaster. From the cancellations and reschedules, every form of weather being thrown at us, seeing the rarest seabird in the Atlantic Ocean to witnessing what was likely some birds' final flight, the fragility and ephemeral nature of it all was palpable. Joy and sadness, highs and lows; I was grateful to bear witness to it all. 🐦





This Townsend's Warbler, found in Fort Greene Park by Doug Gochfeld in mid-November, stayed through the Christmas Bird Count on Dec. 17, a first for Brooklyn. Photo by Janet Zinn.

Notes on Purple Sandpipers

By Nicole Peyrafitte



The *Calidris maritima* are back foraging on Shore Promenade's slippery green rocks. Our holarctic winter residents have returned from their Arctic tundra breeding grounds. *Les bécasseaux violets*, s'il-vous-plaît! are bi-continental, yes! They can be found on both shores of the Atlantic, from Greenland and Iceland to northern Spain and infrequently in North Africa. In my birth country, France, they winter along the coasts from Dunkirk to Biarritz and on our American coasts their wintering extends to Maryland. How smart of them to avoid all the tourist traffic! Dedicated couples they are, with very little extra-pair copulation, as some DNA studies have confirmed their essential monogamy. Voilà!

One more important thing: the sandpipers are in the Scolopacidae family, dating from as early as the Early Oligocene period, around 30 million years ago. Native populations dwelled on this land for thousands of years before the first colonist reached these shores less than 500 years ago. Except for a few occurrences,

their native names are hard to find. After several days of online research and contacting various cultural outfits, here are the names I came up with for sandpiper—more need to be recovered. If you have any sources please contact me at np@nicolepeyrafitte.com.

Lekau in Lenape. This is by deduction, as I found that the totem of the Boy Scout Lekau Lodge, chartered in 1935 in the Camden County Council located in West Collingswood, New Jersey, was the sandpiper¹. It makes sense since the Lenape-English dictionary gives the translation *lekau* to mean sand, gravel. *Ji-twish'-ki-wen* in Chippewa². 🐦

1 <https://oa-bsa.org/article/news-you-can-use-history-behind-merger-lenape-lodges-ancestral-tree>

2 *Bird Nomenclature of the Chippewa Indians*. Author(s): W. W. Cooke. Source: The Auk, July, 1884, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 242-250. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4066840.pdf>



Excerpt of field journal and photos of Purple Sandpipers at Shore Promenade. All work by Nicole Peyrafitte.



Tufted Titmouse in Prospect Park, one of the thousands that have turned up in New York City this autumn. Photo by Carol Page.



Against All Odds: Breeding Piping Plovers at Breezy Point

By Jennifer Kepler

It was a summer full of hope, sadness, frustration, celebration, anger, and awe. And they all happened in the west end of the Rockaway Peninsula, along the shores of Gateway National Recreation Area, from Jacob Riis Park to Fort Tilden to Breezy Point, where I and about 80 others spent our beachgoing days under the bright sun looking after the federally endangered Piping Plover.

Last summer, I volunteered for the NYC Plover Project during a time I was unemployed, with a need to contribute to something and busy myself as I searched

for my next opportunity. As a professional in outdoor education, I thought this would be a great way to pass the time and observe the ebb and flow of life on the beach. My job would be to help educate beachgoers about these birds which seek out these urban beaches to be their nursery. I had no idea it would become much more than that.

Fewer than 100 pairs of Piping Plovers, or PIPLs as we would refer to them in shorthand, by their banding code, nest on the beaches of New York City each year. Their global population is between 6,000-8,000. There

are more polar bears (about four times more) in the world than PIPLs. In the city, the biggest threats to these birds come from humans: from the direct impact of sneaking your well-behaved dog onto the beach to the more indirect ones – though just as dangerous – of rising sea level and extreme storms due to climate change. Plovers do not have it easy.

As a mother of a toddler, I've never felt as much empathy toward an animal as I did this summer. From beginning to end, I witnessed the most important months of these birds' lives, their very real struggle to keep their kind alive: the adults' courtship and nesting and their vigilant incubation and defense of their precious eggs until hatching. I cried tears of joy and sadness. I watched chicks only hours old find refuge with their parents and make it to the water's edge, touching their feet to the ocean for the first time. One can only imagine the rush of information their tiny bodies take in immediately after entering this strange world.

Then, night would fall, and, in the morning, there would be no evidence of the chicks aside from the exclosures that plover volunteers and park rangers had earlier built around the nest to keep out predators like raccoons. Sometimes we would find the parents had fully abandoned the area or were perhaps searching for their lost offspring, flying around, vocalizing constantly. Over time, these exclosures became more like memorials, as countless families were born and then soon disappeared, in a night or over the course of a few days, one plover chick after another until one might remain, and hang on for a while, filling the souls of our volunteer brigade with hope. The predation could have come from raccoons or feral cats or foul play, and next season, with the installation of cameras near the nests, we expect to learn more.

Being on the beach daily, I came to learn not only the patterns of the birds, but beachgoers too. Often I wished for rain, just so the beaches wouldn't be packed, and the birds would have some breathing room. The sliver of shoreline at Fort Tilden, where so many plovers attempt to nest, is one of the most crowded on the peninsula. One of the chicks here was trounced by an oblivious person and later died at a rehabilitation center. Which tells you how tiny – and vulnerable – the chicks are.

The diligence of the U.S. Park Police, however, was impressive to me. Many would come out with binoculars and check on the beach closures. Their commitment to protecting the natural resources of



After the eggs hatch, the adults take the shells and distribute them away from the nest.



The plover chicks weigh less than 2 garlic cloves upon hatching. Their sand color makes them hard to see and their first line of defense when out in the open is to stay still and blend in. This is not an advantageous move on a beach crowded with people haphazardly walking about.



Once out of the nest, the family does not return to it. Dune grass, driftwood, and the adults provide protection and refuge from danger.

the area was indisputable; but for the size of the area they're tasked with protecting, their own numbers were unfortunately not nearly enough. In the end, a total of three chicks fledged. All were from separate nests.

One of the best ways to help Piping Plovers is through education. So many beachgoers think they know the birds, but they're usually thinking of Sanderlings. Beachgoers are also disconnected from the impacts of their activities in the areas where plovers nest.

Some of my personal tips, as a plover lover and sharer of the shore, are as follows:

- Leave dogs at home. Even the presence of a well-behaved dog triggers a predator response in nesting birds, to the point of abandonment. All the birds see is a predator and dogs are one of the leading threats to nesting shorebirds. Service dogs are accommodated on the Riis boardwalk and leashed dogs are always welcome on the boardwalk. Leashed dogs are no longer permitted on Gateway's beaches between March 15 to September 15, dates that differ from NYC Parks' beaches.
- Leave no trace. Banana peels and orange rinds are biodegradable, but they also attract a larger number of raccoons than would be in these places due to the sheer volume of trash. That means more predators for baby birds to dodge. Bring your trash home; trash cans at the beach are not emptied regularly.
- Respect the string line. The string line, or symbolic fencing, protects where the birds take refuge and nest. It also can protect endangered plants like beach amaranth. When you set up right next to the line or, worse, go into the dunes as your personal latrine, you risk endangering birds, plants, and yourself. The ticks and poison ivy living and growing in the dunes will make you regret not staying near Riis for the convenience of its bathrooms. And yes, I have seen birders inside the symbolic fencing at the beach!
- Fort Tilden is not a swimming beach. It is for licensed fishing. If you swim here, you risk your life because there are no lifeguards on duty. I've also been told that swimmers have been hooked before. Riis provides you more safety under the eye of lifeguards. That also means fewer hazards



You see lots of different plover parenting styles, but almost all are hardcore in defending their chicks against all threats, including the ghost crabs, many of which are large enough to grab chicks.

on the beach for wildlife.

- Kites and drones look like predators and, like dogs, are prohibited on the beach during breeding season from spring until late summer.
- If you see signs and extra fencing, read them and heed them. During full beach closures, there are zero high tide rules; it's closed, full stop. These spaces are created to allow chicks access from the dunes to the shore, and they are vital to their potential survival.

This summer we had some real lows – two chicks were stepped on and died – but we also shared wonderful triumphs, such as getting sections of the beach closed to allow a sibling of one of the trampled chicks to fledge. During our rounds, we got to see other wonderful birds, like Royal Terns, Whimbrel, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstones. At times it felt like a Sisyphean assignment, but looking back on it, I feel like a cultural shift – call it a sea change – has already occurred there. People on the beach knew why we were there and they often righted their wrongs before we approached them. The seasonal NPS biotechs became great allies, even volunteering their own time after their shift to watch the chicks and speak to beachgoers. The NYC Plover Project is an amazing opportunity for birders and non-birders alike. I invite you to join this community of individuals who value wildlife and believe our city is made richer by their presence in it. 🐦



Mallard and Hooded Merganser in Central Park. 17
Photo by Marisa Hernandez.

Eating Like a Bird(er)

By Linda Ewing

Picture a cold, windy day at Bush Terminal Piers Park. Snow dust swirled over the pier, deserted except for a handful of people with binoculars.

A Brooklyn Bird Club member (he knows who he is) was leading his first-ever field trip on one of the most miserable days of the year.

“It’s not really so bad,” someone offered, cheerfully – just before a gust of wind knocked over the leader’s new scope. Our group picture shows a row of shapeless figures in bulky coats, faces unrecognizable behind layers of hoods, hats, and scarves.

Everyone agreed that cutting the trip short and adjourning to a warm place for a late breakfast and hot coffee would be an excellent idea. But where to go?

This article is an extended answer to that question. Drawing on personal experience and conversations with other birders who also love to eat, it tours some of the borough’s diverse habitats and neighborhoods, looking for places to rest, warm up, and refuel.

Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden

We’ll start our tour where so many get their first taste of birding –

Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. One easy choice is to stay within the park or garden, which both have their own concessions. Winner, the bakery/café/restaurant on Seventh Avenue, has set up shop in the park’s Picnic House, where its excellent sourdough croissants pair well with a visit to the Sparrow Bowl.

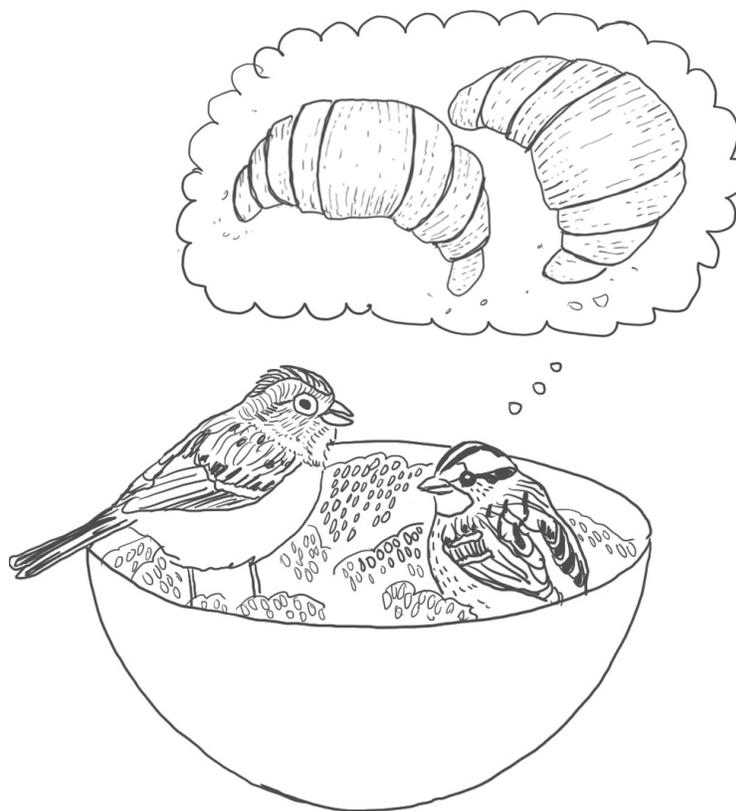
In the Botanic Garden, there’s the Yellow Magnolia Café. Few birders know the garden as well as Indigo Goodson – it’s her patch – and she swears by its biscuits.

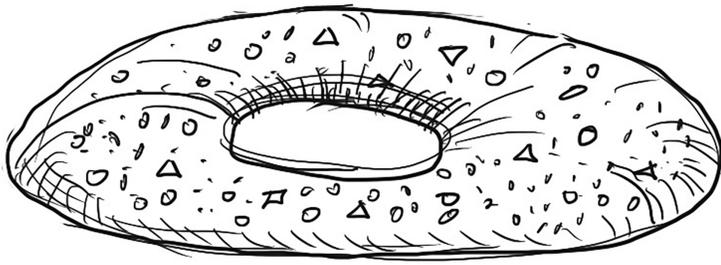
Outside the park and garden, the options multiply. Several names came up repeatedly in conversations with Brooklyn birders. Ix, just steps from the Prospect Park stop on the B/Q train, is an eclectic bistro with Guatemalan roots. Tina Alleva recommends its omelettes, its soups, and (what the heck) its cocktails. Gabriel Willow likes the fact that its Guatemalan-born, French-trained, former-Berliner chef-owner also loves

Korean food and has incorporated kimchi into the menu. How much more Brooklyn can you get? But as tasty and inventive as Ix’s fusion dishes are, Willow still favors its Guatemalan soup-stews, like an exemplary pepian. And then there’s Ix’s extensive hot chocolate selection, from unadorned to ginger-cayenne to flowering lavender.

If Ix is too crowded, Willow continues another block and a half east to De Hot Pot. Their classic Trini fare is also a favorite of Goodson’s. Get the roti or the doubles (always plural, whether you’re ordering one, like me, or

two or three, like Willow). And when they ask if you want them with everything, say yes. Everything, in this case, means tamarind chutney, spicy green mango pickle, and hot pepper sauce. Doubles are vegan, and there’s no shortage of other vegetarian and vegan options. A heaping veggie platter – pumpkin, callaloo,





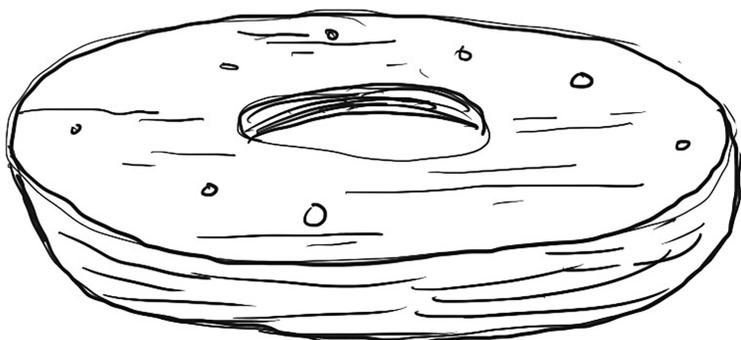
channa, plantains, rice and peas – tests the limits of its foil carry-out container. The location, on Washington Avenue between Lincoln and Lefferts, puts De Hot Pot almost equidistant from the park and the garden.

On the Park Slope side of the park, Ryan Mandelbaum relies on the Bagel Hole for pre-birding provisions. Not only do their bagels routinely show up on “best of” lists compiled by local media, their 7 a.m. opening means you can pick up a bagel or two from their storefront on Seventh Avenue between 12th and 13th Streets and, depending on the time of year, still make it to Lookout Hill at first light.

In Windsor Terrace, Ryan Goldberg has dubbed The Adirondack bar on Prospect Avenue the Brooklyn Bird Club’s clubhouse because so many birding outings adjourn there. As with the Bagel Hole, the draw is, in part, its hours – the bar opens at noon on weekends, 3 p.m. during the week, right about the time even the hardest core of hardcore birders are ready to kick back and share the day’s highlights over a beer or two. But the wide selection of New York state craft brews and decent food add to the appeal. So does the rustic decor, which includes a painting of Wood Ducks lifting off and a taxidermy Ring-necked Pheasant behind the bar.

Green-Wood Cemetery

A confession: I sometimes head to Green-Wood for the nearby food options as much as the birds. From the yeasty aromas that waft over Fifth Avenue by the cemetery’s main entrance, to the small restaurants



clustered along Fourth and Fifth Avenues within easy walking distance of the 35th Street service entrance, Green-Wood feeds its birders well.

Let’s start by investigating the source of those smells by the main entrance. They’re coming from Baked in Brooklyn, directly across the avenue. Is it the best bakery in Brooklyn? Nope. But their cinnamon rolls are enormous, and they sell six-packs of pull-apart rolls larded with dried cranberries and sunflower seeds that are so addictive, some refer to them as “crack rolls.”

Other Green-Wood adjacent bakeries include Girasol, on Fifth Avenue at 21st Street, where Mandelbaum swears by the puff pastry stuffed with guava paste or, if they’re craving something savory and substantial, the mushroom torta; Regina Bakery, tucked away behind the Windsor Tavern on Prospect Avenue off Prospect Park West, a few blocks from the 20th Street entrance, for classic Italian-American treats like rainbow cookies and filled-to-order cannoli; and the venerable Ines Bakery, across from the cemetery’s 35th Street entrance, where you can pick up breakfast, lunch, dinner or dessert. The cinnamon sugar-dusted empanadas filled with creamy arroz con leche are a particular favorite.

But this roster of bakeries barely scratches the surface. There’s also the cluster of women selling tamales and champurrado by the 36th Street D/N/R station, steps from the cemetery. There’s Reina de la Nube, in the same block as Ines, where Green-Wood birders can fantasize about the birds of Ecuador as they warm up with a cup of sweet, milky, hominy-based morocho or tuck into a platter of eggs, carne asada, and plantains. There are some of the best tacos in Brooklyn, from the Tacos El Bronco truck on Fifth Avenue, where you can get an education in offal and ponder what, exactly, is “rose meat.” Or, for something different, drop by Kofte Piyez, across the avenue from the taco truck. It’s pretty much a one-person operation where the owner greets you, takes your order, prepares your food, and serves it to you. He even has a self-published cookbook. And while the restaurant’s name highlights its grilled meat, the array of Turkish salads and mezze are arguably the stars. Don’t miss the juices. Closer to the cemetery’s main entrance, El Continental (Fifth Avenue and 20th Street) is one of those places that gets passed along via word of mouth by birders who’ve sampled their pupusas and other Salvadoran treats. Have you ever wondered what the fruit of the cashew tree tastes like? You can find out here by

ordering a glass of marañón.

I will go out on a limb and assert that Green-Wood offers the most extravagantly varied and delicious food options of any eBird hotspot in Kings County.

Bush Terminal Piers

On the bone-chilling day that opened this article, we eventually headed for Zona Sur, on Fourth Avenue between 43rd and 44th Streets. The restaurant is a labor of love for its two owners, long-time restaurant workers who live in the neighborhood and opened the kind of place they would like to patronize. It's an all-day café and bistro where you can have an extravagant breakfast if you're hungry, or just a cappuccino if you're cold – we were both – and then come back later for dinner with non-birders. They have beer, wine, and cocktails, too, if you want to toast that Glaucous Gull you saw roosting on the Sanitation Department pier.

Even closer to the piers, Third Avenue is dotted with bodegas and lunch spots catering to workers in the area. One spot that's worthy of note is Gran Villa, at 40th Street, a hybrid of a New York City diner and a Salvadoran pupuseria. Their pupusas run from the standard (cheese, beans, pork and permutations thereof) to the uniquely Central American (loroco, ayote, chipilin) to the just, well, strange (pineapple).

Coney Island

Ah, Coney Island in the winter! The wind, the surf, the gulls, the prospect of rarities blown to our shores; also, women in fur coats strolling arm in arm with women

in bikini tops, against a backdrop of closed rides, construction fences and desolate boardwalk. It makes one pity the non-birders who only know Coney Island in the summer.

But where to eat in the off-season, especially with Totonno's still closed? There's Nathan's, of course, where the gulls recommend the crinkly French fries and Daniel Smith, the lobster rolls.

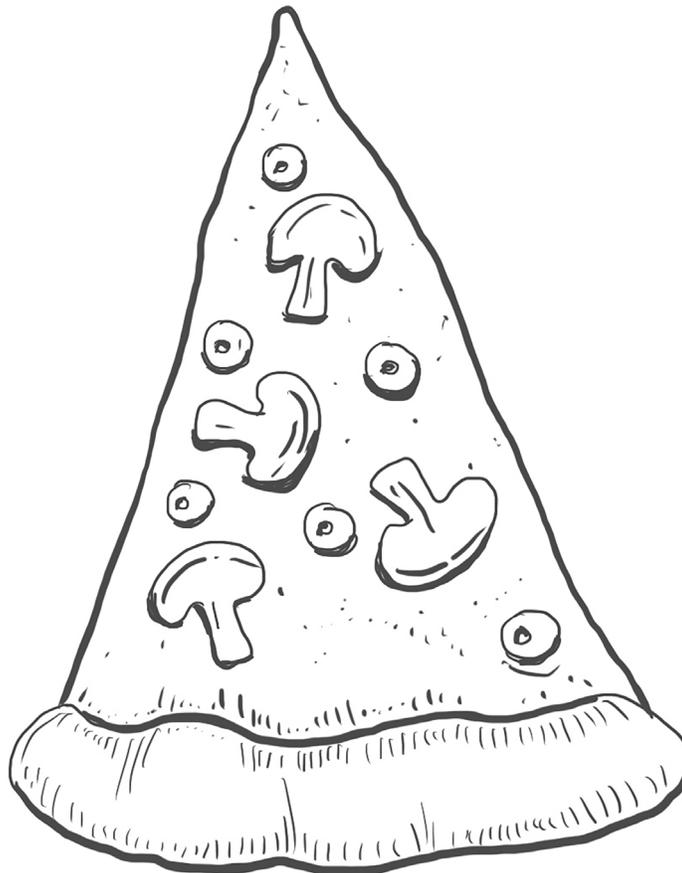
But there are other options. If you don't associate Coney Island with tacos, ducking into Guerrero Deli on Mermaid Avenue and W. 17th Street may change your mind. Go to the back of the store, where the women in the kitchen will take your order (chorizo and egg, please) and then cook it up.

Or head to Brighton Beach for Russian, Ukrainian, Uzbek, Georgian, Uighur and other former-Soviet cuisine. Mandelbaum is partial to Skovorodka, on Brighton Beach Avenue, for Ukrainian and Russian classics. If you're up for a splurge, Tatiana is right on the Brighton Beach

boardwalk. Restaurant by day, club by night, it's pricey, but the pickle plate is complementary – and if you sit outside, you can continue to scan for birds while you wait for your food. Gabriel Willow admits to having done exactly that.

Marine Park

Getting to Marine Park via the F or Q train and the painfully slow B3 bus, rather than zipping there in a car, has one compensating advantage: it brings exposure to the varied cuisines of Avenue U, which take in Sicilian, Jewish (Ashkenazi and Sephardic both), Vietnamese, Chinese, a smattering of Mexican,



Russian, Georgian, Azeri, Uzbek, and Turkish. Safir Bakery, at E. 28th Street, is worth a visit for its Turkish pastries, including the hard-to-find, pistachio-intensive cylinders known as *fistikli sarma*. While Safir claims its *baklava* is the best in town, I'd give the edge to the *simit*, ridiculously tender bread rings thickly covered with sesame seeds. They serve Turkish breakfasts, too.

Knapp Street Pizza, in the triangle defined by Knapp Street, Avenue V and Gerritsen Avenue, is a favorite of the birding trio of Mandelbaum, Michael Yuan, and Max Epstein. It's strategically located, close to the west side of the Marine Park Salt Marsh and with easy access to Plumb Beach.

Floyd Bennett Field

Floyd Bennett is a culinary challenge. It is vast and there's not much around it. Fortunately, the food in the Gateway sports complex is decent, if basic. Multiple birders expressed a mixture of surprise at the quality of their pizza and calzones – yes, they have a real pizza oven – and pleasure in their junkier offerings, like loaded tater tots.

Another option, especially for car-less birders who make the trek to Floyd by public transit, is to stop for Jamaican food by the Flatbush Avenue/Brooklyn College 2/5 station before (or after) hopping on (or off) the Q35 bus. For “before,” the porridge at Ital Fusion

tasty. The various stews only get better as the flavors meld above their steam trays, and the fast-moving jerk chicken (dis)assembly line is a sight to behold.

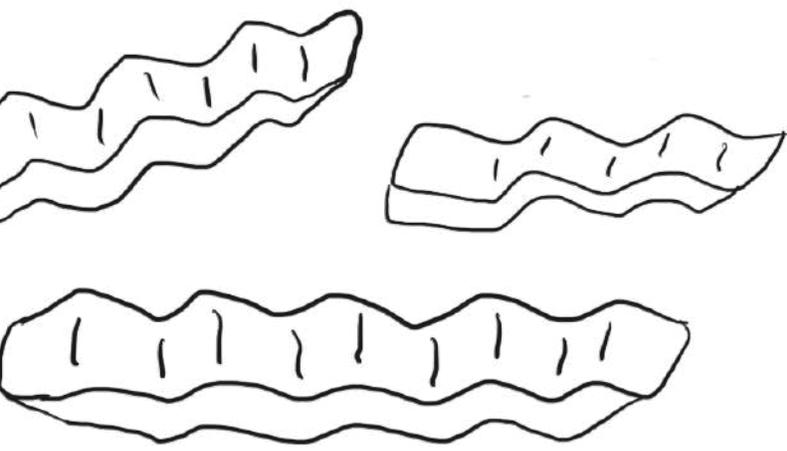
On Flatbush Avenue, the Oasis and the Floridian duke it out for diner supremacy. For reasons that are possibly entirely arbitrary, it's the Oasis, at Quentin Road, that's become the birders' favorite. The menu is classic Greek diner.

The South Brooklyn coast

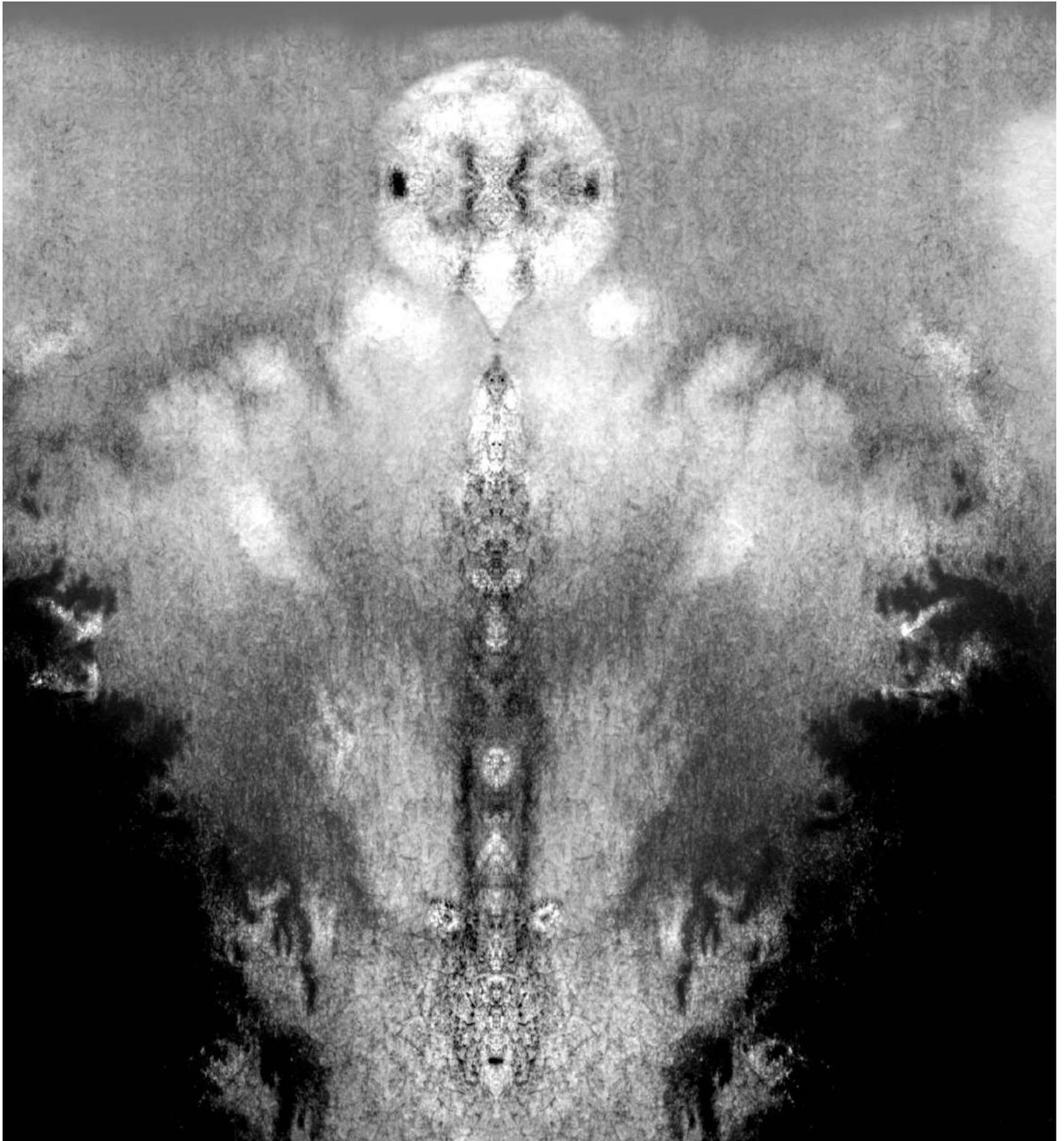
Like Floyd, the birding destinations that hug the Brooklyn coast from Canarsie to Plumb Beach to Caesar's Bay are cut off from dense commercial blocks packed with mom-and-pop restaurants. If they're not brown-bagging it, individuals who regularly bird this part of the borough tend to fortify themselves with pizza. Karen O'Hearn recommends Pizza D'Amore, conveniently located right in the Caesar's Bay shopping development: “it's not Totonno's, but it's good.” Unlike Totonno's, D'Amore serves up slices as well as whole pies. Knapp Street Pizza, between Marine Park and Plumb Beach, has already been mentioned. New Park Pizza, on Cross Bay Boulevard, may be in Queens, but it's a useful refueling stop for birders heading to Terrapin Point, where the border of Kings County cuts through the Jamaica Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

It's not particularly close to any hotspot, but L&B Spumoni Gardens on 86th Street in Gravesend is centrally located for birders covering Prospect, Green-Wood and the South Brooklyn coast in a big day. Service there is quick – a plus for big days – and the square Sicilian slices are delicious.

So ends our tour. We missed plenty of places along the way, but that happens to all of us in both our birding and eating lives. The best way around this, it seems to me, is to keep heading out, looking, and noticing. And eating, too, of course. Who would have thought that looking for birds in Kings County would expose one to so many different neighborhoods, cultures, and cuisines? And yet, that's exactly what birding has done for many of us. Think of this guide as a kind of love letter to Brooklyn's cuisines – which is to say, its people – as well as its birds. 🐦



is worth the short detour up Nostrand. It comes in a variety of grains, is not too sweet, and will fortify you for the wind and cold of the runways. I've never figured out what the little leaves and twigs in the mixture are, but I'm sure they're healthy. For “after,” Fisherman's Cove – a branch of the local mini-chain – is reliably



Sparks!

By Xinyi Zhang

I first encountered the Frigatebird in a crammed, dusty library in my hometown, Qingpu – a water town on the outskirts of Shanghai, China.

Encyclopedias printed on glossy papers were expensive then, but luckily my mom taught at a middle school where I could have unlimited access to an underutilized library. Frigatebirds, this six-year-old learned, are “pirates of the sea,” as they are often seen chasing other seabirds to steal their prey¹. They are mean, and they are cool: the glossy-black plumage, the scissor tail, and the iconic red gular sac the male Frigatebird inflates to become a balloon during courtship displays. Flipping through the encyclopedia, I could almost see the Frigatebird’s bravado jumping out of the pages, a pirate bandana on its head. The Frigatebird is remote and exotic, and seemingly unreachable. And having the knowledge of this exotic bird made me, in my mind, a cool kid. I couldn’t shut up about it for a while.

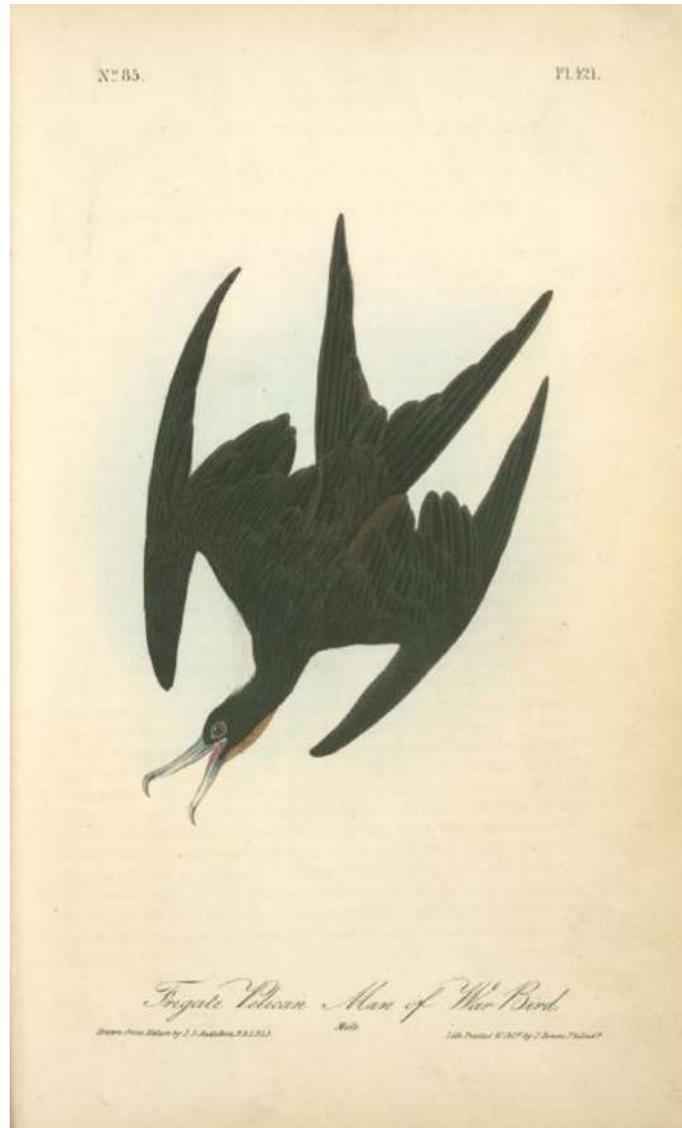
Years later, I was able to see the Frigatebird (both Great and Magnificent) in the Galapagos, nesting high up on the cliff on Isla San Cristóbal, flying over and perching on the boat I stayed on, and performing courtship displays in the large colony on Isla Seymour Norte. I was not a birder then, and it wasn’t until a

few years later after my Galapagos trip that I became a birder. But somehow this experience popped up in my mind when I searched my memory for “sparks.” It is perhaps because of the symbolism of it. The word “spark” implies an intensely personal moment of enlightenment, with an inevitable sense of romanticism attached to it. And what’s more romantic than what had been imagined to be unreachable finally reached, the impossible encounter realized?

Except that there wasn’t much effort involved. Seeing the Frigatebirds was not a long-time dream

come true: I simply joined the family trip of a close friend who was living in Ecuador at the time. But we are great at making associations and meanings out of random encounters, and I was able to transport myself to the dingy library in my hometown immediately upon seeing the Frigatebirds. My relation to the Frigatebirds is meaningful – sanctified in my mind – because it in part encapsulates my experience as a long-distance migrant and thus my relationships to different locales and people there. Frigatebirds simultaneously represent the support I received from my family to learn and explore even when resources were limited, and the unique friendships I was able to foster across borders. I realize now that the “sparks” I have for birding do not come from a single moment of observing a single bird, but from countless moments when I

was able to make connections with other experiences and people across time and space upon seeing a bird – an ability that we all have. This is an insight that sociologist Emile Durkheim expressed a century ago: animals – in this case, birds – are central to social life because they are useful symbols for expressing the



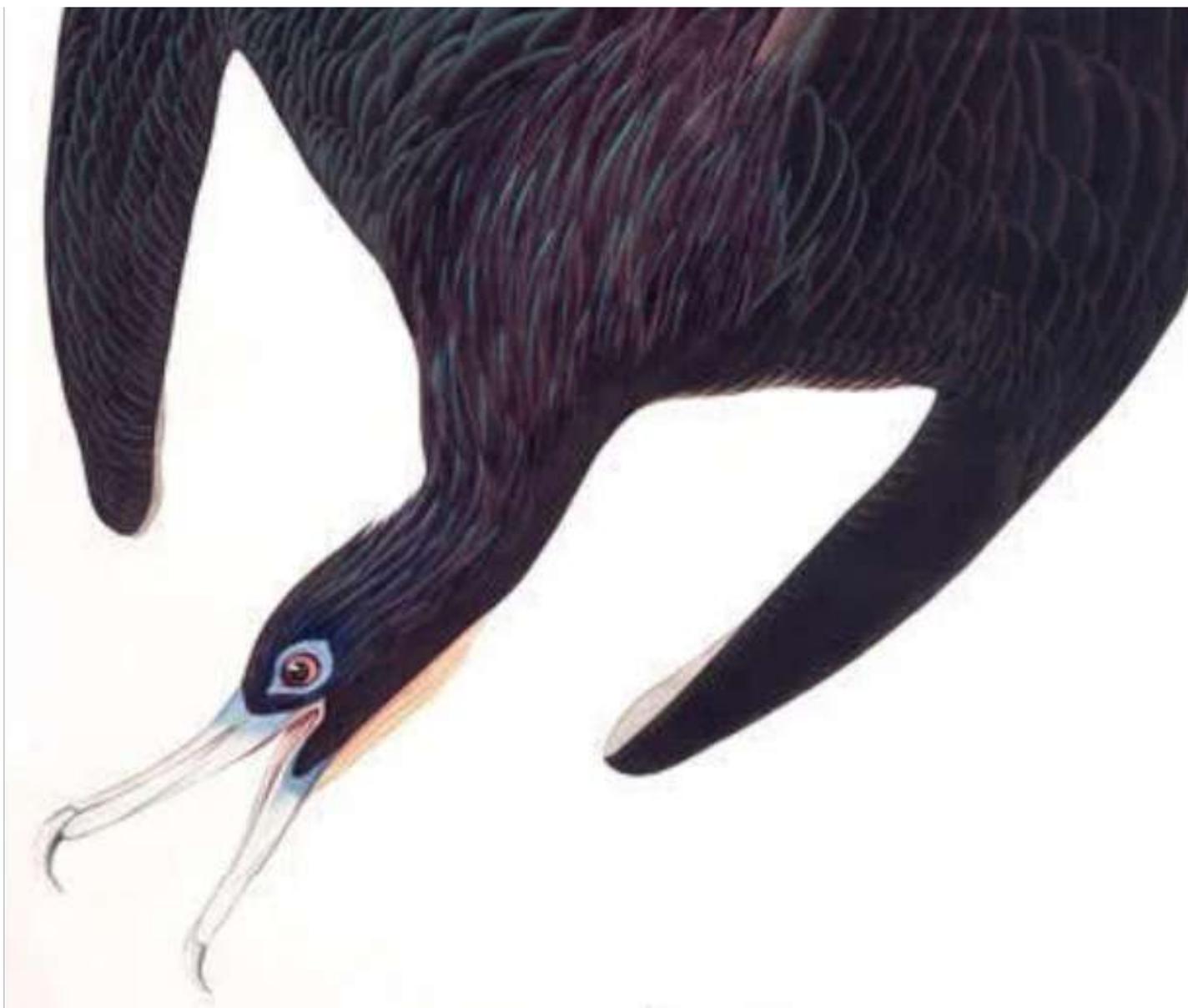
¹ Frigatebirds, as it turns out, mostly catch their own prey, so some argue the reputation is ill-deserved.

relationship between self and society.²

Like many others, I got into birding during the pandemic. The explosion of interest in birding during the last few years makes sociological sense as our relations with birds allow us to acquire a unique capacity to enrich social life when other options are heavily curtailed. Counter to the common belief that we seek connection with nature to escape social life, I noticed through birding how much we seek social connections through our relations to birds: through sharing “sparks” stories, photos, checklists, identification tips, rare bird locations...And it’s through these sharing practices that attentions get focused to natural elements and ecological dynamics that have never been absent – but often assumed to be – in urban spaces: another common

2 I borrow this succinct summary from Colin Jerolmack.

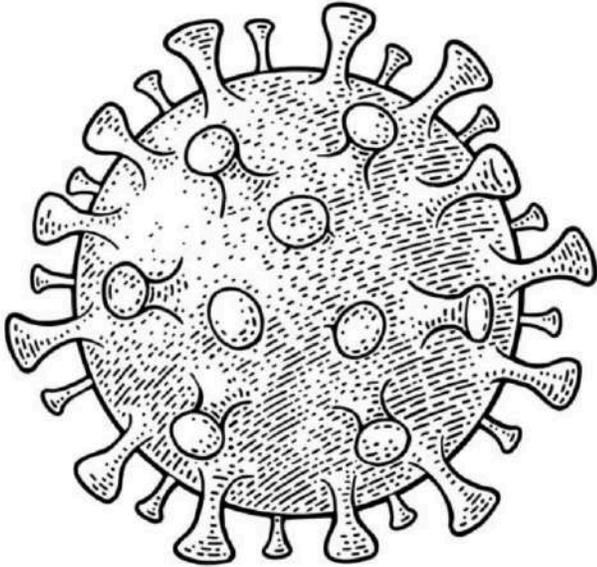
realization that comes with the sparks. Excitingly, bird sightings in New York stir dormant memories and new connections from afar: seeing a Ring-necked Pheasant on the Marine Park Salt Marsh Nature Trail reminded me of having glimpses of them in the countryside bushes while growing up (known colloquially as “wild cocks” there); Great and Snowy Egrets cue in my head the existing claims my dad often made that they were the signs of our water becoming cleaner; my posting of photos of the Northern Mockingbird that frequents my window feeder in the family group chat often solicits blurry cell phone photos of unknown birds from my mom, leading me into eBird rabbit holes. Sparks, in the end, are simple reminders of the moments I shared with other human beings: the social self is constructed through these moments, and for them I have the birds to thank. 🐦



This page and previous: *Frigate Pelican*. Detail of print by J. J. Audubon.



Top and bottom: Bay-breasted Warbler in Green-Wood Cemetery and Vesper Sparrow in Prospect Park. Photos by Janet Zinn.



Report: Effects of Covid-19 on Birding Trends in Brooklyn

By Nadav Gilad-Muth, senior at Millenium Brooklyn High School

How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact birding in Brooklyn, with an emphasis on birding in Prospect Park?

Introduction:

On Saturdays my dad and I like to wake up early and walk to Prospect Park to go birding, hoping to see the rare species that were posted on eBird the day before. These walks range anywhere from one to two hours, allowing ample time to talk about anything and everything, whether birds are part of the topic or not. Recently, our conversations have often returned to the same subject: how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted birding in the park, and more specifically, if

the social gathering and indoor activity restrictions have served as a factor to get more people into the local parks birding. Our hypothesis was that the number of birders would increase as a result of the pandemic because outdoor interactions and activities are safer and less likely to result in the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus than indoor activities. Additionally, we thought that the pandemic gave some people more flexible and remote working schedules, which would result in more opportunities to go birding. What better way to find out than to do some research.

Methods:

To address our hypothesis I decided to use eBird data as an indicator of the level of birding activity in Brooklyn. The eBird app, developed and supported by Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology, is one of the most widely used birding apps in the United States. Using the eBird app, birders can log the birds they identify, as well as when, where, with whom, and for how long they were birding. This is a great source of information for studying bird and birding trends; however, the most significant caveat is that we can only see the activity of the birders who use the app and not the activity of all birders in Brooklyn. I did a literature search to determine what percentage of birders use the eBird app, but I was not able to find any literature on this subject. From my own experience and knowledge of other birders in Brooklyn, I estimated that 20-40 percent of birders record their observations with eBird, and the analyses here will use this subset of birders as a general indicator of the whole birding community.

I registered as a data user with eBird and downloaded eBird data for Kings County (Brooklyn) from 2017 to 2022. These data were downloaded as csv files and opened and analyzed in Microsoft Excel. There are no names or personal identifying information associated with the eBirders (designated by a unique identifying number) or in the eBird lists (also represented by a unique identifying number). There are two significant limitations to consider with this data: 1) as mentioned above, only data submitted from eBirders is available and I do not know what fraction of all birders that represents, or if the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic equally affects birders who use eBird and those birders who do not (although I expect the effect will be the same on both groups), and, 2) the data in the eBird archive is organized in a way that is convenient for asking questions about different bird species that are

observed, but not conveniently organized to address questions about eBirders or lists submitted. Regarding the issue of data organization, I needed to employ a number of filtering, sorting, and aggregating routines on the original dataset in Excel in order to extract the information on the number of unique eBirders and the number of eBird lists submitted.

Results:

The first question addressed was the effect of the pandemic on the number of eBirders. To keep things simple and reduce the size of the data I needed to work with, I looked only at eBird lists submitted from Prospect Park. Figure 1 shows that there was an increase in eBird users that joined the platform during the pandemic. In 2017 there were approximately 700 unique eBirders who submitted at least one list from Prospect Park (blue bars and left-side y-axis), and that number increases each year, reaching almost 1,800 unique eBirders reporting from Prospect Park in 2021 (the last year analyzed in this study). The orange line in Figure 1 (using the right-side y-axis) shows the number of events (eBird lists submitted) and this also increases each year from 2017 (~9,000 lists) to 2021 (~27,000 lists). However, if we look in the inset for Figure 1, we can see the percentage change from the previous year, and in fact the number of new eBirders from 2019 to

2020 drops by ~15%, whereas the average increase from one year to the next prior to the pandemic was ~25%. Yet, between 2020 and 2021 the increase in new eBirders submitting from Prospect Park is ~45%! One possible interpretation of this is that the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in an initial drop in the rate of increase, possibly from NYC-area restrictions, fear, and an abundance of caution. Then in 2021, with the availability of the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine and an easing of Covid restrictions, more people felt comfortable going out birding, and there is a significant boost because the 2021 increase in eBirders includes those that might have started birding in 2020 but chose not to because of the pandemic. The effect of the pandemic relative rate of change on lists submitted is the opposite – there is a significant percentage increase in the number of lists submitted in 2020, possibly the result of existing eBirders going out to bird more frequently because of not having work, or having remote work, and the desire to get outdoors. That jump in 2020 is absent in 2021 as people return to work, and feel more comfortable with indoor activities, and the results are a less significant rise in the number of eBird lists submitted (despite the increase in unique eBirders). An alternative explanation is that in 2021 eBirders went birding individually, or in smaller groups, and submitted more lists relative to a year when eBirders

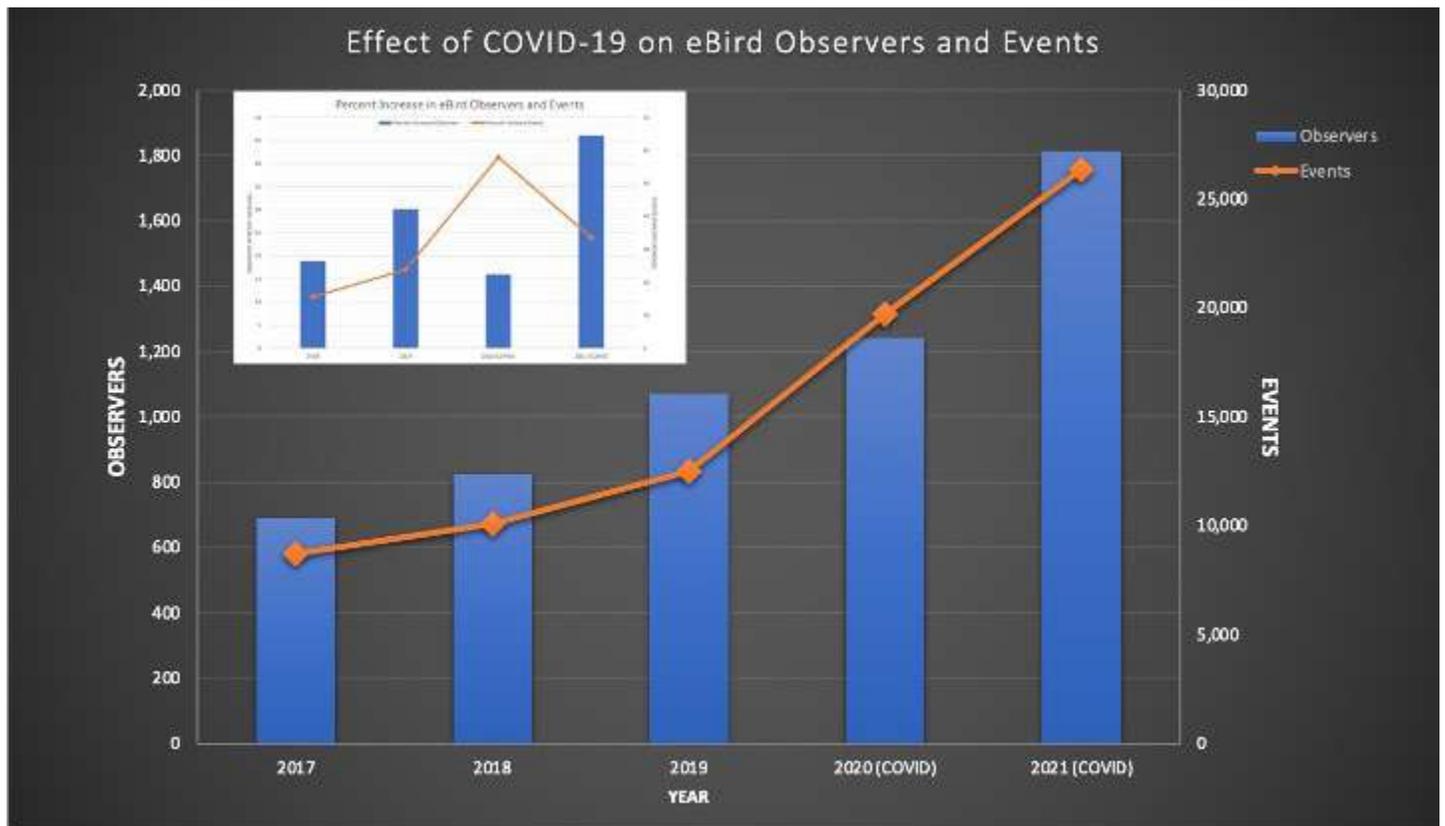


Figure 1.

were comfortable in larger groups and submitted one list for the group. A deeper dive into the data may allow these two explanations to be teased apart.

With these eBird data in hand, I decided to address a couple of other questions my dad and I would discuss on our birding walks. Figure 2 shows the significance of birding together! For birding events in Prospect Park lasting between 15-120 minutes, the number of species identified (y-axis) increases steadily with increasing number of birders, up to 20 birders (there are too few reports from groups of five, 10 and 30 birders to be confident in those lower values). Increasing the observers from one to four results in an increase of species observed from an average of ~28 to an average of ~53! This is not surprising because more eyes looking about are likely to see more birds. The other advantage of increased number of birders is that within a larger group there is more likely to be an expert birder, which means fewer birds go unlisted because

they were unidentified. The benefit in additional birders in a group appears to level off at about four birders. This could be because with four birders nearly all the birds in a given area are sighted. Or, as the number of birders increases, the benefit drops off, since more birders create more of a perceived threat for the birds themselves, driving them into hiding.

I also used the eBird data to look at how the amount of time spent birding, or distance traveled while birding, influenced the number of species identified. Again, as would be predicted, Figure 3 shows that the number of species identified increases with both distance and time. However, the rate of additional species observed looks to drop off a bit after 3-4 km and 50 minutes. Beyond those points there are slightly diminishing returns with more distance or time spent birding. However, these data are difficult to interpret because there is also the effect of habitat, and with greater time or distance there is the chance to explore more habitats,

and that could keep the rate of additional species identified at a relatively constant level. Again, digging deeper into the data and limiting the study to only eBird lists reported from smaller sites, such as the Vale of Cashmere or Lookout Hill, might make it possible to tease out the effect of multiple habitats on identification rates.

Conclusion:

It appears that the factors that my dad and I discussed on our walks played a role in the increase in birders in the park during the pandemic. While we didn't study enough eBird data to state anything definitive, the data is consistent with a larger percent increase

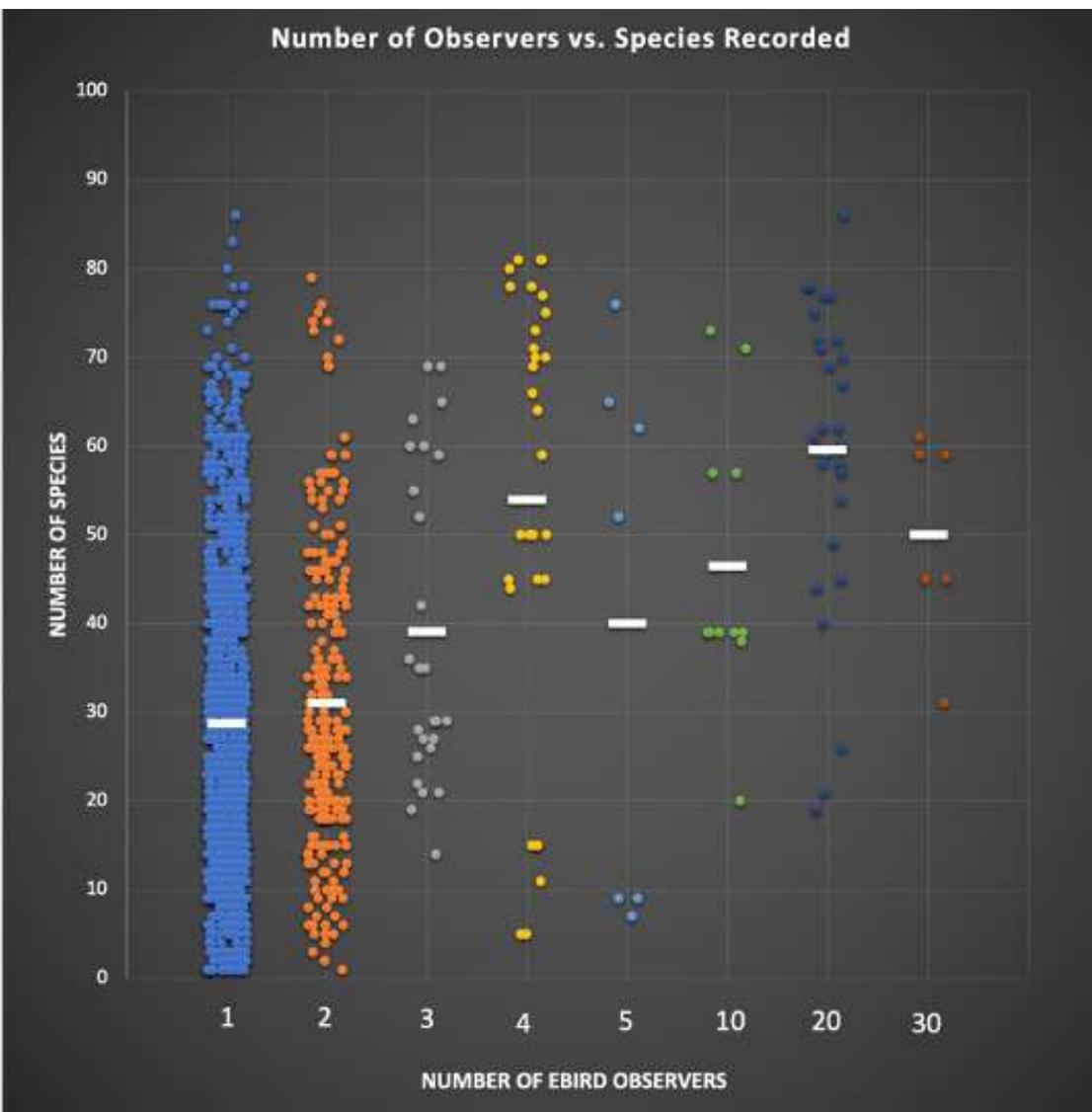


Figure 2.

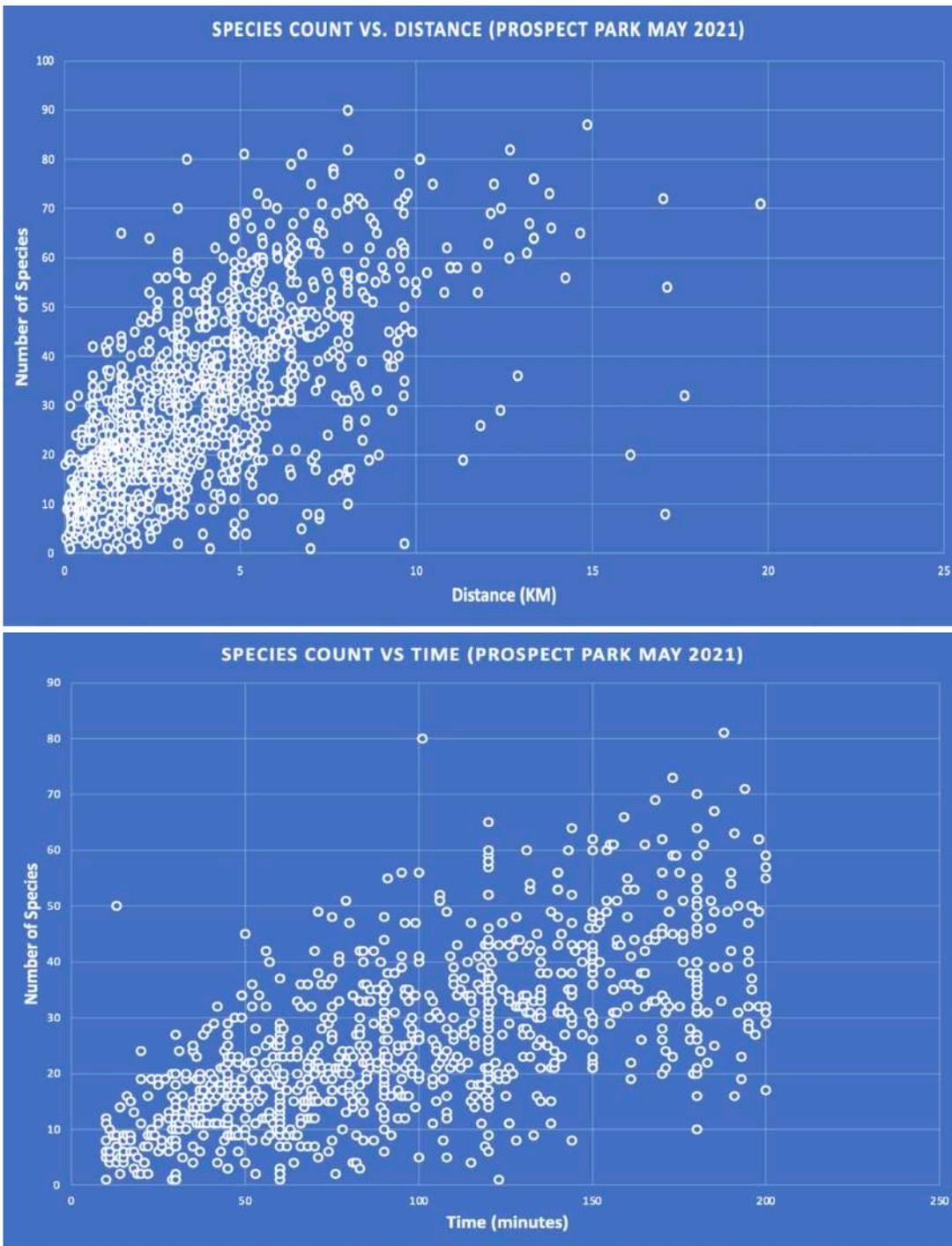


Figure 3.

in eBird lists submitted because of the pandemic. This supports our hypothesis, since continuing eBirders were birding more often and submitting more lists during the pandemic year of 2020 than in previous years. However, the data is inconclusive regarding new eBirders joining as a result of the pandemic because each year prior to the pandemic there were significant increases in the number of new eBirders submitting from Prospect Park. An additional significant weakness is that we cannot tell how many birders log their data on eBird and therefore we cannot easily extrapolate

to all the birders in Prospect Park. In order for this research to be more impactful we would need to know what percentage of birders log data on eBird, which could be found through a survey of birders in the park. Overall, this study was revealing of the ways the pandemic influenced birding in Prospect Park, and helps to illustrate the general trends in birding in the park. This study was effective in beginning to answer the questions my dad and I have been wondering about and it was rewarding to uncover insights about birdwatching in general! 🐦



Common Yellowthroat. Watercolor on paper by Carol Page.



Rainbow over Black Turtle Cove, Galapagos Islands.
All photos by Michelle Talich.

A Galapagos Adventure

By Michelle Talich

Last June, I fulfilled a lifelong dream of visiting the Galapagos by going on a birdwatching tour of the islands with Wildside Nature Tours. Led by wildlife and nature photographer Lee Hoy, the trip was more amazing than I ever could have imagined and worth every penny. While I feel like I could write an entire book about my experience, here is a brief travel journal highlighting some of the most memorable birds and other creatures I encountered in my 10 days in Ecuador.

On day one, I arrived in Quito, Ecuador, late at night and spent the first day of the trip wandering

the grounds of the hotel, San Jose de Puembo, while waiting for the other members of the tour to arrive. I saw a pair of beautiful Vermillion Flycatchers, several Black-tailed Trainbearer hummingbirds, some Rufous-collared Sparrows and a gorgeous Blue-gray Tanager snacking on some fruit. It turned out there were only six of us on the trip, plus the tour leader and two local naturalists.

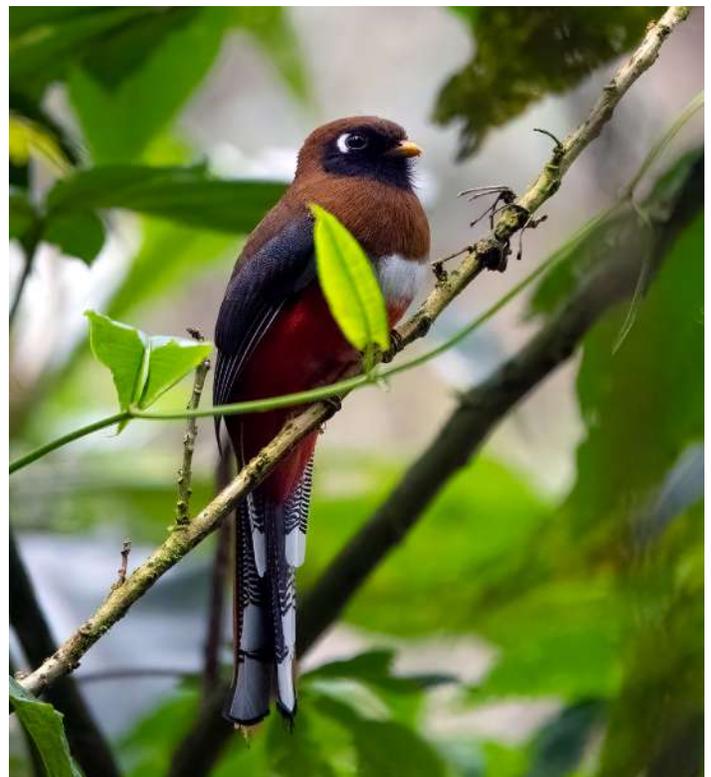
The second day, we all piled into a small bus and headed to Guango Lodge, a wonderful little place on the east slopes of the Ecuadorian Andes. Situated at an altitude of roughly 9,000 feet, the lodge is surrounded



by temperate cloud forest laced with a network of birding trails. A spectacular variety of hummingbirds are known to frequent the lodge's feeders and nearby rivers provide opportunities for glimpses of Torrent Ducks and White-capped Dippers. On the drive there, we pulled over to the side of the road to scan the hillside for spectacled bears and got lucky – we spotted one snacking on some vegetation. During this stop we also saw an Andean Condor soaring overhead, a Variable Hawk and some Carunculated Caracaras.

At the lodge, the hummingbird feeders didn't disappoint. We oohed and aahed as the tiny, jewel-toned birds seemed to zip between raindrops. We enjoyed looks at Tourmaline Sunangels, Speckled Hummingbirds, Long-tailed Sylphs, Collared Incas, Chestnut-breasted Coronets and White-bellied Woodstars, to name a few. Two standouts that we observed during lunch were a magnificent Sword-billed Hummingbird and a darling Glowing Puffleg – it seemed to be wearing tiny, fabulous, bright white leg warmers. A quick walk on one of the trails rewarded us with views of many stunning birds including a Masked Trogon, a Chestnut-bellied Chat-Tyrant, A

Top and bottom: Long-tailed Sylph and Masked Trogon at Guango Lodge.



Pale-naped Brushfinch, several Turquoise Jays, an Inca Jay, and a Hooded Mountain Tanager. As we were leaving the lodge, two Masked Flowerpiercers came to say goodbye, one perching for a bit on a red plastic tray that complimented the bird's captivating red eyes. Sadly, we did not see any Torrent Ducks or Dippers during our visit but that just means that I will be visiting Guango Lodge again one day.

On the third day, we flew from Quito to Baltra Island in the Galapagos, which boasts the world's first ecological airport. From there we took buses to the port where we boarded panga boats that shuttled us to the Solaris – a beautiful yacht and our home for the next week. Once aboard, we met the crew, had a snack and got acquainted with our cabins as we set sail for nearby Santa Cruz Island. Upon arriving at our destination, we hiked around Los Gemelos Sinkholes and got our first introduction to some of Darwin's famous finches – we saw Woodpecker Finches, Small Ground-finches, Medium Ground-finches as well as several Green Warbler-finches. Next we visited El Chato Tortoise Reserve to observe Galapagos giant tortoises roaming freely in their native habitat. It was thrilling to watch such majestic creatures move around the grounds and hear them munch on grass and leaves. While there we saw our first White-cheeked Pintail, a Dark-billed Cuckoo, several bright Mangrove Warblers and a Paint-Billed Crake. We also saw Large and Small Tree-Finches. While by no means flashy, the endemic finches of the Galapagos, with their widely varying beak sizes, are fascinating and each new species was exciting to see.

After a long, rough night of sailing we woke up



at Genovesa Island on day four, otherwise known as Bird Island. The morning was spent exploring Darwin Bay, giving wide berth to all the sea lions and staring awestruck at colonies of Red-footed Boobies, Swallow-tailed Gulls, Nazca Boobies and Great Frigatebirds. There were Genovesa Ground-finches, Genovesa Cactus-finches and Galapagos Mockingbirds. In the afternoon we climbed Prince Phillip's Steps – a series of steep wooden stairs built right into the side of the cliff. During the climb we saw Galapagos Doves and Grey Warbler-finches and at the top were greeted by a breathtaking panorama of Red-billed Tropicbirds, Galapagos Shearwaters and an assortment of boobies flying and diving around the cliffs.

Day five was a two-island day. In the morning we visited South Plaza Island, an otherworldly landscape covered with low growing red plants. Tons of red-orange Sally Lightfoot crabs scuttled across the rocks. Sea lions and both marine and land iguanas lounged everywhere. The marine iguanas have special glands that allow them



Top to bottom: Red-footed Booby, Nazca Boobies, and Great Frigatebird on Genovesa Island.



to expel excess salt from their bodies by sneezing or snorting it out. We saw more shearwaters, tropicbirds and Swallow-tailed Gulls along with a lone Kelp Gull. We also saw our first Lava Heron. In the afternoon we visited Santa Fe Island where sea lions of all sizes snoozed along the beach. Black-tipped and white-tipped reef sharks were visible in the clear water and sea turtles poked their heads up every few minutes for a breath of air. Here we also saw two Galapagos Hawks, Brown Pelicans, Magnificent Frigatebirds and – an unusual sighting that excited our local naturalist the most – a Bank Swallow.

On the sixth day, we visited San Cristobal Island in the morning, where we watched Blue-footed Boobies dive into the shallow water for fish right in front of us while beautiful Kicker Rock gleamed in the distance. We enjoyed looks at a Semipalmated Plover, a very cooperative Lava Heron, orange ghost crabs, Brown Pelicans, San Cristobal Mockingbirds and a Smooth-billed Ani. The most exciting sighting for me was a pair of Lava Gulls. Closely related to Franklin's and Laughing Gulls, the Lava Gull is endemic to the Galapagos Islands and considered to be the rarest gull in the world. That afternoon we climbed many steps to visit the only freshwater lake in the islands, called



Top to bottom: Espanola Mockingbirds and Espanola Ground Finch on Espanola Island.
Lava Gulls on San Cristobal Island.



El Junco Lagoon, where we watched a pair of Magnificent Frigatebirds bathe. Then on to another turtle sanctuary to see San Cristobal giant tortoises as well as some birds including a lovely Galapagos Flycatcher.

As our boat neared Espanola on the following day, we were surrounded by dozens and dozens of dolphins swimming alongside us. The highlights of Garner Bay included a just-hatched sea turtle making its way towards the ocean and some very friendly Espanola Mockingbirds. That afternoon we hiked to Punta Suarez which was a remarkable experience. Nazca and Blue-footed Boobies sat on eggs and fed their young right next to the path. Sea lions lounged on the rocks all around us and we passed a blowhole where we saw American Oystercatchers, a Ruddy Turnstone, and a Wandering Tattler. At the point there were dozens of Waved Albatross, one of the most awesome birds I've seen in real life. Two of them performed a courtship ritual, clacking their beaks and bobbing their

Top and bottom: Giant Tortoise on San Cristobal Island and Blue-footed Boobies on Espanola Island.



heads while others preened and napped around them. The air was full of soaring albatross and Red-billed Tropicbirds. We watched albatross take off one by one from the cliff edge while others came in for a landing, the massive birds both elegant and surprisingly graceful.

Today – day eight – we visited Floreana, where we took a panga ride around Islet Champion to search for Floreana Mockingbirds. We got very lucky and saw three of them, along with Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Brown Noddies, and Blue-footed Boobies. Then we went to Post Office Bay to sift through the stacks of postcards left behind by other travelers in search of any that might be possible to hand deliver upon our return home. We watched a Striated Heron fish, saw some Sanderlings, and went shuffling for rays along the beach. There was a Great Blue Heron keeping a watchful eye over a sea turtle nesting area, well-positioned to gulp down any unfortunate hatchlings that might appear during his shift. That evening we went for a gorgeous sunset panga ride and got to see some beautiful, bright American Flamingos feeding in the shallows.

Day nine – what a day! Not only did we see Galapagos Penguins off Santiago Island, we got to snorkel with them! What quirky, amazing little birds. They zipped around underwater, chasing after schools of small fish. I had close encounters with a white-tipped reef shark, a sea turtle, and a couple of playful sea lions. Afterwards we hiked over the mesmerizing lava flows at Sullivan Bay, and in the afternoon went to Bartolomé to climb the 370-odd steps and look out at the extraordinary view of Pinnacle Rock that was used in the 2003 Russell Crowe movie “Master and Commander.”

For our final morning in the Galapagos, we visited Black Turtle Cove and took a panga ride through the mangroves. Sea turtles poked their heads up out of the water all around us, some so close that we could hear them suck in air before diving back below the surface. Adult and baby white-tipped reef sharks swam beneath the pangas and we saw both spotted and golden rays. An Osprey flew overhead – another unusual and very exciting sight for our naturalist. On our way back to the Solaris a rainbow stretched across the sky, the perfect farewell.



Wave Albatrosses on Espanola Island.



There were so many more unforgettable things that happened during the trip that I didn't mention – the Elliot's Storm Petrel that landed on the deck of our ship, the Galapagos fur seals we saw while kayaking, the heavenly fresh fruit juices that awaited us after every excursion off the boat, the incomparable peace of watching the sun rise from the uppermost deck every morning. I urge you to add a trip to the Galapagos to your bucket list so you can experience it for yourself. 🐦



Top to bottom: Galapagos Penguin and Sally Lightfoot crabs on Santiago Island. Marine Iguanas on Galapagos Islands.

