Spring 2019

*Brooklyn Bird Club's*

# CLAPPER RAIL

# Inside This Issue









Cover: White-eyed Vireo in Green-Wood Cemetery.
Next Page: Northern Gannet at Plumb Beach.
Photographs by Sean Sime.

# Editor's Note

As you read this, spring migration in the Northeast is nearing its end, and our local parks that were recently filled with birdsong have grown quieter. We hope this issue, with its collection of photography and artwork from the last few months, gives you a chance to reflect on your favorite moments of the spring and provides a small dose of comfort that these birds will be passing through again before you know it.

This spring has been a proud time to be a Brooklyn birder. The teams that participated in the Birdathon, as Dennis Hrehowsik and Tina Alleva describe in these pages, raised a club-record amount, matched by The Rainforest Fund, to protect dozens of acres of the lowland Chocó rainforest in Ecuador. And anecdotally, I've encountered more birders in Prospect Park than in previous springs, and many new faces at that.

Thus, the BBC continues to spread its wings, from field trips to activism, here and much farther afield. Members continue mobilizing for conservation and social-justice campaigns while pushing officials to do what's right for birds and nature. In uncertain and turbulent times, it encourages me to think about the actions that Brooklyn birders take every day in making this city more hospitable for birds and the people who enjoy watching them.

– Ryan Goldberg

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# Saving The Choco

Palm Oil trees. Photograph by Sean Graesser.

By Dennis Hrehowsik

The call came from James Muchmore. "Hey Dennis, I've got a print project I'd like to talk about if you have some time." Little did I know I was about to find our 2019 Birdathon recipient.

I've come to realize that perhaps the most important duty of the president of the Brooklyn Bird Club is presenting the council with potential recipients for our annual Birdathon. One thing I've found is that when searching for a cause, it has a way of finding you. One winter's day in 2016, a chance encounter with former BBC president Ron Bourque at the Salt Marsh led to that year's cause: the planting of the garden at the Jean Bourque Memorial blind at Floyd Bennett Field. The rescue of an unlucky Snowy Owl by Bobby and Cathy Hovarth at Floyd Bennett brought my attention to the good work being done by their organization, WINORR, and so we chose them as our 2018 recipient.

I knew I shared a lot in common with James, a designer, birder and conservationist, but I just never got a chance to spend much time with him before he moved to Connecticut. So once he called me, I was looking forward to the chance to get to know him a little better. James offers the services of his design firm, Muchmore Design, to non-profit conservation outfits in an effort to help them create a professional internet presence and attract attention in an increasingly competitive virtual landscape. James had gone down to the Chocó, a unique lowland rainforest eco-region that extends from Panama in the north through Ecuador in the south, and he wanted to make some screen prints of the photos he had taken in the hopes of selling them to raise money for a foundation, called Save El Chocó, that was working to conserve it. When he came to my studio to pick up his edition, he told me about what was going on in Ecuador.

"An acre of land costs $275 down there and Save El Chocó is trying to snap it up before the palm oil industry does," he said. "Tons of our migrants winter there. It's a very special place."

As James told me about the work the foundation was doing, I realized this was an opportunity for the club to help our birds outside the borders of the U.S. and extend our reach beyond Prospect Park. Brooklyn has become an international city in its own right, and

I was looking for an opportunity for us to bring our conservation work to the world stage. Prospect Park's an important way station for migrating birds but it's only a small part of the picture. To have a real impact, we have to work to protect habitat all along the North American flyway.

Now, as I write this, the dust has settled on the 2019 Birdathon and the pledges are coming in. As things stand, we're on target for our most successful fundraiser to date. I would like to thank all the teams and donors for participating. I'm immensely proud of the way everyone has embraced this cause and worked together to make it a success. And so as the last wave of spring migrants move into the region, I'm turning my ear from the sky to the ground, listening carefully for next year's Birdathon cause. Maybe it will come from you.

Lumber trucks are a daily sight in the Chocó.

Summer Tanager, one of many Eastern migrants that winters in the Chocó. Photograph by James Muchmore.

# Birdathon: Competition With a Cause

Birders amass at the base of Lookout Hill in Prospect Park. Photograph by Rob Bate.

By Tina Alleva

My alarm began blaring early on the morning of May 11, Birdathon Saturday, as the sun barely illuminated the clear sky. Thank god it was going to be a nice day—something of a rarity this spring. It's not like I needed the alarm, though, since I was already imagining the variety and volume of migrating birds my team were about to see. I got ready, grabbed my coffee, and quickly cleaned and packed my binoculars. A sense of urgency had overtaken me; some teams were already out there, their International Migratory Bird Day starting in the pre-dawn hours.

As I cut across Breeze Hill in Prospect Park to meet my team, the Beasts of Birdin', I delighted in the dawn chorus: Northern Parula, Eastern Towhee, and Black-throated Blue were singing. I was eager to begin the count, and the rules state that two people on a team must confirm a sighting by sight or sound. As we assembled and made our way to our first stop, Lookout Hill, the other teams we met in passing offered promise for an exciting day. "We already got a lot of species up here," announced the Laughing See Gulls, who we encountered as they were coming down Lookout. This friendly competition and sportsmanship would be a hallmark of the day, with teams freely sharing sightings.

Later that morning, Chelsea Lawrence of the

Rowdy Turnstones spotted a Common Nighthawk perched high above the Maryland Monument on a dead snag. Shortly afterward, Rob Bate's Tree's a Crowd discovered a termite hatch-out in the same area. Both created a convergence of birds and birders alike. A flock of Cedar Waxwings, a few Scarlet Tanagers, and several species of warblers noisily dined at the insect smorgasbord while more than 20 birders looked on. But there was no time to linger. On this one day, speed is paramount.

Teams then spread out around Kings County, most of them heading toward the coast: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Plumb Beach, Floyd Bennett Field, Marine Park. Some even broke for lunch.

"Our team took a one-hour pizza break at Di Fara," James Muchmore, with the Cuckoo-for-Chocó-Puffs, said of Midwood's famous pizzeria. "It was a lifer pizza slice for three of my teammates!"

Others weren't so laid-back. BBC president Dennis Hrehowsik, captain of the Timberdoodlers, devised a new idea for their traditional stop for burgers. Teammate Bobbi Manian joked, "Not only did he make us get them to go, he wouldn't let us go to the Parkview Diner on Cropsey Avenue, because their burgers are too big and would put us to sleep. We had to settle for Five Guys burgers instead!" The strategy would pay off as the Timberdoodlers later set their personal-best Birdathon record.

As competitive as the Birdathon may seem, at heart it's a fun way to raise awareness and money for an important bird-related cause. And it's not just for veteran birders—casual or beginner birders or people who just want to get outside and connect with nature can participate. Cyrus Baty's Birdwatching for Beginners group attracted 39 participants and raised over $275 during their two-hour walk in Prospect Park. According to Save the Chocó, this year's chosen benefactor, that amount is enough to purchase one acre of land in Ecuador's lowland rainforest and protect it from development.

Still, it was a long day. Some teams birded for more than 12 hours straight, pushing aside exhaustion in the final moments of daylight to count one more species. As the sun crept below Lookout Hill, my team scoured a dimly-lit Prospect Park for an elusive Green Heron, a bird we had frustratingly missed that morning. We didn't find it, but any frustration was erased by a pair of Common Nighthawks we watched flying overhead, beginning their nocturnal ritual. They didn't add to our count, but moments like this will be what I remember

Common Nighthawk in Prospect Park. Photograph by Jennifer Kepler.


Di Fara Pizza on Avenue J. Photograph by James Muchmore.

Cape May Warbler at Jamaica Bay. Photograph by Joshua Malbin.

from the 2019 Birdathon.

At the end of the day, teams tallied their sightings. What first seemed like a tie between the top two teams—the Laughing See Gulls and Cuckoos-for-Chocó-puffs—turned into a win by the former, with 129 species. The top four teams were separated by three species, which only confirms the bounty of Brooklyn birding on the Atlantic Flyway and the chops of its birders.

All told, the cumulative count for Brooklyn was an impressive 165 species. More importantly, the Birdathon raised over $12,500, a club record, for Save the Chocó, which is being matched by The Rainforest Trust. That means we should be able to save at least 90 acres of vital habitat—the wintering ground for many of the birds we saw throughout the day—from the palm oil industry.

Thanks to all the participants, donors, and birds that showed up for this year's Birdathon. Until next year!

# Results:

| | |
|---|---|
| Laughing See Gulls | 129 |
| Cuckoos-for-Chocó-puffs | 127 |
| Timberdoodlers | 127 |
| BOOM Chachalacas | 126 |
| Beasts of Birdin' | 98 |
| Rowdy Turnstones | 97 |
| Trees a Crowd | 72 |
| Introduction to Birdwatching | 38 |

The birds break for lunch, too! Red-tailed Hawk eating a starling in Prospect Park. Photograph by Jennifer Kepler.

# Meet The Artist: Nadir Souirgi

By Linda Ewing

When Nadir Souirgi was growing up in Queens, the son of a Moroccan father and a Haitian mother, the home of his mother's extended family backed up against that of a Mexican-Austrian family, the Ruizes. The two families were close…so close, in fact, that the neighbor kids became fluent in Haitian Creole, and Nadir effectively acquired an additional set of relatives.

*Cassin's Kingbird.* Charcoal and soft pastel on paper.
All artwork by Nadir Souirgi.

It was one of the Ruizes who nurtured Nadir's interest in the natural world. On walks in local parks and outings to Jones Beach, Oscar Ruiz shared his knowledge of birds and nature with his de facto nephew. Nadir looked, listened and learned, and still remembers the first bird he was able to identify independently: a Ruddy Turnstone.

He was five at the time.

While Nadir wouldn't have identified himself as a birder growing up—"I was just a kid who liked nature," he says—he stayed interested in birds after he and his mother moved from New York to Miami. That's where his love of the ocean grew, and where he fell in love with pelagic species. (Appropriately, Nadir's work accompanied the article on "Birding by Boat" that appeared in the Winter 2019 issue of the Clapper Rail.) Even so, in those pre-internet days, he never felt part of a culture of birding, or embedded in a birding community. "I'd never even met another birdwatcher until my senior year of high school," he says.

Art was Nadir's other childhood passion. After graduating from an arts-focused magnet high school, he started community college, hated it, and did what any sensible person with no degree and a keen interest in contemporary art would do: moved to Paris. After a year there, he returned to Miami—and then completed the circle by coming back to New York.

His plan at the time was to make a career as an artist. Instead, he did something bolder and more challenging: became a father. With a daughter to support, Nadir took a job teaching art at an elementary school in East Harlem and went on an extended hiatus from birding.

*Worm-eating Warbler*. Graphite and watercolor on paper, drawn from observation and painted later.

Nadir and kindergarteners exploring the loch in Central Park.

When he took it up again, it was with his daughter at his side, exploring parks in their Inwood neighborhood. Another circle completed: Nadir was playing the role in his daughter's life that Oscar Ruiz had played in his.

As Nadir returned to birding—heading out on his lunch break, binoculars in hand, for a quick survey of Central Park's Conservatory Garden—the kids at his school took note of their art teacher's new habit. Some of them wanted to join in. How could he deny them the opportunity to experience nature that he was giving his own daughter? What began as outings with two or three kids sharing a pair of binoculars became the Harlem County Bird Club, a formal program that introduces children from diverse backgrounds to birds and field science. Nadir describes some of their discoveries: that crows and grackles are not the same thing; that Scarlet Tanagers glow; that egrets are magnificent; and that birds can be found everywhere. On one outing, a Hooded Warbler emerged from cover at eye level, directly in front of a third-grader. The student was stunned—not because the bird was rare, or because they'd been chasing Twitter reports of a HOWA, or because it was a lifer, but simply because it was so beautiful. It was, they declared, the most beautiful bird

they'd ever seen.

Experiences like that have staying power. Two of the Harlem County Bird Club's founding members, now in 11th grade, still text their old teacher about their sightings.

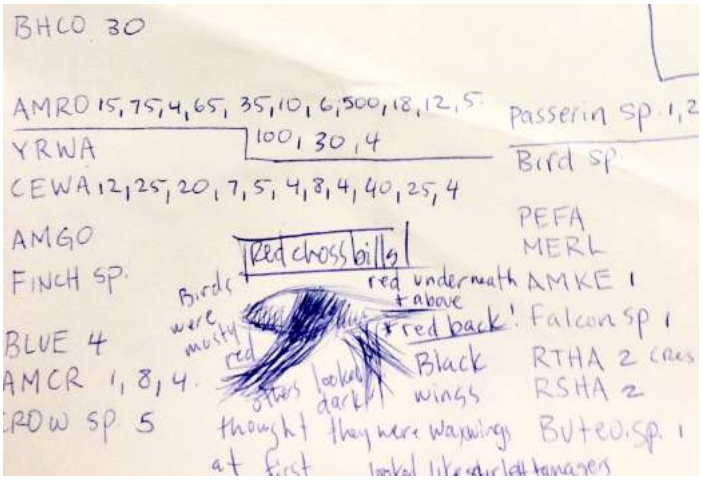
Meanwhile, Nadir's art was evolving. At first, the change was a means to an end, a way to improve his birding skills. "I think I've always been a fairly talented birder," Nadir explains, "but when I got back into it, I discovered gaps." His response was to ditch his field guide and rely instead on notes and sketches done in the field. To get better at drawing in the field, he started drawing birds in his studio. But, inexorably, birds became themes in his art.

**"You could say I'm imbuing it with a human concept of consciousness."**

While he wants his drawings to be scientifically accurate, Nadir emphasizes that he doesn't approach them the way a science illustrator would. His goal, instead, is to create a portrait. To get there, he manipulates online images to create a kind of Frankenstein (Frankenbird?): taking the tilt of the head from one image, the position of the legs from another, the wings from yet another. These composite images, along with knowledge of bird behavior gleaned from his time in the field, become the basis for his drawings. He wants his portraits to be dynamic, not bound by strict parameters.

"I'm trying to capture the bird as it's making a decision, right before it does something," he explains. "You could say I'm imbuing it with a human concept of consciousness."

Nadir would define his art now as occupying the intersection of conservation, the natural world, and colonialism. An upcoming show—his first—in Vienna, Austria, will combine his drawings with a video installation, possibly a talk on race and conservation, and, naturally, a bird walk.




Detail of Nadir's field notes taken while sky-watching from the roof of his building. "This was the day I saw the flock of approximately 30 Red Crossbills actively migrating south over Inwood Hill Park."

*Red Crossbills*, graphite and colored pencil on paper. "While this looks abstract it's actually a drawing of what the birds looked like through my scope at a distance of roughly a quarter mile away." Nadir started drawing after observation and then added color from memory.

Nadir, in his studio, with his drawing of a Ross's Gull. Charcoal, soft pastel, and acrylic paint on paper. Photograph by Belkys Garcia.

*Gulf Stream (Diablotin II)*, Black-capped Petrel. Charcoal and soft pastel on paper.

# Sparks!

By Dan Smith



*Northern Gannet*. Mixed-media illustration by Sam Dean Lynn.

How did I wind up in the back seat of a car racing across Fire Island? Daylight was fading and we were pressing to keep up with our guide in the lead car to get in one more spot before dark. We were looking for shorebirds and I had just seen my first Northern Gannet. As exciting as that was, I couldn't help but wonder if this was the best use of my time.

The misgivings didn't come from a list of unfinished household chores. It was bigger than that. I mentally categorized every organization or activity I've been part of and realized they all were a means to an end, a calculated purpose—college, professional clubs, kid's soccer teams. My participation was to either further my career or benefit my kids. Spending a weekend looking for Common Eiders wasn't my MO.

I was raised in Bristol, Connecticut, which at that time was a little piece of the Rust Belt. The manufacture of ball bearings kept most of our neighbors employed, and when the industry declined the community suffered greatly. While my parents weren't hurt by the factory closings, I saw the effects of being idle had on my friends' families. I learned that if you were working things would be OK.

My parents had an appreciation of nature but not a deep interest. Bats were welcome in our attic, our cats wore bells, but bird ID didn't go beyond calling any little brown bird a sparrow. In the park or the neighborhood swimming hole, I was always looking for frogs and anything else I could find at the water's edge. My mother said I would be a naturalist, but that didn't sound like real work.

As an adult, I would visit my mother in Woodbury, Connecticut, where she ran the library. We would take hikes with a field guide in hand and identify what we could, but the main purpose was just to get outside. My mother's interest in birds grew and sometimes we would visit places specifically to see birds. One morning we were hiking in Roxbury and came upon an owl perched in a big oak tree. We spotted each other at the same time and watched as the owl spread its wings and quickly disappeared into the trees, leaving us in its silent wake.

Unfortunately, she was tragically taken from us and my interest went dormant. We never got to take the next step: using binoculars.

It wasn't until October 2016 that the binoculars fell into my lap in an unexpected way. Since 1996, I've worked at a newspaper, greatly enjoying creating new pages and sections, but in the past 10 years readers have turned away from traditional news sources and the advertisers followed. An email sent to the entire newsroom confirmed our worst fears. It said there would be staff reductions and we could take a buyout or risk being laid off.

It was my 20-year anniversary of employment and I was entitled to a present from the company. I had spent the past two weeks going through a catalog from which I could choose a gift. I panicked when I read the email and picked the first item on my alphabetical list, the 8x32 Celestron Trailseeker binoculars, just beating out the Cuisinart Hurricane Pro blender. If I acted quickly, I could say I made my choice before I read the email with the bad news.

**"I'm part of something that I didn't need or want anything from. It's very liberating."**

October was spent anxiously weighing my options at work and waiting for the binoculars. I survived the layoffs, and the binoculars arrived possessed with a far greater power than 8x32. I could breathe again.

After getting to know how the bins worked (Eyecups? Who knew?) I focused on my first bird. A Blue Jay in Prospect Park perched in a Sweetgum tree doing all the familiar Blue Jay things. But then it jumped. With wings still folded, it leaped off the limb. I watched it fall for a second before it spread its wings and flew. I was stunned at the bird's casual dismissal of gravity.

Since that moment with the Blue Jay I've read many birding books, joined birding clubs, gone on morning bird walks and met many wonderful people. I've enjoyed learning about the walk of a Connecticut Warbler, the flight of the Northern Flicker, and that Blue Jays aren't really blue. I've taken great delight in identifying an Eastern Towhee in front of my midtown office building.

But what I value most is the epiphany I had in the back seat on Fire Island. I discovered I don't need to be the driver everyday and not everything has to have a purpose or even make sense. It's OK to sit back and enjoy the ride. I'm part of something that I didn't need or want anything from. It's very liberating.

Top: *Mourning Warbler*. Drawing by John Dean, age 10. Below: *Yellow Warbler*. Drawing by Elias Markee, age 9.

# Travel Diaries: Mexico

By Ed Crowne

Excepting a few peripheral, mainly non-birding visits to Mexico I had not made it a birding destination. Decades ago, an MD from Mexico I met while birding at a botanical garden in Guayaquil, Ecuador, urged me to experience Mexico's birds firsthand. At home, Howell and Webb's "Birds of Mexico" rested at arm's length. Its cover bird, a Black-throated Magpie-Jay, is stunning. Still, Central and South America seemed more compelling. More habitats—perhaps. More birds. Then after reading Victor Emanuel's "One More Warbler" and listening to a talk he gave at NYC Audubon in December 2017, I began to give increased consideration to Mexico. Soon I found myself analyzing eBird hotspots in Oaxaca, studying plates in Howell and Webb, and downloading songs from xeno-canto.

Cover: View to Pacific Ocean from Pluma Hidalgo. Above: View of Oaxaca Ethnobotanical Garden from adjacent museum. All photographs by Ed Crowne.

So in February 2019, five hours after we ascended from a damp and cold New York, my wife Robbyn and I descended into a hot and dry Oaxaca City. (During our three weeks in Mexico, it did not rain.) With help from the internet, we navigated our rental car from the airport to San Pablo Etla, a suburb of Oaxaca, located just below Benito Juarez Parque Nacional. Anyone driving in Oaxaca quickly learns to pay special added attention to topes (speed bumps). They are frequent and often not well marked. If you are a driver, it is safer to delight in the flowering jacaranda trees and the prolific bougainvillea when walking, not driving. At an altitude of just over 5,000 feet, the city of Oaxaca straddles a broad valley between Sierra Madre del Sur and Sierra Madre Oriental. Within the sierras there are local peaks above 12,000 feet. For birders, a key point is that over seventy percent of the birds of Mexico can be found within the state of Oaxaca, including many endemics.

Our very comfortable, furnished studio (with full kitchen) in San Pablo Etla was part of a larger home owned by retired former residents of California named Melinda and Gene. Our room and their home are decorated with the work of local artists and craftsmen. Our hosts had generously supplied us with lots of groceries and samples of choice mescal. Reluctantly, I declined to try the mescal in favor of preserving what remains of my wits. (At a subsequent dinner with our hosts, I did enjoy a mescal Negroni one evening.) But for those so inclined, there are opportunities to tour mescal from agave fields to finished product. Oaxaca is the main producer of mescal. The agaves I saw were spectacular. And, of course, Oaxaca is the culinary capital of Mexico. So follow birds and beasts, food and drink of your choice.

Overlooking the high plain below are famous archaeological sites like Monte Alban and Yagul. Birders show interest in these sites (see eBird) for the cultural history preserved as well as birds to be found there. A Lesser Roadrunner posing with prey on the side of a pyramid captures the best of both worlds.

Almost as rewarding as seeing and, in many instances, hearing endemic species in Oaxaca was the opportunity to experience so many Western warblers in one place at one time. With a few minor exceptions I am confident that the many migratory (winter resident)

warblers I saw were bound for the western U.S. Had we traveled toward the Caribbean, we certainly would have seen Eastern warblers, Myrtles instead of Audubons, etc.

Thanks to Gene, our host, I was introduced to David Gitlitz, a gregarious, semi-retired academician and birder who supervises the local Christmas count. One morning in San Pablo Etla, I joined a small group of birders for an organized local bird tour led by David, who seemed as much a fixture of local life as the enormous tree near his home. Our walk encompassed mainly the arid slope below the Sierra but included one small reservoir surrounded by denser vegetation. Blue Grosbeaks and Vermillion Flycatchers were among the familiar species we observed that morning. By the time we returned to his home, the heat had overtaken the birds and us.

White-throated Magpie-Jay, Pluma Hidalgo.

On one of our first trips into Oaxaca City, Robbyn and I visited the Museum of Cultures, a repository for artifacts from Monte Alban as well as objects from several thousand years ago to the present. From the second floor of the museum there are vistas that overlook the adjacent Ethnobotanical Garden of Oaxaca. A day or two later we returned to tour the botanical garden. Visitors are required to be part of a guided tour conducted by the garden. This restriction makes birding more constrained. However, if you have time and an interest in plants, this could be birding time well spent. Tours are conducted in Spanish and English.

Once in Oaxaca we made final arrangements to pick up our guide, Roque Antonio Santiago, at a monument to Benito Juarez just outside Oaxaca. Roque has been guiding for over twenty years and lives in Teotitlan de Valle, a Zapotec town 20 miles east of Oaxaca. He speaks excellent English, including idiomatic birdspeak, as well as Zapotec and Spanish. From the monument we drove up into Benito Juarez Parque Nacional, to La Cumbre. On the way up we halted our slow crawl to watch three Long-tailed Wood-Partridges cross in front of us. This beautiful endemic is more often heard than seen. Farther along we began to encounter noisy flocks of Steller's Jays, which included Dwarf Jays in their midst. Moving higher still in the pine-oak forest we heard, then saw Mountain Trogons and, higher still, mixed flocks that included Red Warblers, Elegant Euphonia and Rose-throated Becards. We were sorry to learn that here too, as elsewhere in the world, the pine trees are threatened by bark beetles.

After saying a temporary adios to Roque, we planned and made a three-day trip to the Pacific coast with two overnight stops, one going and one returning. A direct drive from Oaxaca City to the Pacific coast entails a five- to six-hour car ride. The road to the Pacific is like a Coney Island rollercoaster ride. Our first stop was at Pluma Hidalgo, where we spent the night at a coffee plantation. The vegetation I saw here was among the most lush we saw anywhere. It was here that I saw and heard the White-throated Magpie-Jay, a close relative of the bird depicted on the cover of Howell and Webb's "Birds of Mexico." Here too the Red-legged Honeycreeper, a common tropical bird species, was almost ever-present. From Pluma Hidalgo the Pacific Ocean is a just-visible but almost two-hour drive away.

We arrived in the afternoon at Rancho Cerro Largo, a few miles west of Puerto Angel and as close to the Pacific as one can get without being immersed in it. A short time later we were up to our necks in salt water. While a Common Black Hawk kept vigil from the shore, Brown Pelicans drifted past and Great Frigatebirds, Brown Boobies and Neotropical Cormorants circled a large barren island on which hundreds of birds roosted. The next morning, before breakfast, I walked the local road, which led to another beach. It was hard not to hear and then see the West Mexican Chachalacas. Along the way I saw a beautiful Blue Bunting, an Orange-breasted Bunting, a Citrioline Trogon and a Red-breasted Chat, as well as other perhaps less

arresting birds. Upon reaching our room I saw a pair of Russet-crowned Motmots about 10 feet away. It is possible and desirable to arrange a pelagic trip from many of the coastal towns. However, we were content to observe seabirds from the beach. Another day or two at the coast would have been well worth the time.

After leaving the coast we began our weaving ascent to our next destination, recommended to us by our guide Roque: San Jose del Pacifico. At about 7,500 feet above the Pacific, the rather steep roads, paths and slopes here make for challenging observation. Many warblers inhabit the Monkey Claw trees (there are at least four common names in English, plus at least one in Spanish and one in Nahuatl; for those more botanically enthused: *Chiranthodendron pentadactylon*). In any language, birds are drawn to these red-flowered plants. During a short evening stroll I heard an unexpected Whip-poor-will sing repeatedly, the first nightjar for me in Mexico. (The repetitive song of the Whip-poor-will was forever imprinted on me in childhood during camping trips in New Jersey's Pine Barrens.) A walkabout beginning at sunrise yielded mainly more of the species already seen plus a few new additions. The best of the breakfast bunch for me was a Chestnut-sided Shrike Vireo (imagine Chestnut-sided Warbler + shrike + vireo), an intriguing near-endemic.

Bridled Sparrow, Teotitlan del Valle.

A day after returning from the Pacific coast, we again met our guide, Roque. This time we picked him up in Teotitlan del Valle, his hometown. Before driving higher and into the Sierra Juarez, we explored first an uninhabited dry scrub area away from the town and a little farther on in the vicinity of a creek that ran through the thornscrub. From there we went to the reservoir that serves the town. Yellow-breasted Chat, Dusky Hummingbirds and Lark and Clay-colored Sparrows were found in the more xeric terrain while Black Phoebes sought food in the shade along the creek and Belted Kingfishers and Least Grebes fished in the reservoir. At higher elevation Roque was pleased to coax a Hooded Yellowthroat into view.

A few mornings before leaving Oaxaca for Mexico City, I recorded a particular birdsong before sunrise just outside our room. Later that morning, after birding, I thought about the recording while I brushed my

teeth. Nightjar? I searched my xeno-canto recordings. Buff-collared Nightjar. There are two Spanish names for this nightjar. Both mimic its song: Cookacheea and Prestame-tu-cuchillo (lend me your knife). One recording had been made by a birder who lived in the neighborhood. On my final walk about San Pablo Etla I enjoyed last looks at Black-throated Gray and MacGillivray's Warblers, Blue Mockingbirds, Black-vented Orioles and Gray Silky-flycatchers.

Flying from the suburbs of Oaxaca, we landed in the historic center of Mexico City. And while our six days in Mexico City was more culturally than bird oriented, I can certainly recommend a visit to UNAM's Botanical Garden. Adjacent to the garden itself is an ecological park that like the garden attracts birds. Interesting birds here included Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Canyon Towhee and Cinnamon Flowerpiercer. The plants, of course, were fantastic. Meanwhile, in the museums, I found representations of birds, some realistic, others fantastic. Conveniently, the National Museum of Anthropology is located across the street from a large city park (Chapultepec) that includes a botanic garden worth seeing for plants and some birds.

Our Oaxaca hosts, Melinda and Gene, informed us soon after our return to Brooklyn that they had purchased binoculars and begun to put them to good use. Welcome, new birders.

A new field guide to the birds of Mexico is also under construction. This will constitute a welcome update to Mexico's birdlife and your experience. But, if you feel the engines of urgency pulling you south now, go.

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Pyramid of the Sun, Teotihuacan.

*Rose-breasted Grosbeak*. Ink on paper by Toni Simon.

## KETTLING

The low winter sun made driving difficult.
To look down the black asphalt
blurred my eyes. So for a few moments
I looked away, studying
the rock ridges and cliffs carved
out of cragged earth, the
marshy fields of phragmites
their silken heads standing swordlike
in the steady wind.

Above, a kettle of vultures
soared on the thermals, shadows
flying in upright spirals. You can't understand
in that moment how I yearned to be free,
free of the body and all its fog,
untouchable under the whisper of heaven,
rising and falling under my own power,
a current running in me and through me.
A whim of wind, a miracle.

I followed the span of wings
until I had seen enough, until
the long vine of highway
called me back to this world, said
keep going.

*—January Gill O'Neil*

From January Gill O'Neil's "Rewilding" (2018), reprinted by permission of CavanKerry Press.

# Photo Gallery: Sean Sime

Kentucky Warbler in Green-Wood Cemetery.

From top to bottom: Prothonotary Warbler and Black-crowned Night Heron in Prospect Park.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in Prospect Park.

Northern Gannets at Plumb Beach.

Clockwise from top: Veery in Green-Wood Cemetery, Yellow-throated Warbler in Prospect Park, and Whip-poor-will in Green-Wood Cemetery.

# Travel Diaries: Trinidad and Tobago

By Lenny Goldstein

Scarlet Ibises at Caroni Swamp. All photographs by Lenny Goldstein.

Late last January, my wife Marsha and I found ourselves in a boat in the middle of Caroni Swamp (a.k.a. Winston Nanan Caroni Bird Sanctuary), an area of brackish water and mangrove swamp in western Trinidad. It was about an hour before sunset and, cups of rum punch and binoculars in hand, we were awaiting the return of the Scarlet Ibises from their daily feeding in Venezuela, seven miles to the west.

Our guide, Sam Nanan, Winston's grandson, knew the swamp as well as anyone alive. As we waited, he told us all about the history of the place, how his grandfather fought to conserve it and to protect the birds from hunters, and sadly, was beaten to death for his efforts. Then the Ibises started flying into the island where they roost, arriving in groups of 15 or more, settling on the shore before taking their places in the green of the trees above, a couple thousand of them, bright scarlet-red birds with black primary tips. It was a breathtaking sight. In that moment, I thought to myself, how did I end up witnessing such a beautiful spectacle?

Almost two years earlier, I retired from my job and figured it might be fun to take up birding. I started joining the Brooklyn Bird Club's weekly spring migration walks and enjoyed it so much I continued in the fall. On one of those fall walks, Tom Stephenson mentioned that he and Scott Whittle were going to be leading a trip in Belize that winter. I signed up for it that night.

The trip to Belize was, as you'd expect, incredible. On our way to the Belize City Airport for our return flight, Scott mentioned that Trinidad, with its just under 500 species, was another good location and that the Asa Wright Nature Centre (AWNC) was the place to stay. I didn't forget that. When I got home. I was eager to share my excitement with Marsha. She had wanted to visit Costa Rica, so we traveled there a few months later and just about the first bird she saw was the Resplendent Quetzal. That sparked her interest. When we were thinking about where to go this past winter, I recalled Scott's recommendation.

So that's how we ended up in Sam's boat watching Scarlet Ibises softly land at their nightly roost in Caroni Swamp. And there were more—many more—incredible sights that day.

Before boarding the boat, we had gotten long looks at a pair of very close, cooperative Masked Cardinals,

red-headed finches with triangular red throat patches, red eyes, black mask, white underparts and black upperparts. As our boat made its way through a narrower channel of the swamp, we soon spotted several heron species: Great Blue, Great Egret, Little Blue, Tricolored and, up in a tree by the water's edge, an incredibly well-hidden in plain sight Boat-Billed. A Common Black Hawk passed overhead as we trawled past a neatly coiled Mangrove Boa on our left. And to our right, just above our heads, an Eared Dove, with two diagonal black lines on its lower-ear covert, sat on its nest. A female American Pygmy Kingfisher, with its green head and breast band and long black bill, perched just above the water, as a Yellow-headed Caracara flew screaming overhead.

Masked Cardinal at Caroni Swamp.

Making our way into wider waters, Sam pointed out side-by-side Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and then, rounding a curve, we saw a Blue-winged Teal, an Anhinga (one of my spark birds), an Olivaceous (Neotropic) Cormorant, and a flock of American Greater Flamingo. Before leaving, we saw a Straight-billed Woodcreeper, brown and rufous with a large pale-ivory bill and cream-colored tear-shaped spots on its crown and breast, a Bicolored Conebill—a small tanager with blue-gray head and upperparts, brownish wings and dull grayish-yellow underparts—and a Yellow-breasted Flycatcher in the mangroves.

Earlier that afternoon, when we first started out for Caroni, we had made a couple of stops on Demarara Road, pulling over at a field to see a Savanna Hawk in the grass, a Zone-tailed Hawk fly by, a Smooth-billed Ani on a wire and a half-dozen Red-breasted Meadowlarks, small stocky birds with a black head and a bright red breast and shoulder patches, flitting back and forth from tree to grass. We also stopped at a Trincity drainage ditch for awhile where we saw quite a few birds, including a Purple Gallinule (which I was fortunate enough to see before, in Prospect Park, of all places), a Black-necked Stilt, Southern Lapwing, Wattled Jacana and a Pied-water Tyrant.

All these sightings came before seeing the Scarlet Ibises. They, however, were a spectacular finale to a day which began with a hike to Dunston's Cave, located at AWNC, to visit a colony of Oilbirds, the only nocturnal fruit-eating bird in the world. This brown and white-spotted bird with large round red-reflecting eyes and unsettling, snarling calls, makes an eerie display flattened against the shelved walls of the cave. It navigates by echolocation. Because of its fatty diet of palm fruit, incense and laurels, together with low predation and a long gestation period, the young unfledged bird becomes overweight, often 50 percent heavier than the adult. Native tribes used to boil the young birds for their fat, which liquified into oil, giving the bird its name.

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AWNC was our home base for the six days we were in Trinidad. It was established in 1967, one of the first nature centers in the Caribbean, and is comprised of nearly 1,500 acres of mainly forested land in Trinidad's Northern Range. AWNC's properties will be retained under forest cover in perpetuity to protect the community watershed and provide wildlife habitat. During our stay, there was no need to set an alarm clock in order to wake up early. That was taken care of courtesy of a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl singing its repetitive hoop hoop hoop hoop…thirty or more hoops at a clip. And if that didn't do the trick, our noisy

upstairs neighbors, a flock of Crested Oropendolas in long, woven hanging nests, would chime in with their crazy pinball machine sounds and wing rattles. We excused them for the early-morning disturbances because of their good looks: conical cream bills, blue eyes, chestnut brown upperparts and long bright yellow tails.

Every morning before breakfast, we'd take our coffee on the verandah and marvel at the many species to be seen and heard at the feeders. Great Kiskadees and Bananaquits were everywhere. A Spectacled Thrush, with its stark broad yellow orbitals, posed in profile on a tree. Cocoa Thrushes, all rufous-brown above and cinnamon below, stopped by. White-necked Jacobins, Rufous-breasted Hermits, Green Hermits, Green-throated Mangos, Tufted Coquettes, and Copper-rumped Hummingbirds sipped the nectar. Tanagers and their colorful Honeycreeper allies made their presence known below: White-lined and Silver-beaked and Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers; Purple and Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers. Violaceous Euphonias, small, short-tailed, stubby-billed and numerous, brought smiles to our eyes. One morning, a Golden-olive Woodpecker spotted by Marsha tripoded itself to a tree a few feet from the verandah.

There are ten trails on the AWNC grounds, some of which we explored during the mornings and afternoons we weren't traveling off-site. The poorly-named Motmot Trail (try finding one), did, however, afford great views of a Green-backed (Amazonian White-tailed) Trogon and a Guianan (Amazonian Violacious) Trogan sitting motionlessly in mid-canopy. We caught a good glimpse of a Channel-billed Toucan, the only toucan species that occurs in Trinidad. We also spotted an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, a Tropical Kingbird, a Plain-brown Woodcreeper, a Red-rumped Woodpecker, and a White-necked Thrush on this trail. We did manage to discover a White-bearded Manakin off the Discovery Trail, formally dressed in black crown and white collar, and the Golden-headed Manakin with its showy golden-yellow hood. From time to time we heard a clanging metallic sound rising from afar, the source of which we learned when we took a walk on the aptly named Bellbird Trail and found the male Bearded Bellbird, also known as the anvil-bird. It's a stunning bird, its rich chocolate-brown head and black wings playing nicely with a white back, tail and underparts.

Early one morning our guide, named Mahase, picked us up for a full-day trip to the town of Blanchisseuse on the northern coast of Trinidad. On the drive there, we saw kites and hawks, swifts and flycatchers, and woodpeckers and wrens native to South America, but it was also great to find reminders of Brooklyn's spring and fall: Northern Waterthrush, American Redstart and Yellow Warbler, and a new warbler in the Tropical Parula, which unlike its Northern counterpart doesn't have eye arcs or a breast band and is more yellow on its breast and belly. And we saw three more tanagers to go with our verandah bounty: Turqouise and Bay-headed and Speckled.

Nearing Blanchisseuse, we stopped on a high bluff from which we could see the ocean in the distance and, hearing frantic chatter above us, saw Carib Grackles mobbing a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. A few trees away we had clear views of a male Collared Trogon, green, black and red with a tail like a black-and-white piano keyboard and a female, brown and red. When we got to the coast a pair of Brown Pelicans were flying to and fro offshore. Five Southern Lapwings made their way along a rivulet, flying low for a few feet then coming back down to peck in the mud.

Southern Lapwing near Blanchisseuse.

In Blanchisseuse, after spotting a Lineated Woodpecker atop a pole a good many streets ahead, Mahase set up the scope for us to see how this bird differed from the Crimson-crested Woodpecker. (Less red in the face and non-connected white scapulars on its side mantles.) Gray-breasted Martins, gathered on wires, flying out for insects. Back on Blanchisseuse Road, heading south, we stopped a few times to

Rufous-tailed Jacamar near the Asa Wright Nature Center.

observe a Black-tailed Tityra, a Grayish Saltator and a Yellow-rumped Cacique, and as we neared the turnoff to return to AWNC, we got out to spend some time with a Rufous-tailed Jacamar.

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The next day, with Mahase, we traveled to a different habitat: the lowland and savanna environs of Central Trinidad. Our first stop was the Aripo Agricultural Research Station, where birding occurs strictly from the roadside, since the station works with Water Buffalo, known for their unpredictable temperament. The station, which sits on 1,176 acres of forest reserve and pastures, breeds a variety of cattle and other livestock and provides consultancy services, pasture management, problem-solving and training to local farmers. Hence, there were Cattle Egrets galore.

A couple hundred Black Vultures circled above and as we made our way past a dozen or so Southern Lapwings. A Pearl Kite flew by just above our heads, followed by a pair of Green-rumped Parrolets. A White-headed Marsh Tyrant popped its white head and short black body upright in a soggy patch near the cattle. We heard the clear two-note whistle of a Striped Cuckoo sitting on a fence. The slim rapid blur flitting about in the air was a Fork-tailed Palm Swift. We saw Black-crested and Barred Antshrikes and a Gray Kingbird and Blue-black Grassquit darting about.

By the time we arrived at the savanna it was mid-day and quite hot, considerably hotter than the temperature in the Northern Range. We'd lost some time shortly after we started out in the morning, the reason being Mahase's impeccable hearing. He heard a White-bellied Antbird trilling in the bushes a few feet off the side of the road, and we waited there an hour, its trilling going on and on, until finally, for a second and a half, I saw this brown-buff-white shape skulking in the leaves. It was a lesson in focus and patience, and a tribute to Mahase's dedication to getting us on the bird. Later birds were easier to locate, like the male Trinidad Euphonia, feeding on mistletoe berries at the top of a tree, its bright yellow crown and deep blue throat highlighted against a clear blue sky.

Still, Marsha and I had more to pack in. We hopped a short flight to Tobago, spending the next few days at the Blue Waters Inn, near the northeast town of Speyside. One day we went on a 25-minute boat ride to Little Tobago Island to see the Red-billed Tropicbirds that roost in the cliffs there. On the way up the trail, we heard the nasal whine of an Audubon's Shearwater before it incubated a nest in a burrow at the base of a tree. On the ground, the Tobago variant of the White-tipped Dove moved ahead of us, showing its greenish-bronze head and pure white throat. Not wanting to be excluded from the party, three Tyrant Flycatchers graced our ascent: a Yellow-bellied Elaenia with its messy looking, just got out of bed, crest and dirty

lemon breast; a Brown-crested Flycatcher with red-brown eyes; and a Tropical Kingbird with its orange-patched gray head, heavy bill and forked tail.

Proceeding on the trail, we gasped when we saw

Blue-gray Tanager at Little Tobago Island.

a pair of Trinidad Motmot perched on two trees ahead of us. The Trinidad Motmot should perhaps more properly be called the Tobago Motmot, since it's much more common here than on Trinidad. As we made our way higher up the island, we stopped to rest for a bit and within minutes were joined by a number of Blue-gray Tanagers with the same idea. We had seen them all over Trinidad and enjoyed watching them again as they took water from a horizontal pipe-half.

We continued up to the observation platform, where we had a clear view of St. Giles Island and Goat Island in the waters below, and in the sky all around were hundreds of wheeling Red-billed Tropicbirds, largely white birds with coral-red bills and extremely long central tail feathers. Several Magnificent Frigatebirds arrived on the scene; roughly the same size as the tropicbirds, their wingspans are more than twice as long, and they tried pulling at the tropicbirds' tail feathers to pirate the food they had in their crops. The tropicbirds, because of their short legs, had to circle many times in order to achieve a safe landing. We loved watching their aerial show.

We also saw, through a scope, Brown Boobies and the smaller Red-footed Boobies nesting from the bottom up to the halfway point of the cliffs. On the way down we saw a Chivi Vireo, once considered the same species as the Red-eyed Vireo, except that it now seems to be more closely related to the Black-whiskered Vireo.

On the way back to the boat, Marsha spotted a bird down on the ground in the foliage off the trail. At first, our guide Zee thought it was one of the chickens that roamed around the island, but then realized it was a Red-billed Tropicbird. Apparently, the bird had been chased by a Magnificent Frigatebird and fallen beneath dense canopy, unable to take off again. Zee approached the bird, picked it up and, after getting pecked a few times, managed to calm it down. He could feel a fish still in its crop. He checked it for injury and banding, and finding neither, carried the bird down to the dock, where he released it to the open sky.

It felt good to see it fly off! As our boat left the dock, an Osprey flew up from the rocks, leading the way back to Batteaux Bay.

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Red-billed Tropicbird at Little Tobago Island.

*Owlet*. Pen and ink drawing by Martha Walker.

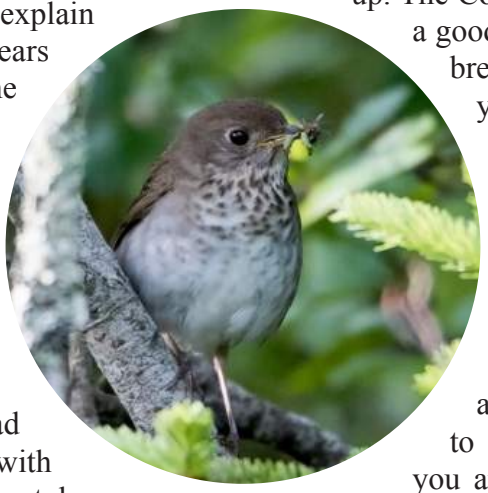
# Atlas Corner: The Joys of Atlasing

By Julie Hart, NY BBA III Project Coordinator

You may have heard people say how atlasing is a different way of birding and an extremely rewarding one at that. But what does this mean? How exactly is atlas birding different from normal birding? Why is it so rewarding? And you may be asking yourself, how can I become familiar with atlas birding before the project begins in 2020? In this article we'll answer these questions and more.

**What is atlasing and how is it rewarding?**

Atlasing is like regular birding but you slow down and observe the behaviors of individual birds. To help put this in perspective, I like to explain to people that I worked for several years doing various bird jobs around the country, but it wasn't until I atlased in my home state that I was able to observe many of the breeding behaviors you read about in books. While blockbusting for the Vermont Breeding Bird Atlas, I was finally able to really enjoy the figure-eight courtship display of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird; was chased off a road by an angry Ruffed Grouse mother with chicks scurrying in every direction at her barking and growling and feigned injury display; observed Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers wriggling in and out of birch trees; and encountered countless thrushes with overstuffed bills full of worms and insects.



By the end of the summer I learned not only the alternate songs of most songbirds but also many of the call notes. I learned to distinguish amicable chatter between a pair from territorial squabbles. I started out knowing the large-scale habitat preferences of most species and a couple months later I recognized the small habitat differences that attract a Willow instead of an Alder Flycatcher. My understanding of bird behavior and identification skills of awkward, disheveled looking fledglings far exceeded what I thought possible. And it was all because I changed the way I birded. I slowed down and watched what the birds did. Sometimes I would sit and wait and not see any signs of breeding, but other times I had the most intimate glimpses into their daily lives. It was a continuously rewarding experience.

My experience is not unique. Many people express similar sentiments after they start atlasing; just ask your fellow bird club members who participated in the last atlas. Best of all, the delight that comes with this type of birding is open to all of us.

**How do I practice atlasing and entering my observations in eBird?**

The atlas doesn't start until 2020, but you don't have to wait to start enjoying this type of birding. You can practice your atlasing skills right now. Some birds are already nesting, while others are courting and setting up territories. Start small by watching the birds in your backyard or favorite park. If you see a behavior and you don't know what it means, look it up. The Cornell Lab's "All About Birds" site is a good place to start. If it turns out to be a breeding behavior, note the behavior on your checklist.

NY BBA III will be using eBird for data entry, so start getting comfortable with eBird now. Check out the free "eBird Essentials" course offered by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, teach yourself by following the eBird tutorials for web and mobile, or ask a fellow birder to show you how to get started. Once you are familiar with eBird, start adding breeding observations to your checklists. Go to the detailed section for each species on your checklist and select the appropriate breeding code. Whether you use mobile or web, it's just a few extra clicks.

We will cover more detail on the different breeding codes in future articles. We will also cover how to make sure you are entering observations within an atlas block and other tips to make your checklists more useful for data analysis. Until then, have fun exploring the joys of atlasing!

*This article first appeared in New York Birders, the newsletter of the New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA).*

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Bicknell's Thrush with bill full of food. Photograph by Sue Barth.

# Join the Breeding Bird Atlas Community Online!

The Atlas website is where we will provide birdwatching tips, field methods, how to use eBird, block maps, answers to frequently asked questions, news and events, you name it! The website is in the nestling stage but will be growing quickly over the next few months.

Follow us on Facebook to share your stories, photos, and videos, ask questions, and discover events happening near you.

Share photos and videos and connect with other atlasers on Instagram.

*Eastern Towhee.* Ink on paper by Toni Simon.

Top: *Hooded Warbler*. Bottom: *Cerulean Warbler*. Mixed media art by Charles Tang.

Top: Common Grackle. Bottom: Black-crowned Night Heron.
All photographs by Tom Stephenson, taken in Prospect Park.

# Happenings in Prospect Park

By Stanley Greenberg

On April 16, 2019, the Prospect Park Community Committee (ComCom) met to hear reports from the Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP), NYPD, and Sue Donohue, the president of the Prospect Park Alliance (PPA). The PPA oversees many of the day-to-day operations of the park, sharing the responsibility with NYC's Parks Department.

There's been a small uptick in crime in the park, mostly unattended bags being stolen, but there was also a sexual assault about a month ago. More recently, on May 8, a birder reported that a man made several attempts to steal their camera while they were alone in the Butterfly Meadow on Lookout Hill at 10:30 in the morning. The birder managed to fend off the would-be thief and reported the attempt to a mounted police officer on Center Drive. As always, be aware of your surroundings. I asked the Alliance administrators to try to get the park better mapped for 311 calls, an issue that we've been pushing for several years now.

We were shown three conceptual approaches for the reconfiguration of the Rose Garden. In general, all are relatively naturalistic, one more than the other two. One plan includes a play area and a small building,

but all increase the greenery. I'm not sure anything has been posted by the Alliance; I'll see if I can get some plans for us to see. This is still far in the future, as a big capital campaign will be required. I'm sure there will be other opportunities to comment on designs.

Speaking of capital campaigns, the Alliance is asking for $5.5 million this year from the Brooklyn delegation and the Mayor to renovate the empty building just inside the Parkside Avenue entrance. Plans call for a restroom and visitor center. As you may know, the Parkside entrance is about to get a new artwork dedicated to Shirley Chisholm, who represented the neighborhood in Congress and was the first African-American woman candidate for president. And the new bike lane on Ocean Avenue will be connected to this project. Word is that the Mayor would like this all completed before he leaves office, so construction should start in fall 2020, completion by 2021.

Unfortunately, to make room for the new bike path, many of the older larger trees will be removed on Ocean Avenue but will be replaced by more new ones. Since DOT has to pay for removed trees based on size, there will be many more new trees planted than are there now.

Work is continuing on Flatbush Avenue; the first phase of perimeter reconstruction is almost complete and new trees went in a couple weeks ago. I'm not sure when the next phase starts, but work on the two new entrances will begin soon. Flatbush Avenue will also get a protected bike lane, coming this fall.

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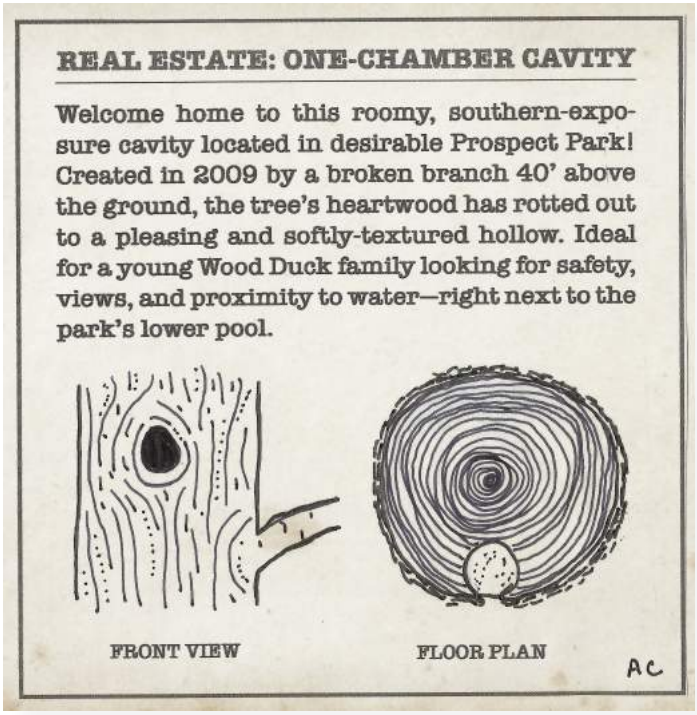
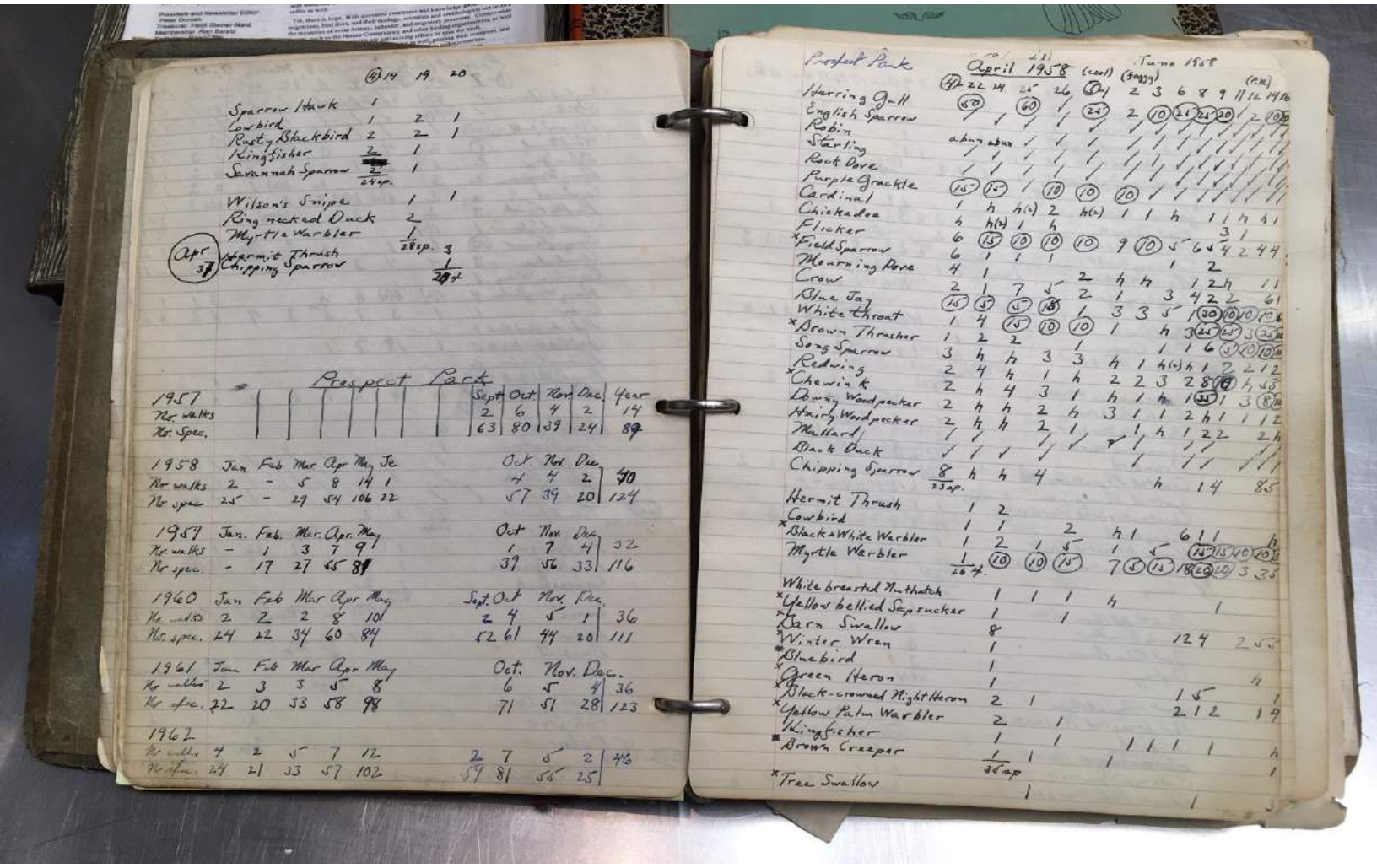



Top to bottom: Wood Duck pair, Gray-cheeked Thrush, and Magnolia Warbler.




# A Spin Through the BBC Archives

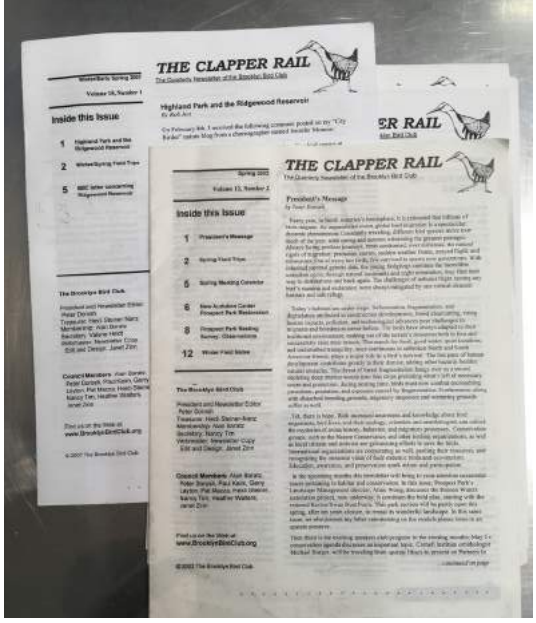
By Angie Co

Top to bottom: Binder of Brooklyn bird sightings from 1950s-60s, BBC Archives at BRT Printshop. All photographs by Angie Co.

They were waiting for me when I arrived at Dennis Hrehowsik's studio: three sizeable plastic tubs, lids off. Through their clear sides, I could see bundles of papers, booklets, and binders—decades of Brooklyn Bird Club archives, the pre-digital age artifacts of local birding history. For years, they'd been sitting in the basement of president emeritus Peter Dorosh, but they've now migrated to a temporary home with Dennis, the current president, at his BRT Printshop.

Dennis introduced me to his colleagues as he showed me around the shop. Like him, they all wore at least one article of clothing splattered with brightly colored pigments. For Dennis, it was his pants. The others wore aprons. The shop was airy and brightly-lit, with large machines and stainless-steel tables, except it was quiet save for an occasional loud whooshing sound.

Together we leafed through the archives, which included faded correspondences between club leaders and various conservation groups, binders filled with carefully-recorded bird lists from Prospect Park, old



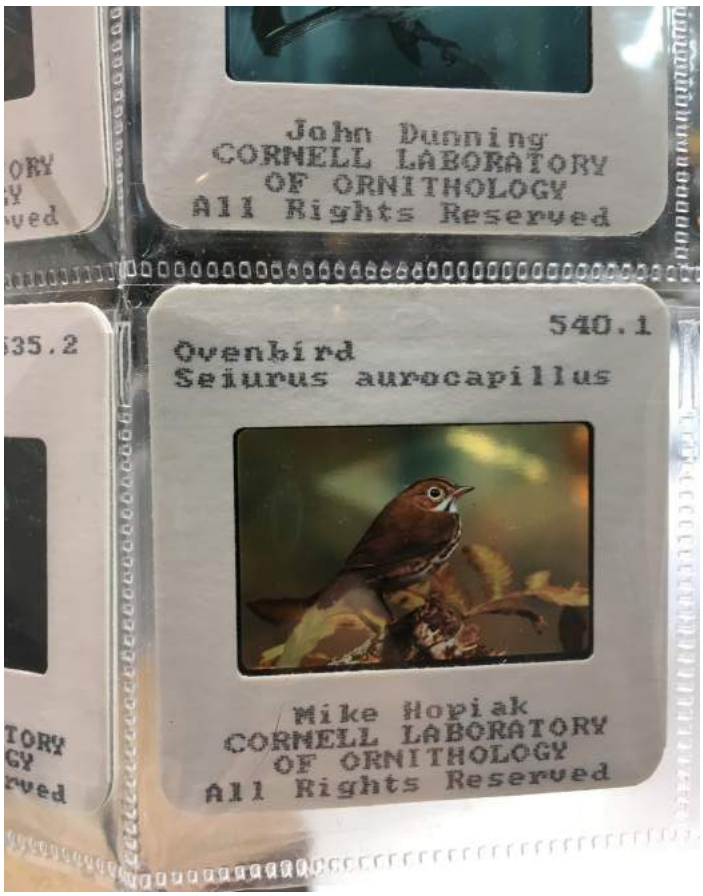

maps and brochures from East Coast birding locales. I snapped a photo of some Clapper Rail newsletters from the early 2000s. The logo back then was a charismatic line drawing of the bird. Who drew it? I flipped through an old photo album. Was it one of these people? Dennis held up a framed black and white photo of a tall man with glasses. "I think this is John Yrizzary. He did a lot to build and expand the club. He was—is—an incredible naturalist."

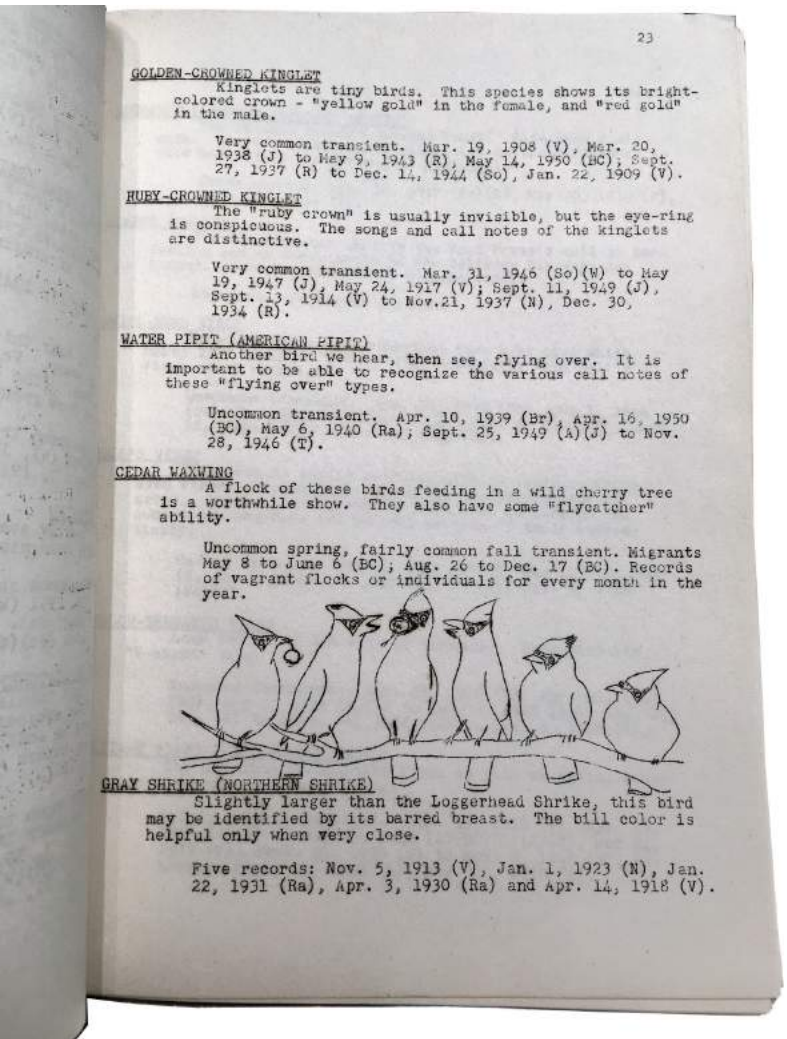
I had heard the name before, probably from Peter, but knew almost nothing about him. And I realized I knew very little about the history of our club. Since I started birding in 2016, the Brooklyn Bird Club has been a constant source of learning and camaraderie. I've joined many guided bird walks and field trips and worked on the Clapper Rail for the past two years, all this fostering friendships with birders old and young. What was the club like before? I resolved to try to find out more by interviewing older club members.

I fished out a plastic sleeve of projector slides labeled "Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology" and held it up to the light. The dark film sprang to life, showing the crisp features of an Ovenbird. It had the same cheery eye-ring, three-stripe cap, and pink legs I'd seen many times through my binoculars. I set down the slides, struck by the vivid familiarity of the creature captured by this now-obsolete technology. Biological evolution seems so slow as to be abstract, happening over generations and generations, while I couldn't count the number of technological advances I've adapted to in my lifetime.

These days, it's not Cornell's slides but eBird and Birdcast that I study. Just as binoculars allow me to zoom in on an individual bird, these networked digital technologies allow me to zoom in and out of geographical regions, seeing with some Sauron-like radar eye the movements of bird masses. I imagined this Ovenbird taking wing for its long migratory journey, a mere speck backlit by the setting sun. It, along with countless other Ovenbirds over eons, followed an ancestral flyway north to their breeding grounds and south to their wintering grounds—a flyway that includes what now is now present-day Brooklyn.

As if to echo these thoughts, the next item I pulled out was a publication of the Brooklyn Bird Club from 1951, titled "The Birds of Prospect Park." Inside the simply-bound edition were sketches and descriptions of the park's migrating and breeding birds. But what I found most fascinating was an essay on the Terminal Moraine. Prospect Park is located along the southernmost boundary of the last Ice Age's Labrador ice sheet. The active topography and rocky composition of this ridge made it harder to develop than surrounding flatter and fertile areas, and thus the park is part of a chain of green spaces following the moraine. The essay puts Prospect Park into its geological context, spinning an epic narrative spanning from prehistory to 1951. We're re-publishing it here to connect the club as it is now to its past, putting the BBC in its own generational context. And if you know what species the old name "Pinewoods Sparrrow" refers to (see the last paragraph of the essay), drop us a line.



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GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET

Kinglets are tiny birds. This species shows its bright-colored crown - "yellow gold" in the female, and "red gold" in the male.

Very common transient. Mar. 19, 1908 (V), Mar. 20, 1938 (J) to May 9, 1943 (R), May 14, 1950 (BC); Sept. 27, 1937 (R) to Dec. 14, 1944 (So), Jan. 22, 1909 (V).

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

The "ruby crown" is usually invisible, but the eye-ring is conspicuous. The songs and call notes of the kinglets are distinctive.

Very common transient. Mar. 31, 1946 (So)(W) to May 19, 1947 (J), May 24, 1917 (V); Sept. 11, 1949 (J), Sept. 13, 1914 (V) to Nov.21, 1937 (N), Dec. 30, 1934 (R).

WATER PIPIT (AMERICAN PIPIT)

Another bird we hear, then see, flying over. It is important to be able to recognize the various call notes of these "flying over" types.

Uncommon transient. Apr. 10, 1939 (Br), Apr. 16, 1950 (BC), May 6, 1940 (Ra); Sept. 25, 1949 (A)(J) to Nov. 28, 1946 (T).

CEDAR WAXWING

A flock of these birds feeding in a wild cherry tree is a worthwhile show. They also have some "flycatcher" ability.

Uncommon spring, fairly common fall transient. Migrants May 8 to June 6 (BC); Aug. 26 to Dec. 17 (BC). Records of vagrant flocks or individuals for every month in the year.

GRAY SHRIKE (NORTHERN SHRIKE)

Slightly larger than the Loggerhead Shrike, this bird may be identified by its barred breast. The bill color is helpful only when very close.

Five records: Nov. 5, 1913 (V), Jan. 1, 1923 (N), Jan. 22, 1931 (Ra), Apr. 3, 1930 (Ra) and Apr. 14, 1918 (V).

# The Terminal Moriane

Published by the Brooklyn Bird Club, 1951

We believe the Moraine Ridge plays an important part in contributing to our list of birds, and we would like to enlarge upon this theme. By observation, this ridge has been found to be a major migration route through the area. We have speculated as to why this is so and we offer this information for your consideration.

We go back to the end of the last Ice Age when the Labrador Ice Sheet covered New England, New York, and northern New Jersey with a mile-high plateau of ice. Along the toe, or front of this ice cliff, earth, rock and other debris, planed off by the advancing glacier, were pushed up to form a ridge, or Terminal Moraine, which marked the southern limit of the ice advance.

The level of the sea had been lowered as the result of a constant evaporation of moisture which was precipitated as rain, or snow, upon this enormous mass of ice, where it remained in frozen captivity for many centuries. The ocean bed was exposed, and off shore stretched a bleak and frozen waste.

Conditions changed and the advance of the ice was at first halted, then began to retreat. The ice melted faster than it formed and in time a tremendous flow of melt-water poured out from under the glacier. Silt and boulders were carried along in this flood and were deposited in alluvial fans extending southward from the moraine, creating an outwash plain. In the closing stages of this melt-and-run-off, Jamaica Bay was scoured out of these silt deposits. (This outwash plain may be recognized in such place names as Flatbush, Flatlands, and further east, the Hempstead Plains, etc.) The present day topography of Long Island was thus formed—with a north shore line of hills, level plains to the south, and sandy beaches along the shore of the ocean.

The Ice Retreat continued and, freed of the crushing weight of the mountain of ice, the land rose slowly—a bare wasteland, but fertile, waiting for a growing season to come. In time, mosses and lichens appeared as ground cover, a typical tundra, which was replaced eventually by a spruce and cedar forest. Ages long these changing periods lasted, with approximately

the conditions found today in the far north. The climate was sub-artic, with short summers and long, cold winters. About this time the birds came back, first the tundra dwellers, followed by the species that nest in spruce forests.

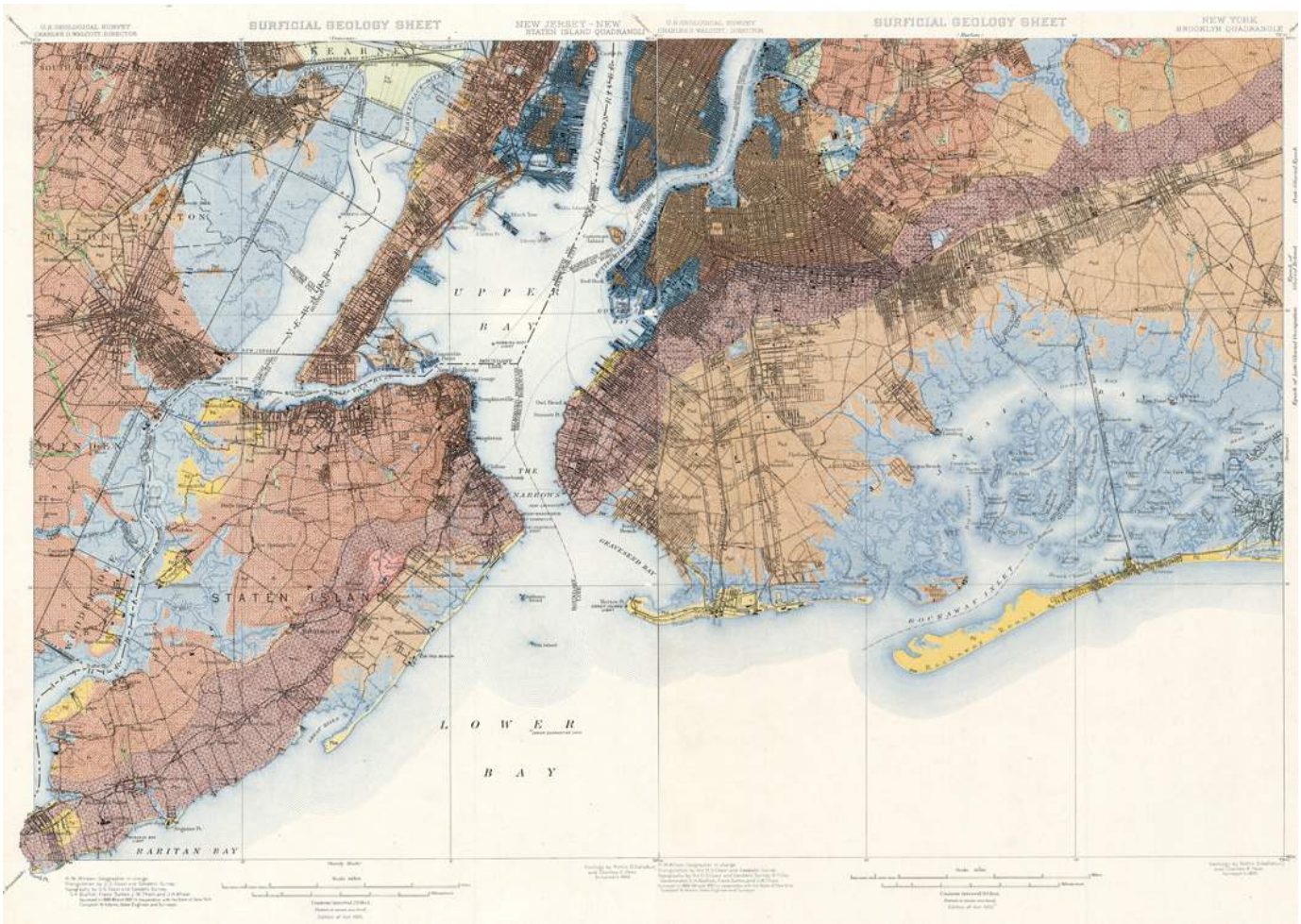
Many centuries passed before conditions changed sufficiently to encourage the germination of deciduous trees. Birch seedlings finally sprouted, to be followed by a typical lowland forest growth, in which were red and black oak, maple, tulip tree, and other mixed hardwoods. Here and there, in ravines and swamp areas, were rhododendron, with red and white cedars.

Unusual plant-soil relationships occurred in the moraine. Boulders of limestone, serpentine, diabase, and granitic rocks were a constituent part of the planed-off material, and these modified the local soil conditions to permit the growth of plants which today are found in the far north. Pine barrens, similar to those in New England and in southern New Jersey, developed on Long Island. The presence of boulders of serpentine rock created local conditions such as those found in the serpentine areas of Connecticut and Massachusetts, and also in Maryland and Virginia. In such areas, special types of plants, insects and bird controls are found. In short, there is evidence that the habitat needs of many unusual birds were satisfactorily filled—the protection needed, the food supply, even to insects feeding on plants native to the home territory.

The birds moved in, nested, migrated south in winter, to return the following spring. Their range slowly extended northward as new areas became available. In time additional species bred here and these also moved father to the north. Each fall they returned over this hereditary flight line, the ancestral flyway, and thus the migration route is believed to have been established along the line of the terminal moraine.

When the Dutch settlers came and developed farms in Brooklyn, the forest covering the area south of the Park was cut down. The outwash plain still shows remnants of this forest, and many small parks and gardens have old trees growing high above the more recent plantations of Norway maples and American elms that line the streets of Flatbush.

The removal of this forest cover resulted in a




US Geological Survey showing the Terminal Moraine (purple), 1902, courtesy of the New York Public Library.

further channeling of the flights, directing them to an ever-narrowing path through the parks of the area. It is imperative that we do all we can to preserve the natural character of the parks situated on the Terminal Moraine, for without the cover, food and water found here the birds are exposed to dangers that in time may lead to their destruction.

In Prospect Park we find ideal conditions for seeing a maximum number of species particularly during spring and fall migrations. We profit by having this interesting terrain feature with its unusual and distinctive habitat successions which has led to the occurrence of many rare birds. We would not be too far wrong in suggesting that, with additional competent observers working the Park, many more rarities would be found.

The fact that this Moraine Ridge is the last such "Height of the land" before the ocean, and that it extends for more than 100 miles along the north shore of Long Island, has resulted in its use as a migration path for hawks. In fall when a north-west high (Meteorological pressure system) follows a low pressure area out to sea, we can expect a good hawk flight. The spring hawk flights also occur on northwest winds, but it has been noted that when a cold front is moving in, (usually a low pressure area with "steep sides" and consequent high winds), the result is a sudden clouding over which appears to drive down hawks migrating through, scattered over a wide area. This seems to account for the spring flights noted in the Records—when these widely-scattered hawks "concentrate" to take advantage of the air currents afforded by the ridge as the strong winds are deflected upward. Winds at this time usually begin in the southwest and eventually swing around to northwest.

To sum up, we can trace the probable occurrence of many unusual species as breeding birds, here on Long Island. Based on the idea that there seems to be a recurrence of birds in areas where they at one time bred, we have made observations accordingly. We note with satisfaction that in Prospect Park we have a record of a Pinewoods Sparrow found exactly where its ancestors would have bred, in a part of the Park where ancient pine barren conditions were found. We point to the regular appearance of Woodcock adjacent to the former site of a swamp that was filled in to permit the construction of the present-day Zoo. Many other interesting observations are possible and a new concept of birding is open to students, in Prospect Park.

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Left: White-throated Sparrow in Prospect Park. Photograph by Ann Feldman.
Right: Bay-breasted Warbler in Prospect Park. Photograph by Tripper Paul.

Clockwise from top: House Finch and White-breasted Nuthatch in Green-Wood Cemetery, Ovenbird in Prospect Park. Photographs by Tom Stephenson.