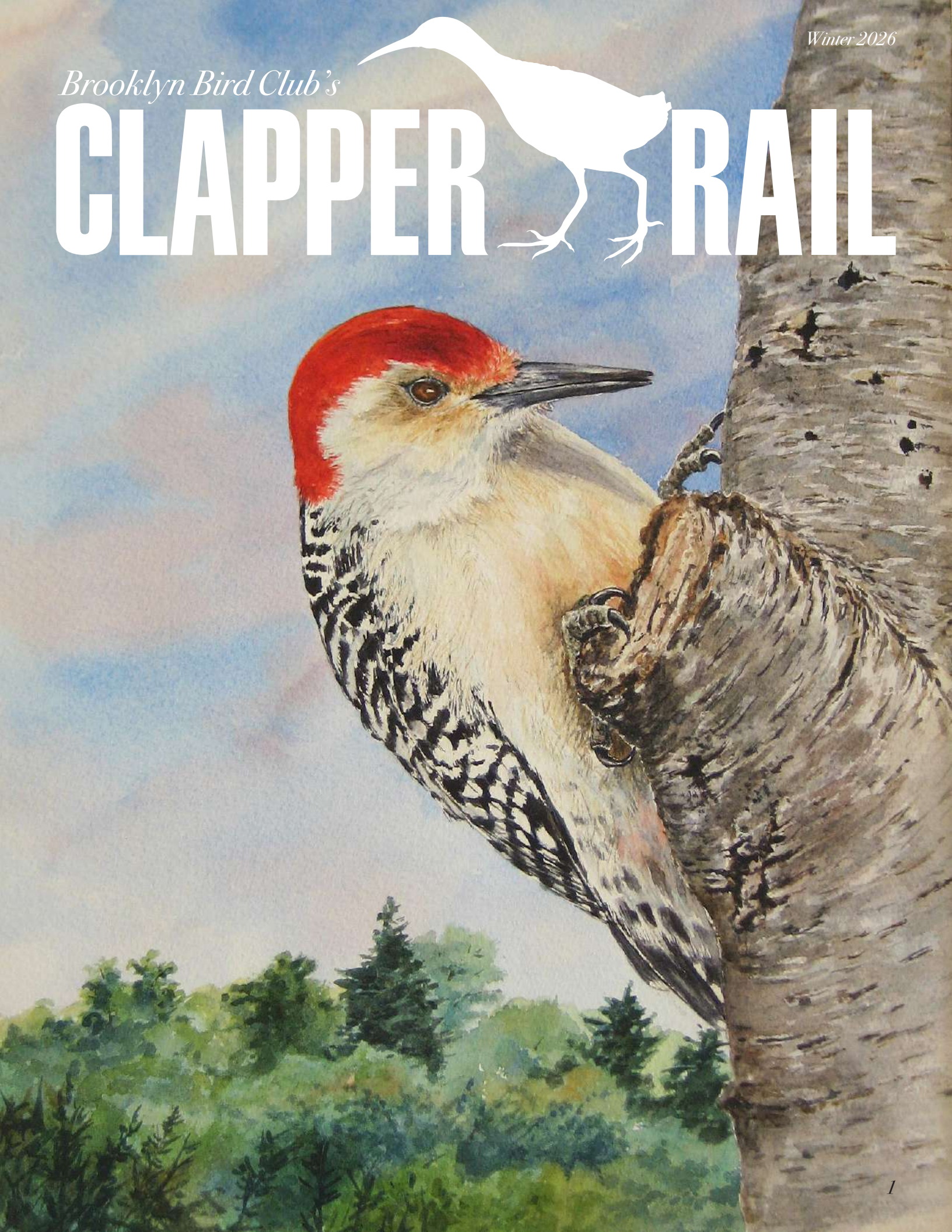


Brooklyn Bird Club's

CLAPPER RAIL



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Annual Report



2025 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT BROOKLYN

TEAMS

12

PARTICIPANTS

143

SPECIES

130

TOTAL BIRDS COUNTED

54,028

The 2025 Brooklyn Christmas Bird Count

By Ryan Goldberg

On December 20, 2025, by foot, car, and kayak, a record number of participants—nearly 150 birders—surveyed the city’s winter bird life in the annual Brooklyn Christmas Bird Count (CBC). The count circle includes almost all the borough of Brooklyn (Kings County), western Jamaica Bay, and the western end of the Rockaway Peninsula.

Counters enjoyed a mostly sunny but cool day, with temperatures in the 30s, and found 130 species, a figure equal to the previous year. They tallied 54,028 individual birds, though, which was about eight percent higher than the year before—a testament, no doubt, to the level of participation. No stone was left unturned in the 15-mile count circle; for example, at the evening’s compilation there was talk of officially adding Holy Cross Cemetery in East Flatbush to the Bergen Beach territory after a sizable evening roost of crows was found there again.

A sustained freeze in the first half of December, however, meant that some birds hadn’t stuck around for the CBC. Most wading birds left for open water, with usual suspects like Great Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron absent. Warblers, which often fill out the rare category, were also missing. Only Palm and Pine were among the irregular sightings. A Nashville Warbler was a count week find at Spring Creek.

Brooklyn’s CBC offers evidence of which birds are adapting to the urban ecosystem, and several raptor species continue to thrive. This year saw an all-time high of Cooper’s Hawks (35) and a 10-year high of Red-tailed Hawks (50), while Bald Eagle, now a regular on the count, saw an all-time high of eight individuals, spread across five different territories.

Other all-time highs included Common Grackle (515), Red-bellied Woodpecker (94), and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (35), all species which welcome milder winters. Prospect Park, with three Hairy Woodpeckers, remains the one place in Brooklyn to find that forest-loving woodpecker. The count total of

Blue Jays, with 328 of them mostly concentrated in Green-Wood Cemetery and Prospect Park, was just shy of a record.

In 2024, the Brooklyn CBC posted the highest tally of Black Scoters anywhere in the country: 6,567. There were fewer this year, with 1,169, but from Breezy Point another 2,250 scoters were seen out in Ambrose Channel, the harbor’s main shipping passage, too distant to be identified but almost certainly Black Scoters. Closer to shore was a good passage of Razorbills, with 68 seen from Fort Tilden, part of the Riis Park territory, and 23 from the Breezy Point tip.

Breezy Point’s other highlights included a rare Indigo Bunting and Vesper Sparrow, as well as four Short-eared Owls that flushed out of the dunes after dawn. Other owls seen that day were Barn—two at Jamaica Bay and one at Floyd Bennett Field—and a Great Horned and Northern Saw-whet at Green-Wood

...a record number of participants surveyed the city’s winter bird life.

and Fort Tilden, respectively. Per usual, Jamaica Bay delivered its share of rare birds: a trio of marsh sparrows—Seaside, Nelson’s, and Saltmarsh—and a Ross’s Goose and Yellow-breasted Chat.

There were also 10-year highs of Surf Scoter (101), Common Goldeneye (153), and American Black Duck (1,147). Six Common Eiders—five at Breezy Point and one at Coney Island—added to the sea duck roster. And a pair of Ring-necked Ducks was a save for Prospect Park.

Those who joined the barrier beach teams—Breezy Point and Riis Park—sent back excited reports

on the numbers of Northern Gannets. Dennis Guiney, of the former team, drove to the Breezy Point tip with three others just before sunrise. Buffeted by a strong west wind, spotters set up their scopes in the lee of Guiney's pickup truck. As the sky brightened, he said they were met with what felt like an endless stream of gannets moving from east to west. "Most notable was their proximity to the shore," Guiney said. "Many flew right over our heads to shorten the distance from the ocean side to the bay side of the jetty." With a clicker, one person counted over 3,000 birds. By the end of the day, the total for the whole team was 3,756.

The drama didn't end there. Some of the gannets that crossed over to the bay undoubtedly flew around to Rockaway Inlet, where dozens were seen from Floyd Bennett Field. One almost didn't make it. At the compilation, Rob Jett, that team's leader, described the rescue by Michelle Talich of a gannet they found stuck in the grasslands. Michelle used her sweatshirt to pick up the bird—miraculously avoiding getting bit or stabbed as the stressed bird lunged at her—then released it at the boat launch, where it paddled out into the bay after Michelle moved it into the water.

I asked Rob about it later and he sent this report:

Every year during the Christmas Bird Count, our sunrise strategy at Floyd Bennett Field is to walk all the grasslands. It is a huge area and I like to get that part of the survey done as early as possible. We break into three teams and walk across pre-assigned fields. Eastern Meadowlark is our main target, but other species occasionally encountered include Ring-necked Pheasant, Wilson's Snipe, Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Snowy Owl, Horned Lark, American Pipit, Snow Bunting, and Savannah Sparrow.

Our teams split up just after dawn and headed to our starting fields. HJ Kim, Kenelma Perez, Bob Washburn, and I spread out across the small triangle of grassland that lies between the airport's main roadway and the southwestern runway. I was still walking to the far end of the field when I heard Bob yelling something. He had been walking a route closest to the runway and had only progressed a few yards. He waved us over.

From a distance I saw something bright white hunkered down in the vegetation. I thought, "Snowy Owl?" My heart jumped. As I approached the large, white mass of feathers and got a clearer view of the large bird, my brain nearly broke. Gannet?! What the heck was a Northern Gannet doing sitting in the grass?

Gannets have short legs set very far back on their bodies. They are similar in design to

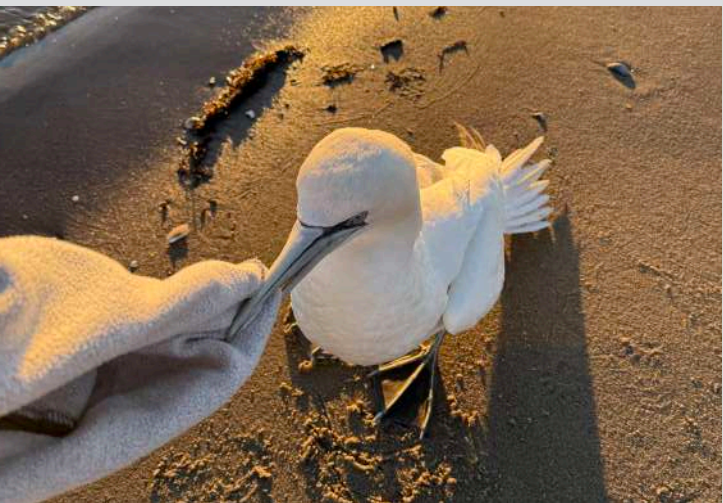
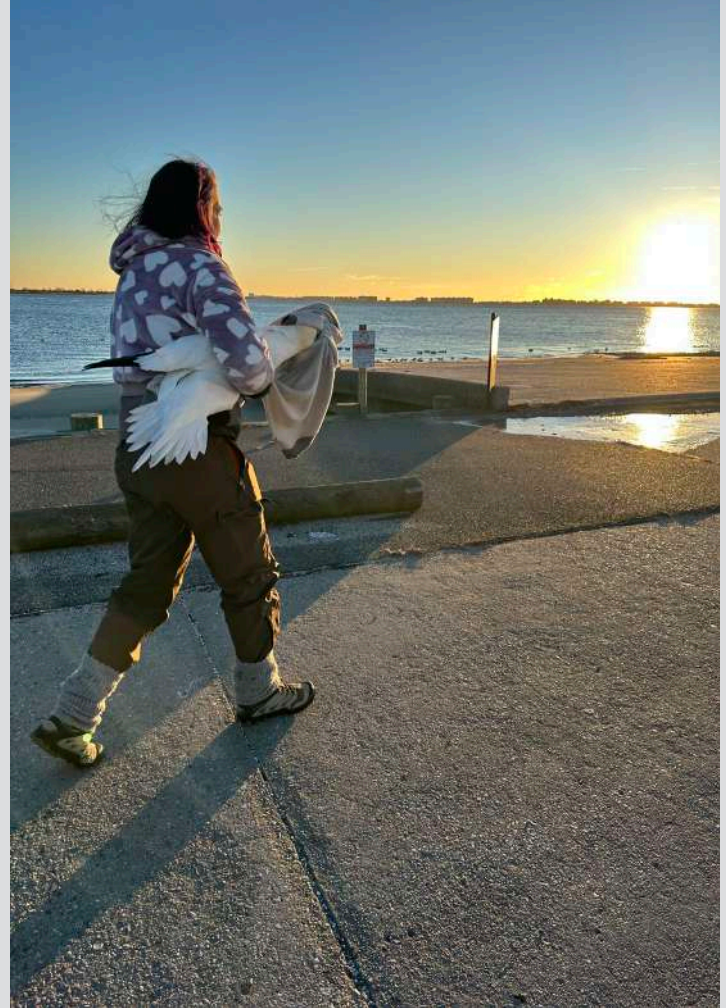
loons in that they are built for pursuing prey underwater, not walking on land. In order to take off from water, they require a running start, flapping heavily while kicking with their feet. We weren't sure how it ended up at the edge of this tangled vegetation, but we needed to get it out and to the water's edge.

Gannets are large seabirds with a nearly six-foot wingspan. Their bill is long and dagger-like with a serrated edge. Standing close to this bird as it made deep, guttural growls and grunts with that weapon agape was, well, terrifying. So I did what any brave, adult male would do: I called over Michelle.

I was aware that Michelle has had extensive experience rescuing wildlife in distress, but was still in total awe as she almost



Northern Gannet at Floyd Bennett Field. Photo by Michelle Talich.



Michelle Talich wrapping the gannet and releasing it at the shore. Photos courtesy of Michelle Talich (left) and Ant Taboada (right).

effortlessly corralled then grabbed this snarling monster of a bird. As luck would have it, Mark Iantosca, another team member, had a perfect, gannet-sized Rubbermaid container in his car. With the bird loaded into the car, Michelle and her other teammates drove to the water at the edge of the boat launch and released it.

I think that the previous day's weather played a major role in the gannet's grounding. Winds were gusting up to 45 mph. In fact, on the day of the count, we were seeing an unprecedented number of gannets flying around Jamaica Bay. They are normally seen out over the ocean, so I surmised that the strong winds had pushed many of them into the bay. In addition, we had been experiencing extensive amounts of rain. When scouting Floyd Bennett Field the day before the count, much of the runways were flooded. I suspect the bird saw the water and landed in it, not realizing it was merely a very large, shallow puddle. When it attempted to take off, it ended up at the edge of the field, which is full of thorny vines.

I've been participating in the annual Christmas Bird Count since the 1990s and can say, with no hesitation, that this was my most memorable count experience...so far.

— Rob Jett 🐦



Barred Owl. Watercolor on paper. All artwork by Paul Keim.

A Heart of Gold, a Man for All Seasons: Remembering Paul Keim

By Peter Dorosh

*“A good man is a friend to all living things.”
—Mahatma Gandhi*

My longtime friend Paul Keim, who passed away last August, was a man for all seasons. His wife, Debbie, called him a renaissance man, which was appropriate for his many talents. He was an excellent birder and leader in the Brooklyn Bird Club, a consummate naturalist, a watercolor painter, a master printer, a musician. But most of all he was a good man with a golden heart, always generous with his time and energy for his family and his friends. I consider myself very fortunate to be counted one of his best and oldest friends.

I first met Paul in the early 1980s. The scene: Swan Boat Pond in Prospect Park, now known as the Upper Pool. Back then it was degraded, choked with phragmites, yet at its northwest corner a calling Sora pulled the sharp-eared Paul toward this rare visitor. Naturally, with my poor hearing, I followed Paul, as did another birder, Jerry Layton. We all became friends that day, and over the years I would

affectionately refer to our introduction as “The Sora Connection.”

I soon found out that Paul was the president of the Brooklyn Bird Club. I had been a member for only a few years, so it was through him that I began to learn more of its history. A decade and a half earlier, the club, which began in 1909, had been near extinction. But like the mythological phoenix, it had risen again thanks to John Yrizarry, a renowned birder and artist, who ascended to the presidency. John left the post after a short time, handing the leadership duties of a revived club to Paul. He kept it relevant through the years with trips, speakers, and a reborn *Clapper Rail* newsletter, thanks to editors Ron and Jeanne Bourque and later Bob Gochfeld, with help from Janet Zinn.

Paul served two long non-consecutive stints as president, handing it off to me in 2000. Through it all, his leadership was a determined act of love, making sure the club survived.

Among my greatest joys were attending club trips that Paul planned and organized. As the club’s trips planner today, I learned so much from Paul, his emphasis on choosing the right time and the most productive locations. Some of my fondest memories are of overnight trips to Montauk Point. The group usually stayed at Peter Joost’s homes in Quogue or Shelter Island, and those trips opened my eyes to the sheer beauty and breathtaking amounts of birds on the barrier beaches in November.

The Montauk trips always included visits to Montauk Point State Park, Shinnecock Inlet, Ponquogue Bridge, the Walking Dunes, Napeague State Park, and Montauk Harbor. Off Montauk Point, we would sometimes see tens of thousands of scoters, eiders, and other waterfowl. We had lighthearted moments, too. Once, turning down Dolphin Lane near Shinnecock Inlet, Paul yelled, “Snowy Owl!” Its field marks showed it to be a flapping garment bag.

Before I met Paul I hewed closely to Prospect Park, but he showed me a wider world full of opportunity and migration spectacles, places like Fort Tilden for hawk watching and Croton Point State Park for its

owls and eagles. As a trip planner now, I took from Paul that to make any trip memorable and dynamic, visiting different habitats and locations was key.

Our involvements in the Christmas Bird Count in December and the state waterfowl count in January brought us closer together and strengthened our friendship. We loved the winter counts, their test of resolve and focus. For the former, we each led teams in Prospect Park, Paul in the north and me in the south. Paul was motivated by his role as a counter, mentoring others and serving a small part in a grassroots conservation movement now in its 126th year. For several decades Paul assisted in the compilation. He was al-



Atlantic Puffin. Watercolor on paper.

ways so happy that night, sharing stories and warm moments with birding friends and acquaintances.

The waterfowl count told a different story. It required grit and stamina to manage walking the long miles, sometimes over 10, in often harsh conditions on the western Rockaways. In those days, the community was much smaller, and the assignment fell to hardy winter birders; of course, Paul, with winter joy in him, asked me along. I remember some years the wind chill dropped below zero, including one where it was minus-30! High, howling winds and bitter cold tested our commitment to counting, yet we pushed on.

I never regretted it, and our friendship was forged in those winter months.

Paul was happiest leading bird walks. He was an excellent ear birder, and his songbird identification ranked up there with the best. He was a musician after all, and both loved and encouraged this side of birding.



Pine Grosbeak. Watercolor on paper.

Paul led walks not only for the Brooklyn Bird Club but also the Linnaean Society, Wave Hill in the Bronx, Girl Scouts, and NYC Bird Alliance. He regularly led the Brooklyn Bird Club's first Sunday walk and its Saturday walk for beginners. He lived for a great spring day, when warblers were singing everywhere, and I and those who joined him on his walks felt fortunate to be led by a master at work.

Paul also had a knack for finding owls. He had keen eyes and knew what clues to look for. Even with pellets on the ground, whitewash, or alarm calls from nearby songbirds, locating an owl in a dense conifer is no small feat. I remember one Christmas Bird Count

he rushed back to find me in the afternoon; on his way home, he had noticed whitewash at the base of a honeysuckle bush next to the Nethermead Arches. He spotted the tiny owl inside the bush. I'm still amazed at his discovery. Our love of owls followed us on our winter excursions, from Snowy Owls at Breezy Point to Great Horned, Long-eared, and the occasional Short-eared and Saw-whet at Croton Point. I always felt that Paul would find them sooner or later. What he found he enjoyed sharing with others.

Paul didn't stop at birding; he was a naturalist in the truest sense of the word. I often recruited him to lead insect walks, butterfly walks, and bat walks for the Brooklyn Bird Club. He knew his trees, too. He sought to pass on this knowledge whenever he could, particularly with the Girl Scouts at their annual summer camp in upstate Dutchess County, where Debbie was a den mother. The impact Paul had on so many lives through his walks will be his enduring legacy.

Paul's generosity extended to his family and friends. His daughter, Kristen, a theatrical producer, often recruited her father to paint backdrops for her productions. Likewise, he was very involved in Debbie's Girl Scouts events and in educational activities at the Prospect Park Zoo, where Debbie worked. Paul was an exceptional watercolor artist, and he was quick to give friends his paintings of birds.

I was the lucky recipient of five of them. I would drive him and his family home after each Christmas Bird Count, and some years he would thank me with a painting. On my wall today are his Barred Owl, Short-eared Owl, American Goshawk, Prothonotary Warbler, and Willow Ptarmigan. I felt bad in a way, because they were a labor of love. But years later I was able to pay him back.

A sixth painting of his, of a Belted Kingfisher, also hangs on my wall. Paul was a member of the Brooklyn Watercolor Society and one year this painting was displayed during an exhibit of the Society at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. All the works were for sale, and when I spotted Paul's, I jumped at the chance to return my affection. I bought it for \$500. Wanting to surprise him, I didn't tell him I bought it. Later, he caught up with me on a field trip and we laughed at his surprise when he learned upon picking up the painting that I was its new owner.

If Paul was ever overexcited about a bird or rare sighting, that was before I met him. He was calm yet appreciative of nature's gifts. I remember confessing

to him once that I was so hyped before one Christmas Bird Count that I rushed to the Lullwater before dawn. The responsibility I felt led me to the brink of a panic attack. When I shared this with Paul, he said that nature has her own timetable and we as observers have no control of the natural world. We should sit back and enjoy it. "It's not worth the stress," he said.

I recalled that lesson years later. Before the arrival of cell phones, texts, and social media, birders relied on word of mouth. One spring, I received a tip that a Prothonotary Warbler was hanging around Prospect Park's Peninsula. After I went to see it, I asked a fellow birder who was there with me to call Paul from a nearby pay phone since this warbler was his nemesis. He had been trying for many years to see one. I waited on the bird for at least an hour, hoping Paul would arrive. Sure enough, he finally walked up, without his binoculars, since he had come straight from work. Debbie had got the message at home and called him at his job. I gave him my binoculars; while he happily watched the Prothonotary, he reminded me that this was the one bird he had been trying to find for

years! I was happy I could return the favor once more to a dear friend.

Paul's humanity touched everyone he met. His bird and nature walks drew people from all walks of life. He was a throwback to a simpler and, yes, pre-technological time. Paul didn't use a computer or email or own a cell phone. I've met few like him, someone who was modest, compassionate, sincere, and generous. I considered him a role model.

I will miss Paul terribly. He was such a genuine friend. A faithful companion in the field, he was a calm and steady influence. He opened my eyes to simply enjoying the beauty of nature in all its forms. I learned from him to appreciate both the nuances of butterflies and the drama of birds, a more complete view of nature and the interconnectivity of birds with their habitats. Competitive birding never existed between the two of us, which made our time together happy. We should feel blessed for knowing a good man like Paul lived on this earth.

Rest in peace, my friend. 🐦



Peregrine Falcon. Watercolor on paper.

After Van Gogh's "Wheatfield With Crows"

There are many crows
above the wheatfield
as the thunderstorm arrives.
What are they all doing there?
Don't they have anything better to do?
No, they don't.
And neither do we.

The road through the wheatfield
doesn't lead anywhere.
Of course, it doesn't.
That's its mystery.
It seems to lead somewhere,
even somewhere significant,
but it doesn't lead anywhere.
It's just a road through a wheatfield,
as negligible as it gets,
not even a road.

— *Michael Ruby*



Courtesy of the Van Gogh Museum.

Michael Handler Ruby is an American poet and longtime editor at The Wall Street Journal. As a poet, he has primarily identified with surrealism, Language poetry, and the New York School, including Bernadette Mayer, whose early books he co-edited.

Photo Gallery: Barbara Schelkle



© Barbara Schelkle

Bank Swallow at Plumb Beach.



Hooded Merganser (top) and American Coot (bottom) in Prospect Park.



Boat-tailed Grackles at Plumb Beach.



House Finch (top) and Field Sparrow (bottom) in Prospect Park.

At Last, the Brooklyn Wild Bird Fund Prepares for Flight

by Jamie Magyar

Given enough time, most urban birders (and many attentive non-birders) find themselves dealing with one of the tough realities of avian life in the city: encountering a sick or injured bird, whether it be a migrating warbler stunned from a window collision, a ragged pigeon weakened by lead poisoning, or a goose tangled in errant fishing line. Without human intervention, many of these creatures have slim odds of survival; oftentimes, it falls upon everyday New Yorkers to figure out how to get them the help they need.

Since 2012, New York City has had one major destination for those fortunate enough to be rescued: the Wild Bird Fund (WBF), the city's only wild animal hospital. In addition to pigeons, songbirds, raptors, and waterfowl, the WBF also cares for turtles, squirrels, and opossums. (Some of NYC's other ubiquitous mammals, like raccoons and bats, are off-limits due to rabies concerns.) Last year, more than 13,000 patients passed through the WBF facility on the Upper West Side; staff estimate that around 90 percent of them suffered from ailments and injuries arising, directly or indirectly, from human activity.

But while the WBF's Upper West Side clinic is convenient for Central Park birders, Midtown office workers picking up window-strike victims and sick pigeons mid-commute, and Upper Manhattanites bringing in birds from that area's many parks, getting there from Brooklyn is another story. For many a Kings County birder, the decision to take a bird in need to the WBF has meant committing oneself to a round trip of a couple hours—either by braving Manhattan traffic or taking a long ride on the uptown C train holding a cardboard box with airholes poked into it, hoping your fellow commuters are too zoned-out or jaded to notice that you're carrying a live pigeon.

So it was a great relief when the WBF announced in January 2023 that it had secured a new outpost in Park Slope, at 183 7th Avenue, just two blocks from Prospect Park and a short bus ride from Green-Wood



A rendering of the new Brooklyn facade.
All images courtesy of Wild Bird Fund.

Cemetery. Near the end of that same year, the WBF launched a capital campaign to raise funds for the new location, with digital renderings and blueprints on its webpage detailing how the space would be transformed. The facility would effectively double the organization's overall capacity; furthermore, the WBF had the opportunity to plan the build-out based on 13 years of experience at their flagship location, allocating space to meet the needs of a wide variety of patients.

As time went on, however, news began to slow. Signage for the Wild Bird Fund went up on the storefront of the building, replacing the name of the nail salon that had once occupied the address, but there were few other signs of activity behind the papered-over windows. The last funding update on the



A rendering of the backyard aviary and pool.

capital campaign webpage was dated from June 2024, and the WBF's social media, while still abuzz with frequent updates on its Manhattan patients, scarcely mentioned the forthcoming Brooklyn branch. In the meantime, wildlife rescuers continued to make the trek to the Upper West Side, uncertain as to when the much-needed second clinic might finally be ready to receive patients.

Then, on November 20, 2025, an announcement was sent to the Wild Bird Fund's e-mail subscribers: construction had begun on the new clinic, and the WBF would be hosting a reception at the Prospect Park Picnic House on December 7 to celebrate the occasion and provide further details, with guided tours of the site earlier that same day. The silence was over: those who had been waiting patiently would now have the chance to get a sneak peek at the scene that was just beginning to take shape behind those blocked-out windows.

Inside the construction site, WBF staff members Phyllis Tseng and Chris Duran guided visitors through a detailed tour, explaining how the organization intends to use each area in the new space. While visitors have been unable to step inside the Manhattan WBF location since before the COVID pandemic, due to space concerns, the new site contains a designated

reception area in its front, securely separated from patient areas. Past this room will be exam and operating rooms; while the Upper West Side clinic must shuttle certain patients to and from partner veterinarians, here there will be enough space and equipment to perform a wider range of procedures, such as X-rays. There will also be three isolation bays, with airlock-style entryways and HVAC sectioning, to minimize the risk posed by birds carrying highly contagious diseases. Another large room, vaguely labeled as the "bird room," according to the current temporary signage, will in fact be dedicated to the most abundant patients: pigeons, which Tseng estimates make up around 70 percent of the birds that pass through the WBF's doors. There will also be a brooder room that will provide ample incubator space for the many baby pigeons—known affectionately as "squeakers"—and other nestlings that the WBF takes in.

Farther back, there will be a large indoor flight room, a waterfowl room, and a designated raptor area. The waterfowl room will have two pools (one larger, one smaller) to alleviate some of the pressure around pool-time scheduling that the WBF currently experiences at its original location, which only has a single pool. Swim-time isn't just a matter of enrichment: ducks, geese, and other aquatic birds need to spend time in the water in order to restore their feathers' waterproofing, and too much time on dry land—especially for heavy birds, such as swans—can

cause their webbed feet to develop painful sores, a condition known as bumblefoot.

At the very back of the building, large, covered cages will allow easily stressed hawks and other birds of prey to convalesce in a relatively quiet space with minimal exposure to their fellow patients. And downstairs, the site's basement will host a laundry area, a break/locker room for staff and volunteers, and a lab for running important medical tests.

Perhaps most excitingly, this location has one major perk that its predecessor does not: a backyard. Prior to their release back into the wild, many WBF patients urgently need access to outdoor aviaries, not only to stretch their wings and strengthen their flight muscles after being cooped up on cage rest, but also, especially in the wintertime, to reacclimate to the stressors of NYC weather. In the past, the WBF has had to rely on external partners to provide this crucial transitional support to its patients: the Narrows Botanical Garden allows the WBF to use an aviary on its campus in Bay Ridge, and individual rehabbers outside of the city, where green space is easier to come by, take in both birds and mammals from the WBF to adjust to the outdoors on their own properties. Once the Brooklyn location is up and running, a spacious aviary cage, which can be separated into two zones with a removable divider, will finally allow the WBF to give its patients outdoor flight time on premises. The backyard will even have its own pool, so that the waterfowl don't miss out on the chance to get some fresh air.

At the reception, attendees stopped by tables providing information about the WBF's operations, nibbled on vegetarian appetizers, met with two charismatic pigeon ambassadors, and could have their photos taken with a person in a giant woodcock costume (whose speakers emitted the bird's signature "peent!" call). Once everyone settled in, WBF founder and director Rita McMahon took the stage for the main presentation. McMahon emphasized the degree to which the organization had grown over the past 13 years: whereas the Manhattan location took in around a thousand patients in its first year of operation, now, the facility might take in more than a hundred patients on a single day during the peak of migration. In addition to providing a convenient location for Brooklyn rescuers, the second WBF location will also take some much-needed pressure off the uptown site that has outgrown its capacity.

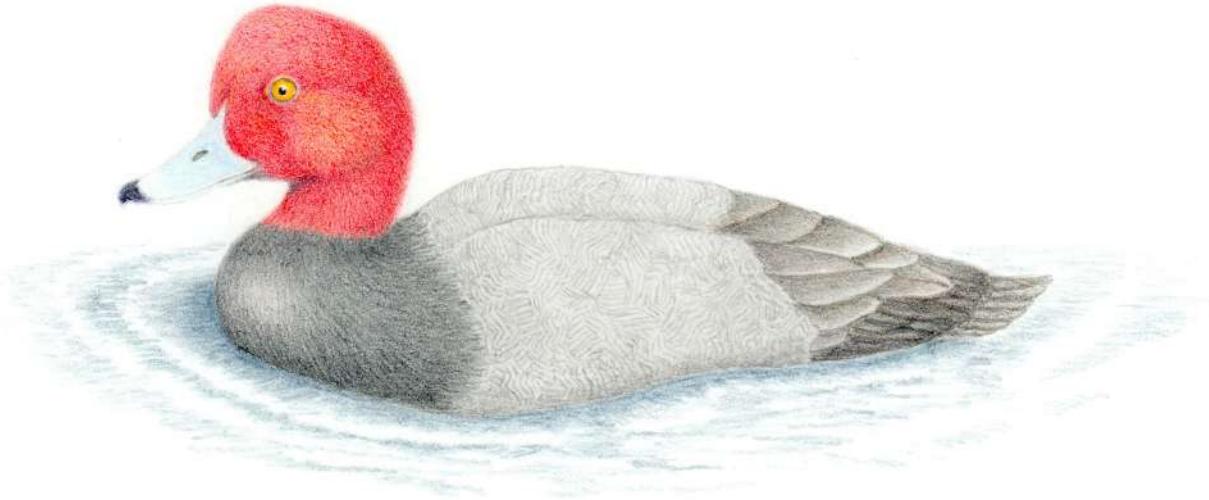
McMahon further noted the breadth of the WBF's mission: beyond its critical contribution to the welfare of its patients, it also serves to open New Yorkers' eyes to the other creatures with which they share this fragile ecosystem, in addition to collaborating with university researchers to study things like lead exposure and the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

Finally, McMahon spoke candidly about the delays that had set back the Brooklyn clinic: construction had been unable to begin as the organization slogged through bureaucratic difficulties with the Brooklyn Department of Buildings. First, there was confusion over whether the WBF's use of the space would require them to obtain a new certificate of occupancy for the building (as it turned out, the law had recently changed; ultimately, no new certificate was needed). Then, there was another hurdle regarding whether costly renovations needed to be made to add a sprinkler system to the basement (where animals will not be kept). While both issues were eventually resolved in the WBF's favor, construction, which had originally been expected to take around six months, had been unable to begin until around a month prior to the reception.

If all goes according to plan from here on out, the WBF hopes to welcome its first patients in Park Slope in the spring of 2026. As is the case at the Upper West Side location, volunteers will play an essential role in helping staff clean, feed, and care for the many animals that pass through its doors. Interested individuals should keep their eyes peeled for a call for volunteers, which will be posted closer to the opening date. For now, Brooklyn birders who don't want to miss any further updates can subscribe to the WBF email list via [their website](#), or follow their social media pages on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#). 🐦



A rendering of the reception area.



Gallery: Marleny Rafferty



Redhead, Bufflehead, Long-tailed Duck
(top to bottom). Color pencil on paper.

Ovenbird in Manhattan. All photos by Michelle Talich.

Some folks are wired to look up, while others are more inclined to look down. I don't mean in a big worldview, positivity versus negativity sort of way, but in a very literal eyes-on-the-sky or eyes-on-the-dirt sort of way. Being the daughter of an avid rock hunter and seashell collector, it's no wonder I fall into the latter category. I grew up across the street from a small suburban park with a large, open lawn that always contained an assortment of riches—loose change, lost earrings, scuffed barrettes, snakes—and so I was conditioned to scan the ground for treasure since I was a kid.

In many ways then, collision monitoring is a dream job. My work is to patrol specific building perimeters, terraces, and green roofs in Manhattan during spring and fall migration and pick up any dead or injured birds I find. Birds can't see the clear barriers we humans like to install between our indoor spaces and the outside world, so glass windows, doors, and balcony railings are invisible hazards to them. They see an illusion of open space, or are drawn to inside lights left on overnight, or else get lured into a reflection of sky, tree branches, or other vegetation.

Some birds that fly into glass are killed on impact. Those that don't die immediately, injured or stunned, are vulnerable to being stepped on, run over, or predated

Reflections of a Collision Monitor

By Michelle Talich

by gulls, rats, or other animals. Still others manage to fly off afterwards and their fate is unknown. Perhaps these “lucky” survivors learn something from the experience and stand a better chance of avoiding a collision in the future, or they may succumb to their injuries elsewhere. According to NYC Bird Alliance, between 90,000 and 230,000 birds die each year in New York due to building and window collisions.

My workday starts during the blue hour, that magical predawn time when the city feels still and



Golden-crowned Kinglet.

calm, as if it's taking a few deep breaths before the day's chaos begins. It can be challenging to get up and get going so early, especially when it's cold or rainy. But it's exhilarating to watch the sun rise while hearing gulls call to each other as they float overhead and House Sparrows chattering themselves awake.

The job feels important and satisfying and gives me a sense of purpose that I haven't felt from other jobs. I get to help birds by collecting data that furthers conservation efforts in urban environments. Sometimes I'm able to help individual birds when I

find them alive and bring them in a brown paper bag to the Wild Bird Fund for treatment and rehabilitation. Whether I find them alive or dead, I get to experience these extraordinary little birds up close. I marvel at their size—they're almost always smaller than I expect—and how lightweight they are, and I examine their field marks from different angles.

I guess it goes without saying that this work is often sad. Many of the collision victims I find have beautiful feather quality and good body condition, something I assess by feeling their keel and the surrounding muscle and fat. They are fit and prepared for their incredible migrations—perfect in every way aside from being dead. Out of necessity I've become desensitized to much of what I see. But some finds weigh heavier than others. Ovenbirds are my favorite warbler, and finding dead ones always bruises my heart. Yet they are one of the most frequent collision victims found in New York. White-throated Sparrows, my spark bird, are another. And it's always unsettling to pick up a bird that is no longer alive but still warm. Sometimes I tell myself that if I just concentrate hard enough and whisper the right combination of spells and prayers, I might be able to will the tiny heart to start beating again, and the bird will flutter back to life in my hand.

But by far the most difficult mornings are the ones where birds fly into glass right above me while I stand there in the role of helpless witness. I remind myself that while I'm unable to prevent it from happening in real time, my being there to see it and record it may help prevent more from happening in the future.

Only recently have I realized that, to some degree, I exist in a near constant state of grief. I'm grieving the loss of each and every bird that dies trying to navigate through our city—the ones I find, the ones my co-workers find, the ones that nobody finds. I suppose it's like experiencing eco-grief or climate grief in that it's always present somewhere in the background. When it pushes its way forward, I tend to bounce between an anger which overwhelms me and causes me to react to mundane things with a ferocity disproportionate to the situation and a dull sadness that has me trudging through the day feeling despondent and sluggish.

There is a quote from Damien Echols that I use as the home screen image on my cell phone when I'm feeling particularly overwhelmed. The first line reads: “Progress is the cure for despair.” Window collisions

are a problem with a solution—we know how to fix this issue. There is a local “Lights Out” law in New York that requires city-owned buildings to turn off all non-essential lights overnight during spring and fall migration, and there are efforts being made to extend this to private commercial buildings. Local Law 15, enacted in 2020, mandates that all new construction and major renovation projects use bird-friendly building materials. For existing buildings, a variety of treatments are sold today that can be applied to windows and other glass surfaces in order to make them visible to birds. These retrofits can prove up to 95 percent effective at preventing collisions, according to the latest research.

When it comes to making New York City a safer place for birds, progress is being made light by light, window by window, building by building.

I’m making progress on a personal level as well. An interest in birds and nature is what led me to birdwatching, which led me to want to help birds beyond just admiring and appreciating them, which led me to seek out volunteer and work opportunities that focus on birds and bird-related issues, which led me to

return to school to study wildlife biology and conservation. That is progress. I’m also working on getting better at balancing bird work and bird enjoyment. It’s OK to “just” admire and appreciate birds, it’s OK to sometimes shirk chores and responsibilities to spend an afternoon birdwatching, it’s OK to embark upon a last minute birdventure to try to catch a glimpse of a rarity.

All these activities led me down the path I am currently on and each one brings me joy. Recognizing that is also progress. When I’m out and about, I’m trying to look up more often because treasures aren’t only found on the ground—sometimes they are perched in a tree or on a rooftop or soaring high up among the clouds. 🐦

If you’re interested in learning more about how to prevent window collisions or would like more information about how to become a volunteer for Project Safe Flight, a collision monitoring initiative that began almost 30 years ago, please visit the NYC Bird Alliance [website](#).



Northern Parula.

Gallery: Toni Simon



Nocturnal Forest.
Ink and digitally
enhanced
klecksograph.

The Heart Weighs In, A Revolt

*Dedicated to Safaa Fathy and
her community in Egypt*



Stela of King Djet, Louvre Museum, 2980 BC.

“The earth is dying. This can be reversed.”
Betsy Damon

I shine in the hour, I rustle the tree,
I count the yesterdays, I sing the bird,
I hasten the dew, I torment time,
I refer to the enemy, I trot out clocks
though I do not rain on fire
I am the equivocal sun
I am the fearsome clod
the tendentious material yes
I am the animal ear, the sodden
Quizzical smirk, I am the pattern
Of the hot stone—eye to the I of eye
I am truculent baggage, a fraught
mist, a fortunate reed, I am
the temperate foreboding,
the lesser known ears

~

I am the witch animal, the breath
of the falcon, the meager of the muse
the alarmed air, the cat scratch
though I release time, the wind that
is Osiris (the task is another for
the east) I am the nose of the song,
written bird apparel, a feast of worms
I am not joking, tenderizing the matter
I am a gray catbird beside the library.
I speak the day-bark
I wrench the leaf veins out,
I tatter the snake bone

~

I am the grass of the wind alley
The tepid stream of bird song, the glint
Of the reasonable doubt, the threat of
the last hour, the smile of the still falcon
the quandary of mourned day lit webs
I am sun auburn-flecked shells
I am childhood and old age, I am a rooster
In a pen of hens, I am the capital call,
The wet rain, the fierce minute,
The catbird’s berry, I am detail and range,

I am laughter without a body, I am the snapdragon's
disappointment, I am the green ends,
your final call, whisking through pages,
I am the assured pain, the captain of quandary,
I am the cascade of decision, I am quicksand,
I am the riptide, the swallows at dusk, I am
The wrong, the right answer, terror of light,
the dust mote, I am the interstices of words, I am
the fifth lap, the eleventh second,
the rain between clouds, I am cobalt,
the hair of wisdom, the essential universe,
I am your friend.

I am reminiscence, a rupture in the wall
I am three stakes
a crocodile with its mouth for open
I am the lightning bolt, I am the match
that lights the lake, I am
watch tower and watch, I am
will power, rendered ear
righteousness in the way of
knowing, I am dead coral on
the sea floor, I am the sea floor
I am the see, the floor—
Seeing takes over consciousness
Violet is the answer to left. I am this
Supreme intuition—looking at a
Shaft of light. I am what other
Answers do you have. I am the
Answer in the dust mote. You call
and I respond.

I sound indigo bunting
Out of the cavernous egg: I fly up and
Alight the red-eyed
Vireo four calls along our back
I am Rabbit Rock the Berkshires
I ascend the underground lungs clouds into
The Night-bark, I cajole my
Spirit to the blue horizon, I
Enter the Day-bark, those drawing from
The ancient of their ancient times
Who show me purple periwinkle past present
Future 3300 years and have reassembled May flowers
Of tiny white blossoms appearing amid the
Rock toppled over by glacier
I am a hawk, a great eagle
I wheel with the orange newt
Stand aghast as the queen lanternfly
hummingbird wood bee—
I render the time its discontents
I pull the news like taffy out of
Its dictatorial airs I forge the
chemicals alchemical. I tell time
to stop, reflect, ask the goddess in the sycamore
how she bees. I have no watch
in this

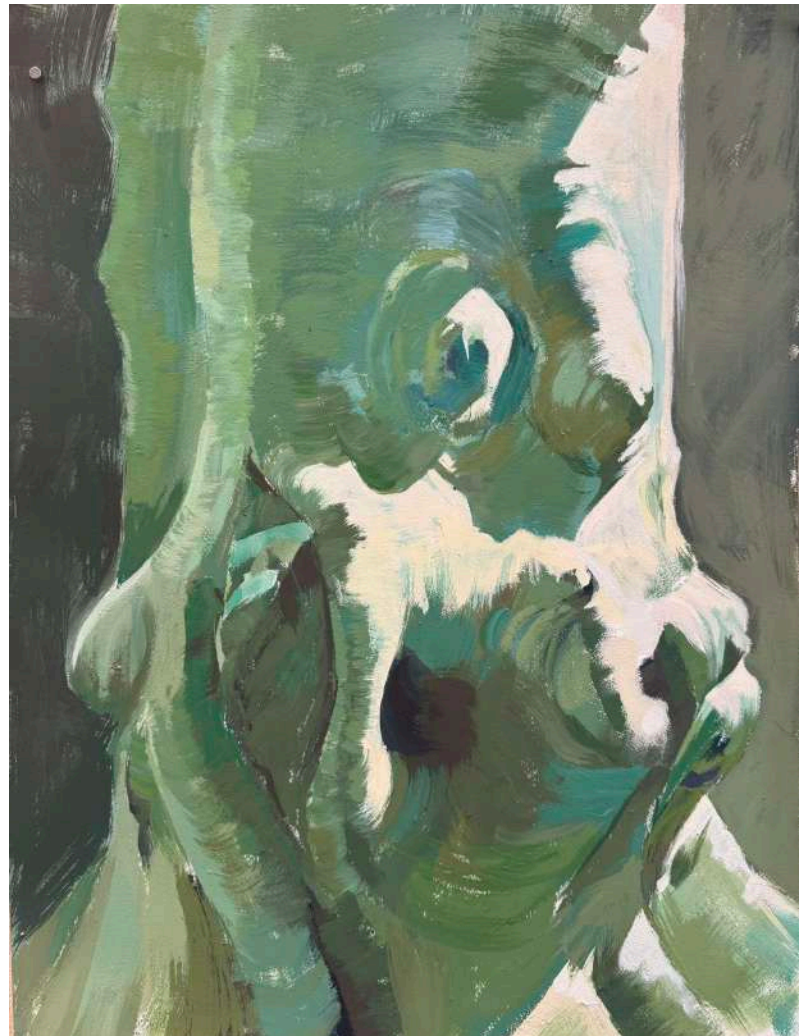
— *Sarah Riggs*

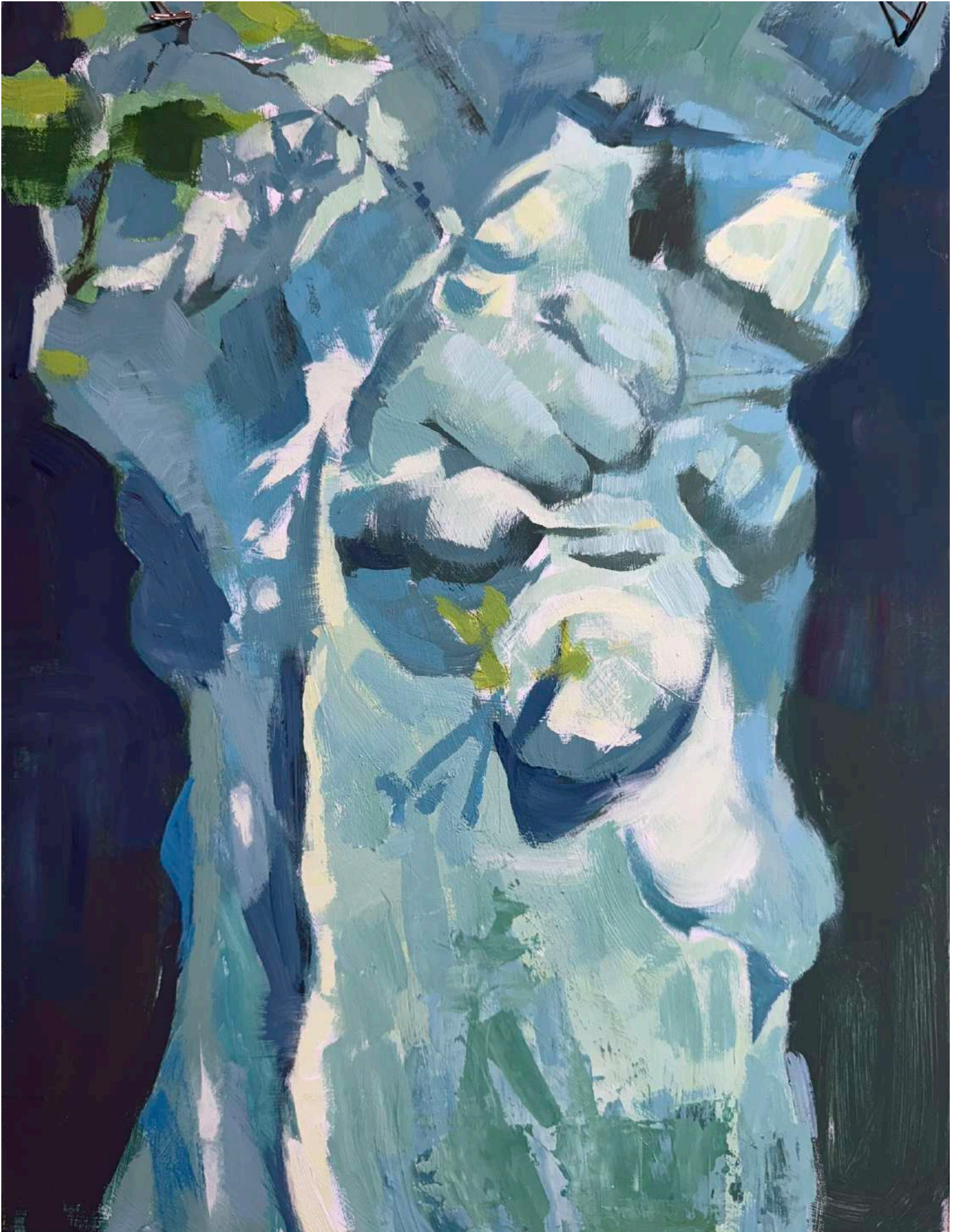
Sarah Riggs is a poet and artist who lives near Prospect Park. Pomme & Granite, one of her eight books of poetry, won a 1913 Press Poetry Prize, and her translation of Etel Adnan's Time won a Griffin and Best Translated Book Award. She regularly watches birds, including on her first visit to Egypt, in Minya along the Nile in February 2025.



London Planes (this page and next).
Flashe paint on paper or board.

Gallery: Birgitta Rubin





Fashion Reporting from the First Warbler Migration Gala Held in Autumn

By Ryan McGrady

Welcome to the 5,834,012th Annual Warbler Migration Gala! Coming to you live, just after dawn, for fashion's most anticipated event of the year! I'll be your host here beside the hottest red maple in town, where all the males perch before proceeding into the event. You're in for the most parulidae-licious parade of sartorial splendor, so get your cameras and binoculars ready!

This year comes with a little twist! To mix things up, the organizers moved this year's event from May to October, catching them on their way south for the first time in the event's history! But don't get your multi-pocket khaki vests in a bunch—all your favorite jubilant jetsetters are here.

Oh, and it's starting now!

First to arrive is a real crowd-pleaser: Black-throated Green Warbler! What a way to start the show! Stunning as always, wearing a dark black bib on a streaky white t-shirt, contrasting with that gorgeous yellow face, with an obsidian eyeline from ear to nose. Exquisite. Just exquisite.

Did they coordinate this? Up next is none other than Black-throated Blue! It's kismet. Classic black throat, face, and flanks with a clean snowy white belly, but of course he's known for that timeless dusky blue suit covering his back and wings, punctuated by a crisp white pocket square reminiscent of Brioni. And just as soon as he appeared, he's gone.

Thrilled to announce this year's sponsor is Stickers You Can Put on Your Windows! They come in dots, lines, and fun pictures. All sorts of styles for

any of your great big stupid windows in your home or office. Stickers You Can Put on Your Windows: "Because We Like Birds and They Can't See Glass Very Well."

My spotters tell me next up is...oh, no, wait. Is that a vireo? No, get him out of here. The vireo event was last week—they think just because they don't migrate as far, they can come to all the parties. Get him out.

Wait, no. I'm so sorry folks, I'm being assured it's not a vireo after all. God, they test me. It's Tennessee Warbler! This stately southern gentleman prefers smart essentials over flashy colors, so look for a misty off-white Oxford shirt and gray pageboy cap, elevated by a crisp yellow-green cape and styled with a simple charcoal eye line.

Oh, oh my. I see why there was some confusion. That Graceland scamp switched his ensemble! I... did not know they did that. Yes, interesting choice, a yellow-green jumpsuit of some sort? Gives the impression of well-tailored swamp water. Perhaps ironically? Or maybe someone started sipping the Jack Daniels before the big flight. Kidding, of course. What is this, the waxwing party? Are they giving out effervescent berries? Kidding!

Our next attendee really knows how to work the red maple. American Redstart is wearing a blast from the 90s: tasteful black-above-white-be-

low tuxedo patched with neon orange synthetics under the armpits and on the wings and tail. But what we really love is the way he moves, hopping towards us, fanning his tail, flipping it back and forth, snapping



it to stun flies and fans alike. You can see why he's a media darling.

Oh, look there! No. Squirrel.

Okay, up next, I'm told is Palm Warbler, but it looks like we have another change. Is that allowed? I spent all year learning the old looks...

Normally Palm has a sort of Ivy League wooly professorial look above: a brown-streaked yellow sweater, brownish-tan jacket, and rust-colored cap. But then there's that crazy electric yellow under the tail. Some say it's a choice; others say it's because of the constant tail bobbing. Perching, hunting, shopping. (Bobbing, bobbing, bobbing.) Does anyone remember the gala a few thousand years ago when he was bobbing (of course) and stumbled into a dance-off with Redstart and some random fully unbrowed gnatcatcher just passing by? Couldn't make it up if I tried. It went viral.

Today Palm Warbler's getting his bob on but just looks...duller. Thoughts and prayers. Maybe it's for a role.

I can see someone arriving. There, in that tree with the sun on the leaves. No, see this tree here? Follow the trunk up until it forks like this. Follow the left branch, then it forks again at the burl. Go right, then there's that other branch that passes through diagonally...right there. Right there. You might need to be where I'm standing. Now he moved.

It's Wilson's Warbler! One of our celebrities who will be changing their name in the coming years to separate these fashion icons from their often troubling human namesakes. Looking a little unkempt today, but still a pleasing lemony yellow suit with a jet-black Caesar cut. Here's a possible new name: Definitely-Not-a-Toupee Warbler. *wink* (We're friends.)

In my ear they're telling me Blackpoll Warbler and Bay-Breasted Warbler have arrived together. They're an odd pair, but they've been friends for ages—the brooding goth chickadee and the masked cowboy up to their old hijinks. Here they come, and... they're dressed the same. And dressed like their mates. Folks, I don't know what to say anymore.

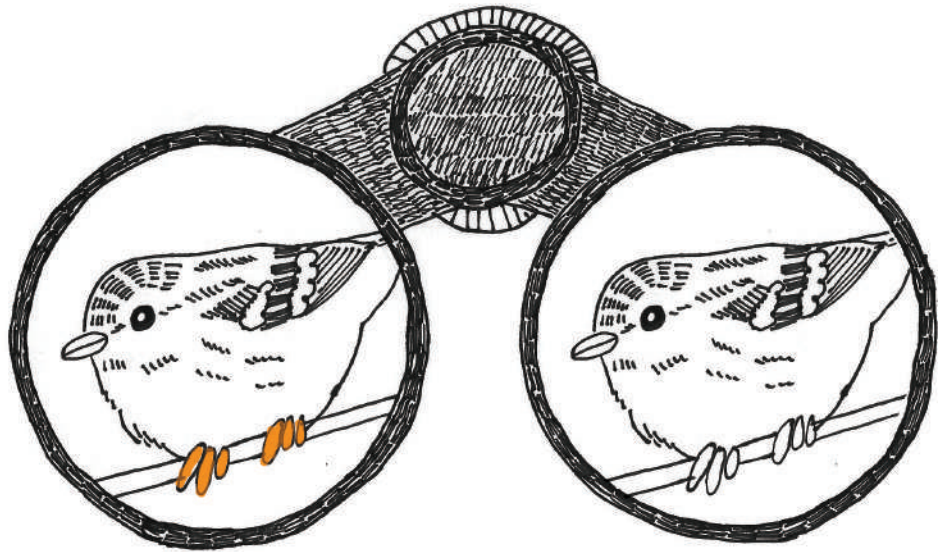
Are they trying to hop on the fashion androgyny train? It's been big since YSL's holiday shorebird ball.

Is it drag? Did they both accidentally grab the yellow-green housecoat hanging up at home next to their elaborate costumes? *clapping* They. are. dressed. like. each. other. and. their. mates. You know what? I'm here for it.

I see now that Blackpoll has accessorized with bright orange pumps, so yes, drag. It's drag. First time for drag at the Warbler Gala, and if I'm being honest, I can't believe it took this long.

Don't stay out too late, Blackpoll, we know you have a longer flight than anyone tonight!

Chestnut-sided Warbler just arrived in full meltdown. He has fashioned his usual tightly cropped Day-Glo cap into a ridiculous mullet extending down his back. There's no sign of the sharp black mask and,



inexplicably, he has chosen to remove nearly all of his namesake color!

Now Common Yellowthroat is here and hiding behind absolutely every leaf on his walk over, coyly peering out with his Colombina mask, but I just don't have the bandwidth. I know we have several fan favorites yet to come, but we're going to go to commercial so the producers can get me the right fashion field guide.

[hot mic]: Do they even make a Field Guide to Birds that Stopped Trying? And why is nobody singing? I keep waiting for a solo, but they just hop by and off they go. We're going to have to fill time with so many sticker ads. 🐦

The Vale of Cashmere

By Chris Miller

When I started birding early in the pandemic, I would spend Sundays sitting on a bench at the Vale of Cashmere, in the northeast corner of Prospect Park, and watch the birds that landed on the stone pillars around its neoclassical fountain. Soon I met other birders and learned that there were more than sparrows and cardinals in this great world of birding. I bought a telephoto lens for my camera, but still, I often would stay at the Vale for my entire visit to the park. It was that good.

The geography of the Vale—bowl-shaped, surrounded by steep walls of earth—makes it a migrant trap. This depression was formed about 17,000 years ago when a buried chunk of the Wisconsin glacier began to melt, collapsing the soil. Olmsted and Vaux were drawn to the terrain, too, and they designed a small pool and gardens there.

“Children sailed miniature boats and played in the underbrush while their parents escaped the summer’s heat in the Rustic Arbor on the hillside above,” according to a Prospect Park Alliance history.

In the 1890s, the firm of McKim, Mead and White, hired to design Grand Army Plaza, were also asked to redesign the so-called Children’s Pool.

“They replaced the pool’s soft edge with a granite balustrade in the Beaux-Arts style and installed a fountain. The wife of Brooklyn Mayor Alfred Chapin nicknamed the area the ‘Vale of Cashmere,’ inspired by the Thomas Moore poem ‘Lalla Rookh, an Oriental Romance.’”

In time, the Vale’s trees grew taller and shrubs claimed the slopes. For many it became a hidden gem, overgrown and a little wild. The slopes offer refuge for thrushes and sparrows; the fountain, when full of rainwater, is a place for birds to bathe. It remains the first place I visit when I go birding in the park. The sounds of the city quickly fade away.

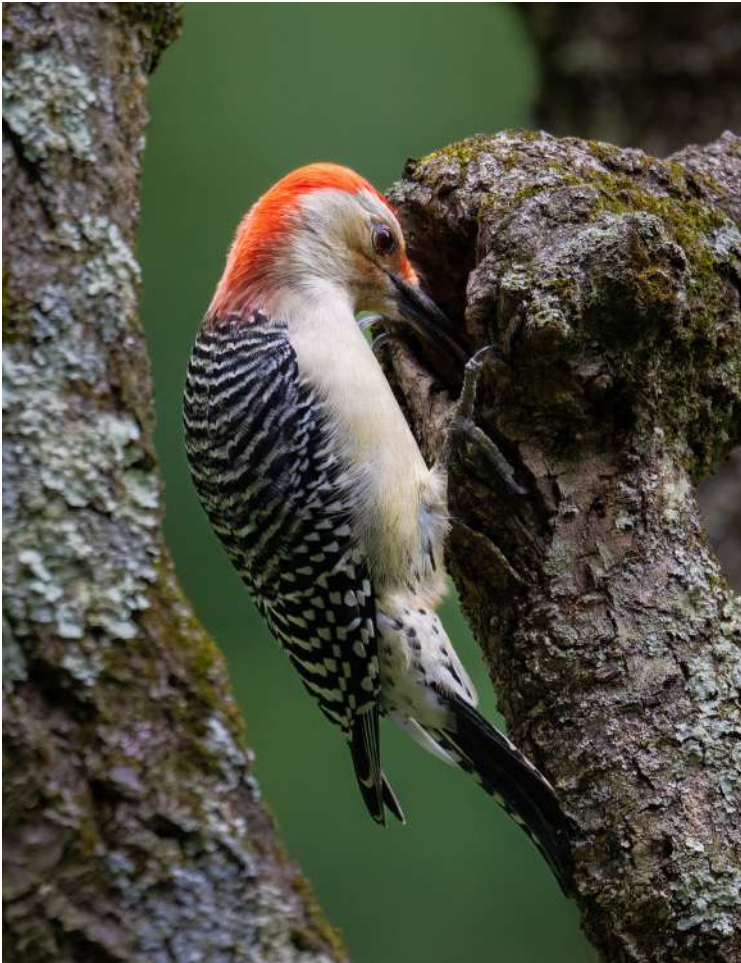
More than 50 years since its last restoration, though, the Vale’s about to get a serious makeover. In 2021, the city gave \$40 million to the Prospect Park Alliance to restore and enhance the Children’s Pool and the former Rose Garden. Birders offered feedback on that design, hoping to keep the Vale as an important migrant stopover. The plan, it seems, will be to bring back the historic details of the Children’s Pool and add new plantings, bird-friendly features, and a stormwater capture system.

Work is expected to begin this season, which means I’ll be forced to change my birding routine. To recognize this special place, I was asked to show some of my favorite photos from the Vale.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird,
September 22, 2023

Each summer we get a few hummingbirds visiting the Vale to sip nectar from the jewelweed, honeysuckle, and cardinal flowers. I always enjoy seeing them.





Red-bellied Woodpecker,
September 22, 2023

*Red-bellied Woodpeckers
nest in the Vale each year
and are year-round residents.*

Green Heron,
April 28, 2024

*This is the only time I've
seen a Green Heron in the
Vale. It showed up to the
fountain and patiently hunted
for roughly two hours before
catching this bullfrog.*





Yellow Warbler,
May 2, 2024

This was a whimsical moment of a Yellow Warbler splashing around in the fountain. I know it's taboo to anthropomorphize birds, but this one looked like he was having a great time.

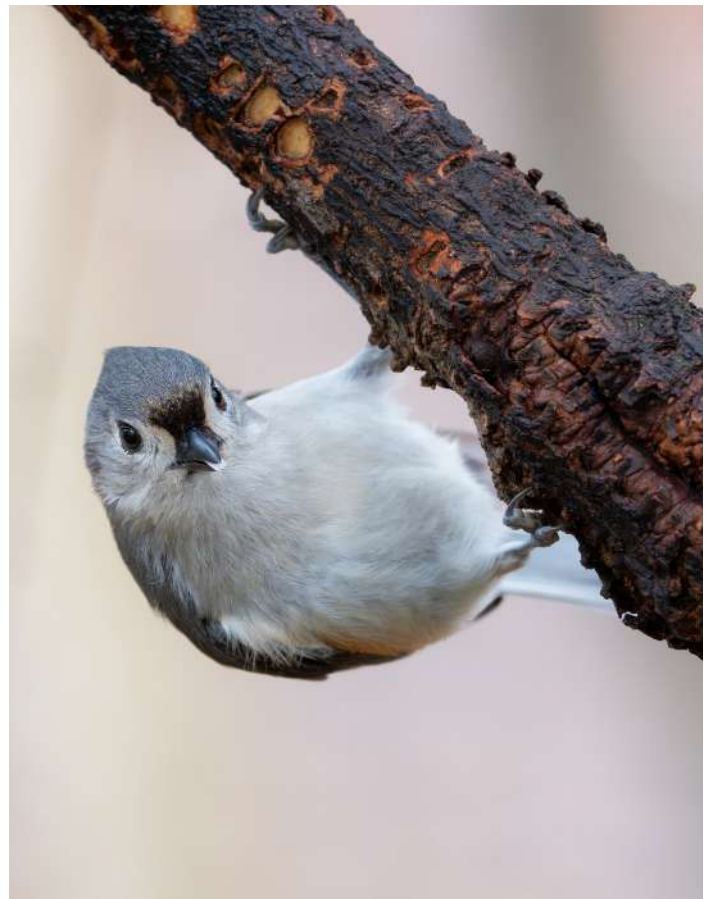


Orchard Oriole,
May 7, 2024

Of the many visitors to the Vale's "bath house," this was one of my favorites. I hadn't seen an Orchard Oriole in this plumage before, an immature male. Lovely.

Tufted Titmouse,
March 20, 2025

This Tufted Titmouse was lapping sap from a fresh well. As soon as the sapsucker responsible for the wells left to another tree, the titmouse—along with other sap-loving birds—would come in and have a taste. This photo was taken on the first day of spring.





White-eyed Vireo,
May 17, 2025

This White-eyed Vireo, the first I had ever seen, had wood shavings in its mouth. Was it thinking of nesting nearby? I was fortunate to get this photo accentuating that striking white iris framed by the yellow spectacle.

Clay-colored Sparrow,
May 25, 2025

This bird popped up out of nowhere for only a moment and then was gone. This was the first recorded sighting of this species in the Vale, according to my limited research on eBird. You are much more likely to see them in the grassy areas of the Nethermead or Sparrow Bowl.



Extreme Birding: A Review of “Listers”

By Marcela Mulholland

You couldn't join a local bird walk this past fall without hearing someone quote from the new documentary, “Listers: A Glimpse into Extreme Birdwatching.” The film, which has garnered nearly three million views on YouTube since its premiere last August, is part van-life vlog, part David Attenborough documentary, and it offers a charming portrayal of birding told through the lenses of Owen and Quentin Reiser, two Gen-Z brothers with severe cases of “early-onset birding” who turn their camcorders on the avian inhabitants of the Lower 48 and the humans that devote their lives to pursuing them. Viewers are treated to an up-close look at miserable nights sleeping in a mosquito-infested minivan outside of Cracker Barrel alongside exquisite footage of Downy Woodpeckers, Pyrrhuloxia, Tufted Puffins and more. But what starts as a humorous portrait of a cannabis-fueled fixation on the birds of North America ends up a more fundamental exploration of the values and practices that are shaping birding in the digital age. What lingers most about “Listers” isn't the ornithological life portrayed, but the depiction of how a pastime once defined by connection with nature has become warped by a competitive culture enabled by technology.

No forum better encapsulates the influence technology has had on birding than eBird, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's online database that allows birders to submit checklists of the species they observe. eBird is used by both informal birders and those with more elaborate ambitions, such as birders pursuing a “Big

Year,” a now time-worn competition made mainstream by the book (and movie) of the same name to record as many species as possible in a calendar year. “Listers” follows the Reiser brothers as they attempt their own Big Year in the continental U.S., driving across the country and diligently tracking each sighting on eBird. As the film progresses, viewers see their eBird tally tick up slowly as they aim to overtake Ruben and Victor Stoll, the record-holders with 751 species observed in 2022. At one point their total ticks down when their submission of a Gray Flycatcher is rejected by an eBird moderator. While the Reisers at first seem surprised at how seriously eBird is taken, there are many birders in the film for whom their entire birding experience revolves around the platform, which offers a “leaderboard” for every hotspot, county, state, and country—not to mention the world. The eBird fixation is so intense that at one point Quentin says, “Birders have an e-boner for eBird,” a highlight of the film for me and a line I have quoted on numerous BBC walks.

eBoners aside, the film shows how this hyper-fixation with online tracking can fundamentally



Owen Reiser (left) and Quentin Reiser (right) in a scene from the film.

alter, and in some instances corrupt, the experience of birdwatching. “Listers” introduces viewers to the concept of stringing, which they define as “making up birds and stuff like that” —essentially, intentional false claims of bird identification. The film details one particularly infamous example of stringing, dubbed “Swallowgate,” in which a North Carolina birder posted a photo of the first-ever sighting in that state of a Violet-green Swallow only for it to be later discovered that the photo was taken in Colorado. The uproar in the birding community forced the birder into exile.

While Swallowgate was an extreme incident, what I found more chilling was seeing all the socially acceptable ways that eBird influences the birders featured in the film. One such birder, Alex Lamoreaux, tracks *every single* bird he sees, including Rock Pigeons on the side of the highway. Lamoreaux boasts of having over 74,000 lists on eBird, and at one point in the film he drives to a cemetery in Texas to see a Hermit Warbler, a species he has already seen hun-

“What is the essence of birdwatching in the internet age?”

dreds of times, for no other reason than that he hasn’t seen it in this specific Texas county and he wants the credit on his eBird list for that geographic area.

It’s not just eBird that’s changing the experience of birding. Before “Bird Alert” Twitter updates, there were Rare Bird Alert hotlines one could call to learn (or report) unusual sightings in a specific region. Viewers see Owen call every such hotline in the country only to find they are all defunct—save for one run by Amish birders in Ohio, whose culture keeps this pre-digital alert system alive. There’s also the Merlin app, referred to as “eBird’s cousin” in the film, which will identify birds based on either their vocalizations or submitted photos. Birders can also use Merlin or any field guide app on their phone as “playback” to summon birds nearby. Quentin demonstrates the analog version of playback when he mimics the call of a Northern Pygmy-Owl using a flute.

Although the flute is a clever counter to the smartphone, it’s not until the last quarter of the film that we see the Reisers begin to take their own stance on the digital. The most interesting trajectory of the film is not that of any particular bird’s flight path but rather Owen and Quentin’s move to abandon their Big Year in favor of a simpler approach. Instead of chasing rare birds, they go see American Flamingos, a species they’d already added to their eBird list, for no other reason than that a Florida Man with a boat invited them and why not. Meanwhile, Ezekiel Dobson, a 19-year-old on his own Big Year adventure, drives 26 hours to see a rare vagrant that looks like a House Sparrow.

Dobson goes on to break the Stolls’ record; the Reisers do not. This final juxtaposition illuminates the question at the core of the film: what is the essence of birdwatching in the internet age? In the words of Sparky, one of the birders featured, “I want to put the watching back in birdwatching.” One wonders where it went.

For me, the draw of birding is that it offers a reprieve from our online lives, a chance to feel unmanufactured awe that no one is profiting from. Yet as “Listers” makes clear, even birding isn’t safe from the digital and attention economy that seeks to colonize every part of our lives. One goes outside to look up at the trees and is interrupted by birdsong playing from an app; you see a new species and can’t help but feel a tug to post about it online. It would take a hermit (warbler?) to be completely immune to such forces, but perhaps what’s most refreshing about “Listers” is the Reisers’ refusal to succumb to an all-or-nothing posture in light of these tensions. They embody a way to relate to both the technological and the sacred with ease, taking what serves from the tech (they do, after all, track their whole year on eBird) and leaving the rest.

Technology enhances their experience; it does not dominate it. In the end, they go back to see the flamingos. The flamingos are lovely. They are beautiful, awe-inducing, and worth seeing, even if it’s a repeat on their list, even at the cost of seeing a rare bird 20 hours away. The whole point, after all, is to watch birds. 🐦

American Sweetgum: A Winter Lifesaver for Birds

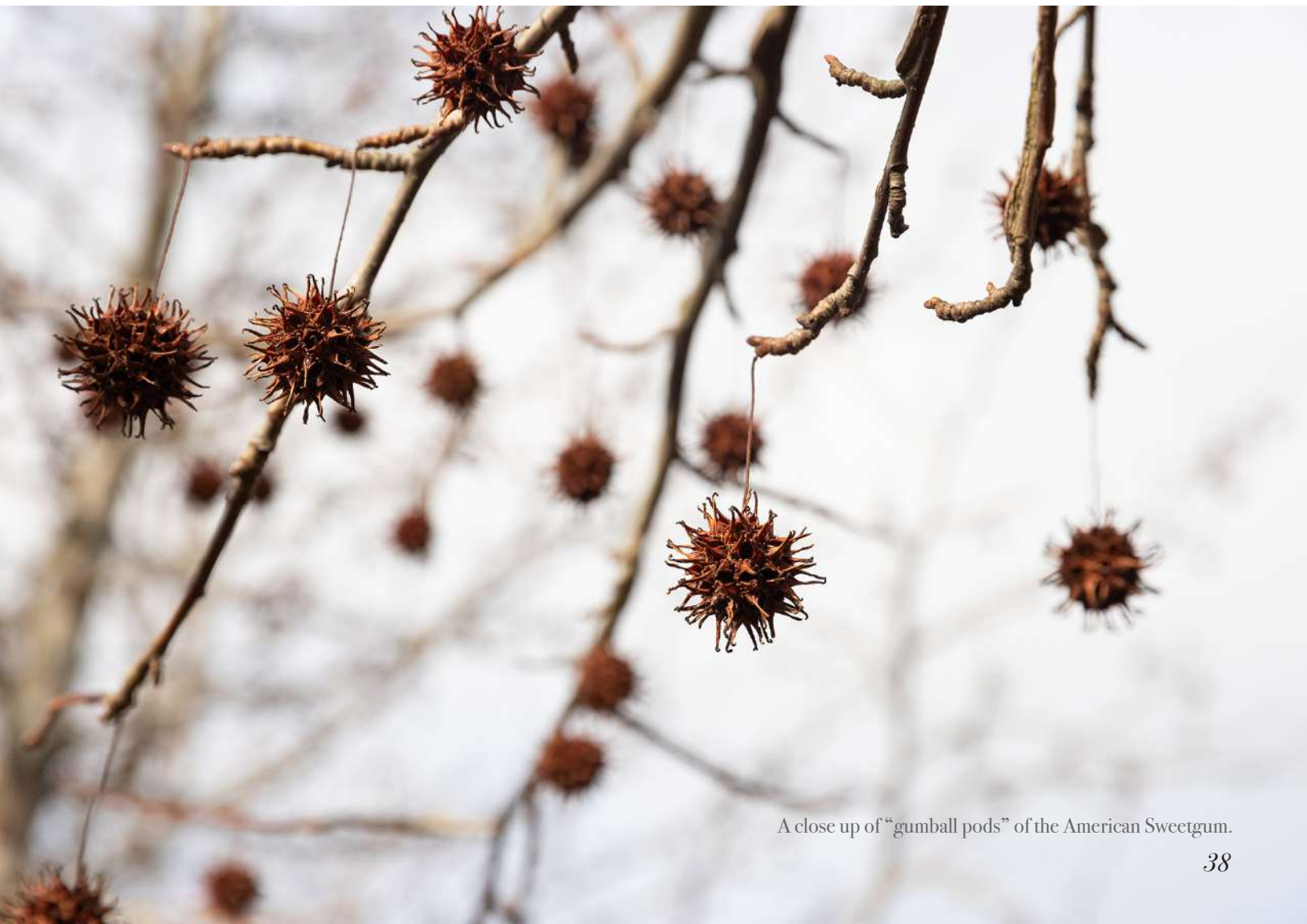
By Peter Dorosh

One of the best trees for birders to visit in the winter is the American Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*). In the warmer months, the Sweetgum is best known by its star-shaped leaves. And in late summer, its spiny fruit—“gumball pods”—appears. But the fruit doesn’t ripen

until late autumn or early winter, at which time the tree becomes an attractive food source for birds.

Bird species with pointy beaks, like finches and blackbirds, exploit the seed, eating from the still-attached balls. They break through the outer seed husk, oftentimes spilling seed to the ground. Ground species like sparrows and Mourning Doves take advantage of that spillage. When the seed gumballs drop to the ground, so will the occasional Hermit Thrush and Carolina Wren.

During finch irruptions, Sweetgums are places to look for Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Redpoll, and even both crossbill species. One excellent place to find a row of these trees is in Green-Wood Cemetery on Southwood Avenue and Vista Avenue, off Central. Both roads are laden with Sweetgums. In both places, I have seen one of my favorite winter finches, the Redpoll. It was an exciting, rare opportunity—but I was helped by knowing what they like to eat. 🐦



A close up of “gumball pods” of the American Sweetgum.

BROOKLYN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT ANNUAL REPORT: 2025

SPECIES	TOTAL SEEN	NS	PP	GW	OH	MP	FB	BB	SC	JB	RP	BP	BT
Snow Goose	1610									1600	7		3
Ross's Goose	1									1			
Brant	9,351	96			1221	1174	810	455	2280	2300	422	283	310
Canada Goose	4,387	219	565	22	135	293	280	857	738	756	56	66	400
Mute Swan	90	1	5		76		1			6		1	
Wood Duck	5		4	1									
Northern Shoveler	221	1	202	1		7			10				
Gadwall	130	62			10	1	10	4	29	14			
American Wigeon	106	30			8	18	4	2	15	19	5	5	
Mallard	582	29	200	7	143	88	25		41	21	26	2	
American Black Duck	1,147	130	3		26	35	36	38	89	534	37	19	200
Northern Pintail	31									31			
Green-winged Teal	130				2	1			123	4			
Canvasback	0									cw			
Ring-necked Duck	2		2										
Greater Scaup	838	20			91	42	110	109	142	291		7	26
Lesser Scaup	132	85			4	5	1		37				
Common Eider	6				1							5	
Surf Scoter	101				20	3	11				21	46	
White-winged Scoter	54										22	32	
Black Scoter	1,169				232	135	7				231	564	
Scoter (sp.)	2,250											2250	
Long-tailed Duck	165				1	15	39				63	47	
Bufflehead	1,058	138		1	68	26	71	167	173	225	115	26	48
Common Goldeneye	153							7	3	142			1
Hooded Merganser	57		1	1	2			9	31	13			
Common Merganser	0		cw										
Red-breasted Merganser	1,543	10			156	40	356	83	34	440	155	265	4
Ruddy Duck	634		12	1	6	81			448	86			
Ring-necked Pheasant	1					1							
Pied-billed Grebe	2					2							
Horned Grebe	56					3	9	15	16	7	2	3	1
Mourning Dove	443	118	94	70	63	8	6	35	14	4	14	17	
Rock Pigeon	2805	1210	122	166	604	59	15	192	198	37	107	95	
Clapper Rail	0					cw							
American Coot	28		23						5				
American Oystercatcher	24					5	17						2
Black-bellied Plover	55					33	14					8	
Killdeer	7							2	3	2			
Ruddy Turnstone	14										14		
Sanderling	521					85					132	304	

SPECIES	TOTAL SEEN	NS	PP	GW	OH	MP	FB	BB	SC	JB	RP	BP	BT
Dunlin	171					55				8	60	2	46
Purple Sandpiper	11				9						2		
American Woodcock	6						2			2		2	
Wilson's Snipe	2								2				
Razorbill	91										68	23	
Bonaparte's Gull	179				11						58	110	
Black-headed Gull	1					1							
Laughing Gull	2										2		
Ring-billed Gull	6211	1235	383	7	1638	552	1069	245	746	99	132	69	36
Herring Gull	4176	542	91	31	149	85	1027	258	281	969	110	377	256
Iceland Gull	2						1					1	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	13	1					2				2	8	
Glaucous Gull	0	cw											
Great Black-backed Gull	455	98	2		75	6	27	11	7	29	27	171	2
Red-throated Loon	296					2	2				196	96	
Common Loon	173				5	4	7	2		3	6	146	
Northern Gannet	4014				202		55				1	3756	
Great Cormorant	57	3				16	13				4	21	
Double-crested Cormorant	148	27			30	1	15	18	4	1	15	35	2
Great Blue Heron	21		4		1	1	6	2	6				1
Bald Eagle	8		1	1	3		2					1	
Northern Harrier	17					2	4		5	4	1	1	
Sharp-shinned Hawk	7		1				1		1	2	1	1	
Cooper's Hawk	35	7	2	5	2	1	6	4	1	2	2	3	
Red-shouldered Hawk	4		1	1	1		1						
Red-tailed Hawk	50	8	12	8	3	3	7	4	3	1		1	
American Barn Owl	3						1			2			
Great Horned Owl	1			1									
Snowy Owl	0											cw	
Short-eared Owl	4											4	
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1										1		
Belted Kingfisher	3				1				2				
Red-bellied Woodpecker	94	12	30	30	5	6	4	2	4		1		
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	35	9	16	10									
Downy Woodpecker	98	11	30	5	8	7	8	5	9	5	6	4	
Hairy Woodpecker	3		3										
Northern Flicker	100	4	2			10	37	10	10	12	7	8	
American Kestrel	29	4	4	6	3	1	4		4		2	1	
Merlin	9		2	2			2	1				2	
Peregrine Falcon	11	2		1		1	2			2	1	2	
Monk Parakeet	31			31									
Blue Jay	328	9	98	139	18	14	9	7	34				
American Crow	358	44	3	3	13	11	13	220	46		2	3	
Fish Crow	353	7	3	2	2			70	269				
Common Raven	13	3		1			4			1	2	2	
Horned Lark	146				2		70			36	30	8	
Black-capped Chickadee	13					1	5		1		3	3	
Tufted Titmouse	59	1	21	14	7	10	4		2				
Tree Swallow	46									7	4	35	

SPECIES	TOTAL SEEN	NS	PP	GW	OH	MP	FB	BB	SC	JB	RP	BP	BT
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	8		6	1		1							
Golden-crowned Kinglet	9		2							7			
Cedar Waxwing	19		1				1			9		8	
Red-breasted Nuthatch	27	2	5	8			10				2		
White-breasted Nuthatch	37	1	20	13	3								
Brown Creeper	11		6	1		2	2						
Carolina Wren	61	2	6	2	1	4	9	3	4	11	14	5	
Winter Wren	1										1		
Marsh Wren	0					cw							
Gray Catbird	14	5							1	5	2	1	
Northern Mockingbird	159	18	9	25	6	4	39	9	16	14	11	8	
European Starling	1583	621	27	180	154	3	159	53	208	81	82	15	
Eastern Bluebird	8						8						
Hermit Thrush	22	6	5	2		2	2			1	4		
American Robin	475	64	109	66	2	12	100	5	12	59	45	1	
House Sparrow	873	211	192	21	83	8	17	107	127	20	82	5	
American Pipit	12				4	1	7						
House Finch	178	28	7	10		3	73	7		4	21	25	
American Goldfinch	119	6	26	4	1	20	5	32	6	2	6	11	
Snow Bunting	68										15	53	
Chipping Sparrow	9			6					2	1			
Field Sparrow	6						1	2		1		2	
Fox Sparrow	49		8	5	1	5	7	1	7	5	6	4	
American Tree Sparrow	33				1	2	9		3	7	2	9	
Dark-eyed Junco	436	38	34	197	41	12	15	31	33	14	10	11	
White-throated Sparrow	927	206	142	27	45	9	158	81	51	111	73	24	
Vesper Sparrow	1											1	
Seaside Sparrow	1									1			
Nelson's Sparrow	1									1			
Saltmarsh Sparrow	1									1			
Savannah Sparrow	45					1	25	2	8	2		7	
Song Sparrow	266	16	11	3	8	12	53	18	29	37	21	58	
Lincoln's Sparrow									cw				
Swamp Sparrow	40	6				4	2	1	6	9	3	9	
Eastern Towhee	8	1								2	2	3	
Yellow-breasted Chat	1									1			
Eastern Meadowlark	4						4						
Baltimore Oriole	1		1										
Red-winged Blackbird	315		26	130		2	1	12	37	60	21	26	
Brown-headed Cowbird	267										255	12	
Common Grackle	515		114	401									
Boat-tailed Grackle	800								40	760			
Orange-crowned Warbler	15		1			4		2	1	4	2	1	
Nashville Warbler	0								cw				
Palm Warbler	2				1					1			
Pine Warbler	1								1				
Yellow-rumped Warbler	764					18	74	189		154	196	133	
Northern Cardinal	288	14	62	31	9	21	47	18	14	30	29	13	
Indigo Bunting	1											1	

SPECIES	TOTAL SEEN	NS	PP	GW	OH	MP	FB	BB	SC	JB	RP	BP	BT
Species Count	130	50	55	48	57	68	75	47	60	70	69	75	16
Numbers Seen	54,028	5,421	2,762	1,701	5,417	3,100	5,060	3,407	6,472	9,133	3,080	7,137	1,338



The compilation at the Prospect Park Boathouse. Photo by Angie Co.