

The Broadwing



Publication of the Montclair Bird Club
October 2023

Montclair, NJ
Volume LXX, Number 2

In This Issue

Anti-bird Spike Nests	2
October Meeting by Conor Mark Jameson	3
MBC Bird of the Year	4
Science News.....	5
Scheduled Field Trips.....	7
Field Trip Reports	12
Migrant Trap VIII	15
New Club Members	16
South of France with Rick Wright	17
Virtual Bird Walks	48
Meeting History	49
Birds in This Issue	51

Message from the Editor October 2023

Dear Members and Friends,

The message in this issue is a request. The club is searching for an experienced webmaster to manage our site.

Responsibilities would include updating content and adding new design elements. The site uses Wix software. If you have an interest and some talent, please contact me at MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com.

I hope everyone is enjoying the new Your Weekly Bird. If you would like to participate, please submit two pictures and two paragraphs, and we'll do the rest.

Participation is also welcome at our Virtual Bird Walks.

Sandy

Next club meeting: Wednesday, October 11, 2023
Virtual Bird Walk: Friday, October 27, 2023

Anti-bird Spike Nests

A magpie nest incorporating more than 1500 bird-deterrent spikes in Antwerp, Belgium.

by Auke-Florian Hiemstra

Some Eurasian magpies may use the spikes as they were originally intended—to ward off other birds.

The full story can be found in *Science News*, *Smithsonian*, and *Nature*.



Some birds, like crows and magpies, are using anti-bird spikes to build their nests. These birds are learning to rip strips of the spikes off of buildings and use them as nesting material. The spikes are long strips of needle-like rods that are used to repel birds from roosting on rooftops, doorframes, and other human-made structures.

Researchers have found nests in trees in Rotterdam, Netherlands, and Antwerp, Belgium, that were constructed almost entirely from the spikes. One nest in Antwerp contained roughly 50 meters worth of anti-bird strips and 1,500 visible spikes.

The Eurasian Magpie nest that started the new study was found in a residential area in Glasgow, Scotland. The nest was covered with bird-deterrent material.

Google Bard

Generative AI is experimental. Info quality may vary.

7:30 pm on ZOOM

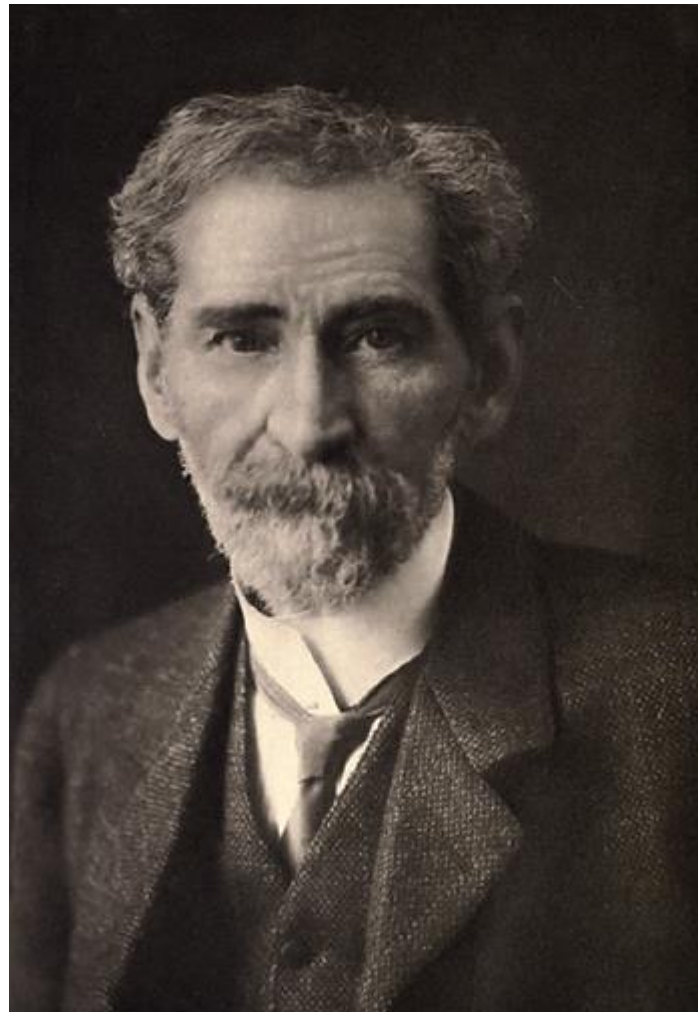
Wednesday, October 11, 2023

Finding W. H. Hudson

The Writer Who Came to Britain to Save the Birds

***by* Conor Mark Jameson**

Read an interview with Conor Mark Jameson [here](#).



Montclair Bird Club
2023 Bird of the Year
Belted Kingfisher



Photo by Ric Cohn
Garret Mountain Reservation

It is time to give some
thought to what bird should
be recognized as the Bird of
the Year for 2024.

This songbird's genes may show how climate change has sped up evolution.

By Kate Selig, The Washington Post



Even bird enthusiasts will admit the southwestern willow flycatcher isn't very flashy. But in studying the DNA of this brownish-olive songbird, scientists say they have found something remarkable: evidence that the endangered bird is adapting at the genetic level to climate change.

These genetic changes are not visible to the human

eye—but the birds are now probably better equipped to weather increasingly wet and humid days in southern California, the researchers found.

The findings add to a body of research suggesting that climate change is forcing evolution in some animals at a rapid pace. Scientists say this work—accelerated by advances in genomic sequencing technology—helps understand how wildlife can cope and respond to the pressures of rising global temperatures.

In the case of the southwestern willow flycatcher, the researchers found that the birds today are more likely to possess beneficial genes associated with handling heat stress than a century ago.

“When people hear ‘evolution,’ they think it will take thousands or millions of years, but this study shows that it can happen incredibly quickly with climate change,” said Allison Shultz, an ornithologist at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County who helped provide historic samples for the study, which was published in *Nature Climate Change* in June.

Many studies of organisms have documented changes that can be traced to a warming planet—such as certain plants growing smaller leaves during particularly hot summers. But these organisms don't necessarily pass these changes on to their offspring, as the researchers documented with the flycatcher, explained Sheela Turbek, a postdoctoral fellow at Colorado State University, who led the study.

The full story: [Songbird](#)

Some African birds follow nomadic ants to their next meal.

By Yao-Hua Law

Specialized interactions between birds and driver ants in Africa could help explain why the birds are especially sensitive to forest disturbances.

To better understand Equatorial Guinea's tropical birds, the ornithologists Luke L. Powell and Patricia Rodrigues scan the ground rather than the trees. They are searching for nests of driver ants (*Dorylus* spp.). These voracious predators will march out of their underground nests and fan out into a meters-wide swarm, flushing insects and worms from the undergrowth. From the trees, birds swoop down to catch the fleeing insects. And where the ant swarms go, the birds follow.

Swarms make humming and “tick tick tick” sounds, says Powell, of the University of Porto in Portugal. It is the sound of the ants—and of animals scurrying in panic. “Then you hear the sounds of birds chirping at the edge [of the swarm], communicating.”

Ant-following birds are well studied in the neotropics. In Africa, however, “people have seen birds follow ants, but nobody has really looked” to see whether the animals have a specialized relationship, says Rodrigues, from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

The first step to figuring that out is finding driver ant nests. Since 2020, Rodrigues has spent weeks at a time scrutinizing the ground for ants in a forest near Ciudad de la Paz. When she finds them, she knows to keep her distance. “They’re super-duper aggressive and they have giant mandibles that can pierce your skin,” Rodrigues says. Despite her caution, ant bites “inevitably happen”—sometimes the ants fall out of trees onto her and her colleagues.

The full story: *Science News*, [African ants](#).



A chestnut-backed antbird Following an army ant swarm
in Panama

Field Trips

Montclair Hawk Lookout Raptor ID Workshop

October 1, 2023, 11 am to 2 pm.

Rain Date: October 8, 2023, 11 am to 2 pm

In our very own backyard, the [Montclair Hawk Lookout](#) is our country's 2nd oldest continuous hawk watch and New Jersey Audubon's smallest sanctuary.

It's a great location to learn the basic techniques of raptor flight identification. We'll have an experienced hawk watcher or two on the platform to help you understand what you are seeing and looking for. All levels and ages are welcome. Bring sunscreen, a hat, and some water. Word of warning: the walk uphill to the top of the hawk lookout platform is 103 steps and there is no bathroom at this location.

Contact us at mbcoutings@gmail.com for further information.

Directions & Parking

For GPS purposes, please use 34 Edgecliff Road, Upper Montclair, New Jersey 07043. This is the address of the Hawk Lookout's street level next door neighbor. The trail head is next to this house. Please note that parking is only permitted on one side of Edgecliff Road (the same side as the house at 34 Edgecliff Road). There is also additional parking further up the road on the opposite side by the south entrance to Mills Reservation.



Troy Meadows Natural Area

Saturday, October 21, 2023

8:30 to 11:30 am (rain or shine)

Troy Meadows in Parsippany and East Hanover is an excellent place to encounter a wide variety of songbirds, waterfowl, wading birds, raptors, and, if we're lucky, rarities, especially some hard-to-find sparrows. This very special area is one of the best freshwater marshes in Northern New Jersey.

Drive to the end of Troy Meadows Road; the turnoff is at 40.84913908249395, -74.38472085305187. We will meet in the small parking area on your left close to the gas pipeline crossing. The area can be very wet, and waterproof boots are highly recommended. There are no bathrooms here.



Fall Birding at Sandy Hook

Saturday, October 28, 2023

8:30 am to 12:30 pm

rain date October 29

The northernmost point on the Jersey shore, Sandy Hook has long been known as one of New Jersey's premiere birding sites. In fall, Sandy Hook's considerable patches of coastal forest can attract great numbers of migrants crossing New York Bay. We will explore this and the other habitats at Sandy Hook in search of a good variety of sparrows, late warblers, thrushes, shorebirds, raptors and maybe something unexpected.

We will meet at Lot B, on the right side of the road just a few hundred yards after the entrance gate. Park near the building in the center of the lot, which has a public restroom.

Sandy Hook is largely flat and its trails are not challenging, but walking in general can be quite fatiguing since it is mostly done on sand. We recommend comfortable hiking boots that can keep sand out. Along with binoculars, please bring a scope if you own one—there are many spots where it will come in handy. Extra layers are recommended if it is windy.

Bee Meadow Park

111 Reynolds Road, Whippany, NJ 07981

Thursday, November 2, 8:00 am. Rain date: Friday, November 3

Meet in the parking lot

A favorite childhood birding haunt of Pete Dunne, 89-acre Bee Meadow is a multiple-use park with playing fields, swimming pools, and great birding opportunities year round. The two ponds attest to the area's historical use in brick production, as does the often slippery clay soil. We hope to see a variety of ducks, sparrows, and other late migrants in habitats including wet woodland, a powerline cut, woodland edge, and native plantings. The trails here are flat, but can be wet and slick; off-trail walking is allowed. There are no bathrooms here at this season. Meet in the parking lot at 111 Reynolds Road, Whippany; [driving directions are here](#).



Mill Creek Marsh Photography Trip

Saturday, November 11, 2023

with Sandy Sorkin and Ric Cohn

Rain date: Sunday, November 12

Join us for a Montclair Bird Club photography field trip to Mill Creek Marsh. We'll meet at the entrance gate by Bob's Discount Furniture at 8:00 am with cameras, tripods, scopes, and smartphones. We'll take our time on the trail, keeping the sun over our shoulders, and concentrate on photographing birds, landscapes, groundhogs, and any other slice of nature we encounter—sharing tips, helping each other with equipment, or reviewing shots. If you are new to photography or just like to watch photographers, you are welcome to come along. Contact Sandy Sorkin at 973 698-7900 for further information.

Search in your GPS for Mill Creek Marsh Trail, Secaucus, NJ 07094, or for Bob's Discount Furniture and Mattress Store, 3 Mill Creek Dr., Secaucus, NJ 07094. The entrance to the marsh is right next to Bob's Furniture.

1. Take NJ Route 3 East.
2. Follow NJ-3 E to State Rd 3 E Local in Secaucus. Take the exit from NJ-3 E toward N Bergen/Kennedy Blvd/I-95. **This exit comes up quickly, immediately after the second overpass.**
3. Take Harmon Meadow Blvd.
4. Harmon Meadow Blvd. brings you to a T-intersection in front of Sam's Club; turn left and stay to the right.
5. Turn right at the next light to park at Bob's Discount Furniture.



Field Trip Reports

DeKorte Park

Friday, August 25, 2023, 5 pm

It was fun to be at DeKorte late in the day. The light was beautiful, and the faint evening breeze felt good, but birds were not plentiful. The water level was high in the West Pool and on the Sawmill Creek mudflats, keeping sandpipers out of sight. The most numerous birds were great egrets, which entertained us by arguing over sitting rights on the deck of the Environmental Center. There were many mallards in eclipse plumage, with one lone and sorry northern pintail that had an injured wing. Calls to those in the know informed us that the naturalists knew about this bird and were keeping an eye on it.

Trip highlights included molting Forster terns feeding fish to their ridiculously large begging juveniles, two stubborn mallards that insisted on sitting in the road, flyover barn swallows, many goldfinches, and a beautiful yellow warbler that hung around to give all of us a chance to see it.



Clarks Pond, Bloomfield, NJ
September 15, 2023
A birder's meetup

It's not always that the weather stars align for good birding, but when they do, it's just glorious. That's what happened for us at Clarks Pond. A short walk from the parking lot we found a lively mixed flock that included an eastern wood-pewee, black-throated green warblers, a least flycatcher, red-eyed vireos, northern parulas, and a chestnut-sided warbler. In the same area, we got good looks at a gathering of northern flickers and a single red-tailed hawk perched in a tree.

The walk back through the woodland was quiet, but at the bridge over the Third River, we found a spotted sandpiper bobbing its tail frenetically up and down. The pond, which is usually packed cheek to jowl with Canada geese, was surprisingly empty of all but one goose. We continued our walk out to the fields behind the Bloomfield Middle School and were thrilled to encounter an estimated 50 migrating broad-winged hawks kettling and then flying off to the west. Wow! What a sight! We topped off our list with a soaring adult bald eagle as we gathered in the parking lot to say goodbye.

- Beni Fishbein

Canada goose	Mallard
Rock pigeon	Mourning dove
Chimney swift	Spotted sandpiper
Great blue heron	Black vulture
Turkey vulture	Bald eagle
Broad-winged hawk	Red-tailed hawk
Red-bellied woodpecker	Downy woodpecker
Hairy woodpecker	Northern flicker
American kestrel	Eastern wood-pewee
Least flycatcher	Empidonax sp.
Red-eyed vireo	Northern cardinal
Blue jay	American crow
Common raven	White-breasted nuthatch
European starling	Gray catbird
American robin	House finch
Common grackle	Black-and-white warbler
Common yellowthroat	American redstart
Northern parula	Chestnut-sided warbler
Black-throated blue warbler	Black-throated green warbler
Magnolia warbler	

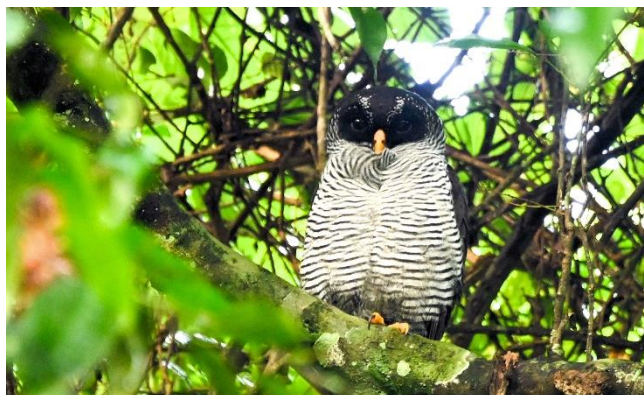


Migrant Trap
by Æneas Faber
VIII

I left my daypack and scope in Tuck's car when he dropped me off in front of the big house with olive siding on Nuttall Street, where I brushed the caked-on gunk from my jeans and stamped my boots before ringing the bell. Phoebe was waiting for me, and though she looked a bit pale, a little drawn, seemed to have weathered the strain of the big day better than I had. She showed me down the long hall and asked me to take a seat in the dark library while she brought us a snack from the kitchen. I settled gratefully into one of the tall morocco leather chairs, careful not to shake any more mud than necessary from my boots onto the deep wool carpets, and ran my eyes along the well-stocked shelves.

I had known this room for years, and some of my earliest memories were of accompanying my father on his visits to old Mr. Miller, a friend of the family's and one of Faber & Co.'s most important clients; while the men examined whatever new treasure my father had brought along, Miss Miller—Phoebe—would sit in a corner of the room with me and feed me cookies and point out the birds at the feeders just outside the windows. While my father and Mr. Miller leafed reverently through the massive musty volumes of long-dead ornithologists, Phoebe and I watched the living, flitting counterparts to their hand-colored plates: frosty chattering redpolls; evening grosbeaks the color of winter sun and ice; and once a small, absurdly tame, mock-serious owl, the ferocity of his yellow eyes made ridiculous by the black ear-muffs he wore, like me, against the midwestern cold. Phoebe, who must have been a little younger than I am now, seemed to me immeasurably old and immeasurably wise, and in some confused way I believed that she incorporated the knowledge contained in the books in her father's library, most of them purchased from my father's store, and that the books spoke to me through her.

Just as she had all those years before, Phoebe came humming into the library with a plate of sugar cookies, this time, however, with a tall dark bottle beside them on the silver tray. "A hair of the Duck!," she announced, and poured us both a flute of slightly flat champagne left over from last night's—or was it that morning's?—celebration at The Cave. "I'm so glad that you were able to find some time this afternoon, and hope that I haven't pulled you away from anything important." Phoebe listened intently to my account of the day's birding with Tuck, and made a note of the red-necked phalaropes at the settling ponds; she then settled back with a cookie, looked lingeringly over the shelves in what was now in her library, and sighed.



To be continued

New Montclair Bird Club Members 2023

January

Monica Cardoza	Ridgewood, NJ
Susan & Michael Monaghan	Montclair, NJ
Anil & Seema Nerurkar	Wayne, NJ

February

Karen Nikeson	Edgewater, NJ
---------------	---------------

March

Grace Friend	Montclair, NJ
Camille Gutmore	Nutley, NJ
Christie Morganstein	Randolph, NJ

April

Hillary Leonard	Montclair, NJ
Kathrine McCaffery	Maplewood, NJ
Kathy & Bob Wilson	Newton, NJ

May

Michael Yellin	Montclair, NJ
Amanda & A. J. Tobia	Rockaway, NJ

June

Vicki Seabrook	New York, NY
----------------	--------------

July

Michael Davenport	Succasunna, NJ
Eileen Diaz	Upper Montclair, NJ
Victor Go	Bloomfield, NJ
Liz Hillyer	
Marc Holzapfel	
John Smallwood	Randolph, NJ

August

Eric Knies	Clifton, NJ
Diane Louie	Madison, NJ
Roland Straton	Montclair, NJ
Susan Sheldon	Seattle, WA
Peter Rosario	

This list includes new members, returning members, and additions from our Friends roster.

The south of France is appealing at any season, but for the birder, May in Provence is virtually unbeatable. You can join Rick and Alison on another journey into one of Europe's richest cultural and landscapes next spring: ventbird.com/our-team/RickWright/62

FRANCE: Birds and Art in Provence

May 22–30, 2023 with Rick Wright and Alison Beringer

What, people ask me, is my favorite place to bird? The answer's easy: it's the place I happen to be birding when they ask. But when I'm stuck inside, by work or weather or weariness, the Mediterranean coast of France is one of the places that comes to the longing mind first. It isn't just that the birding is great—though it is, with pratincoles and flamingos and nightingales and hoopoes and rollers—but all that great birding takes place against a cultural and historical backdrop virtually without equal in Europe or anywhere in the world.



Birding the imposing ruins of Les Baux. (The catapult is not original.) Photo Rick Wright

“Birds and art” is our shorthand for it, but the experience goes much deeper, encompassing natural phenomena from wildflowers to squirrels and human phenomena including ancient townscapes, medieval churches, rice paddies and melon fields, early Christian cemeteries, a new Frank Gehry tower, white horses and black bulls, Renaissance city halls, and food. Food: lots of food, accompanied by an equal abundance of some of the best wines in the world. It all comes together in what I think of as a “whole landscape” birding experience, at its best a seamless fusion of the natural and the cultural wonders of a complex countryside and cityscape.



A young Pied Avocet family. Photo Michael Gordon

Think, for example, of our visit to the hospital of St-Paul de Mausole, where a peek into the iris gardens below van Gogh's window led us to our best sighting of a Eurasian Jay when one flew past to land at close range behind the handsome apse of the Romanesque church next door.



The view out van Gogh's window at St-Paul de Mausole. Photo Rick Wright

Or, more evocative still, our dinner at La Paillotte in Arles, where we sat outside on the sidewalk on an exquisite spring evening while courting parties of Common Swifts flashed noisily down the street to nesting sites in the ruins of the medieval Dominican church and a steady parade of Rooks moved between their railroad station colony and the open fields on the edge of town. In the medieval town of Les Baux, at the Roman aqueduct of the Pont du Gard, along the salt pannes of Piémanson, beside the first-century city of Glanum, on the sheep pastures of La Crau, and in the early Christian cemetery of the Alyscamps, it was delightfully impossible to predict whether our next discovery would be feathered or not.



A stroll in the Alyscamps. Photo Rick Wright

I hope that each of you came away with the same appreciation for the richness of this ancient and still vibrant landscape, and that your memories are all the deeper for the variety of experiences we had along the way—but most of all, that we get to travel together again soon to another destination full of surprising history both natural and human.

- *Rick Wright and Alison Beringer*



Greater Flamingos in the Camargue. Photo Michael Gordon

ITINERARY

MAY 22: departures for France, with arrivals the next morning.

MAY 23: 7:00 pm, first get-acquainted meeting, followed by dinner in our Arles hotel 7:30–9:30 pm. 70s F, mostly clear, calm.

MAY 24: breakfast beginning 6:30 am in hotel. Departure for Pont du Gard 8:00 am. Warm, clear, breezy. Arrive at Pont du Gard, rive gauche, 8:50 am. Birding until 12:05; lunch at Les Terrasses to 1:30 pm. Arrive Arles 3:30 pm. Break in hotel, then walk to Alyscamps 4:15 pm. Bright, light high clouds, upper 70s F. Alyscamps to 5:25 pm; clouds gathering. Checklist at hotel 6:50–7:15; dinner at L’Affenage 7:30–9:20 pm. After a light shower, clearing and cooler.



The Pont du Gard. Photo Rick Wright

May 25: breakfast beginning 6:30 am in hotel. Departure for eastern Camargue 7:30 am. Cloudy, followed by scattered light sprinkles at Piémanson, 8:20–10:25 am, and followed by steady light rain at Palissade, 10:30–12:05. Lunch at La Camargue, Salin de Giraud; clearing, bright, calm, 60s F. At hotel 3:25 pm. Break until 7:00: checklist, then dinner at Waux Hall 7:30–9:20 pm. Clear, light rain, clear, calm, 60s F.

May 26: breakfast beginning 6:30 am in hotel. Departure for Les Baux 8:00 am. 70s F, sunny, light breeze. Les Baux 8:50 am – 12:00 pm; lunch at Trois Mages 12:00–1:40 pm. 80s F, sunny, light breeze. St-Paul and les Antiques 2:05–3:45 pm; sunny, light breeze, mid-80s F. At hotel 4:30 pm. Checklist 6:20 pm, dinner at La Paillotte 7:00–9:25 pm.



Les Baux. Photo Rick Wright

May 27: breakfast beginning 7:00 am in hotel. Departure for Petite Camargue 7:30 am. 70s F, sunny, light breeze; quickly rising into the low 80s. Pont de Tourradons 8:25–10:30 am. Gallician bakery followed by Centre découverte Scamandre 11:10–12:05. Lunch at Flamant rose, Albaron, 12:30–2:45 pm. At hotel 3:25 pm. Free time in Arles. Checklist and dinner in hotel 7:00–8:10 pm.

May 28: early group left hotel 5:30 am. Peau de Meau 6:00–10:25 am; 60s F, bright, light breeze. Hotel at 10:50. Re-assembled for lunch at Malarte 12:00–12:55 pm. St-Trophime and cloister 1:00–2:10 pm. Low 80s F, bright, light breeze. Checklist 6:45 pm in hotel, dinner at Patio Alysamps 7:00–9:20 pm. Clear, calm, 60s F.



A Black Kite on La Crau. Photo Michael Gordon

May 29: breakfast at hotel beginning 6:30 am. Departure for western Camargue 8:00 am. Bright, 60s F, calm. Cacharel 8:35–9:20. 70s F, partly cloudy. Pont de Gau 9:30–11:20. Low 70s F, partly cloudy, calm. At hotel 12:00. Lunch Escaladou 12:15–2:00. Clouding over, very faint sprinkle at one point. Optional visit to Musée de l'Arles Antique. At hotel 4:20 pm. Checklist in hotel 6:30 pm. Heavy rain, then clearing and humid. Dinner at Galoubet 7:00–8:45 pm. Clear, 60s F, calm.

May 30: tour ends with breakfast at hotel beginning 6:30 am. Clear, 70s F, calm.

For precise localities and numbers, see ebird.org/tripreport/130963.

WATERFOWL—ANATIDAE

Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*: seen nearly every day, including birds on distant nests and birds with cygnets; while this enormous waterfowl is not “mute,” the rhythmic roaring of its wings in flight is far more often heard than its quiet grunts and whistles.

Common Shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna*: these handsome waterfowl, with their boldly patterned plumage and scarlet bills, were common at virtually all of the wetland sites we visited. They place their nests in hollow trees, large nestboxes, or rabbit holes; their fossorial habits probably lurk behind the origin of the name *Alopochen* (“fox goose”) for their close relative the Egyptian Goose.



A male Common Shelduck. Photo Michael Gordon

Gadwall, *Mareca strepera*: found across the entire temperate latitudes of the northern hemisphere, this species was uncommon just fifty years ago, but has become one of the most familiar puddle ducks in Europe and North America. We found small numbers in the Camargue wetlands, where this often inconspicuous species nests. The English name is inscrutable, but the scientific species epithet *strepera*, “noisy,” refers to the male’s almost constant eructating grunt during the mating season.

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*: one of the most familiar waterfowl, and the forebear of almost all domestic ducks. We saw small numbers throughout, on brackish, salt, and freshwater wetlands. The males at Cacharel May 29 were looking quite ragged already, probably just beginning their molt out of the bright breeding plumage into their summertime “eclipse.” While this species is notorious for its willingness to breed with virtually any other species of duck or goose, true hybrids—the offspring of pairings between a Mallard and another species of waterfowl—are actually scarce; most odd-looking mallard-like ducks are in fact mongrels produced by the mating of different domestic breeds, as if a Chihuahua were crossed with a Great Dane. The best way to come to an educated guess about such birds’ parentage is often to consult the illustrated websites of poultry dealers.

Common Teal, *Anas crecca*: conservative taxonomies still list this bird as conspecific with the American Green-winged Teal, but most authorities now “split” the two, naming the American bird *Anas carolinensis*. Each occurs as a scarce visitor in the range of the other, especially in winter. Two at the Pont du Gard were a surprise at this late date.

Red-crested Pochard, *Netta rufina*: a total of barely half a dozen at the Pont des Tourradons and at Scamandre was surprisingly low; it is not unusual in some years to see that many in an hour at favored sites in the Camargue.

PHEASANTS AND GROUSE—PHASIANIDAE

Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*: one of the most widely and most successfully introduced birds in the northern hemisphere; native to scattered areas of central and western Asia. This species is quite local in southern France, but we had one male on the fields near Salin de Giraud May 25 and heard another at La Palissade that same day.



Greater Flamingos, the ultimate Camargue bird. Photo Michael Gordon

FLAMINGOS—PHOENICOPTERIDAE

Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus roseus*: abundant and unmissable anywhere in the Camargue; the nesting colonies are entirely inaccessible, but flocks are constantly in sight as they commute between the breeding sites and feeding areas, where hundreds loaf and sieve the salty water with virtually no regard for even the nearest of humans. The sight of a flock against a blue sky, or dotting the flat waters at sunset, or massed on marshes and mudflats to feed is unforgettable, truly *the* bird spectacle of southern France. This species has at times been considered conspecific with the American Flamingo, from which it differs obviously in plumage; while the American bird is red, the Greater Flamingo is a “white” flamingo, with scarlet limited to the wings and tail, often inconspicuous on the ground but gloriously ablaze in flight.

GREBES—PODICIPEDIDAE



A Great Crested Grebe looks over its shoulder. Photo Michael Gordon

Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: these chunky little diving birds are common virtually everywhere in France, but their small size and sneaky habits—*Tachybaptus* means “speedy diver”—can make them hard to see. We enjoyed good views eventually on a canal at the Pont des Tourradons and later that same day at Scamandre. Even when breeding birds are at their most secretive, their loud musical trilling gives them away.

Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus*: present in pairs on most Camargue wetlands, but often somewhat difficult to detect during the

period of nest-building, when the adults tend to stick closer to cover. Nevertheless, we had some very good views of these birds and their ridiculously ornate breeding plumages. In addition to its beauty, this species played a historic role in the development of ornithological ethology as a science; the Great Crested Grebe was one of the first European birds to be subjected to rigorous behavioral study, conducted by Julian Huxley and published in 1914.

PIGEONS AND DOVES—COLUMBIDAE

Rock Pigeon, *Columba livia*: birds of feral origin were abundant in towns and cities, with smaller numbers to be seen in less populous and more remote settlements. All of the Rock Pigeons in France, with the possible exception of some birds in Brittany and Normandy, are the descendants of feral birds; it was exciting all the same to see them nesting on cliffs in the “natural” way in the Alpilles.

Common Wood Pigeon, *Columba palumbus*: this huge and colorful pigeon quickly became a familiar sight and sound almost anywhere there were trees for it to perch and nest in. The long tail and dark under wing are as distinctive as the white slashes across the upper wing and neck, and its low-pitched growling song is unmistakable once heard.



Common Wood Pigeon. Photo Michael Gordon

European Turtle Dove, *Streptopelia turtur*: once one of the most familiar birds of agricultural Europe, this species is now extremely rare over much of its range, and we were fortunate to see as many as we did. Our total of five (!) individuals was spread across three of the major habitats we visited: the woodlands along the River Gardon at the Pont du Gard, the Little Camargue marshes at Tourradons and Scamandre, and the stony steppe of La Crau. Slightly bland at a distance, these birds are breathtakingly beautiful in a closer view, with richly patterned rufous upper parts, black under wings, and finely traced black and white neck patches. The song, which we heard several times, is a pleasant purring.

Eurasian Collared Dove, *Streptopelia decaocto*: this now familiar bird was unknown in western Europe until the 1930s, when the populations in Turkey and the Balkans increased massively and began to explosively expand their range to the north and west, eventually reaching Iceland. Strikingly, birds released in the Bahamas in the 1970s adhered to the same compass reading when they began their rapid march across the North American continent: rather than spreading in all directions, they have rapidly moved northwest, such that this species is more abundant by orders of magnitude in Alaska than in North Carolina. The strange species epithet means “eighteen,” and has its origins in ancient Middle Eastern narratives featuring the bird.

BUSTARDS—OTIDIDAE

Little Bustard, *Tetrax tetrax*: a single male on La Crau, his head and neck sticking up out of the grass just as we were about to turn around and give up on the species. Fortunately, this is a very distinctive bird at any distance, and we had good if rather far-away views of the handsome neck pattern. Earlier in the season, males display by jumping into the air and uttering an uncouth buzz, responsible for their indelicate French name; see birdaz.com/blog/2014/05/18/flatulent-field-ducks.

CUCKOOS—CUCULIDAE

Great Spotted Cuckoo, *Clamator glandarius*: it is not hard to miss this charismatic species entirely on a May visit to the Camargue, but this year we had incredible experiences with at least two individuals, in flight and perched, in the marshes at Tourradons. We saw them again and again as they chased each other (and a male Common Cuckoo!) through the air, strikingly obliging behavior for a bird that we sometimes find only huddled deep in a dense tamarisk. The principal foster species for this large, boldly marked cuckoo is the Eurasian Magpie, which both adults and juveniles somewhat resemble in plumage—the species epithet *glandarius* alludes to this visual similarity to a corvid, as does the vernacular name in many languages, including French, which calls this bird the “jay cuckoo.”

Common Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus*: as one of the most famous of Middle English songs reminds us, May is the classic arrival time in western Europe for this appealing but usually invisible species. We heard the insistent and thoroughly horological song at several sites in the Camargue and on La Crau, and had nice looks at a gray male at Tourradons being harassed by Great Spotted Cuckoos.

SWIFTS—APODIDAE

Alpine Swift, *Apus melba*: this enormous bicolored swift is common on cliffs both natural and artificial; our best views were of birds nesting, as their ancestors must have two millennia ago, in the Pont du Gard. We also enjoyed close views at Les Baux, a classic site for the species.

Common Swift, *Apus apus*: common throughout. This species is especially abundant and especially conspicuous in cities, where the birds nest in crooks and crannies in buildings and towers, but is also easily seen feeding over rice paddies and hayfields in the countryside. The signature scene of a summer evening in Provence is the mad courtship flight of the swifts, screaming as small flocks career just overhead, turning the corners with just inches to spare. We enjoyed an especially crazed show during our outdoor dinner at La Paillotte, when courting groups tore past on their way to circle the evocative ruins of the Dominican church just behind us. The dusk gathering of roosting flocks, high above the city, are almost as memorable. One of the major publishing events of 2023 will be the eagerly awaited appearance of Mark Cocker’s *One Midsummer’s Day*, an account by Europe’s foremost nature writer of the cultural and ecological meaning of this familiar but rapidly decreasing species.



Common Moorhen. Photo Michael Gordon

RAILS—RALLIDAE

Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*: common but generally inconspicuous on the Camargue marshes. This red-billed rail has been considered conspecific with the Common Gallinule of the Americas, but was re-split some years ago at the species level; the voices of the two species differ, but apart from subtle differences in the shape of the forehead shield, they are visually virtually indistinguishable.

Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra*: more common and more easily seen than the moorhen on larger open lakes and marshes. Coots around the world are much of a sameness, but this species is easily distinguished from its most similar congener, the American Coot, by its large and pure white forehead shield and the absence of any white on the under tail coverts; Eurasian Coots are scarce but almost regular visitors to the Canadian Maritimes, and may be overlooked elsewhere in eastern North America.

Western Swamphen, *Porphyrio porphyrio*: the Pont des Tourradons is the center of abundance in France for this uncommon and very shy marsh dweller; even so, we do not find it every year. This year, though, we were enormously fortunate in getting repeated views of at least half a dozen of these huge and colorful rails; none was particularly close, but it was impressive nonetheless to watch them stalk among the lesser coots and moorhens in the shallow water of the Camargue marshes. Once given only subspecific rank in a broadly construed species known as the Purple Swamphen, this and five other taxa have now been split; the bird of western Europe is the Western Swamphen, while it is the Gray-headed Swamphen that has become established as a result of introductions and escapes in Florida.

THICK-KNEES—BURHINIDAE

Eurasian Thick-knee, *Burhinus oediconemus*: this beautifully patterned shorebird is one of the great specialties of La Crau. It can hardly be missed by birders arriving early enough in the day, but our total this year of 13 individuals was startling, a very encouraging sign for a bird whose populations have suffered throughout its western range as the barren habitats it prefers have become ever scarcer. We started with the usual distant looks in dim early morning light, but eventually had quite close views of birds on the ground and in flight, when they display the striking and intricate patterns of the spread wing. A few snatches of song from some of the birds made it plain why they are also (and more evocatively) known in English as Stone Curlews.

STILTS AND AVOCETS—RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*: common and noisy in the Camargue, both in the marshes and on drained rice paddies. We saw several birds on nests, and watched very young chicks take what must have been their first steps at the Pont de Gau; tempers ran high when another adult approached the chicks, and the parents inflicted what seemed like real harm on the intruder before hastening their young back into cover.



Black-winged Stilts. Photo Michael Gordon

Pied Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta*: an infrequent case among shorebirds, this species has been increasing in numbers and range for the better part of a century now. We encountered at least two dozen individuals, some of them no doubt still migrants but others, at Pont de Gau, with tiny chicks nestled up under the parents' belly feathers.

OYSTERCATCHERS—HAEMATOPODIDAE

Eurasian Oystercatcher, *Haematopus ostralegus*: often one of the most frequently encountered shorebirds in the area, but this year we had to wait until the last day to see this large, noisy species; one apparent pair and a single bird at Cacharel were our total.

PLOVERS—CHARADRIIDAE

Black-bellied Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*: about fifteen scattered along the causeway to the beach at Piémanson May 25. This is an extremely widespread species; in the Old World, it is often known, drably enough, as the Gray Plover.

Northern Lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus*: four roadside birds in the vicinity of Salin de Giraud May 25 were probably still on the way north. Though its numbers in western Europe have fallen dramatically, these handsome plovers still stage occasional wintertime incursions into Atlantic Canada and the US.

Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus*: we had marvelous views of this rare beach-dweller at Piémanson and again on our last morning at Cacharel. The colorful head pattern, especially in breeding males, is noticeably different from that of the American Snowy Plover, with which this Old World species has sometimes been lumped.

Common Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*: two latish birds at Piémanson May 25. The striking plumage pattern, with a broad black breast band and bold head pattern, is surprisingly cryptic against the stony background these birds prefer, a fine example of what the American painter Abbott Thayer described more than a hundred years ago as disruptive coloration.

SANDPIPERS—SCOLOPACIDAE

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*: breeding across the high latitudes of the northern hemisphere, this is probably the commonest of migrant sandpipers in western Europe, wintering in huge flocks on washes and estuaries. Like the ringed plovers, this species has a boldly patterned plumage that serves as surprisingly effective camouflage against the rocks and seaweed of its preferred habitats. We found a nice flock of about 70 at Piémanson, feeding on the ground and then sweeping through the sky like distant starlings.

Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos*: much less common than many other sandpipers. We found a single individual at Piémanson May 25, identified by its rather plain upper parts, bright white under parts, and incessant bobbing. This is the closest relative to the American Spotted Sandpiper, which resembles it in unspotted winter plumage.

Common Redshank, *Tringa tetanus*: like a small, brightly patterned and colored yellowlegs, this is still a fairly common breeding bird on marshes and damp fields, its cheerful piping a familiar sound in many places. At least three pairs kept busy chasing each other and any other bird that dared intrude during our visit to Piémanson May 25.

PRATINCOLES—GLAREOLIDAE



One of an impressive flock of Collared Pratincoles at the Pont des Tourradons. Photo Michael Gordon

Collared Pratincole, *Glareola pratincola*: a classic Camargue specialty, still holding on in what appear to be only two small colonies in the area. We were amazed this time to encounter a feeding flock of no fewer than 14 at the Pont des Tourradons, repeatedly coming very close as they dashed through the air like huge swallows. We were able to see the diagnostic wing pattern on at least eight individuals, and the others were almost certainly Collareds as well; Black-winged and other pratincoles are a remote possibility in May.

GULLS AND TERNS—LARIDAE

Slender-billed Gull, *Chroicocephalus genei*: a total of only about ten of these stunning, snout-faced gulls. While their population is clearly increasing in the Camargue, their feeding localities appear to vary from day to day, and it is usually a surprise when a small flock suddenly appears before us on the shallow flats or over the marshes. On the political relevance of this species to mid-nineteenth-century European republicans, see

birdaz.com/blog/2013/06/12/lambruschinis-republican-gull.

Black-headed Gull, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*: this familiar species was common in all wetland habitats, from rice paddies to beaches to the marshes of the Camargue. On the tangled mess that is gull names, see birdaz.com/blog/2006/07/02/whos-laughing-now.

Mediterranean Gull, *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*: this gorgeous gull, the closest relative of the equally stunning Pallas's Gull, has undergone remarkable population growth in the past fifty years, and as we discovered, it continues to found new colonies in Mediterranean France. We often see them standing in the rice paddies at this time of year, but the sight of at least 100 pairs on territories and on nests at the Pont de Gau was among the clear highlights of the tour for me.

Yellow-legged Gull, *Larus michahellis*: this large, dark member of the Herring Gull complex is the only big white-headed gull expected in the area at this season, and we saw it almost everywhere we went, both coastally and as far inland as the Pont du Gard. There is a noisy nesting colony along the causeway at Piémanson, where we also saw Great Cormorants and Eurasian Spoonbills setting up housekeeping.

Little Tern, *Sternula albifrons*: well named in both English and scientificese, this tiny but scrappy seabird was seen in small numbers at several Camargue sites. The plumage differences between this and the American Least Tern are subtle, involving mostly the head and tail patterns, but the voice is quite different—and there is rarely even the least danger that a Little Tern will be silent long.

Gull-billed Tern, *Gelochelidon nilotica*: one of the most widespread birds in the world, nesting on six continents, but nowhere especially abundant. We saw most of ours from the moving vehicle as they hunted low over fields and rice paddies; a flyby at our hotel May 24 was, I believe, the first time I'd seen this elegantly plumaged bird right in Arles.



Storks on the nest. Photo Michael Gordon

Caspian Tern, *Hydroprogne caspia*: one at the Pont des Tourradons May 27. This, the world's largest tern is an uncommon spring bird in the Camargue.

Whiskered Tern, *Chlidonias hybrida*: this is the common “marsh tern” of southern Europe, nesting on shallow marshes, where it feeds not by diving but by swooping and skimming the surface of the water. Oddly, we as a group saw Whiskered Terns only at the Pont de Tourradon, a reliable nesting site. The scientific name is often misunderstood; see birdaz.com/blog/2014/09/14/did-anybody-ever-really-think-that/.

Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*: saddled with another misleading English name, this very widespread tern is only fairly common as a breeder in the Camargue; we saw small numbers at four sites. Most interesting was a bird on an apparent nest at the edge of the Mediterranean Gull colony at Pont de Gau, a risky place, it would seem, for tern chicks.

Sandwich Tern, *Thalasseus sandvicensis*: the smallest of Europe's “large” terns is usually common at Piémanson, but the dull weather on our morning visit there dampened activity, and we found only a couple. Recent progressive taxonomies treat the European bird and the extremely similar North American counterpart as two species, naming the latter Cabot's Tern, *Th. acuflavidus*; Caribbean and South American representatives of the complex, with yellow-orange bills, are Cayenne Terns, *Th. eurygnathus*.

STORKS—CICONIIDAE

White Stork, *Ciconia ciconia*: not that long ago, it was important to know where the few Camargue nesting sites were so as not to miss this species entirely. Happily, White Storks are now quite common and quite widespread across the region, and while we did see several occupied nests with young, we also encountered this bird a number of times without specifically looking for it, even over the city of Arles.

CORMORANTS—PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*: small numbers in the Camargue included birds probably on a nest in the Yellow-legged Gull colony at Piémanson. Interestingly, we saw at least one adult still showing the white thigh patches of high breeding plumage; that mark seems to persist longer in southern Europe than in northern Europe or North America.

HERONS—ARDEIDAE

Gray Heron, *Ardea cinerea*: found in small numbers throughout the Camargue, with an impressive concentration in the heronry at Pont de Gau, where several nests held young ranging from tiny nestlings to near-fledglings. This species is often said to closely resemble its congener the Great Blue Heron, but the Old World bird is considerably smaller and stockier, with shorter legs and a shorter bill; it also lacks the conspicuous rufous wing and thigh markings that are distinctive of the Great Blue. Nevertheless, Gray Herons are almost certainly overlooked on the Atlantic coast of the United States and in the Canadian Maritimes.

Purple Heron, *Ardea purpurea*: this slender, snaky heron with the heavily marked neck tends to be crepuscular and rather secretive, but we had decent looks at three individuals at different Camargue sites.

Great Egret, *Ardea alba*: somewhat uncommon in the Camargue, but our tally of only three birds was surprisingly low. At the moment, the Great Egrets of the Old World are lumped with those of the new, but the soft part colors differ in the two populations in the breeding season; given the importance of bill and leg color in heron pairing, it seems likely that these two should once again be treated as distinct at the species level.

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*: this is the most abundant and most conspicuous heron in the Camargue, present, it sometimes seems, on every rice paddy and in every vegetated ditch. The increase in this species' range and populations has seen individuals regularly occurring in the West Indies and on the Atlantic coast of the United States and Canada; the key identification features are the color of the bare facial skin and the structure of the crest in breeding birds.

Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*: common among the white Camargue horses and black Camargue bulls on pastures and marshes. This species reached France from its original essentially African range in the 1950s, and is now an everyday sight on fields in the south.



stepping Cattle Egret. Photo Michael Gordon

A high-

Squacco Heron, *Ardeola ralloides*: only a single bird seen this year, a quick flyby at the Pont des Tourradons.

Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*: after seeing several birds in flight at various sites in the Camargue, we found a single adult perched at close range at the Pont de Gau. On average, European birds have broader white head patches and, in breeding condition, redder tarsi than American individuals.



IBIS AND SPOONBILLS—THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus*: ubiquitous in nearly every wet habitat, and often seen overhead flying from marsh to marsh. Quite uncommon in France just a couple of decades ago, this species has increased dramatically, and the population appears to be still growing. At least three nests at the Pont de Gau held chicks.

Glossy Ibis with nestlings. Photo Michael Gordon

Eurasian Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia*: another wading bird whose numbers in southern France have steadily grown this century. We saw spoonbills at a number of Camargue sites, but none of those views could come close to watching from just a few feet away at the Pont de Gau as an importunate juvenile chased its harried parent through the shallows. This species has occurred in the Caribbean; if it follows the precedent established by the Glossy Ibis and the Cattle Egret, it will sooner or later appear in continental North America.



A young

Eurasian Spoonbill begs from its parent as a Greater Flamingo looks on. Photo Rick Wright

SHEARWATERS AND PETRELS—PROCELLARIIDAE

Yelkouan/Balearic Shearwater, *Puffinus sp.*: a number of birds at Piémanson were painfully distant on the dim horizon. The Yelkouan Shearwater is far the more common species here, but the birds were simply too far off for definitive identification. The genus name *Puffinus*, a perennial favorite of the writers of birding quizzes, is derived from the English name “puffin,” known from as early as the fourteenth century as a trade name for the chubby young of shearwaters stolen from the nesting burrow and salted for use as winter food; the name’s transfer to the bright-billed auk is attested no earlier than the late seventeenth century.

HAWKS—ACCIPITRIDAE

European Honey Buzzard, *Pernis apivorus*: wonderful views of at least one individual at the Pont du Gard, a fairly reliable locality for this often inconspicuous raptor. Its English name notwithstanding, this odd raptor is not known to eat honey, though “chunks of ‘chewed’ wax comb [are] frequently found near nests,” or even in the nest, where they are believed to serve as decoration (Orta et al., *Birds of the World*). The honey buzzard’s standard food is instead the bees and wasps themselves, captured by excavating ground nests.



A Honey Buzzard at the Pont du Gard. Photo Michael Gordon

Short-toed Snake Eagle, *Circaetus gallicus*: excellent views of one at the Pont du Gard, followed by almost equally good looks at one over Les Baux. We watched the birds hover, their legs slightly drooped and heads pointed groundward as they looked for serpent prey, but were not so fortunate as to observe a capture.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier, *Circus aeruginosus*: surprisingly, we saw this common raptor only once, a female-plumaged bird at some distance at the Pont de Gau May 29.

Black Kite, *Milvus migrans*: the common large bird of prey of much of southern Europe, seen anywhere and everywhere as these big, floppy black birds searched for carrion and the odd defenseless mammal or bird; kites eat well in lambing season, when they eagerly clear up the afterbirth.

Common Buzzard, *Buteo buteo*: half a dozen over the course of the tour, in flight and on low roadside perches. This is the common large bird of prey in northern Europe, “replaced,” as it were, by Black Kites in the south.

HOOPoes—UPUPIDAE

Eurasian Hoopoe, *Upupa epops*: a quick flyby at Scamandre, not seen by everyone, was followed a few days later by at least five on La Crau, feeding, flying, and singing entirely undisturbed by our presence.

KINGFISHERS—ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis*: this living jewel of a bird is common along the tamarisk-lined canals in the area, but often seen only as an electric-blue flash skimming the water’s surface. This year, some of us saw two birds at the Pont de Tourradons, followed by repeated very brief sightings of at least two more at Scamandre.

BEE-EATERS—MEROPIDAE

European Bee-eater, *Merops apiaster*: small numbers at five sites, including the Pont du Gard and Camargue localities; this incredibly colorful aerial hunter is most easily detected by its distinctive grumbling flight calls, but we also had nice looks at perched birds a couple of times. European Bee-eaters are colonial, nesting in sheer dirt banks where they dig deep nest holes; they are late arrivals in spring, though, and some of the birds we saw may still have been northbound migrants.

ROLLERS—CORACIIDAE

European Roller, *Coracias garrulus*: about seven for the tour, most, unfortunately, from a moving vehicle, but we enjoyed good if slightly distant views of at least two on La Crau, where this pigeon-sized “bluebird” nests in cavities in small woodlands bordering the steppe. Steadily rising temperatures in Europe are taking rollers ever farther north on the continent, and their numbers are increasing in their historical range, including France.

WOODPECKERS—PICIDAE

Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos major*: two at the Pont Du Gard May 24. This is the commonest woodpecker over most of Europe.

Eurasian Green Woodpecker, *Picus viridis*: one heard loudly yaffling at the Pont du Gard May 24 refused to let itself be seen.



A lovely relief of a female dancer, from the Roman theater in Arles. Photo Rick Wright

FALCONS—FALCONIDAE

Eurasian Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*: seen on 3 days, mostly from the road, but decent views of hovering and perched birds a couple of times. All of the kestrels identifiable on La Crau were of this species.

Eurasian Hobby, *Falco subbuteo*: only about four of this very dashing, scimitar-winged falcon, but one at La Palissade May 25 offered spectacular views.

OLD WORLD ORIOLES—ORIOLIDAE

Eurasian Golden Oriole, *Oriolus oriolus*: the Pont du Gard had something like five birds singing around the parking lot, often very close to us; but the well-developed vegetation and brisk winds kept them from ever becoming visible no matter how hard we searched. Another singing in the early morning on La Crau was at first distant, but then appeared in the bare twigs of a tree not far down the road; this bird was a first-cycle male, still in green plumage, but still provided a good look at a normally secretive species.

SHRIKES—LANIIDAE

Iberian Gray Shrike, *Lanius meridionalis*: two, presumably a pair, hunting the steppe of La Crau when we arrived early the morning of May 28. This uncommon bird of the western Mediterranean was long considered conspecific with the Great Gray and Northern Shrikes, but the three are now treated as three distinct species, with the Iberian and the Northern more closely related to each other than is either to the Great Gray.

Woodchat Shrike, *Lanius senator*: a glorious male paused in the trees below the right bank visitor center at the Pont du Gard May 24. The name “woodchat” is said by some to have its origin in a typographical error for “wildcat,” with reference to the shrike’s bloodthirsty efficiency as a hunter. I am unconvinced.

JAYS AND CROWS—CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius*: This big, colorful bird is often surprisingly shy, especially in the breeding season. One at Les Baux May 26 was seen by just a couple of us and briefly; another at St-Paul that afternoon was more obliging, perching to be admired in the gardens behind the church.



La Crau. Photo Rick Wright

Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica*: common and reliably conspicuous throughout. This and the American Black-billed Magpie were once considered conspecific, but their plumage similarities notwithstanding, they are now recognized as distinct.

Eurasian Jackdaw, *Corvus monedula*: common nearly throughout, in towns, on fields, and over marshes and lakes. These handsome little crows are always excitable, but a flock of forty or more at Glanum was decidedly agitated by something, funneling high into the sky while giving their cheerful hollow calls. The strange scientific species name, apparently meaning coin-eater, remains inscrutable, but may have something to do with the legendary fondness of corvids for shiny objects.

Rook, *Corvus frugilegus*: quite local in the area, with the nearest colony at the Arles train station; those birds fly out in the morning to feed on the fields, then reassemble in the evening. Another true “birds and art” moment was sitting on the rue Dr Fanton in Arles over dinner while Rooks flew over one and two at a time and swifts screamed overhead. These extremely social crows are a characteristic feature of many European landscapes; in *Wild America*, James Fisher recorded how much he missed them on his visit to the New World.

Carrion Crow, *Corvus corone*: small numbers on fields, generally seen as single individuals or pairs.



Great Tit. Photo Michael Gordon

TITS—PARIDAE

Crested Tit, *Lophophanes cristatus*: excellent views of one feeding in the trees at St Paul May 26. This is far and away the most reliable place in the area to find this tiny, handsomely marked bird, but even here we miss the species most years.

Great Tit, *Parus major*: the commonest and most conspicuous member of the family in France, encountered almost every day; the familiar rasping song, heard virtually wherever there is a tree with a hole in it, gave this species its old folk name of “saw-whetter,” a name given very different application in North America.

LARKS—ALAUDIDAE

Eurasian Skylark, *Alauda arvensis*: once one of the most abundant birds of the European countryside, this dull-plumed aerial singer has declined

drastically with the intensification of agriculture. We were fortunate to see—and more fortunate still to hear—ten or more on La Crau. The average song lasts two to four seconds, but some birds may sing for almost half an hour, floating so high as to be nearly invisible to the human eye before descending. Popular wisdom to the contrary, Skylarks, of both sexes, also sing from the ground.

Crested Lark, *Galerida cristata*: good looks on La Crau and, especially, on the road at Cacharel. This large brown lark has disappeared from many areas in its former range in northern Europe, but remains common and conspicuous in the Camargue marshes. The loud, whistled song is very unlike that of the skylark, which prefers drier habitats.

BEARDED REEDLING—PANURIDAE

Bearded Reedling, *Panurus biarmicus*: currently classified as the only member in its family. This oddly beautiful little bird of vast reedbeds has a very scattered distribution in the western, European portion of its range, and usually does a good job of avoiding detection out in the dense vegetation. The Cacharel Road is one of our favorite areas to look for these birds, and it came through again this year: it took patience, but eventually a pair perched long enough for us to get scope views of the straw-colored back, the weird bristly tail, and the male’s beautiful powder-blue head and black “moustache.”

CISTICOLAS—CISTICOLIDAE

Zitting Cisticola, *Cisticola juncidis*: the only member of a very large family (160+ species) to make it into western Europe. We saw this tiny, nearly tailless bird a number of times as it sang in bounding flight, incessantly hissing its well-spaced “zit ... zit” notes. Eventually, I believe that everyone had good looks at this unassuming but still attractive bird perched as well.

REED WARBLERS—ACROCEPHALIDAE

Melodious Warbler, *Hippolais polyglotta*: common and noisy in the Camargue and on the canals edging La Crau, but not always easy to see. We found our best views when birds were singing high in tamarisks or other sparsely leaved vegetation. The quite similar Icterine Warbler is longer-winged and often less yellow below, and occurs in southern France only as a very scarce migrant; its song is less varied and includes more metallic whines than that of the Melodious.



Melodious Warbler. Photo Rick Wright

Common Reed Warbler, *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*: several heard May 27 in the Petite Camargue, but as is often the case with this rather secretive species, only briefly glimpsed. Fortunately, the loud, rhythmic “talking” song gives it away even when it is buried deep in the reedbeds.

Great Reed Warbler, *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: one, heard only, at the Pont des Tourradons May 27. This thrush-sized reed warbler

is often more forthcoming than its smaller relatives, but this individual remained low in the vegetation and did not permit so much as a quick glimpse.

SWALLOWS—HIRUNDINIDAE

Eurasian Crag Martin, *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*: a bird of nooks and crannies in vertical stone surfaces, seen only at the Pont du Gard and at Les Baux. At the former locality, we saw these large, subtly colored swallows flying into holes in the ancient stones, no doubt nest sites; at the latter, we enjoyed marvelous close looks at birds from above, where we could admire their bulky proportions and whitish tail “windows.”

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*: common throughout in the countryside, with many birds obviously on territory for the breeding season even as others were passing through on their way north. While this and the North American Barn Swallow are at present considered conspecific, the two differ consistently in plumage: European birds are notably paler below, with a better-defined breast band, and males have very long tail streamers. Only in North America do male Barn Swallows share in incubating the eggs, a behavior correlated with that population’s shorter streamers.

Common House Martin, *Delichon urbicum*: in most places, this species is even more closely dependent on the human presence than the Barn Swallow; almost all House Martins long ago adopted the eaves of buildings as the preferred nest site, with only a few still resorting to cliff

faces or caves. We saw these compact black and white swallows in small towns from Gallician to Cacharel, where they nest in small colonies beneath the eaves of houses; they are absent from central Arles and other cities.

BUSH WARBLERS—SCOTOCERCIDAE

Cetti's Warbler, *Cettia cetti*: one of the first birds heard and one of the first songs learned by any springtime visitor to the Camargue. This fairly large, broad-tailed warbler resembles a nightingale in its reddish upper parts and its secrecy; singing birds are usually invisible by choice, but their sheer abundance and our abundant patience meant that most of us eventually had acceptable views. The history of this species' discovery, and the matching of the loud song to the demurely plumaged bird, is briefly summarized at birdnote.org/listen/shows/cettis-warbler.



A Blackcap proclaims his territory at Les Baux. Photo Michael Gordon

LEAF WARBLERS—PHYLLOSCOPIDAE

***Phylloscopus sp.*:** seen on three days, north to Iona. The abundance of Wood Warblers was the perfect evocation of an older Britain when we arrived at the farmhouse of Loch Gruinart May 13, and their sad springtime piping reminded us each time we heard it of Gilbert White, who in the mid-eighteenth century was the first to settle the question of whether this species and the look-alike Chiffchaff were different birds.

BUSHTITS—AEGITHALIDAE

Long-tailed Tit, *Aegithalos caudatus*:

sadly, only one seen and that only by the leaders, as we arrived in the parking lot at Scamandre May 27. This European species is the closest relative of the American Bushtit, and the two build similarly lavish nests out of plant down and fuzz.

SYLVIID WARBLERS AND BABBLERS—SYLVIIDAE

Eurasian Blackcap, *Sylvia atricapilla*: less common than in northern Europe, this stocky warbler with the spectacular song was nevertheless seen and heard at half a dozen sites, including at our hotel in Arles and in the Summer Garden park across the street. Our best views were of a male singing persistently from leafless twigs just outside the walls of Les Baux; scope views revealed that his somber plumage was less attractive than the loud, clarinet-like song.

Sardinian Warbler, *Curruca melanocephala*: this attractive warbler of dense thickets was heard at several sites, and we had fine views after a while of birds at Les Baux, including juveniles being fed. The genus name *Curruca*, meaning “cuckold,” probably refers to the frequency with which some members of this genus serve as foster parents to the Common Cuckoo.

TREECREEPERS—CERTHIIDAE

Short-toed Treecreeper, *Certhia brachydactyla*: a singing bird heard at the Pont du Gard May 24.

STARLINGS—STURNIDAE

European Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*: one of Europe's most beautiful birds is also one of its commonest, and we saw European Starlings every day, with shrill juveniles apparent by the end of our tour. This is the species successfully introduced into the United States in the nineteenth century by sentimental immigrants; there is no truth, however, to the chestnut about the desire to introduce "all the birds of Shakespeare," a fiction apparently concocted in the third or fourth decade of the twentieth century.

THRUSHES—TURDIDAE

Eurasian Blackbird, *Turdus merula*: as usual, seen only at St-Paul de Mausole, where the quiet woods and regularly turned flower beds are ideal habitat.



A male European Blackbird skulks in the leaves at St-Paul de Mausole. Photo Rick Wright

CHATS—MUSCICAPIDAE

Spotted Flycatcher, *Muscicapa striata*: one at Scamandre May 27. This and the Mediterranean Flycatcher *Muscicapa tyrrhenica* are considered conspecific by some authorities.

Common Nightingale, *Luscinia megarhynchos*: heard every day, and finally seen well at Pont de Gau May 29, when one perched in the open to sing for a few minutes. The low-pitched "glugging" notes resemble one phrase sung by the Northern Cardinal, the reason that that American species was once known as the Virginia Nightingale. For a moving French tale of the

symbolic force of the night-singing bird, see allpoetry.com/poem/13108770-The-Nightingale-by-Marie-de-France. The literary locus classicus is Book VI of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph6.htm#480077265), in which three figures are transformed into three different birds: the hoopoe, the swallow, and the nightingale.

Common Redstart, *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: this is far and away the less common of the two redstart species found in southern France, but we had good luck with it this year, seeing a total of five at three different localities. Unlike the more abundant Black Redstart, which happily nests in cracks and crevices in cliffs and buildings, this species generally requires tree cavities, making it more frequent in orchards and open woodlands than in cities and on steep rocky slopes.



Black Redstart. Photo Rick Wright

Black Redstart, *Phoenicurus ochruros*: seen and heard nearly every day, and often the first song heard in the mornings, when males in Arles sang their gravelly warble from atop houses and churches well before sunrise. The species is especially abundant on the cliffs of the Alpilles, and we found at least eight singing and feeding from the rocks and the ruins of the castle of Les Baux. The Provençal name ramounur “chimney sweep” alludes to its fondness for all things brick and stone.

Blue Rock Thrush, *Monticola solitarius*: wonderful if somewhat distant views of a very calm male at Les Baux. This is one of the most oddly colored birds in Europe, too blue to be called plumbeous and too grey to be called cobalt. In one of the most famous of modern Italian poems,

Leopardi compares this bird and its remote and lonely haunts to the life of the poet: tinyurl.com/LeopardiPassero.

Whinchat, *Saxicola rubetra*: another very attractive member of the chat family; we had excellent views of a migrant at Piémanson May 25, perched at close range in the marsh vegetation. “Whin” is an obsolete English name for gorse and other dense and prickly shrubs.

PASSERIDAE—OLD WORLD SPARROWS



An Iberian-type Yellow Wagtail. Photo Rick Wright

House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*: common throughout, in cities and at farmsteads. A fine illustration of how politically fraught ornithological science can be is provided by Otto Kleinschmidt’s World War One-era analysis of House Sparrow taxonomy; see birdaz.com/blog/2015/06/20/hostile-birds.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus*: this is a locally common breeder throughout southern France, but the species shows strong preferences for certain traditional sites. Birds are present in the city of Arles, usually in the Summer Garden across from our hotel, an

unusually “urban” habitat for this species in western Europe (in the eastern parts of its range, this is the common city sparrow). Salin de Giraud, where we saw our first, is also a tried-and-true site to see Tree Sparrows; they nest under the eaves of houses here, and we were fortunate to find the small park across from our lunchtime restaurant newly mown, making insects in the grass easy pickings for the birds. And the bridge at Tourradons is essentially one giant birdhouse for this species. These charming little birds were introduced to many places in the United States in the nineteenth century, but became established only along the Mississippi River in Missouri and Illinois; finally, 175 years after they were first brought to St. Louis, those birds have now spread north along the river to Iowa and Minnesota.

WAGTAILS AND PIPITS—MOTACILLIDAE

Western Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla flava*: seen at four Camargue sites, where the species is a common summer resident and breeder. This part of France is right on the permeable boundary between the western subspecies *iberiae* and the easterly *cinereocapilla*, and we saw individuals resembling both taxa and at least one apparent intergrade; the principal distinction is the presence or absence of a white supercilium.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba*: less common than the yellow, this species was seen on only one day, several individuals feeding on rocks in the middle of the river Gardon May 24. In Provence, all the wagtails have long been the subject of superstition and dread: to kill a wagtail, even accidentally, is to run the risk of losing one’s entire flock of sheep.

Tawny Pipit, *Anthus campestris*: excellent looks at five or so on La Crau May 28. Once a common bird in much of western Europe, the Tawny Pipit has withdrawn from much of its more northerly range and is now reliably found only on sandy or rocky flats in the south. In France, it

nests not only in dry steppe-like habitats but also out in the sparse salicornia flats of the Camargue.

FINCHES—FRINGILLIDAE

Common Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs*: more often heard than seen at this season, but we eventually had wonderful looks at both males and females at the Pont du Gard, at Les Baux, and at St-Paul. This is often said to be the most abundant bird in northern Europe, where it is frequently encountered in small city parks and gardens, but in the more southerly portions of its range, it prefers wilder wooded habitats. The scientific species epithet *coelebs* means “bachelor,” Linnaeus’s allusion to the tendency of this finch to winter in sex-segregated flocks.



A male European Serin. Photo Rick Wright

European Greenfinch, *Chloris chloris*: easy to hear, its popping calls and buzzy song conspicuous even at our hotel and in Arles, but harder to see in spring, when its color and size closely match the newly emerged leaves. We finally had lingering views of a male singing at the Pont de Gau May 29.

European Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis*: common virtually throughout, in Arles, in the Camargue, and in the Alpilles. The bubbling calls quickly became familiar, helping us find feeding or loafing birds we might otherwise have overlooked. With its red face and fondness for thorny perches, the European Goldfinch is one of the most iconographically important birds in western art; see the standard work on the matter at archive.org/details/symbolicgoldfinc0000frie.

European Serin, *Serinus serinus*: a tiny, stub-faced and short-tailed yellow finch, with a song like a pebble stuck in a wheel (I don’t know who first said that). Our best looks

were at Les Baux, where birds were singing from trees and stones in the castle ruins; we also saw at least three birds at the Pont des Tourradons May 27.

OLD WORLD BUNTINGS—EMBERIZIDAE

Corn Bunting, *Emberiza calandra*: surprisingly scarce this year on La Crau, where we often see and hear more of these than any other passerine. The lack of quantity was more than made up for by the quality of the views of singing birds. This is the *avis miliaria* of the Romans, so called (“millet bird”) because large numbers were kept in cages and fattened on millet for the eating.

Cirl Bunting, *Emberiza cirlus*: sometimes hard to find on this tour, but some of us had fine views of a female at Les Baux, and most of us got to watch a male sing at the Pont des Tourradons.

Reed Bunting, *Emberiza schoeniclus*: great looks at a very fancy male at Piémanson May 25. One of the early names for this bird was “junco,” from its fondness for rushes; the name was transferred to the gray New World sparrow in the nineteenth century. See birdaz.com/blog/2014/02/09/junco.



Birding at Pont de Gau. Photo Rick Wright

Virtual Bird Walks

2020

July	1	Local Birding
August	2	Backyards and a Marsh
September	3	Backyards and Trips
October	4	Member Birding
November	5	Member Birding
December	6	Member Birding

2021

January	7	International Birding and New York City
February	8	International Birding
March	9	Member Birding
April	10	Shore Birds
May	11	Local Birding
June	12	Member Birding
July	13	Birding Costa Rica
August	14	Identify a Bird by Its Eyes
September	15	Birds and Water
October	16	Birds with Masks
November	17	Winter Birds

2022

January	18	Personal Choice
February	19	Color
March	20	Signs of Spring
April	21	Birds Eating or Black & White Birds
May	22	Local Birds
September	23	My Summer
November	24	Bird Pairs
December	25	A Trip

2023

January	26	Winter
February	27	A Month in a Birder's Life
March	28	Egrets, Herons, and Wading Birds
April	29	Woodpeckers
May	30	Small Birds
June		Members Meeting, no Virtual Bird Walk
September	31	What I Did on My Summer Vacation
October	32	Black & Orange

Montclair Bird Club Meeting History

2020

May	An Online Quiz, with Rick Wright.
June	A Walk on Pipeline Road, by Sandy Sorkin.
July	The Real James Bond, by Jim Wright.
August	An Online Quiz, with Rick Wright.
September	Manakins and Microbes, by Jennifer Houtz.
October	Bizarre Breeding Behaviors of Tropical Cuckoos, by Christine Riehl.
November	Dispersal in Young Peregrine Falcons, by Elise Morton.
December	An MBC Story Slam, by Pamela Olsen.

2021

January	Modern-Day Exploration in the Tropics, by Dan Lane.
February	Winter Raptors, by Giselle Smisko.
March	Damselflies and Dragonflies: The Other White Meat, by George Nixon.
April	Wolf Natural History and Tourism in Yellowstone, by Paul Brown.
May	Sandhills and Saw-whets, by Matthew Schuler.
June	Magnificent Namibia, by Linda Woodbury.
September	Raptors, by Wayne Greenstone.
October	Watershed, by Hazel England.
November	Build-a-Bird, with Rick Wright.

2022

January	A Tale of Many Penguins, by Ardith Bondi.
February	Oh! Canada, by Chris Sturm.
March	Tracking the Migration of New Jersey Birds Using the Motus Network, by Cailin O'Connor.
April	Spotlighting Voices in Bird Conservation, by Mardi Dickinson.
May	101 Great Birds from Around the World, by Mark Garland.
June	Member's Meeting.
September	Exploring the Big Bend in Southwest Texas, by Donna Traylor.
October	Build-a-Bird II, with Rick Wright.
November	On Safari: Botswana and South Africa, by Ric Cohn.

2023

January America's Iconic Birdman: Frank Chapman, by James Huffstodt.
February A Bird Club in San Diego, by Rick Wright.
March The Peregrine Project, by Wayne Quinto Greenstone.
April Piping Plovers on the Rockaway Peninsula, by Chris Allieri.
May Basic Ornithology, by Phil Echo.
June Members Meeting.
September Build-a-Bird III, with Rick Wright.

2023–2024 Officers and Executive Board

OFFICERS

President	Donna Traylor
Vice President	Evan Cutler
Secretary	Pat Sanders
Treasurer	Sandy Sorkin

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Bill Beren
Ric Cohn
Wayne Greenstone
Don Traylor
Rick Wright

Upcoming VENT Tours

VentBird.com

Panama	Fall at the Canopy Tower	October 21–28, 2023
Nebraska	Sandhill Cranes and Prairie Chickens	March 15–22, 2024; March 17–24, 2025
Texas	Totally Texas Solar Eclipse	April 5–11, 2024
Alabama	The Gulf Coast and Dauphin Island	April 15–21, 2024; April 14–20, 2025
Greece	The North of Greece	May 5–20, 2024
Scotland	Wild Scotland	May 26 – June 7, 2024
Colorado	A Summer Stay in Estes Park	June 17–23, 2024; June 15–21, 2025
Colorado	Northeast Colorado	June 23–26, 2024; June 21–24, 2025
Spain	Birds and Art in Asturias	August 28 – September 6, 2024
France	Birds and Art in Provence	May 1–9, 2025
Scotland	Scotland in Style	May 10–19 2025
Germany	Birds and Art in Berlin and Brandenburg	September 19–28, 2025
France	Brittany in Fall	October 1–9, 2025

**VICTOR
EMANUEL
NATURE
TOURS**

In This Issue

- Page 1: Smooth-billed ani, Panama, by Sandy Sorkin (SS)
Page 5: Willow flycatcher (SS)
Page 7: Cooper hawk (SS)
Page 8: Bald eagle
Page 9: Various ducks and geese (SS)
Page 10: Herring gull
Page 11: Barn swallow (SS)
Page 13: Northern parula, eastern wood-pewee, black-throated green warbler, downy woodpecker, by Ric Cohn (RC)
Page 14: Black-and-white owl (SS)

From the Editor's Desk

Please feel free to email any items you would like included in future issues of *The Broadwing*. Please include pictures and any other news that will entertain or educate our members.

Sandy

MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com



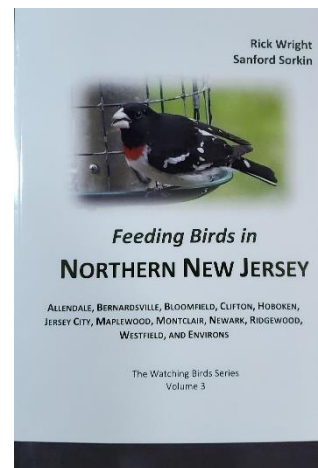
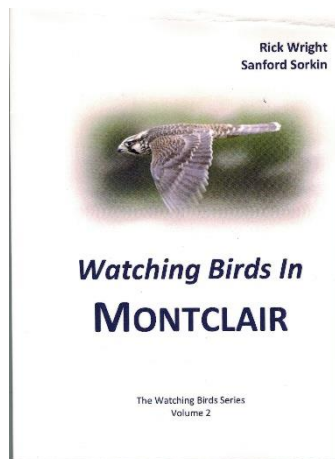
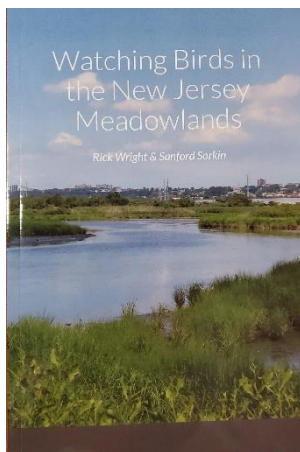
watchung booksellers

YOUR COMMUNITY BOOKSTORE

54 Fairfield Street, Watchung Plaza, Montclair, NJ 07042 Monday - Friday 10-7
973.744.7177 • info@watchungbooksellers.com Saturday & Sunday 10-5

Not every community is so fortunate as to have a community bookstore. Here in Montclair and Bloomfield, Watchung Booksellers has supported our communities, and vice versa, for more than three decades. Watchung Booksellers offers a carefully selected range of literary fiction, biography, history, travel, education, poetry, the arts, and natural history, including *Watching Birds in Montclair*, *Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands*, *Feeding Birds in Northern New Jersey*, and other titles in the Custom Bird Guides series.

With over 70 combined years of bookselling experience, the staff knows how to choose challenging, nurturing, and inspiring books, and knows, too, how to value the input and advice of readers and writers in our area’s thriving literary community. Watchung Booksellers further serves the community with a full schedule of events, including author presentations, poetry readings, children’s story times, in-house book groups, and special programs for writers and readers of all ages. The store and its staff are fierce supporters of our community’s schools and libraries among many other political, religious, and civic institutions, including the Montclair Bird Club.



The MBC Bulletin Bird

Montclair Bird Club Officers for 2023–2024

PresidentDonna Traylor
Vice PresidentEvan Cutler
TreasurerSandy Sorkin
Recording SecretaryPat Sanders

Committees

Field TripsBeni Fishbein
ProgramsDonna Traylor
PublicityWayne Greenstone
Refreshments.....Betsy Cohen

**The Broadwing Editor
and Photographer**Sandy Sorkin

THE BROADWING

The *Broadwing* is published ten times a year:
We vacation during July and August.

Send photos, field notes, or articles to Sandy at
MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com.

© Copyright 2023. All rights reserved by the contributors.