

The Broadwing



Publication of the Montclair Bird Club
August 2021

Montclair, NJ
Volume LXVI, Number 12

Black-crowned Night-Heron at Edgemont Memorial Park

Message from the Editor August 2021

Dear Members,

Fifteen months ago, we made the decision to make *The Broadwing* a monthly publication. The intent was to keep us connected during a very difficult year. The much-appreciated comments we have received confirm the goal was met.

An unintended consequence has been an amazing increase in readership and club membership. Each issue is now being distributed to almost 300 email addresses.

This is the last issue of the fiscal year, and I have every confidence that our wonderful contributors will continue to offer interesting and educational content into our next year.

Thank you everyone,

Sandy Sorkin

In This Issue

Ornithology textbook	2
Virtual Bird Walks.....	4
Tiny ancient bird	5
Feeding birds.....	6
New member of the Nuttall Ornithological Club	7
Guatemala: Birding the Francisco Marroquín Campus	9
Whales and Birds.....	11

Next meeting: Wednesday, September 8
Virtual Bird Walk: Thursday, August 19
Virtual Bird Walk: Thursday, September 16

The first ornithology textbook, arguably, was written by Frederick II. It was completed most likely in the 1240s, but nobody really knows. The ornithological sections are part of the larger tract known as *De arte venandi cum avibus*, On the Art of Hunting with Birds.





Virtual Bird Walks August and September

The theme of the September Virtual Bird Walk has not been determined yet, but it could be Introduced Birds. The staff of The Broadwing (both of us) will be certain to notify everyone when we decide. The best guidance at this time is to keep your cameras handy while birding. The theme for August is Bird Eyes. You get to interpret the theme anyway you like.

Participants will be able to share their screens or email their pictures for inclusion in a group PowerPoint. Emails should be sent at least three days in advance of the meeting to MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com.

Sandy

Recent Montclair Bird Club Meetings

May 2020:	An Online Quiz, with Rick Wright.
June 2020:	A Walk on Pipeline Road, by Sandy Sorkin.
July 2020:	The Real James Bond, by Jim Wright.
August 2020:	An Online Quiz, with Rick Wright.
September 2020:	Manakins and Microbes, by Jeniffer Houtz.
October 2020:	The Bizarre Breeding Behaviors of Tropical Cuckoos, by Christine Riehl.
November 2020:	Dispersal in Young Peregrine Falcons, by Elise Morton.
December 2020:	An MBC Story Slam, by Pamela Olsen.
January 2021:	Modern-Day Exploration in the Tropics, by Dan Lane.
February 2021:	Winter Raptors, by Giselle Smisko.
March 2021:	Damselflies and Dragonflies: the Other White Meat, by George Nixon.
April 2021:	Wolf Natural History and Tourism in Yellowstone, by Paul Brown.
May 2021:	Sandhills and Saw-whets, by Matthew Schuler.
June 2021:	Magnificent Namibia, by Linda Woodbury.

Tiny ancient bird from China shares skull features with *Tyrannosaurus rex*

Chinese Academy of Sciences



Researchers from the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences have discovered the 120-million-year-old partial fossil skeleton of a tiny extinct bird that fits in the palm of the hand and preserves a unique skull with a mix of avian and non-avian dinosaur features.

The two-centimeter-long (0.75 inch) skull shares many structural and functional features with the gigantic *Tyrannosaurus rex*, indicating that early birds kept many features of their dinosaurian ancestors and their skulls functioned in much the same way.

Their findings were published in *Nature Communications* on June 23.

The bird was deposited 120 million years ago in a shallow lake in what is today Liaoning Province, in northeastern China.

Through detailed reconstruction of the bird family tree, the researchers demonstrated that the new fossil bird species belongs to an extinct group of birds called enantiornithines, or 'opposite birds.' They are the most diverse group of birds from the time of the dinosaurs in the Cretaceous and have been found all over the world.

Birds don't become dependent on human feeding, study suggests

Oregon State University

Oregon State University researchers have some good news for the well-meaning masses who place bird feeders in their yards: The small songbirds who visit the feeders seem unlikely to develop an unhealthy reliance on them.

"There's still much we don't know about how intentional feeding might induce changes in wild bird populations, but our study suggests that putting out food for small birds in winter will not lead to an increased dependence on human-provided food," said Jim Rivers, an animal ecologist with the OSU College of Forestry.



Findings from the research, which looked at black-capped chickadees outfitted with radio frequency identification tags, were published in the *Journal of Avian Biology*.

Birds flown to Mexico to escape rising seas

Rodrigo Pérez Ortega

Thirty-three black-footed albatrosses (*Phoebastria nigripes*) started new lives on Guadalupe Island in Mexico after being flown 6,000 kilometers from Midway Atoll near Hawaii. On Midway, they “were destined to drown,” says conservation biologist Julio Hernández Montoya. The birds were flown on a commercial airline as eggs or one-month-old chicks, in the first transfer of a seabird species between nations. Conservationists first restored Guadalupe Island to its lush natural state by removing invasive species, including nearly 50,000 goats and 1,500 feral cats.



Guadalupe Island

MBC Executive Board member Rick Wright has been elected to the Nuttall Ornithological Club, the oldest organization in the New World dedicated to the study of birds. Based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, since 1873, the NOC is the parent organization of the American Ornithological Society (*olim* American Ornithologists' Union). To qualify for membership, nominees must demonstrate excellence in scholarship, leadership, and field skills.



Thomas Nuttall

FIELD TRIP COORDINATOR

Would you like to be the club's **Field Trip Coordinator**? The position is open and requires a little time. If you have an interest and want a little more information, please **contact Sandy** at **MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com**.



Sandia Crest



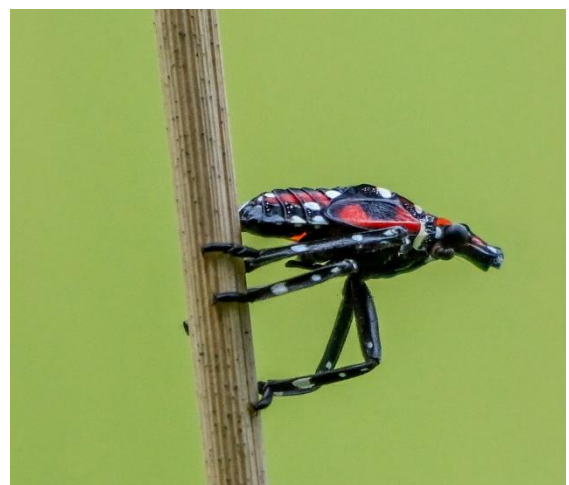
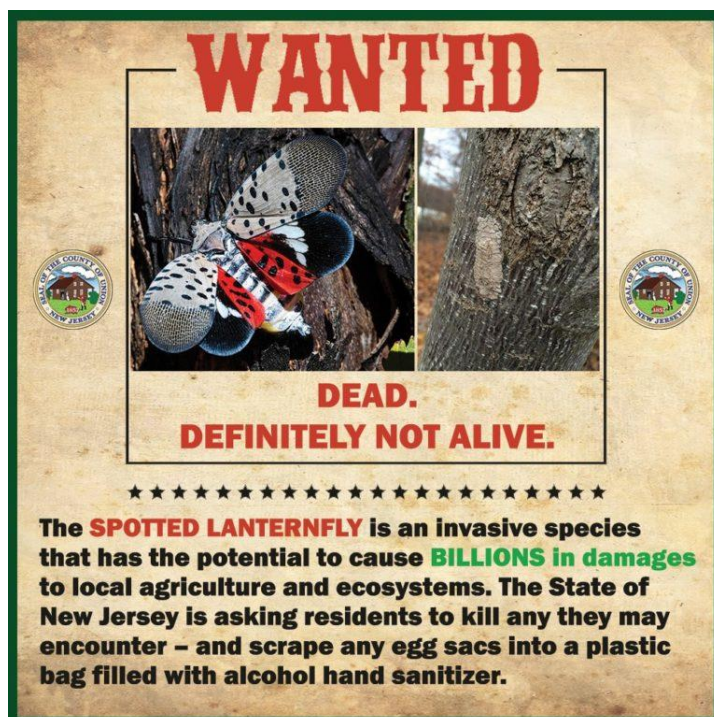
Morbidity/Mortality Event in Nestling and Fledgling mid-Atlantic Songbirds

A morbidity/mortality event has been occurring in nestling and fledgling songbirds in the mid-Atlantic, extending into the Southeast and eastern upper Midwest. Since mid-May, numerous young birds—mainly blue jays, starlings, and common grackles, but also robins and cardinals—have been found with eye and neurologic issues. In some cases these birds have been found dead in large numbers.

Some of the birds are exhibiting symptoms such as head tremors, weakness or partial paralysis of the legs, falling to one side, or the inability to stand at all; they may also vocalize excessively. Most of the birds, however, show good body weight, probably because their parents are still feeding them.

Cases have been reported in DC, TN, KY, VA, WV, MD, DE, IN, OH, FL, PA, and NJ. Many theories have been posed as to the cause of this event. No cause has been identified yet.

If you observe birds with any of these symptoms or find dead birds on your property, please contact the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife's Wildlife Veterinarian Dr. Nicole Lewis (Nicole.lewis@dep.nj.gov), or call 877-WARN-DEP for any additional instructions. Dead birds should be handled with gloves, double-bagged, and kept cool until picked up. Any bird baths or feeders should be cleaned and removed if you find sick or dead birds on your property.



Guatemala: Birding the Francisco Marroquín Campus

Rick Wright

It's one of the commonest of commonplaces when you're birding the American tropics: "This place looks like an exotic plant nursery!"

Especially *this* place, because it is . . . an exotic plant nursery, a quiet corner of Guatemala City's Universidad Francisco Marroquín where palms and bamboos and other tropical

fancies are being raised in pots for use in campus landscaping. The entire campus is a spectacularly beautiful site, nestled into a steep canyon just a few minutes by taxi from the city's international airport.



Most tourists to Guatemala spend just a few minutes walking the edge of Francisco Marroquín on their way to the incredible Popol Vuh Museum, but birders know that right here is one of the most exciting localities in Guatemala City, one that amply repays not minutes but hours of easy birding. A leisurely morning's stroll across the pleasingly hilly

campus is likely to produce about 40 species—more if your ear is better than mine.





Lesson motmots, bushy-crested jays, rufous-browed peppershrikes, and boat-billed flycatchers are among the common Central American specialties here. What makes a late winter visit to Francisco Marroquín even more fascinating, though, is the combination of tropical novelties with so many wintering birds from the north. A motmot perches quietly above a path with a feeding wood thrush, a peppershrike hunts at eye level while a yellow-bellied sapsucker studies the tree trunk, a boat-bill strikes righteous fear into a little flock of Townsend warblers and warbling vireos: that's the Guatemala highlands in winter.



On a recent morning at Francisco Marroquín, my favorite unexpected constellation rose late in the walk, when a couple of white-naped brush finches drew my attention to the weedy edge of a compost dump. I love all members of the genus *Atlapetes*, but this particular encounter was made all the more exciting by the magnolia and MacGillivray warblers and yellow-throated vireos feeding alongside these stunning tropical sparrows.

Some hours later, the call of the museum grew too loud to resist, audible even over the incessant chanting of the buffy-crowned wood partridges. The Popol Vuh, named for the great Maya epic, holds one of the largest and most informatively presented collections in the world of pre-Columbian and colonial art from Central America: densely inscribed stelae, ceramics decorated with startlingly animated figures and scenes, monumental funerary vessels dating to millennia before the European conquest of the New World.

Inevitably, we are drawn to objects depicting birds and bird-like figures. My "favorites" change with every visit, but each time I find myself especially impressed by a curassow-headed whistling vessel, designed to sound vaguely avian notes when it is filled with water and rocked from side to side. To most visitors, this is just one more among the charming objects on exhibit in the museum. To us, though, this ancient pot represents the link between the birds we watch just outside and their ancestors, observed and rightly admired by Central America's earliest human inhabitants.



Whales and Birds

Sandy Sorkin

Rick Wright asked me if I had any interest in a whale-watching trip, noting that in addition to whales there was a good chance for some pelagic birding. There were two opportunities being offered. The first was a 12-hour whale-watching trip leaving Belmar, NJ, at 5 am. The second option was a shorter excursion of three hours departing at the civilized noon hour. We opted for the three-hour cruise and re-read the brochure to be certain we weren't on the *Minnow*.



Even though we were on a whale-watching expedition, one of the primary objectives was to see the numerous birds we believed would be congregating offshore watching the whales with us. Either trip would have served our goal, but I was certain I didn't want to be on a boat smaller than the *Queen Mary II* for 12 hours at sea. I haven't been seasick in the past and didn't want to try a full day on the high seas to determine if I still had functioning sea legs.

We did what any good sailor would do upon boarding the ship. We bought the shirt, then staked out a position near the front of the boat on the port side. For those even less nautical than I am, port is the left side. Why we thought the whales would have a decided preference for port I don't remember, but that is where they were.

After leaving port (that's got to be confusing), we were told to watch for the whale's spouting as they came up to breathe. The spout is certainly an indication that a whale is present, but the whale breath lets you know they are really close. When your entire diet is seafood, halitosis is a major understatement.

The good news is that we saw humpback whales. The first never really got his head much out of the water and brought his tail way up before diving before diving and returning to the school of menhaden. The menhaden hang out together in huge schools near the surface. If they successfully stay away from predators, such as multi-ton humpback whales, they can live over ten years and weigh up to one pound. I mention the menhaden because I was taught in school that baleen whales ate krill in big watery gulps, then strained the water out of their mouths through the baleen. Turns out that they also like fish. I suspect that the menhaden eat phytoplankton and zooplankton, so the whales don't have to do it themselves.





A second humpback breached about a mile from us, and I never got the *National Geographic*-quality picture I wanted. Then he swam towards us and started to feed on the port side. This second whale had another idea about the optimal way to gorge on fish. He would dive and return to the surface with his eyes shut and mouth wide open. I finally realized that I needed to have my camera ready to shoot as soon as the menhaden

started to frantically leap out of the water in an effort to escape. It is apparent how whales might get a mouthful of anything that happened to be on the surface.



The sky wasn't teeming with birds, but I did manage to see a few Wilson storm petrels (lifer 1,086) and a flock of short-billed dowitchers. We also had common and Forster terns follow us out to sea, though I suspect they could have found the whales on their own.



As much as I want to do this again, I suspect I'm not ready for a full-day trip. Three hours was just perfect. Mostly because the whales were cooperative.



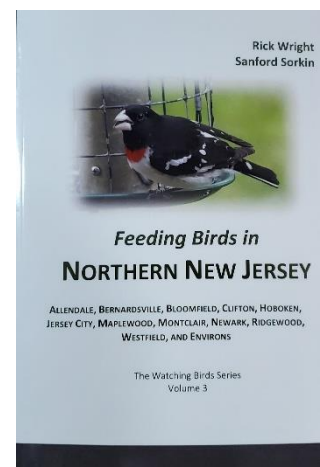
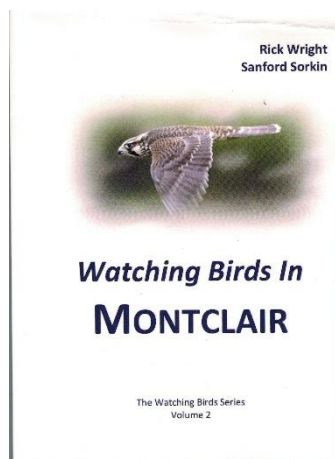
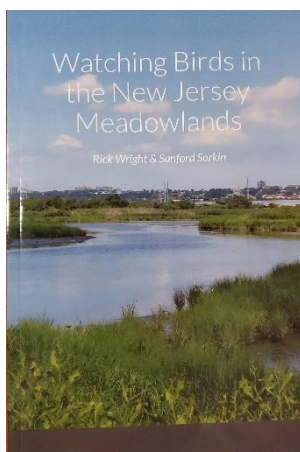
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With over 70 combined years of bookselling experience, the staff knows how to choose challenging, nurturing, and inspiring books, and knows, too, how to value the input and advice of readers and writers in our area's thriving literary community. Watchung 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 LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

April 5–11, 2022

with Rick Wright

From our base at a single, centrally located hotel in McAllen, we will make day trips out into the subtropical habitats that make the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas one of the true must-see birding destinations in the US. Among the sites we expect to visit are South Padre Island, Laguna Atascosa and Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuges, Bentsen–Rio Grande State Park, Anzalduas County Park, Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, and La Joya—but there is always the possibility of an exciting rarity disrupting our plans. Some of the regional specialties we will be looking for are the least grebe, Mexican and mottled ducks, hook-billed and white-tailed kites, gray and white-tailed hawks, crested caracara, plain chachalaca, red-billed pigeon, white-tipped dove, green parakeet, red-crowned parrot, pauraque, buff-bellied hummingbird, ringed and green kingfishers, golden-fronted woodpecker, vermilion flycatcher, great kiskadee, Couch and tropical kingbirds, green jay, Chihuahuan raven, black-crested titmouse, verdin, cactus wren, clay-colored thrush, long-billed thrasher, tropical parula, pyrrhuloxia, painted bunting, olive sparrow, Morelet seedeater, Cassin and Botteri sparrows, Sprague pipit, bronzed cowbird, and Altamira and Audubon orioles. Minimum of 4, maximum of 7 registrants. Participants are responsible for the own airfare, lodging expenses, and food. The non-refundable registration fee, covering vehicle rental and the volunteer leader's expenses, is expected to be between \$600 and \$800, depending on number of participants. **Register with Sandy Sorkin, montclairbirdclub100@gmail.com, beginning December 10.**

SOUTH AFRICA: WESTERN CAPE AND KRUGER
September 27 to October 14, 2022
with Rick Wright and Patrick Cardwell

We start in Cape Town and return from Johannesburg, in between visiting sites such as West Coast National Park, the Cape of Good Hope, Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden, and Kruger National Park. We will enjoy a vast range of birdlife, from penguins to rollers to cisticolas, along with many of the large mammals that South Africa is so famous for. With visits to Robben Island, the site of Nelson Mandela's long imprisonment, and Johannesburg's Apartheid Museum, our trip also offers insight into the history and culture of this beautiful and diverse country.

Strictly limited to 12 participants plus the two leaders, this trip is open to LSNY members, members of the Montclair Bird Club, and clients of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. For more information and to register, please email or phone Erik Lindqvist at erik@ventbird.com or (800) 328-8368.

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 reduce anxiety and make us smile.

Sandy

MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com

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In This Issue

Page 1: Black-crowned night-heron
Page 6: Black-capped chickadee
Page 8: Resting spotted lanternfly
Page 10: Lesson motmot, rufous-browed peppershrike
Page 11: Royal tern
Page 12: Wilson storm petrel, common tern, short-billed dowitchers

The MBC Bulletin Bird

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and Photographer** Sandy Sorkin

THE BROADWING

The *Broadwing* is published five times a year:
January, March, May, late summer, and October.
Or monthly during a pandemic.

Send photos, field notes, or articles to Sandy at
[**MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com.**](mailto:MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com)

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