The Broadwing

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Message from the Editor
April 2022

Dear Members and Friends,

I think we all wonder if the Covid days are almost behind us, with in-person meetings in the very near future. The club addressed the uncertainty we faced during the pandemic by making *The Broadwing* a monthly newsletter. We also introduced a weekly quiz and created monthly Virtual Bird walks. The *raison d'être* of these efforts was to foster a sense of connectivity. I hope that everyone agrees that the club has met its goal.

Sandy

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Next meeting: Wednesday, April 13
Virtual Bird Walk: Thursday, April 21
Birders' Meet-up: Check website for the April date!

Hitchhiking

Correspondence

From Jim Cubie
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A doctor would never counsel his patients like bird organizations advise homeowners.

A two-packs-per-day smoker visits his doctor. The patient asks, "What can I do to extend my life?" His doctor will tell him that he should eat right, exercise, and take his blood pressure medicine, but "**if you don't stop smoking, nothing else you do will really matter**. The other good things cannot make up for the deadly consequences of smoking."

Bird organizations do the opposite. They give homeowners a list of "ten good things to do for birds." They should say "**stop killing birds in your yard—control cats and prevent window collisions.** All the other 'good things for birds' cannot make up for 1.25 billion bird deaths caused by cats and home windows" (2–6 birds per home annually.)

The typical advice to homeowners listing "good things for birds"—such as installing a nest box, providing water and cover, counting birds, buying shade grown coffee—will do little or nothing to increase bird populations as long as the yard is killing birds.

As the graph below makes clear, there are only two steps we can take in our backyards that really will save birds: control cats and prevent window collisions. A yard includes a home's windows.

Even if the list of "good things for birds" includes "prevent window collisions," a list delivers the false message that all of these "good things for birds" are equally effective. In fact, only two, controlling cats and preventing window collisions, will prevent bird deaths. Very few lists even mention controlling cats or preventing window collisions.

Doing something is not better than nothing. Promoting "participation" instead of preventing bird deaths undermines the very mission of bird organizations. If bird clubs offer easy options to their members, they will choose them—instead of controlling their beloved cats and or spending $50 to prevent window collisions. It is infinitely more important to save birds than to make members happy.

The authors of a major study on bird mortality finished with a call for ecologists to "demonstrate leadership" in preventing bird deaths. "Leadership" means telling our members and the public the truth: we have to start and premise all our yard management on stopping bird deaths caused by our cats and windows.

Like the smoker's doctor we must deliver the blunt message. "**First of all, control cats and prevent window collisions. Nothing else you do will make any real difference.**"

A yard that kills birds cannot be "bird friendly" no matter what else is done in the yard. Homeowners must start by preventing bird deaths.

To work together to develop a new model of pro-bird yard management, join the "Bird Safe Working Group" with an email to jimcubie1@gmail.com; questions are welcome.

April Virtual Bird Walk

The theme of our April Virtual Bird walk is Black & White Birds or Birds Eating. Once again, you may interpret the theme as you see fit.

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

Sandy

Recent Montclair Bird Club Meetings

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, by 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.

Fairview Farms Preserve
and
American Woodcock Meet-up
March 8, 2022

The day did not start off well. We couldn't find Fairview Farms Preserve. GPS was useless and passersby had no idea where it was. Fortunately, a call to Deb DeSalvo, our leader and host, pointed us in the right direction and we managed to find our way there. It was certainly well worth it.

Fairview Farms Wildlife Preserve, located in Bedminster, NJ, is the home of the Raritan Headwaters Association. Made up of 170 acres of woodlands, fields, and wetlands, it is a beautiful place that is being restored through the removal of invasive plants and replanting with native species. We saw many birds there. Some highlights included great looks at eastern bluebirds, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, and a red-breasted nuthatch. We also got to hear a chorus of wood frogs and spring peepers by the farm's wet areas, which was a treat.

After Fairview Farms Preserve, we traveled a short distance to Deb and Jason DeSalvo's property. Deb and Jason hosted us at their lovely energy-neutral home and showed us around their property, which includes farmland, woodlands, wetlands, and a stream. While the sun set, we began to hear the buzzy, electric *peenting* of woodcocks, which grew louder and louder. Eventually, some of the woodcocks soared into the sky, wings twittering, circling way above us and giving us excellent silhouetted views against the darkening sky. As a bonus, we were also treated to the low hooting of a great horned owl. We were ten very happy birders indeed! Many thanks to Jason and Deb for so generously hosting us for the day.

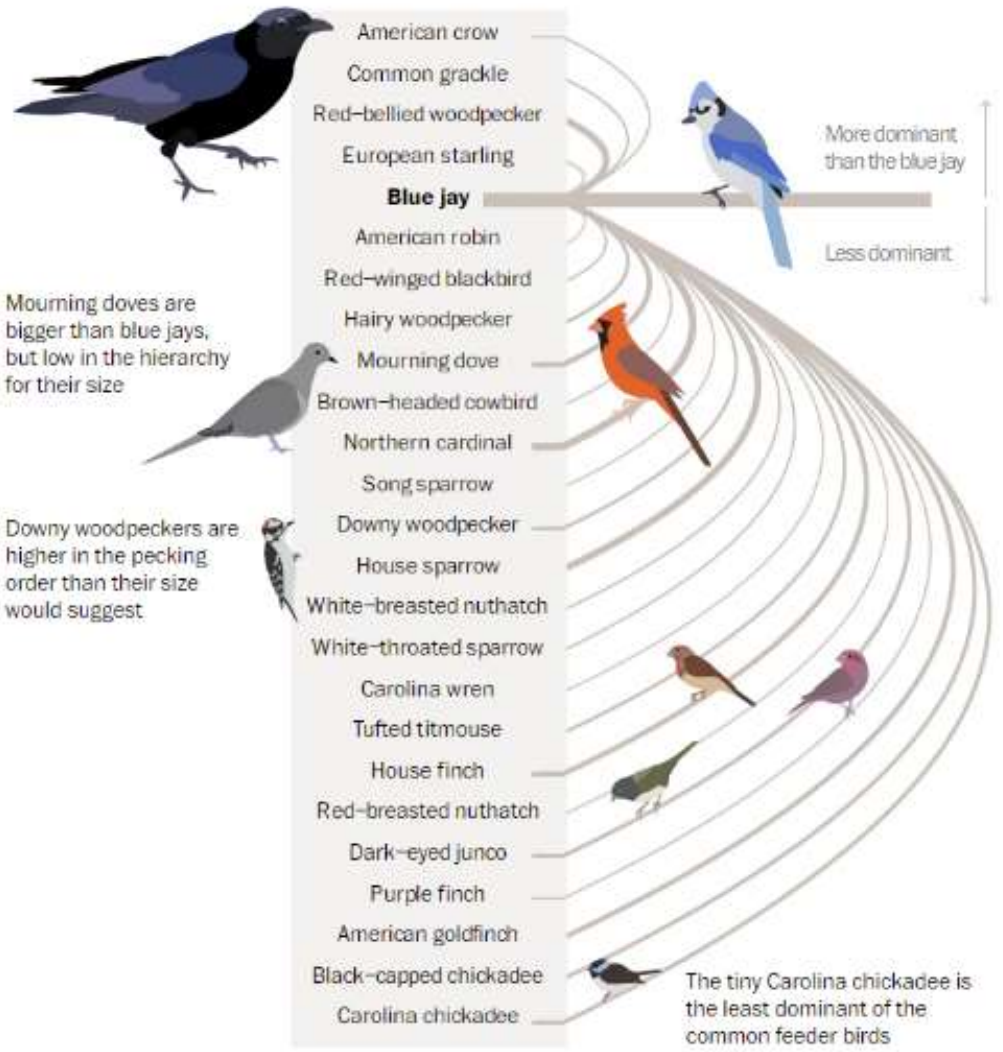
27 species were seen or heard

Canada goose	Black-capped chickadee
Mourning dove	Tufted titmouse
American woodcock	Red-breasted nuthatch
Great blue heron	White-breasted nuthatch
Black vulture	European starling
Turkey Vulture	Eastern bluebird
Red-tailed hawk	American robin
Great horned owl	American goldfinch
Yellow-bellied sapsucker	Dark-eyed junco
Red-bellied woodpecker	White-throated sparrow
Downy woodpecker	Song sparrow
Northern flicker	American goldfinch
American crow	Yellow-rumped warbler
Fish crow	

The Feeder Hierarchy Is No Longer a Mystery

Blue jays are up there, but no match for crows

Birds most commonly observed at bird feeders in the Northeastern United States. Thicker lines indicate a species interacts with the blue jay more often.



Birds Are Laying Their Eggs Earlier, and Climate Change is to Blame

By Field Museum

A drawer in the Field Museum's egg collections. Photo by Bill Strausberger

Spring is in the air. Birds are singing and beginning to build their nests. It happens every year, like clockwork. But a new study in the *Journal of Animal Ecology* shows that many species of birds are nesting and laying eggs nearly a month earlier than they did a hundred years ago. By comparing recent observations with century-old eggs preserved in museum collections, scientists were able to determine that about a third of the bird species nesting in Chicago have moved their egg-laying up by an average of 25 days. And as far as the researchers can tell, the culprit in this shift is climate change.

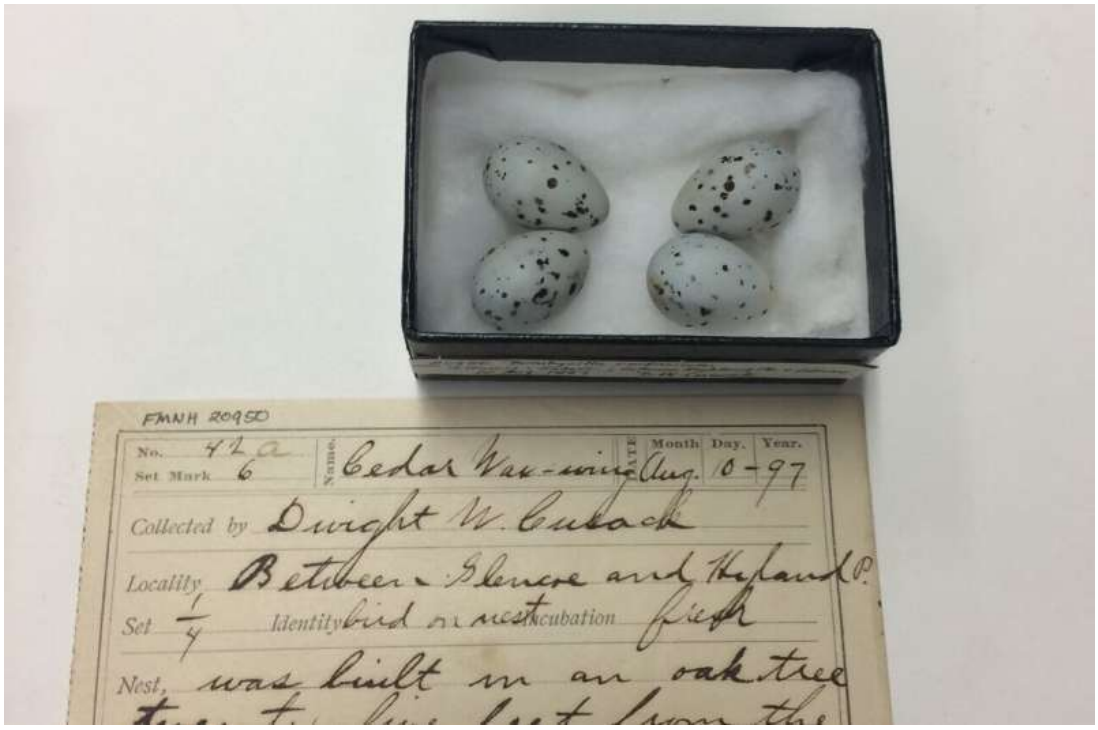
"Egg collections are such a fascinating tool for us to learn about bird ecology over time," says John Bates, curator of birds at the Field Museum and the study's lead author. "I love the fact that this paper combines older and modern datasets to look at these trends over about 120 years and help answer really critical questions about how climate change is affecting birds."

Bates got interested in studying the museum's egg collections after editing a book about eggs. "Once I got to know our egg collection, I got to thinking about how valuable that collection's data are, and how those data aren't replicated in modern collections," he says.

The egg collection itself occupies a small room crammed full with floor-to-ceiling cabinets, each containing hundreds of eggs, most of which were collected a century ago. The eggs themselves (or rather, just their clean, dry shells, with the contents blown out a hundred years ago) are stored in small boxes and accompanied by labels, often handwritten, saying what kind of bird they belong to, where they're from, and precisely when they were collected.

"These early egg people had to be incredible natural historians in order to do what they did. You really have to know the birds in order to go out and find the nests and do the collecting," says Bates. "They were very attuned to when the birds were starting to lay, and that leads to, in my opinion, very accurate dates for when the eggs were laid."

The Field Museum's egg collection, like most, drops off after the 1920s, when egg collecting went out of fashion, both for amateur hobbyists and scientists. But Bates's colleague Bill Strausberger, a research associate at the museum, had worked for years on cowbird parasitism at the Morton Arboretum in the Chicago suburbs, climbing ladders and examining nests to see where brown-headed cowbirds had laid their eggs for other birds to raise. "He had to get out there every spring and find as many nests as he could and see whether or not they were parasitized, and so it occurred to me that he had modern nesting data," says Bates. Chris Whelan, an evolutionary ecologist at the University of Illinois at Chicago, also contributed to the modern dataset, with songbird nesting data collected in Chicagoland starting in 1989, when he began work at the Morton Arboretum. Whelan and Strausberger's contributions to the study were critical, Bates says, because "finding nests is a lot harder than almost anybody realizes."



A clutch of cedar waxwing eggs in the Field Museum, collected in 1897. Photo by Field Museum

"Finding nests and following their fate to success or failure is extremely time-consuming and challenging," says Whelan. "We learned to recognize what I called 'nesty' behavior. This includes gathering nest material, like twigs, grass, roots, or bark, depending on bird species, or capturing food like caterpillars but not consuming the food item—this likely indicates a parent is foraging to gather food for nestlings." Whelan and his team used mirrors mounted on long poles to peer into high-up nests, and they kept careful track of the dates when eggs were laid and hatched.

The researchers then had two big sets of nesting data: one from roughly 1880-1920, and another from about 1990 to 2015. "There's a gap in the middle, and that's where Mason Fidino came in," says Bates. Fidino, a quantitative ecologist at Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo and a co-author of the study, built models for analyzing the data that allowed them to address the gap in the middle of the 20th century, as well as the differences in sampling between early egg collectors and Whelan and Strausberger's research.

"Because of this uneven sampling, we had to share a little bit of information among species within our statistical model, which can help improve estimates a little bit for the rare species," says Fidino. "We all realized rather quickly that there might be some outliers present in the data, and if not accounted for, those could have a rather large influence on the results. Because of this, we had to build our model to reduce the overall influence of any outliers, if they were present in the data."

The analyses showed a surprising trend: among the 72 species for which historical and modern data were available in the Chicagoland region, about a third have been nesting earlier and earlier. The birds whose nesting habits had changed were laying their first eggs 25.1 days earlier than they were a hundred years ago.

In addition to illustrating that birds are laying eggs earlier, the researchers looked for a reason. Given that the climate crisis has dramatically affected so many aspects of biology, the researchers looked at rising temperatures as a potential explanation for the earlier nesting. But the scientists hit another snag: there are no consistent temperature data for the region going back that far. So they turned to a proxy for temperature: the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

"We couldn't find a single source of long-term temperature data for the Midwest, which was surprising, but you can approximate temperature with carbon dioxide levels, which are very well documented," says Bates. The carbon dioxide data come from a variety of sources, including the chemical composition of ice cores from glaciers.

The amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere over time neatly maps onto larger temperature trends, and the researchers found that it also correlated with the changes in egg-laying dates. "Global climate change has not been linear over this nearly 150-year period, and therefore species may have advanced their lay date non-linearly as well. Therefore, we included both linear and non-linear trends in our model," says Fidino. "We found that the simulated data were very similar to the observed data, which indicated that our model did a decent job."

The changes in temperature are seemingly small, just a few degrees, but these little changes translate to different plants blooming and insects emerging—things that could affect the food available for birds.

"The majority of the birds we looked at eat insects, and insects' seasonal behavior is also affected by climate. The birds have to move their egg-laying dates to adapt," says Bates.

And while birds' laying their eggs a few weeks early might seem like a small matter in the grand scheme of things, Bates notes that it's part of a larger story. "The birds in our study area, upwards of 150 species, all have different evolutionary histories and different breeding biology, so it's all about the details. These changes in nesting dates might result in them competing for food and resources in a way that they didn't used to," he says. "There are all kinds of really important nuances that we need to know about in terms of how animals are responding to climate change."

In addition to serving as a warning about climate change, Bates says the study highlights the importance of museum collections, particularly egg collections, which are often under-utilized. "There are 5 million eggs out there in collections worldwide, and yet there are very few publications using museum collections of eggs," says Bates. "They're a treasure trove of data about the past, and they can help us answer important questions about our world today."

Ann McLellan Bigelow working in the Field Museum's collections in 1951. Photo by John Bayalis

Roman theater of Arles

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Triumphal arch at Glanum, first century BCE

Viking ship burial on Öland

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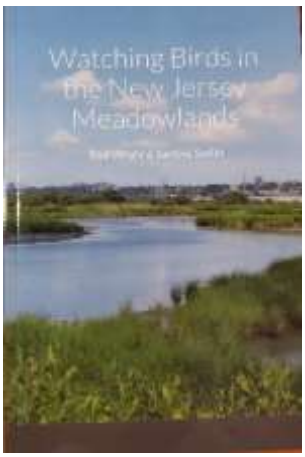

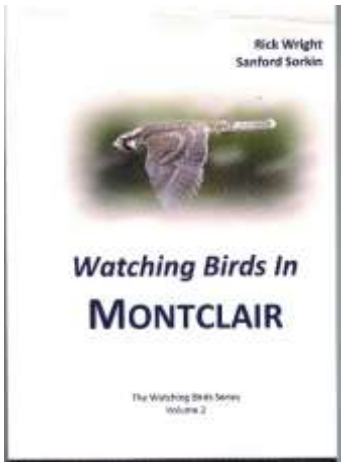

From the Editor's Desk

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

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The MBC Bulletin Bird

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THE BROADWING

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