The Broadwing

Publication of the Montclair Bird Club
January 2021

Montclair, NJ
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President's Message
January 2021

I hope that we are getting closer to in-person meetings in the new year. Regardless, it seems like a good idea to continue with our video format as well, to reach friends and speakers anywhere.

I started asking birding friends if they would like to contribute articles to the *Broadwing*. Two have agreed, and in this issue we have a story from a friend and new columnist in Trinidad and Tobago and another from Washington State.

There is also an excerpt from *Poultry Science*, because I started to wonder if there is any benefit to birds if their birdbath contains fluoridated tap water.

Sandy

In This Issue

Next meeting: Wednesday, January 13
Virtual Bird Walk: Thursday, January 21

Glad my car isn't in that parking lot

The benefits of fluoridation are well documented, but should we use tap water to fill our birdbaths?

From *Poultry Science*, April 1981

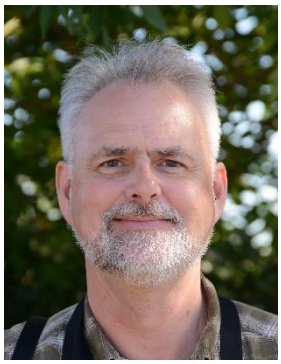
The effect of sodium fluoride on egg production, egg quality, and bone strength of caged layers

J. W. Merkley

The development of bone fragility in caged layers is a major problem in the poultry industry. The incidence of bone breakage during the processing of spent hens substantially reduces the economic return from these birds. In two trials, a commercial strain of White Leghorn pullets was used. In each trial, one-day-old chicks were divided into two groups, wing banded, and placed in floor pens. The treated group received fluoridated water at levels up to 300 ppm. The control group of birds received only well water. At 20 weeks of age, birds from each group were transferred to one of two laying batteries. One battery of birds received fluoridated water (100 ppm F). The other served as a control and those birds received only well water. Production rate, egg weight, shell strength, shell thickness, and Haugh units were determined for each bird. At 45 weeks of age, the humeri and tibiae were removed, and bone strength, percentage of bone ash, and fluoride content were determined. Combined data from both trials showed that the fluoride treatment increased the breaking strength of humeri from 6.86 to 13.35 kg and that of tibiae from 6.61 to 13.10 kg. The fluoride treatment also significantly (P less than .01) increased the percentage of bone ash. Egg quality and rate of production were not reduced by the fluoride treatment.

BIRD CLUBS ON THE MOVE

Rick Wright



Originally published by VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

We throw around the word “disaster” easily nowadays, but this pandemic has been more destructive than any other event, natural or artificial, in my lifetime. The loss of well over a million lives worldwide would be staggeringly incomprehensible were those losses not so tragically personal for so many of us. With more than a fifth of the deaths here in the United States, there is no longer anything abstract about this disease and the toll it takes on our friends, our loved ones, on us.

Not even the most fortunate among us has been unaffected as an individual. And because individuals exist in networks, communities, and cultures, those institutions, too, have been damaged—not just altered, but damaged. The day-to-day connections essential to our understanding of ourselves and our relationships with others were once effortless, but now, acts like a friendly hug or a shared chuckle or even just a smile come freighted with worry; the moment’s hesitation—is it safe? for me? for them?—creates a hiccough of disconnection, as if nothing we do with each other can ever be spontaneous again.

Six months ago, it seemed to many of us that Covid-19 would push many already teetering groups and organizations over the edge. Local and regional bird clubs, to take the obvious example, had been on their last legs for well more than a decade, as memberships dwindled and aged. Surely this would be the end of any organization whose survival was so delicately dependent on those once-a-month meetings in church basements and the bimonthly field trips with the same half a dozen loyalists. In normal times, a cough or a little snow on the roads was more than enough to cancel those events. And times are far from normal.

But then came the surprise. As it became more and more obvious that birding travel would have to be put on hold, we began to turn inward, to the local birding communities that we might not have had quite as much time for in the past. Regular meetings and field trips would be impossible, of course, but the newsletter remained—a venerable technology still faithfully curated by bird club editors, in some cases even in its ancestral form as a paper publication, sent through the mail. Like most club duties and functions, the responsibility of writing for the newsletter

traditionally fell to a tiny core of regular contributors.

Setting up an old-style bird club meeting

Now, though, in the time of Covid-19, with so much unwelcome spare time on our quarantined hands, we put pen to paper or pixel to monitor and finally started to produce the stories and articles we'd been carrying in our heads for months and even years, never finding a chance to sit down and just write. Newsletters that had struggled along as two pages or four suddenly found themselves filled to bursting with notes and comments from our friends, whose exciting accounts of past trips and sightings helped us forget the new limits imposed on our own birding. Faced with so new and so welcome an abundance of copy, editors found themselves forced to expand to eight pages and beyond, and to accelerate the schedule of publication; many have now gone from quarterly to bimonthly or even monthly. The concomitant rise in postage costs has encouraged the "migration" (fitting word, that) of even the most hide-bound publications from paper to digital formats.

Digital delivery is essentially free, making it possible to expand at no cost the effective reach of a club newsletter far beyond the dues-paying members. Friends and friends of friends can now read the same materials—and newsletters, delivered for free, are among any bird club's most powerful recruitment devices.

Once the digital divide was overcome, there was nothing to stop bird clubs from branching out into a wide range of e-communications. Among the most popular genres has been the quiz. In a way, birding has always had the structure of a puzzle, requiring the creative combination of scattered clues to reach an accurate identification. Online publication makes it easy to share full-color images—or, on the part of some especially nefarious quizmasters, small portions of full-color images—for identification tests, and the possibility of linking to books and journals in online libraries helps create challenging and rewarding quizzes on the history and culture of birds and birding. One of the organizations I belong to, northern New Jersey's Montclair Bird Club, has distributed nearly 60 biweekly quizzes now, some of them easy, some of them hard, all of them informative. Each quiz goes out to nearly 200 birders around the world, a far cry from the fifteen or twenty of the faithful who in more carefree days could be counted on to attend a weekday meeting.

The popularity of those quizzes, all of them now archived on the club's website, led inevitably to "live" quiz rounds broadcasted on Zoom. I had never heard of Zoom before

March of this year, when suddenly it was everywhere. Zoom quizzes, on birds and a hundred thousand other interesting topics, are now being run what seems like twenty-four hours a day, and it is easy to take part in two or three a day originating from clubs and organizations all around the globe, rubbing virtual shoulders with birders from the very same countries we wish we were visiting.

And if quizzes work so well on Zoom, why not meetings? The atmosphere is different, and the cookies are sorely missed, but online meetings bring their own advantages with them. The chairs are comfortable, the screen always visible, the volume levels up to you. No one has to worry about driving home in the dark or in bad weather. The elderly and the homebound can attend again, safely and easily. Best of all, just as in the quizzes, there are no geographic bounds. My attendance at the Linnaean Society is unhampered by any need to park on the Upper West Side; I can "go" to events of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club without the two hours of wearying travel to Philadelphia; any meeting of any club anywhere in the world is open to me if I can figure out the time differences and remember to set the alarm clock.

Many of those meetings, wherever they issue from, are even more interesting than they have been in the past. Program chairpeople and club treasurers are canny sorts, and they quickly figured out that honoraria could be increased while money could still be saved: captivating speakers whose reluctance or whose geographical remoteness had stood in the way of their boarding a plane for a grueling and expensive flight are now available virtually, ready to speak from the comfort of their own homes or offices.

There are no silver linings to a global catastrophe like this one. But there are surprises. One of the biggest for me has been the renewal of the bird club. Over these past challenging months, I have often felt that I knew my fellow members better and spent more time with them—even if it is time on line—than back in the lamented days of in-person meetings and excursions. Long deemed antiquated, even moribund, the local bird club may well prove to be the glue that bonds our little communities, the venerable institution that winds up preserving birding and its unique culture through these difficult times and beyond.

Upcoming tours with Rick Wright and Victor Emanuel Nature Tours
Click each tour title for more details.

- **April 20–28, 2021** France: Birds & Art in Provence
- **April 29 – May 9, 2021** France: Birds & Art in Burgundy
- **May 12–20, 2021** Poland: Birds & Art in Royal Krakow
- **July 18–31, 2021** Circumnavigation of the Black Sea
- **August 19–28, 2021** England: British Birdfair & Coastal Norfolk
- **September 8–17, 2021** Spain: Birds & Art in the Northwest
- **September 19–28, 2021** Germany: Birds & Art in Berlin & Brandenburg
- **September 27 – October 14, 2022** South Africa: Birds, Wildlife & Culture
- **May 12– 20, 2022** France: Birds & Art in Provence
- **May 20–30, 2022** France: Birds & Art in Burgundy
- **May 30 – June 9, 2022** Germany in Spring: Birds & Art in Berlin & Brandenburg
- **September 7–22, 2022** Hungary & The Czech Republic: Birds & Music from Budapest to Prague
- **September 27 – October 14, 2022** South Africa: The Western Cape and Kruger

Trinidad and Tobago Features the Oilbird

Jason Radix
Eureka Natural History Tours
naturetobago.com
(868) 731-0759

The small twin island country of Trinidad and Tobago is located in the southernmost Caribbean, approximately 7 miles north of Venezuela. Although culturally and politically a part of the English-speaking Caribbean, geologically and biologically it belongs to South America. This is evident in the islands' rich and diverse natural history, with a range of lush habitats teeming with native birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and tropical plants.

Birds are represented here by more species than all of the other terrestrial vertebrate groups combined. Trinidad and Tobago is widely considered the country with the greatest number of bird species per land area in the world: more than 480 species have been documented in less than 2000 square miles. Many of these birds are strange, interesting, and endemic, found nowhere but Trinidad and Tobago. Among this global birding hotspot's most peculiar, and most fascinating, birds is the oilbird.

The oilbird, *Steatornis caripensis*, is the only nocturnal fruit-eating bird in the world. Limited in its distribution to only a few remote parts of northern South America and Trinidad, it is also unique in its gregarious cave-dwelling habits and its echolocation abilities. This is a target species for visiting birdwatchers and for general nature enthusiasts alike.

The oilbird is a white-spotted brown bird with a wingspan of 42 inches and an overall length of 18 inches. This is one of the larger members of the order Caprimulgifomes, represented in North America by the nighthawks and goatsuckers; it is the only member of the family Steatornithidae.

Unlike such other nocturnal birds as owls, nightjars, and nighthawks, all of which are carnivores, the oilbird feeds exclusively on the fruits of various palm and laurel species, which are all high in fat. Their fatty diet, combined with low predation and a long nestling period, allows the unfledged young to become very fat, often as much as 50% heavier than the adult. It was at this

stage that members of native tribes caught, killed, and boiled the chicks, liquefying the body fat into oil—whence the name “oilbird.”

These natives called the species *guácharo*, “the one that wails and moans,” for their ferocious snarling calls. Early French colonists knew them as *diablotin,* “little devil,” for their roosting in perpetual darkness.

As a cave-dwelling and nocturnal species that undertakes long foraging flights, this bird is never seen by most visitors or local wildlife enthusiasts. The best opportunity to witness this natural wonder is a daytime visit to one of the colonies at their remote roost. The most accessible site is Dunston’s Cave, at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, Trinidad. To limit disturbance, short visits to this otherwise restricted site are offered only twice a week to guests of the Centre. The hike to other colonies is treacherous, requiring the leadership of qualified guides to visit safely.

The oilbird is listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as “of least concern,” yet it remains a very sensitive species which requires protection in the few areas it survives. To witness this very special bird, visit Trinidad and Tobago.

Jason Radix *is a professional tour guide in Trinidad and Tobago, with extensive knowledge of the trails and species found on the islands. As one of our columnists, he will spotlight birds and birding locations in future issues of the* Broadwing*.*

The Montclair Bird Club has distributed the following proposal to two universities and to our local high school.

The Montclair Bird Club

Organized 1920

Else Greenstone Avian Essay Competition
January 2021

Overview
The *Montclair Bird Club* (MBC) is soliciting proposals for an original essay to be published in the club's Broadwing newsletter. The contest honors the decades of contributions that Else Greenstone made to students, novice birders, visitors to the Montclair hawkwatch, and the community.

Students are invited to submit an original essay about birds and illustrated if possible, suitable for inclusion in the club newsletter. They essay should be approximately 700-1,000 words, and if possible illustrated. Essays will be reviewed by the MBC Executive Committee, and the author of the selected essay will be presented an honorarium of $500.

The Montclair Bird Club
The MBC was organized in 1920 and celebrated its 100th Anniversary in 2020. Meetings are held each month except for July, August, and December. The June meeting features presentations by club members. While the name implies a primary interest in birding topics, many lectures address other nature topics (e.g., forestry, soil management, and endangered species, etc.), and non-avian species (e.g., reptiles, butterflies, and bats). The MBC has an Executive Committee composed of nine members, and they will be responsible for reviewing and selecting an essay.

Objectives
The objective of the MBC is multi-faceted: we want to expand our commitment to a mutually beneficial relationship with the community; we also want to encourage students to pursue their interests in nature and introduce them to the MBC, and ideally have them participate in our monthly meetings.

Essay Format

Title: Preferably a short title that can be used to promote the topic in our newsletter and on our website.

Length: The essay should be between 700-1,000 words. Illustrations are desirable.

Contact Information: Please provide your name, an e-mail address, study year, major and how you would like to be contacted. If your preference is a phone call, please add your phone number.

Full Description: The essay can reflect your research, academic interests, birding experiences, avian conservation, etc. The scope can be local, national, or even international. Please address the topic in an organized fashion.

Selection Criteria: The MBC Executive Committee will be responsible for reviewing essays and making a selection. They will assess the essays originality and its relevance to the interests of the MBC. All decisions of the Executive Committee will be final. If more than one exceptional essay is received, the Executive Committee may request permission to publish the other essays in the Broadwing for a smaller honorarium.

Timeline: **August 30, 2021** Essays must be received by the MBC Executive Committee by this date. The submission in a PDF or DOC format should be made to MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com

September 15, 2021 Notification of accepted essay. Publication will be in the October or November Broadwing.

Legal: You own the copyright to your original work. If you have used additional resources, please give credit where it is due. The selection(s) of the Executive Committee are final.

For clarification or additional information, please email MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com.

Please feel free to email the *Broadwing* with any items you would like to see included in future issues. Please include pictures and any news that will reduce anxiety and make us smile.

MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com

Hits and Misses

Michael Sheldon

I am not particularly goal-oriented when it comes to birding. Sure, I keep a life list and a yard list. But I don't have targets that I'm trying to reach by any particular date. That said, I do have an informal list of species that I feel I ought to see, photograph, and get to know because they are regulars on the island where I live.

That's Whidbey Island, which is 55 miles long (as the car drives) and fairly skinny. It sits at the junction of the Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca—the body of water that separates the Olympic Peninsula from Vancouver Island. If there is a clear night, you can stand somewhere near that junction and see the lights of Victoria, the capital of British Columbia.

The checklist compiled by Whidbey Audubon lists 230 species. However, only 106 of these are categorized as "common" during at least one season of the year. I'd add in the 61 species the local experts have categorized as "uncommon," but are not that hard to ferret out if you spend some time here.

Here's a tally of the year's hits and misses.

Several **red crossbills** visited my yard in June. I'd caught a glimpse of one the year before and was hoping to get a photograph. This year the crossbills were enjoying our sunflower seed feeder. They spent a lot of time eating and allowed me to get surprisingly close for a nicely detailed portrait.

Swainson thrush is a common visitor in late spring. I saw and heard them a couple of times in 2019, but only in the shadows of heavily forested areas. Struck out completely in 2020.

I had been chasing reports of **band-tailed pigeon** sightings since I moved to Whidbey two and a half years ago. Had no luck until a large, purple bird started visiting our platform feeder in August. Any motion to raise binoculars or camera would send them flying off. Finally managed to get my camera set up in a concealed corner and took a couple of pictures of the band-tailed Pigeon after it flew to a safer perch.

The **Virginia rail** is a bird that is often heard but seldom seen at Deer Lagoon, an important bird area just a few miles from my house. I've had a few good looks, but never managed to capture pixels…until this year. It is a very very very poor photograph, taken at a distance and well hidden bird in the reeds. I won't show it here. It's a start…better luck next year.

Northern shrike. Actually, I've gotten several good looks, as this bird likes to perch up high, but I never seem to have my camera when this happens. This winter, I managed to get a photo of the quarry obscured by branches.

In wintertime, **Pacific wrens** set up housekeeping in the bog behind my house. But they're fast-moving, dark-plumaged, shy, and tiny. I have a lot of blurry, underexposed photos of them.

To this year's targets I'm adding evening grosbeak and barn owl. Of course, there's a bigger list of birds off-island that are of interest. I'm including the broad-winged hawk near the top of the heap. Maybe I'll see y'all at Montclair Hawkwatch one of these days.

Michael Sheldon *is a South Jersey native who moved west in 1980. He worked as a writer and photographer and is now retired. For more info and photo portfolio, please visit <msheldon.com>.*

Montclair and Bloomfield lie in one of the Northeast's rare "no-man's-lands" not covered by any official CBC circle.

CBC MYTH, CBC REALITY

Rick Wright

The Christmas Bird Count is famously a New Jersey invention, created in the last year of the nineteenth century by Frank Chapman of Englewood. Chapman, of course, was a highly regarded scientist at the American Museum, but he was also his day's ornithological populizer extraordinaire; and when in the pages of *Bird-Lore* he called for an organized bird census to be taken on Christmas Day 1900, the response was enthusiastic, not just on the banks of the Hudson but across the continent, from California to Florida and the Canadian Maritimes.

As usual in the case of beloved traditions, the origin story of the Christmas Bird Count has been overlaid with fiction in the 120 years since. The most persistent myth is that Chapman's scheme was meant as a conservation effort, a tale repeated every year by those who should know better. Even the National Audubon Society, which coordinates what are now more than 2,000 counts involving tens of thousands of observers, claims that Chapman was "speaking out" against the tradition of the Christmas side hunt, a competitive shooting event popular in some areas in the nineteenth century. Chapman, so goes the made-up story, was urging the readers of *Bird-Lore* to "go out that upcoming season . . . and do a Christmas bird census rather than a Christmas bird hunt," replacing senseless slaughter with good clean scientific fun.

Heartwarming as it may be, the story makes no sense. If ever a choir was already converted, it was the readers of *Bird-Lore*, and no amount of preaching in the magazine's pages was likely to convince anyone outside that enlightened circle. Chapman's original announcement makes no mention of the need to replace the side hunt, and indeed he suggests that that barbaric pastime might already then have been a thing of the past, doomed by a "very radical change of tone . . . one of the significant signs of the times."

Instead, Chapman's proposed Yuletide census was *modeled on* the Christmas side hunt, and was meant to spark some of the same "spirit of wholesome competition" aroused by the bloody prototype. The publication of the lists gathered in that first census was only secondarily to compile scientific data; in the first instance, the goal of a walk in what turned out to be "exceptionally fine weather on Christmas Day" was pleasure, a pleasure shared in in December 1900 by such famous and far-flung birdwatchers as Ralph Hoffmann, Charles H. Rogers, Witmer Stone, Lynds Jones, Alexander Wetmore, and, of course, Chapman himself.

And so four Montclair Bird Club members were in good historical company at sunrise December 20, the date of this year's Lower Hudson Christmas Bird Count. Centered in the Hudson River off West 58th Street in New York, the count circle reaches 7.5 miles into New Jersey, west to Lyndhurst, south to I-78, and north almost to the cradle of the event itself, Englewood. In years like this one that find us at home in December, we have tallied birds at two of the most interesting wetland sites in the circle, Mill Creek Marsh and Cromakill Marsh.

This year found us breaking snow at Mill Creek Marsh at sunrise. The water was low and the tide still falling, the worst possible conditions for a census that should be heavy on waterfowl. For the first time in memory, Mill Creek failed to produce northern shovelers, gadwalls, or buffleheads, all common wintering species that are usually conspicuous at high tide. Green-winged teal prefer to feed in the mud at low tide; the recent snow and cold, however, meant that what should have been exposed flats irresistible to those feathered bulldozers were covered by great sheets and plates of ice. All the same, our two marshes held more than half of all the teal recorded on this year's count.

The same weather that apparently dispersed the ducks concentrated passerines in snow-free patches, especially sparrows. Song sparrows are ubiquitous year-round in the cattails, spartina, and phragmites, joined at most seasons by smaller numbers of swamp sparrows. This year, though, the snow had driven large numbers of white-throated sparrows out into the marshes, and at Mill Creek this species accounted for more than half of all the passerellids we encountered. Two American tree sparrows, a red fox sparrow, and a single white-crowned sparrow in its formative plumage were no less delightful for being expected in small numbers at the season.

Our day's total at our two sites came to 33 species, satisfyingly better than we had predicted. Just how informative our tally will be for researchers of the future, though, is an open question. The strength of CBC data has been the rough comparability of observer effort over the years; Because of the manifest dangers of spending sustained time in groups in this time of Covid-19, few Christmas Bird Counts of the 2020–2021 season issued any kind of public call for participants, and thus were conducted by fewer participants than normal. Central Park, one of the most productive sites on the Lower Hudson Count, was entirely off limits to CBC birders this year. If science requires the replicable, then 2020 may well be struck from the record. But as Frank Chapman wrote more than a century ago, the Christmas Bird Count is not only about science; any day afield "add[s] materially to the pleasure of those who [take] part in it."

Chapman, F. 1900. “A Christmas Bird-Census.” *Bird-Lore* 2: 192.
———. 1901. “The Christmas Bird Census.” *Bird-Lore* 3: 28–33.
Repanshek, K. 2020. “121 Years of Counting Birds During the Holidays.” nationalparkstraveler.org.

Lower Hudson CBC 2020
Mill Creek Marsh and Cromakill Marsh

Canada Goose 308
Northern Shoveler 1
Gadwall 4
Mallard 35
American Black Duck 6
Green-winged Teal 214
Hooded Merganser 2
Common Merganser 25
Feral Pigeon 1
Mourning Dove 6
Ring-billed Gull 122
Herring Gull 12
Great Black-backed Gull 5
Northern Harrier 3
Cooper Hawk 1
Red-tailed Hawk 4
Downy Woodpecker 2
Peregrine Falcon 1
Monk Parakeet 7
Blue Jay 1
Crow sp. 32
Black-capped Chickadee 7
Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1
Carolina Wren 1
European Starling 20
Northern Mockingbird 7
House Sparrow 8
House Finch 2
American Goldfinch 8
Red Fox Sparrow 1
American Tree Sparrow 2
White-crowned Sparrow 1
White-throated Sparrow 57
Song Sparrow 28
Swamp Sparrow 3
Northern Cardinal 5

Mill Creek Marsh
December 20, 2020

From the *New York Times*

Monarch Butterflies "Cost Too Much to Save"

Monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) will not benefit from being listed as an endangered species under US law, because officials say the lack the money to protect them. Monarch numbers have crashed because of the impact of pesticides and climate change on their food source, milkweed plants. "We have to work within the funding resources that we have," said Lori Nordstrom, assistant regional director for ecological services for the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Midwest region. Conservationists laud the success of grant programs that pay farmers to maintain pollinator habitat, and urge citizens to plant milkweed themselves.

Gulls to Great Auks: An Art Exhibit and Lecture Program

January 22 – May 14, 2021
Fairfield University Art Museum
Fairfield, CT

Several of the online lectures in this series are sure to interest Montclair Bird Club members. For the full program, click here.

Pictures from the December Virtual Bird Walk

Birds in This Issue

The MBC Bulletin Bird

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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 the editor at MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com.

From the Editor's Desk

Please feel free to email me with 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.

MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com