

The Broadwing



Publication of the Montclair Bird Club
September 2021

Montclair, NJ
Volume LXVII, Number 1

Message from the Editor September 2021

Dear Members,

Fall is here and in addition to a new Broadwing, we are starting to see warblers in our parks and yards.

This is also a perfect time to visit the club website www.MontclairBirdClub.org and look at our new Meet-Up groups with leaderless walks. The first two are scheduled for September 25 and October 23.

Regular Zoom meetings resume this month. We hope to be able to return to in person meetings in the near future, but until that is possible we will remain virtual. We will also continue to host Virtual Bird Walks. The theme for the September VBW is Birds & Water.

Sandy Sorkin

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

On the Rocks



September Virtual Bird Walk

The theme of the September Virtual Bird Walk is **Birds & Water**. Birds can be in the water, contemplating a plunge, diving, or simply drinking. If the bird is carrying a fish, we'll assume it came from water. Once again, you get to interpret the theme.

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.

Is Your Home Safe for Birds?

Sally Ellyson, New Jersey Audubon



Chris Neff

American Bird Conservancy and New Jersey Audubon estimate that collisions with windows and other building glass kill one billion birds in the United States each year. We often hold the tallest glass skyscrapers responsible for this disaster, but in fact, glass at lower levels kills more birds. Most of these deaths occur during the day in fall, when birds—many of them juveniles, less observant and less experienced than adults—are feeding in preparation for continuing their flight south that night, for the upcoming nightly flight.

A Smithsonian study estimates that about half of those deaths, as many as 500 million each year, are the result of collisions with glass windows in houses. Many bird deaths can be avoided if we pay attention to our windows and modify them as needed.

Depending on the time of day, position of the glass, and interior or exterior lighting, a window can reflect the landscape, mirror the sky, or create the illusion of an open pathway. When birds see vegetation reflected in a window, they may fly right into it in search of food, shelter, or safety. Take a look at your windows from outside at different times of day. If they are highly reflective of the landscape or the sky, they could be dangerous to birds. Use one of the solutions presented below to modify your windows, especially if you have noticed dead or injured birds beneath them.

Bird Feeders and Nest Boxes

It is a good idea to place bird feeders and nesting boxes no more than two or three feet away from your windows. If these structures are close to windows, birds leaving the feeder or box are unlikely to gather enough speed to harm themselves in a collision.

If you have a lot of open space, see the discussion and suggestions at <https://njudubon.org/nest-box>.

Prevention

Adding netting or screens to the outside of windows provides a “cushion” of space that can slow the impact of a window collision. Acopian Bird Savers are string curtains that hang in front of a window outside; you can buy them or make them yourself using instructions from birdsavers.com. Applying a film such as CollidEscape (collidescape.org) to the outside of a window can prevent dangerously misleading reflections while still letting you look through the glass from inside. There are also decorative films to deter birds from flying into reflective glass without significantly reducing visibility from inside; Solyx Bird Safety Window Films, for example, have lines or dots that keep birds from mistaking a reflection for vegetation or sky (decorativefilm.com/specialty-bird-safety).

American Bird Conservancy has rated and approved many other solutions (abcbirds.org/glass-collisions/stop-birds-hitting-windows).

Citizen Science

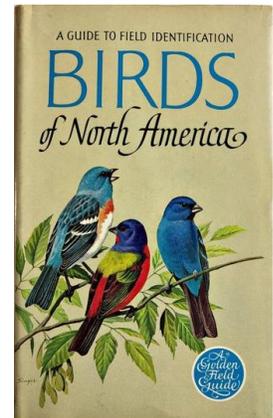
New Jersey Audubon is collecting data on bird deaths due to window collisions in New Jersey. A pilot program is starting in the Montclair area in late summer of 2021. Go to the program website, dbird.org, to post photos of birds that have been killed or injured and to provide key information about the collision: date, time, and location. You will also be asked to indicate the bird’s species, age, and sex, if it is known to you, and space is provided for further notes.

To get more information and to help us make the world safer for birds, visit us at njudubon.org/keeping-birds-safe.

Birding Then and Now

Sandy Sorkin

In 1958 my family moved from the suburbs to the country. An abandoned three-story orphanage dominated the 25 acres adjoining our modest two acres. When we arrived, the structure had been abandoned for at least 30 or 40 years. The building had no doors, and very few unbroken windowpanes remained. Overall, the building looked old but nonetheless enticing to exploring children walking in the woods. As children, we moved through the rooms on every floor a thousand times and located a few secret places in the basement, including a wire cage. Exploration of every room and closet never ended, but one afternoon as I left through a narrow side door, a pair of large birds flew directly above me. They were low enough that I thought they were looking at me. Their faces and color suggested they were owls, and my Golden Field Guide—*Birds of North America* confirmed it. There were barn owls living in the windowless attic. That experience could have been when I realized I liked looking at birds.



The most common birds on our property were the pheasants. Ignoring their beauty for the moment, pheasants must be the birds most likely to cause a heart attack. They sit in the taller grass and wait until the last possible second to loudly flush as you are about to trip over them. I don't see many pheasants these days, and I miss them. And I am reconsidering my original motivation for liking to go birding. It could have been the loud, bright pheasants.

About the same time, well before I was old enough to drive, I spent a few days hiking along the Appalachian Trail. If I remember properly, we spent one day hiking uphill, the next day following the ridgeline, and the third day walking downhill. Uphill and downhill are never fun, but the second day was amazing. I have no idea how many miles we could see from the ridge, which hardly mattered because we had the trees in every fall color. We also had hawks gliding below us. The notion of being above the birds was new and unexpected. I assume most were red-tailed, and I didn't know enough to identify the others. If this wasn't the instant I realized I enjoyed birding, it was clearly the one that cemented the idea in my mind, and I wanted to see more.



A hawk visiting my backyard in winter.

I think we all wonder if those childhood landmark moments ever repeat themselves. Will I ever again experience the same excitement seeing an owl, a pheasant, or a hawk? The answer has apparently been yes, confirmed by the number of cameras and pairs of binoculars I own, and of course a library shelf of bird books. A few much more recent events come to mind. A burrowing

owl just staring at me. He's on a berm and I'm staring from the passenger side window. I'm just as excited as when the barn owls exited the attic.

A least bittern posed motionless ten feet in front of me letting me take a perfect photograph.



Am owl staring back.

All my previous least bittern encounters were just a little too far away for a good picture. I believe this bittern was waiting for me to signal him that I had the shot.



Just this week, a

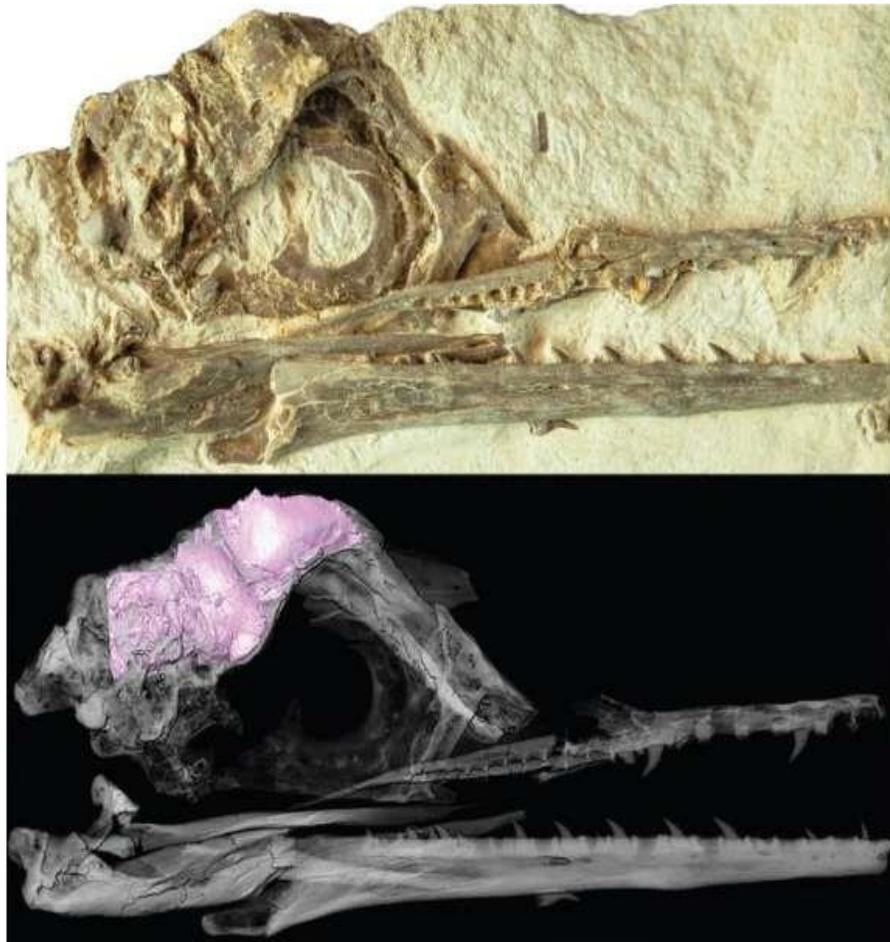
northern waterthrush slogged a bit in my birdbath. Other than the birdbath, there are no other water features that might attract the bird. But like the bittern, he waited for me to get the shot.



I guess I'm just fortunate that the thrill of new sightings on hikes, or in the backyard, hasn't worn off over six decades.

Bird Brains Left Other Dinosaurs Behind

University of Texas at Austin



A photograph of the new fossil of *Ichthyornis* (top) and a transparent 3D model (bottom, in pink) of the skull and brain (bottom, in pink). Christopher Torres / The University of Texas at Austin

Today, being "birdbrained" means forgetting where you left your keys or wallet. But 66 million years ago, it may have meant the difference between life and death—and may help explain why birds are the only dinosaurs left on Earth.

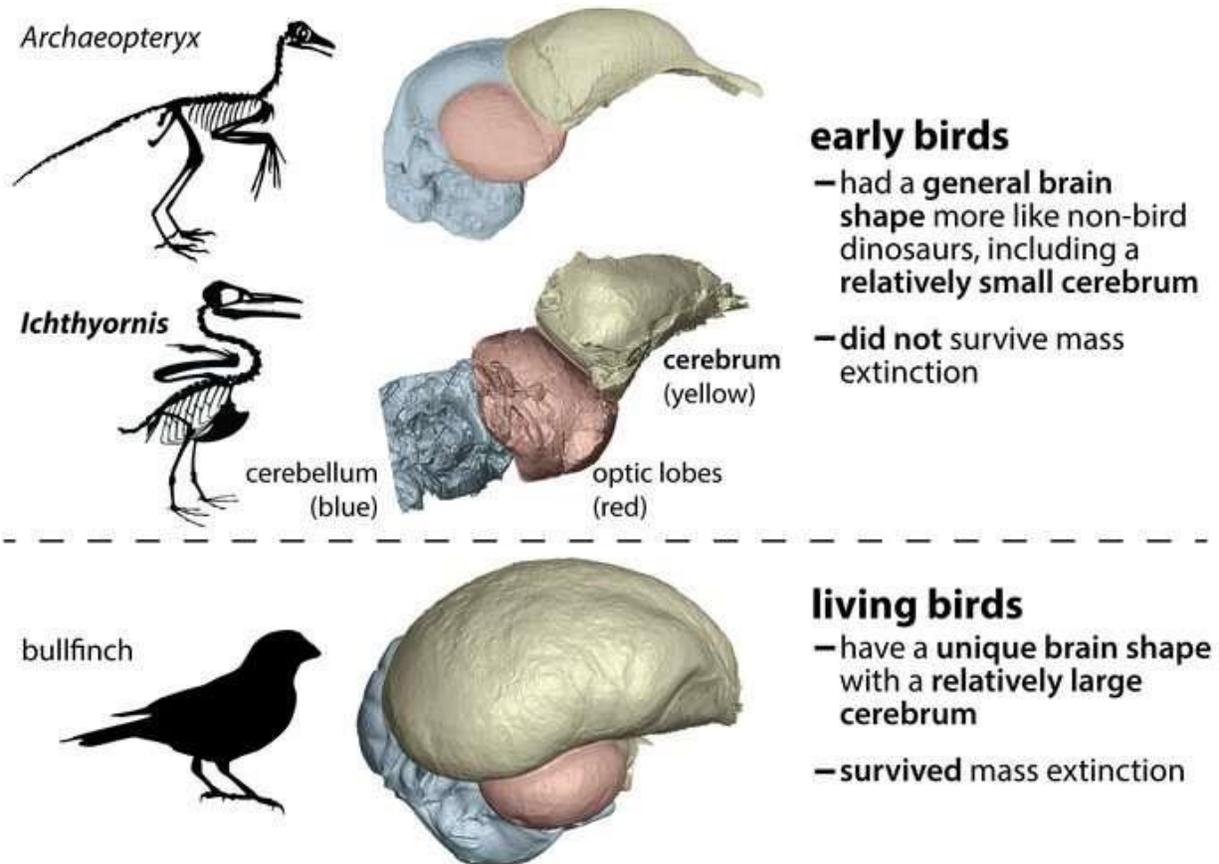
Research on a newly discovered bird fossil led by The University of Texas at Austin found that a unique brain shape may be why the ancestors of living birds survived the mass extinction that claimed all other known dinosaurs.

"Living birds have brains more complex than any known animals except mammals," said lead investigator Christopher Torres, who conducted the research while earning a Ph.D. from the UT College of Natural Sciences and is now a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellow at Ohio University and research associate at the UT Jackson School of Geosciences. "This new fossil finally lets us test the idea that those brains played a major role in their survival."

The fossil is about 70 million years old and has a nearly complete skull, a rare occurrence in the fossil record that allowed the scientists to compare the ancient bird to birds living today.

The findings were published July 30 in the journal *Science Advances*.

The fossil is a new specimen of a bird named *Ichthyornis*, which went extinct at the same time as other, nonavian dinosaurs and lived in what is now Kansas during the late Cretaceous Period. *Ichthyornis* has a blend of avian and nonavian dinosaur—like characteristics—including jaws full of teeth but tipped with a beak. The intact skull let Torres and his collaborators get a closer look at the brain.



The ancestors of living birds had a brain shape much different from other dinosaurs (including other early birds). This suggests that brain differences may have affected survival during the mass extinction that wiped out all nonavian dinosaurs.

Bird skulls wrap tightly around their brains. With CT-imaging data, the researchers used the skull of *Ichthyornis* like a mold to create a 3D replica of its brain, called an endocast. They compared that endocast with ones created for living birds and more distant dinosaurian relatives.

The researchers found that the brain of *Ichthyornis* had more in common with nonavian dinosaurs than with living birds. In particular, the cerebral hemispheres—where higher cognitive functions such as speech, thought, and emotion occur in humans—are much bigger in living birds than in *Ichthyornis*. That pattern suggests that these functions could be connected to surviving the mass extinction.

"If a feature of the brain affected survivorship, we would expect it to be present in the survivors but absent in the casualties, like *Ichthyornis*," said Torres. "That's exactly what we see here."

The search for skulls from early birds and closely related dinosaurs has been challenging paleontologists for centuries. Bird skeletons are notoriously brittle and rarely survive in the fossil record intact in three dimensions. Well-preserved skulls are particularly rare—but that's exactly what scientists need in order to understand what their brains were like in life.

"*Ichthyornis* is key to unraveling that mystery," said Julia Clarke, a professor at the UT Jackson School of Geosciences and co-author of the study. "This fossil helps bring us much closer to answering some persistent questions concerning living birds and their survivorship among dinosaurs."

Rubbish-raiding Parrots Take Lessons from Co-conspirators

Sulphur-crested cockatoos are the first parrots known to have a complex culture centered on food-gathering.

Parrots in eastern Australia have picked up a variety of bin-diving techniques by watching their neighbors—the first evidence that these large birds have distinct food-gathering cultures.

Over the last three years, sulphur-crested cockatoos (*Cacatua galerita*) have been seen flipping open household bins in the suburbs around Sydney to hunt for food in the litter. Barbara Klump and Lucy Aplin at the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior in Radolfzell, Germany, and their colleagues surveyed residents in 44 suburbs in the area and compiled reports of cockatoos prying open rubbish bins. Most sightings involved multiple birds.

The authors marked and watched almost 500 birds in three neighborhoods. They observed how the parrots shuffled over the bins, over the bins, using precise beak and foot movements to lift the lids.

Birds in one region tended to have similar sequences of perching and lid-flipping, suggesting that they learned the routine from each other, the authors say. The behavior probably originated in three suburbs and spread to 41 others.



Science (2021)

Selva Verde, Costa Rica

Rick Wright

I try to do things the right way, but can't always manage to get them in exactly the right order. Take Central and South America, for example: Only after almost 20 years of birding in Ecuador, Peru, Panama, the Bahamas, Guatemala, Trinidad, Guyana, Mexico, and Honduras did I finally pay a visit to Costa Rica, the classic first destination for temperate-zone birders eager to taste the delights of the tropics. It isn't that I had anything against Costa Rica, famously among the most welcoming countries in Latin America, with a nature-tourism infrastructure to rival any in the world. But the opportunity had never come up.



This past summer, when it seemed, briefly, that many parts of life might once again approach the normal, Alison and I decided to celebrate with a vacation, the first time we would travel alone together since the last innocent days of 2019. We chose Costa Rica, a country new to both of us, with lots of birds and, for Alison, lots of life birds, and reachable by a non-stop flight from Newark.



We chose, too, to “do” Costa Rica in a way unlike that preferred by most first-time visitors. Because I had spent time in Central America, and because most of the birds would be new to Alison wherever we went, we decided in this time of Covid to forgo the usual itinerary hitting all the hotspots, and instead to select a single base for our ten days, with a couple of scheduled guided outings to special sites not far away. Our

base, we decided, would be no more than two hours from San José, reachable without a rental car, physically comfortable, within walking distance of a restaurant, and willing to arrange our pre-flight Covid-19 tests. And, of course, have lots of birds.

To our mild surprise, we found such a place, Selva Verde Lodge in Heredia Province. We knew we had struck gold when on our walk from the reception desk to our room we were greeted immediately by buff-rumped warblers, collared aracaris, and yellow-throated toucans; over the next days, we fell into a happy rhythm of birding briefly before breakfast, then taking the rest of the morning to wander the lodge's almost 500 acres to see what we might see. We could

virtually count on finding slaty-tailed trogons, rufous motmots, northern barred woodcreepers, orange-billed sparrows, and hordes of their rainforest companions on any given day, and there were surprises, too: a snowy male snowy cotinga, a ludicrous family of crested owls, honking green ibis startled off the quiet trails. Every day brought something new, and even on the few occasions when an afternoon shower chased us to our porch for an hour, we knew that it would not be long before red-throated ant-tanagers, variable seedeaters, or rufous-tailed hummingbirds paid us a return visit. One night, the soothing clatter of rain on the rooftops was interrupted by the insistent hooting of a black-and-white owl singing from the railing outside our window.



With all this unceasing novelty around us, Alison was happy to bird the lodge trails again and again—but there was one bird she wanted to see, and one I wanted her to see, the resplendent quetzal. Quetzals are mountain birds, leaving the lowlands to the lesser trogons, and so early one morning we found ourselves being driven up the ominously named Cerro de la Muerte,

where a highly successful conservation program pays farmers to leave the quetzals' favored avocado trees standing in their fields. We'd been birding only a few minutes, grateful after a week on the humid Caribbean slope for the clear, cool, dry air, when the call came in: a local farmer had seen a bird feeding in one of the spared avocados on his land. And we were off. The quetzal, a fine green and red male with two improbably long, wispy upper tail coverts, stayed in sight for the better part of an hour as we oohed and aahed through the scopes. No one knows how many quetzals survive in Costa Rica, but with some 60% of the country in forest, including most of the mountain ranges, the species is surely more abundant here than anywhere else.

Emboldened by our quick success with the quetzal, I mentioned to our fine local guide that there was another montane species I had long dreamed of seeing. I'd assumed that the search for volcano juncos would be impractical, but Ivan assured me that the best area in the country for this odd little snowbird wasn't that far away after all. As we made our slow ascent to 11,000

feet, buffy tuftedcheeks and sooty thrushes gave us wonderful views, but no juncos—until suddenly a commotion in the paramo shrubbery resolved itself into a family of them, hungry, still-streaky juveniles harrying their exhausted parents. We encountered several small groups of these fierce-eyed birds shuffling along the roadside, and I was delighted to find them every bit as tame and just as photogenic as their northern congeners.

Our ten days passed as birding time always does—far too fast. But all the same, this first visit to Costa Rica was long enough to convince us that we would make many more.



Cornell Experts Not Overly Alarmed by Mysterious Songbird Sickness

Faith Fisher

Crusty eyes, seizures, and paralysis are among the strange symptoms that have recently plagued and even killed some songbirds in several eastern states.

Although this deadly phenomenon has reached neighboring states such as Pennsylvania and New Jersey, New York has yet to report a case of the mysterious outbreak. While remaining vigilant about the situation and researching causes. Experts at Cornell's Lab of Ornithology and the College of Veterinary Medicine are not overly alarmed, especially as cases taper off and songbird populations remain stable.

The Cornell Wildlife Health Lab has been monitoring the situation. The lab, housed under the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, was created in 2010 with the Department of Environmental Conservation in order to develop a wildlife disease surveillance program. The lab works with a network of partners on the local, state, and national level, and engages with the public in order to promote the health of wildlife populations.

The lab received the first reports of cases at the end of May from partners in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC. Researchers in these states began testing, but were unable to come up with any conclusive results about the outbreak.

"Over the course of weeks, no one was finding anything infectious," Elizabeth Bunting, Senior Extension Associate at the Cornell Wildlife Health Lab, said. "They did a lot of testing but could not come up with any disease process, and the rehabilitators were telling us they were trying antibiotics and things like that, but they did not have great effectiveness."

Bunting said that the outbreak exhibits similar symptoms to mycoplasma, a bacterial infection that commonly afflicts finches, causing swollen eyes. However, avian mycoplasmosis is not associated with the neurological effects of the unknown illness. Labs across the nation have worked to rule out many other possibilities including salmonella, avian influenza, and the West Nile virus.

In just the past few weeks, the Wildlife Lab has received widespread news of declining cases and dropping mortality rates.

"Information coming out of the National Wildlife Health Center and some of the other states said that the cases were declining all of a sudden," Bunting said. "That would not be typical of an infectious disease outbreak. You wouldn't expect an infectious disease to just spontaneously go away."

This sudden decline lends support to a tentative hypothesis about the cause of the outbreak. The most recent working theory is that the outbreak is related to the emergence of the cicadas this year—the geographic distribution and the timing of the undetermined songbird illness directly coincide with the arrival of the cicadas.

The cicadas emerged in Washington, DC, and eleven other states: Delaware, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, Florida, and Kentucky. Birds in these states started showing the unusual symptoms about a week after the mid-May emergence.

“The distribution of states where this spontaneously popped up was an exact match for the cicada emergence map, and it is a very strange distribution of states for this kind of outbreak,” Bunton said. “It was Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and then it moved over to Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, but it completely skipped New York and the rest of New England. That is an exact replica of the cicada map.”

Bunton and some other researchers believe that the ingestion of the cicadas could have had toxic effects on the birds. It is possible that some humans sprayed the cicadas with pesticides, which affect the brains of birds and could have caused the neurological symptoms. fungi carried by cicadas also produce toxins, which could have produced the illness in birds eating the insects.

The decline in cases corresponds with the disappearance of the cicadas. Although researchers will continue to monitor the situation, Bunton said that the outbreak should not be a cause of alarm. The outbreak does not pose any threat to humans, nor does it threaten the stability of the stability of songbird populations.

“This seems not to have been something that was going to travel and have a really significant impact,” Bunton said. “But we are very thankful that people are paying attention. This is exactly what we need to have happen when we see things in wildlife that are concerning.”





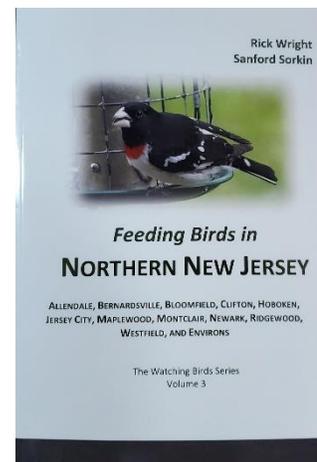
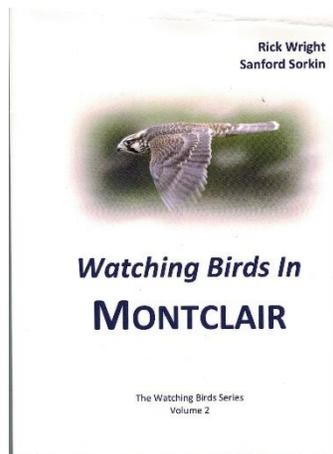
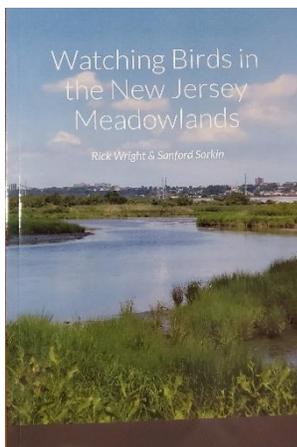
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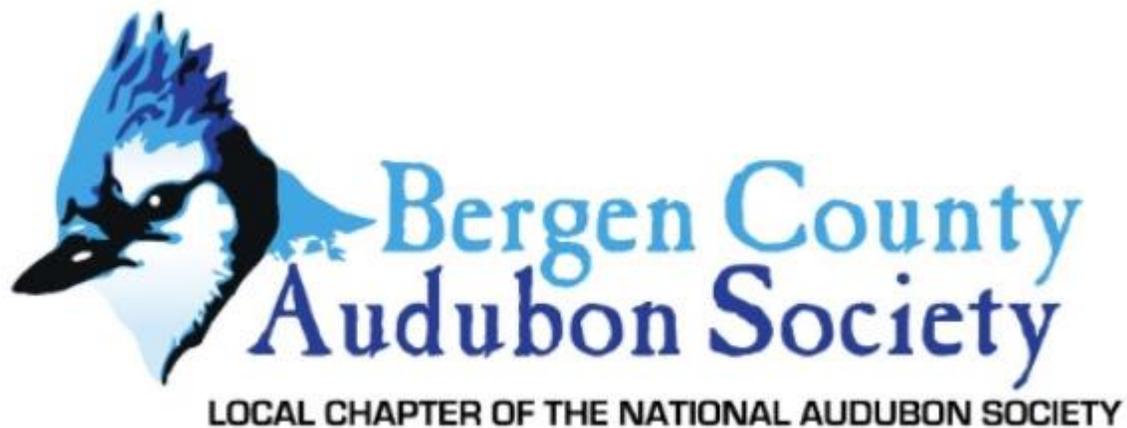
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With over 70 combined years of bookselling experience, the staff knows how to choose challenging, nurturing, and inspiring books, and knows, too, how to value the input and advice of readers and writers in our area's thriving literary community. Watchung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





Bergen Audubon Meadowlands Birding Festival Volunteers Needed

The Meadowlands Birding Festival is nearing, and volunteers are needed to help staff the children's activity tables; help is also needed with set up. The festival is being held at Richard DeKorte Park in Lyndhurst on Sunday, September 12th from 8:30AM-3:00PM. An hour or two of your time would be greatly appreciated. Contact Marie Longo at MLongo8383@aol.com (preferred) or (201) 498-0809 to sign up.

[Join Bergen Audubon!](#)

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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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 Sandy at
MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com.**

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