

The Broadwing



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March 2022

Montclair, NJ
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Message from the Editor March 2022

Dear Members and Friends,

One day we will be able to resume regular meetings. But the regular meetings will be converted into hybrid meetings combining in-person and Zoom. (The issue of refreshments at meetings will have to be resolved at a later date.)

In response to a great suggestion, the club will entertain nominations for a BIRD of the YEAR for 2022. The selected bird will be featured in *The Broadwing* with the best pictures supplied by readers. Please give some thought to what bird you would like to see as the club's BoY.

Send your suggestions to the editor by replying to this email. Though not a requirement, a narrative with the reason you selected the bird and any of your photographs would be welcome.

Sandy

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**Check out the Bird of the Year
initiative.**

**Next meeting: Wednesday, March 9
Virtual Bird Walk: Thursday, March 17
Birders' Meet-up: Check website for the March date!**



Rubber ducks are apparently available in fancy dress and in most sizes.

I don't know why Godzilla and Mothra come to mind.

A Topiary Chicken

Carol Off

Excerpt published in Harper's of an interview with Jim Puckett, the mayor of Fitzgerald, Georgia, conducted in November by the CBC Radio correspondent Carol Off. Puckett lost his 2021 bid for reelection after spending almost \$300,000 to build a sixty-four-foot-tall topiary chicken.

CAROL OFF: Mayor Puckett, the voters have spoken. Do you have any regrets about your giant chicken?

JIM PUCKETT: No ma'am, none whatsoever. My giant chicken has done exactly what I wanted it to do.

OFF: You spent \$300,000 and you just got defeated. Why is it a success?

PUCKETT: Because we've been on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* twice. I've been in newspapers across the country, from New York to San Francisco to China to India. We've got a great little town, and this chicken has garnered us worldwide recognition. Now, the voters obviously don't see the importance of that. You might not like everything that I do, but you're never going to say I sat around and didn't do anything.

OFF: Okay, so you mention the *Wall Street Journal*, which said that this election campaign was a referendum on your chicken, and it turns out that you got sixty-nine votes and that your opponent got 95 percent of the votes cast. So a lot of people were quite unhappy with this project.

PUCKETT: Yes, ma'am. With the city and the county we're about 19,000, and there are definitely a lot of people who do not understand what I was trying to do. And I'm okay with that. I'm very, very proud.

OFF: Okay, but this giant topiary chicken never got completed. It has no greenery on

it. Tell us what you thought your giant chicken would be.

PUCKETT: Hopefully, when they put the greenery on it, it's going to end up being the world's largest topiary chicken. And it's got an Airbnb in it that you'll be able to rent out. It will be up to the next administration to finish it. They're going to finish the chicken—we're \$291,000 in.

OFF: But what you got is a giant rebar silhouette of a chicken, right?

PUCKETT: Correct.

OFF: And nothing growing on it. Now, it does take a lot of work, with gardening and trimming, to get topiary to grow on something that large, does it not?

PUCKETT: I'm not going to say it doesn't take a lot of work, but once it's grown, the upkeep will be minimal. We'll have an irrigation system that waters it. It's not something that you're gonna have to have your landscape crew come by once a week to maintain. But this is all new, and that's one reason for the problems we ran into—there's no consultant for a sixty-four-foot, nine-and-a-half-ton steel chicken. It's a learning experience for all of us.

OFF: But your local people, they're pretty critical. They said, "Who the hell needs a chicken in Fitzgerald? We need housing." The Unfinished Rooster Rusty, they're calling it. They're calling for it to be demolished. What do you say to those people?

PUCKETT: Every time it makes a national article, I get calls from people saying, “Hey, I’ve got my credit card in my hand. I’m ready to book that chicken right now. We want to come to Fitzgerald.” I’m not kidding!

OFF: But why a chicken?

PUCKETT: Oh, great question! In Fitzgerald, we have these wild Burmese chickens that run around our town. In the late seventies, the U.S. Department of Agriculture did an experiment about thirty minutes from here with these wild Burmese chickens. I don’t know all the details, but the wild Burmese chickens that they released somehow migrated to Fitzgerald, and they’re all over town. You may go to a red light down on Main Street—this is no exaggeration—and a family of chickens may walk right in front of you across the street. The locals have a

love-hate relationship with the chickens. Some think they’re beautiful and gorgeous. Some can’t stand them because they crow. And we actually have a city ordinance that you can’t harm these chickens. Inevitably, when I bring a prospect to Fitzgerald that wants to open up a manufacturing plant, one of the first questions we get is, “Hey, can we see the wild chickens?” So I decided one day: You know what? We’re going to build a wild chicken.

OFF: So this is a tribute to feral Burmese jungle fowl—

PUCKETT: Chickens.

OFF: Chickens, yes. So you have the chicken almost built. What if the new mayor decides he’s going to have the chicken put down?

PUCKETT: It would kill me.



Gull Season

Rick Wright



The Raritan River at Sayreville, with the gulls' banquet hall in the upper center. Photo Rick Wright

There are plenty of gulls in the Meadowlands, and I can remember driving up from Princeton on cold January mornings in the 1980s, when the landfills were still going full toxic force, to add a lesser black-backed or Iceland gull to the year list. Those days are gone, the dumps and the larid concentrations alike. Where big flocks do still assemble, on the flats of Sawmill Creek or the stumps of Mill Creek Marsh, the birds are often so far distant or so flighty that even success in finding an uncommon gull can feel tiresome. Most of the time they turn out to be all ring-billed gulls anyway.

These past few winters, I've put more effort into gull watching at two sites in central New Jersey, neither of them much more than half an hour's drive from Bloomfield. Just like the good old days, these two Middlesex County localities—the Edison Boat Launch and Sayreville's Ken Buchanan Park—center on a landfill. Thousands of herring gulls feed behind the bulldozers when the dump is open, then drift down to the Raritan River to pass in review. Any of a dozen other species are possible, and lesser black-backed and Kumlien gulls can almost

be expected on any weekday visit between November and March.

I am far from an expert gull watcher. Sometimes I flatter myself that it's because I don't care, but most of the time I'm willing to admit that it's a lack of patience and shortfall in skill that keep me from finding more (read: any) Caspian or Heuglin gulls on the Raritan. But I have learned a little in recent winters, at least about the practicalities of gulling in inland New Jersey.



The Edison and Sayreville sites are less than two miles apart as the larid flies, but each has its advantages and its shortcomings. (Because they are on opposite banks of the Raritan, though, it takes nearly as much time to drive from one to the other as to drive to either from home.) The river is narrower at Edison, increasing the chances of breathtakingly close views of a rarity on the water or on the opposite shore. At times, large numbers of gulls concentrate right off the parking lot, but often, the mass gathers slightly downstream; because the path along the river is short, it can be impossible to follow the birds as they float out of sight around the bend. Light can be a problem in the mornings, too, the water sparkling and flashing to dazzle the eye just as a suspect gull takes off to fly into the

sun. The river is broader at Sayreville, making it that much easier for loafing birds to scatter. But because the park is downstream from the landfill, the current often carries them right past the observer on the bank. Large numbers of birds gather on the floating docks just below the parking lot, and even larger numbers on the seawall beneath the disused power plant. If there happen to be no birds at the first vantage point, there are other accessible spots upstream along Major Drive, and a puzzling bird can be chased up and down as it moves. Glare is rarely a problem here unless birds are concentrated directly across the river, when they are usually too distant for enjoyment in any event.

Watching gulls is as easy as identifying them can sometimes be maddening. Simply set up someplace comfortable (there are covered picnic tables at both Edison and Sayreville) and look. When birds are on the water, try to move downstream to maximize the time in which they are in view. Especially on cold days, look for gulls warming themselves in tight huddles on nearby roofs and parking lots. Numbers of bald eagles winter at the landfill, and at least one pair nests nearby; a close raptor overhead may flush large numbers of gulls,



a chance especially to look for white-winged or dark-backed gulls in the flock.

Just plain watching is the best way to progress in gull identification, particularly if you are fortunate enough to spend time doing it with someone who knows more than you (not hard in my case). There is also a wide selection of identification



books, websites, and videos to help: forty-five years ago, all that was available was the odd article in the birding press and Jonathan Dwight's *Gulls of the World*—published in 1925. Today, even the standard field guides do a good job with this very challenging group, but serious gull watchers now have recourse to the detailed accounts in Grant's *Gulls*, Dunn and Howell's *Gulls of the*



Americas, Olsen and Larsson's *Gulls of North America, Europe, and Asia*, Olsen's *Gulls of the World*, and Adriaens et al.'s *Gulls of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East*.

The expansive geographic scope of most of these works is a great advantage to the seeker of rarities: high on the list of anticipated species for New Jersey are Old



World larids such as the Mediterranean and yellow-legged gulls. It's just a matter of time.

Frostbite in Birds

Alison Beringer

Do birds get frostbite? If you're like me, you probably respond no, they don't—after all, their feathery and in some case downy coat would surely protect them, wouldn't it? However, I learned otherwise when I checked in on "our" Canada goose in recovery at [The Raptor Trust](#). I'd better start from the beginning:

On December 27, 2021, I was in Branch Brook Park in Newark, walking a portion of Rick's Christmas Bird Count, which, as readers of the [Broadwing](#) know, was the same route that R. F. Haulenbeek walked in 1921. Readers will also know that Canada goose was the most abundant bird Rick saw that day (about 1000), but, at least for some of us, it's about looking for—and at—individual birds, even if one has already "seen" that species on the count. Rick and I were both shocked and distressed to see a Canada goose entangled in fishing line and suspended from its right foot in a tree in Branch Brook Park. That tree was growing on a little island in the river so that we could not (simply?) climb up and cut the bird free. We called for help—the Essex County Animal Control was our most successful appeal, and eventually (it was a holiday) a helpful man came out to assess the situation, but given the location, inaccessible without a boat, he was unable to help. This was about 90 minutes after we first called, and the bird, which had initially been flapping its wings, was now only turning its head now and then.



If you're like us, you cannot bear to see a creature suffer because of humankind's carelessness—I am well aware that kestrels and other predators swoop down to eat at our feeder (and not the seeds), but that I can accept as a part of the cycle of nature. However, a bird suffering and slowly freezing to death because of a human's careless disposal of fishing line is a completely different situation.

We called friends and local non-profits for advice, help, ideas. One friend suggested calling the Raptor Trust (yes, I know Canada geese are not raptors), which I did. They were the most ready to help, though even they were hesitant that they would be able to find a boat and come down to Newark, but they took down the bird's location and said they'd see what they could do. Several hours later, they came through: Dylan, one of their employees, brought a kayak down, paddled over, climbed the tree, freed the bird, and took it back to their headquarters. It's been there since, slowly recovering from a badly damaged leg. I was encouraged when I learned early in the new year that it had taken to hissing at its caretakers. Excellent! When I wrote to check in again on February 20, I was told it had been returned to the wild. It had suffered "severe frostbite covering the right foot." The staff treated the foot extensively and reported that new, healthy skin had formed by the time it went back to the wild. I have learned that yes, birds get frostbite, and yes, they can recover!



Thank you, Dylan, for your kayaking and tree-climbing skills, and thank you, Nikki, for answering the phone and organizing the rescue. Without you two and the Raptor Trust, that individual would have suffered a terrible death.

Quest For the Steller Sea Eagle

Bruce Christensen

What motivates a person to chase a rare bird? I suppose that is the question that many ask. Late in December 2021, I was in Salem County looking at the northern lapwing when I encountered a birder who had just returned from seeing the mega-rare Steller sea eagle in Massachusetts. I said to myself, it has not been seen in a few weeks, and I doubt it will still be around. Another few weeks went by, and I was down in Cumberland County chasing the same lapwing. By chance, I ran into Ray Duffy, who had made a trip up to Maine to see the Steller; he had been able to see this magnificent bird within half an hour.



The seed was sown. I was not able to make the trip north right away, but still entertained faintly the hope of seeing the bird that for many years had been on my wish list. Since it seemed unlikely that I would see it on Russia's Kamchatka or off the northern shore of the Japanese island of Hokkaido, I thought I should make the attempt.





What were my thoughts while making the night drive to Maine on January 12? I thought that the chances would be slim, but it would be worth the trip just having had the experience of looking for one of the rarest birds to be seen in the lower 48 states. My wife and I checked into our hotel in Bath, Maine, at 1:00 am, and shortly after 6:00 am we were driving the 30 miles to Boothbay Harbor, where a large number of birders from all over the USA were assembled at the Maine Aquarium. Around 10:00 am, a report came in that the Steller was being seen just beyond the Southport bridge. Many got into their cars and rushed to the site. Upon our arrival, we saw the bird perched atop a large conifer on an island some distance away. What elation when you finally get to see such a rarity! Even a very distant view was very satisfying. At this point, a closer view would be like icing on a cake. Later that afternoon, I did get that icing, when the bird was reported on Factory Cove Road. Thankfully, the bird was still there and presented some good photo opportunities. An experience like this should be shared.

Since I had taken several days off from school, we felt no reason to rush back. On Friday, we tuned northward on a lighthouse quest, which eventually took us as far as Acadia National Park. On the way back, we made the mandatory stop at L.L. Bean in Freeport, and briefly stopped at Portland Head Light and at Nubble Head Light at Cape Neddick in York. In Portland, the temperature hovered around -2° F with a 40-mph wind coming off the water.

What a satisfying trip home.

Liberty State Park Meet-up, February 19, 2022

Beni Fishbein

Eight of us braved the cold and wind to explore a small part of Liberty State Park. All bundled up, we were grateful that the sun was out as we enjoyed some terrific looks at red-breasted mergansers, brant, and buffleheads on the way from the park headquarters on Morris Pesin Drive to Caven Point and back. By the time we returned, the sky was completely overcast, people were chilled and tired, and the temperatures were dropping, so we called it a day. A total of 21 species were seen.

Brant	Common loon
Canada goose	Blue jay
Gadwall	American crow
Mallard	European starling
Scaup sp.	American robin
Bufflehead	House sparrow
Red-breasted merganser	Red-winged blackbird
Rock pigeon	Common grackle
Mourning dove	Yellow-rumped warbler
Ring-billed gull	Northern cardinal
Great black-backed gull	Song sparrow





March Virtual Bird Walk

The theme of our March Virtual Bird walk is **Signs of Spring**. Once again, you may interpret the theme as you see fit. Birds are desirable, but also consider the landscape—buds, leaves, melting snow, earlier sunrises, nest building, etc.

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

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.
September 2021:	Raptors, by Wayne Greenstone.
October 2021:	Watershed, by Hazel England.
November 2021:	Build-a-Bird, by Rick Wright.
January 2022:	A Tale of Many Penguins, by Ardith Bondi.
February 2022:	Oh! Canada, by Chris Sturm



Roman theater of Arles

Upcoming VENT Tours

VentBird.com



Nebraska:	Cranes and Prairie-Chickens	March 15–22, 2022; March 15–22, 2023
Kansas:	Shorebirds on the Prairie NEW	April 18–4, 2022; April 17–23, 2023
NY to WA:	Birding America by Train NEW	May 18–31, 2022
Colorado:	Summer in Estes Park NEW	June 19–25, 2022; June 18–24, 2023
Colorado:	Mountain Plover and Longspurs	June 25–28, 2022; June 24–27, 2023
Sweden:	Fall on Öland	August 28 – September 4, 2022
Spain:	Birds and Art in Asturias NEW	September 7–16, 2022
South Africa:	Birds, Culture, and History NEW	September 27 – October 4, 2022
Antarctica:	Bird and Mammal Odyssey	December 26, 2022 – January 17, 2023
New Jersey:	Birding the American Revolution NEW	May 13–20, 2023
France:	Birds and Art in Provence	May 22–30, 2023
Germany:	Birds and Art in Berlin	September 28 – October 7, 2023
Italy:	Venice and the Po Delta	October 7–15, 2023
Israel:	Birds, Culture, and History NEW	November 3–15, 2023



Triumphal arch at Glanum,
first century BCE



Viking ship burial
on Öland



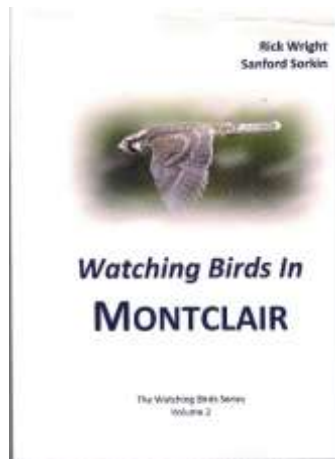
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With over 70 combined years of bookselling experience, the staff knows how to choose challenging, nurturing, and inspiring books, and knows, too, how to value the input and advice of readers and writers in our area's thriving literary community. Watchung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



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.

\$750 early registration discount for registrations before June 1!

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

2021–2022 Montclair Bird Club Officers and Executive Board



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The MBC Bulletin Bird

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Publicity Wayne Greenstone
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The Broadwing Editor and Photographer

Sandy Sorkin

THE BROADWING

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

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

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