From the Presidents Perch

A SWEET TREE FOR MEADOWLANDS' WILDLIFE  

by Don Torino

A few years back birders from all over New Jersey and some neighboring states descended upon Losen Slote Creek Park to see if they could get a look at Redpolls and White-winged Crossbills that were generous enough to stop over and give us local folks a thrill. As a multitude of binoculars gazed skyward I could hear a nice young lady cry out, “There they are on the itchy balls!” I couldn’t help but laugh, since I hadn’t heard the tree referred to by that name for a very, very long time. Of course the tree that she was so happily denoting was a Liquidambar styraciflua, the Sweetgum tree.

My first introduction to the Sweetgum goes back to my youth wandering the wild places of the Meadowlands with my friend Paul who was a West Virginia transplant. Paul would always give me some of his good down-home backwoods words of wisdom whenever he got a chance. “When you’re hunting squirrels in the winter always look for the tree with the little balls, they hold plenty of food when all the other trees are empty”. As time went on I never forgot the lessons of my youth and used what I had learned from my West Virginian chum, but this time for a much more gentle purpose, to help me on my birding ventures. Find a Sweetgum in places like DeKorte, Mill Creek and Losen Slote or wherever and you will find birds.

The Sweetgum tree got its name for the sweet taste and gummy feel of its sap, Native Americans and early Pioneers would chew its hard clumps of resin which could be obtained by stripping off the bark and allowing the resin to harden. Sweetgums are large trees, growing up to 100 feet tall. They have a straight trunk up to three feet wide and grow in woods and along streambanks and lakes. They are easy to identify by their star-shaped leaves with five pointy lobes, and a long stalk with fully grown leaves about six inches long, and bright green. In the Fall, leaves turn red. Sweetgum flowers are tiny, greenish, and ball-like that grow in clusters and of course there is its spiny ball like fruit.

If there was ever a perfect wildlife tree it would be the Sweetgum, the nectar produced by the flowers attract pollinators, hummingbirds and thirty-three species of native caterpillars critical to a healthy ecosystem including the Luna Moth, a declining species. And then of course there are those wonderful “little itchy balls”, the characteristic woody fruits covered with spikey prickles. Whether you know the name of the tree or not, everyone knows the tree that is guilty of those little brown prickly balls all over the ground in late fall and winter that you find yourself tripping over and the very same ones you loved to throw at friends when you were a kid. These wonderful little wildlife magnets make the inconvenience of the little orbs on the driveway well worth having. The seeds in the gum ball structure look similar to the nyjer (thistle) seeds commonly sold for bird food and will attract the same birds as a finch feeder and more. There may be up to 50 seeds in each ball that are loved by birds such as Goldfinches, Crossbills, Redpolls, Chickadees, Red-winged Blackbirds and even Wild Turkey dine on the little gum ball seeds. The next time you come across one of the seed balls on the ground, pick it up and tap the ball in your hand. You will see all the tiny seeds drop out, those seeds mean survival to many of our winter birds. Recently I read that there are Sweetgum cultivars that produce no seed balls, in my opinion this should be considered a crime against nature, like having decaffeinated coffee or non-alcoholic beer, why bother?

For years my neighbor had a beautiful sweetgum which hung partly over my property, when he cut it down I lost many of the great bird species that would visit my backyard. Unfortunately this is what happens to many of the backyard sweetgums, they are cut down because homeowners get tired of raking up the many balls that get strewn all over their yards. Just in case you are looking for something more environmentally friendly and imaginative with all those Sweetgum balls, they can be used in many craft projects that are fun for the whole family http://www.sturdyforcommonthings.com/2012/12/diy-sweetgum-ball-garland/.

Plant species like the Sweetgum in the Meadowlands and in our backyards is critical to having and keeping a healthy and vibrant ecosystem in our community. It is a plant that plays an important role in providing food for our many bird species here in the Meadowlands and all of New Jersey. This winter when the birds may seem few and far between look for a Sweetgum tree and my bet is you will find the birds.
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Published quarterly by the Bergen County Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Send articles to PO Box 235, Paramus, NJ 07653-0235 or email nancys@nj.rr.com. Editor: Nancy Salvati.

2019 ANNUAL MEADOWLANDS BIRDING FESTIVAL

Many thanks to all our BCAS volunteers and to the NJSEA and Suez North Jersey for a successful festival with music, walks and talks and celebrating the Meadowlands' amazing bird population.

Here is the bird of the day, a Least Bittern, nesting in DeKorte Park. (photo thanks to Dee De Santis)

SCHEDULE OF MONTHLY EVENTS & MEETINGS,
FALL/WINTER 2019-20

Meetings held at Teaneck Creek Conservancy, Puffin Way, Teaneck.
Programs are free and open to the public.
Business Meeting 7:30pm, Programs at 8pm.

Wed., November 20 – Stephanie Seymour will present a program which includes her melodic harmony laden album, “There Are Birds”.

It’s an album about birds, nature, the passage of time and her story told from a bird’s perspective. Stephanie's love of birds and the natural world is what supports her through her most challenging times. Birding always restores peace and calm to her soul.

You can visit www.t herearebirds.com for more information. CDs will be available for purchase at the meeting.


Wed., January 15 – David Hall, BCAS board member and founder of the BCAS Spring Count presents “Using the Christmas Bird Count to View Climate Change”.

David Hall will explore changes in bird migration patterns due to Climate Change. Which species still find our area friendly as a wintering spot, and which ones have been lost.

David Hall is the Director of Field Work for BCAS, a Member of the BCAS Board of Directors and a Board Member of the New Jersey Audubon Society. He is also a Professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in NYC. Dave has participated in several local Christmas Bird Counts since 1978, and has been the Christmas Bird Count compiler for BCAS since about 1995.

ANNUAL MEMBERS PONTOON TRIP – AUGUST 2019

Our members enjoyed great weather and wonderful birds, turtles and butterflies along the Hackensack River in the Meadowlands.

Both the Clapper Rail (below) and Yellow Crown Night Heron (l) were seen along the way.

(Photos thanks to Joe Koscielny.)

2
THE PLEASURE OF CERTIFIED WILDLIFE GARDENS  
by Barbara McGuirk

I have always loved to garden. But it wasn't until I met Don Torino that I learned my plantings were incapable of providing food for nature. Why? My yard held a collection of exotic plants bought at local nurseries. Because these plants were often from far-away places, they had not evolved over millennia with our fauna. If I had stuck plastic plants into my garden, I would be providing the same food benefit—none at all. I was horrified. I decided to learn all that I could about native plants and change my perspective on gardening.

This past September 5th, I was busy cooking, occasionally looking out my kitchen window at a small garden in front of me. In the span of thirty minutes, I witnessed the value of a native plant garden: A hummingbird darted from cardinal flowers, to zinnias, and finally, to my orange lantana. Then, four pairs of goldfinches dove into the zinnia patch. I watched each bird pull seeds from the center of the bloom closest to it. Swiftly, two robins flew to the poke weed berries, a plant I was usually never fond of because it grows rapidly and intrusively. However, this year I closely observed it. Unlike other food producing varieties, it doesn't flower and berry all at once. Instead, as the plant grows, it adds additional blooms, so there is a continuous supply of nutrient-rich food for migrating birds.

Nestled amongst the summer bloom, some plants, like the native asters and goldenrods, are waiting for their time to shine. They will help sustain the local and migrating bird population. My garden was especially plentiful this season due in part, no doubt, to the ample supply of water the region had this year. But I have to suspect that my new approach to weeding also helped. As new plants appeared in early spring, I refused to pull them out until I was able to identify the species. To my amazement, new cardinal flowers, milkweed and cone flowers grew from seed. Native plants are adapted to this environment, so they thrive with little assistance.

Summer's end is near, but I know my garden will continue to be a food source for months to come. I no longer clean up my yard in the fall. Instead, I allow the faded blooms, full of seeds, to remain until the following spring. I get to watch the food benefits continue into the cold winter months. Soon, March will arrive and my withered plants, devoid of most seeds, will be cleaned out of the garden. Next year, my natives will thrive again, and I will delight in a flock of starving robins who have found the winterberry holly berries or in the bird that hears the insect nestled in an old piece of wood stirring. Don Torino's knowledge, imparted to me, has helped me turn my property into a thriving network of food, shelter, water, and nesting places. For that, I am truly grateful.
2019 FIELD TRIPS - FALL/WINTER 2020

Unless noted, all field trips are rain OR shine. For last minute changes due to inclement weather or other conditions, please notify trip leader. For additional information or to make suggestions for field trips, please contact Field Chair, Chris Takacs at 201-207-0426 or americanchris22@gmail.com. For a complete list of directions to field trip sites please visit www.bergencountyaudubon.org.

Note: Don Torino contact Info 201-230-4983, greatauk4@gmail.com. Dave Hall: 973-226-7825 david.hall@einstein.yu.edu

November 3 (Sun) 10:00 AM Richard DeKorte Park. Waterfowl, wintering birds. Contact: Don Torino 201-230-4983

November 5 (Tues) 10:00 AM Frank Chapman Trail, Teaneck. Sparrows and wintering birds. Contact: Don Torino

November 10 (Sun) 10:00 AM NJ Botanical Gardens, Ringwood. Sparrows and wintering birds. Contact: Don Torino

November 14 (Thurs) 8:30 AM Hilltop Reservation. Wintering birds, sparrows. Contact: Dave Hall 973-226-7825

November 17 (Sun) 10:00 AM The Celery Farm. Contact: Don Torino 201-230-4983 greatauk4@gmail.com

November 19 (Tues) 10:00 AM Mill Creek Marsh ducks, raptors, wintering birds. Contact: Don Torino 201-230-4983

November 23 (Sat) 9:00 AM Mehrhof Pond / BCUA. Limited # of participants. Waterfowl, wintering birds. Contact: Dave Hall 973-226-7825 david.hall@einstein.yu.edu

November 28 (Thursday) 10:00 AM Thanksgiving walk at Losen Slote. Wintering birds, sparrows, possible owls. Contact: Don Torino

December 1 (Sun) 10:00 AM Mehrhof Pond. Ducks, wintering birds. Contact: Don Torino 201-230-4983

December 3 (Tues) 9:30 AM Leader's Choice Walk Check BCAS website and email for details Contact: Don Torino

December 14 (Sat) All day Christmas Bird Count. Count our wintering birds. Contact: Dave Hall 973-226-7825

December 15 (Sun) 10:00 AM Frank Chapman Trail, Teaneck. Sparrows and wintering birds. Contact: Don Torino

December 17 (Tues) 10:00 AM Mill Creek Point/ Schmidt’s Woods. Wintering birds. Contact: Don Torino

December 19 (Thurs) 8:45 AM Weequahic Park, Newark. Wintering Ducks. Contact: Dave Hall 973-226-7825

December 25 (Wed) 9:00 AM Christmas Day walk at New Overpeck Park. Wintering birds, waterfowl and raptors. Meet at Bandshell Lot, Contact: Don Torino 201-230-4983 greatauk4@gmail.com

January 1 (Wed) 10:00 AM New Year’s Day walk DeKorte Park. Wintering birds, waterfowl and raptors. Contact: Don Torino

January 2 (Thurs) 8:45 AM Weequahic Park, Newark. Wintering Ducks, early migrants. Contact: Dave Hall 973-226-7825

January 5 (Sun) 10:00 AM Disposal Rd / Harrier Meadow. Waterfowl, raptors, wintering birds. Contact: Don Torino

January 7 (Tues) 10:00 AM River Barge Park. Waterfowl, raptors, wintering birds. Contact: Don Torino

January 12 (Sun) Eagle Fest. Check BCAS website and email for details. Contact: Don Torino

January 16 (Thurs) 8:30 AM Hilltop Reservation. Wintering birds, sparrows. Contact: Dave Hall 973-226-7825

January 19 (Sun) 10:00 AM New Overpeck Park. Wintering birds, waterfowl and raptors. Meet at Bandshell Lot, Contact: Don Torino

January 21 (Tues) 10:00 AM Losen Slote/ Mehrhof Pond. Ducks, wintering birds. Contact: Don Torino 201-230-4983

January 26 (Sun) Bald Eagle Presentation and walk. Check BCAS website and email for details. Contact: Don Torino
LET THE CATS GO WILD

Conservation Chair, Karen Nickeson

The leadership of BCAS and its members have stepped up prodigiously in creating and preserving habitat for Monarch butterflies. You have provided host plants and protected those caterpillars, or ‘cats.’ We all want to see the Monarchs rally their numbers and survive. At events, some members or visitors tell me they have collected scores of caterpillars, raised them, and released them after hatching. A recent article in *Palisades Nature Notes* by Greenbrook Sanctuary naturalist, Sandy Bonardi, alerted me to some new science that advises to let them grow wild.

Evidence shows that captive-bred Monarchs tend to be less fit. Their chances of surviving in the wild are roughly equal to those left vulnerable to predation. So, statistically, there is no net benefit. Differences in temperature, light exposure, food availability, predation threat, population density seem to cause adaptations that degrade the survivability of individuals. And those traits are transmitted genetically, if they reproduce. One study shows that individuals raised in captivity lose their south orientation, and so cannot migrate. Neither can their offspring.

Sources of these findings include:

- National Academy of Sciences, https://www.pnas.org/content/116/29/14671

The general recommendation is that, if you are willing to take all precautions in preventing transmission of parasites and pathogens, you should limit hand-rearing to ten individuals per year. As a teaching tool to demonstrate the life cycle of the Monarch, hand-raising can be very effective and not harmful on a small scale.

Please consider joining efforts to tag migrating Monarchs and continue to preserve and plant milkweed and other native plants.

Book Review by DAVID HALL


This is a fascinating book about the many guises taken by the wild coyote in American life and American history. The Coyote originated in the American Southwest as a native of arid deserts and mountainsides, often called the Prairie Wolf. Since the United States’ western expansion, this species has migrated over time to become a continent-wide nuisance. Famous in Indian lore as having a god-like presence with notable spunk and deviousness, the Coyote became a target of public disdain as the American West was settled. This book plays every possible card, looking back at the Coyote’s impact on Indian life and lore, its impact on American history and culture, and looking forward at the Coyote’s future role on the urban American scene.

Dan Flores is an accomplished author of Western history. The book details the ways in which the western states and federal government worked for 100 years to exterminate the Coyote. These tactics quickly forced the Grey Wolf and the Bison to the verge of extinction. But the Coyote was always able to slip the trap, increasing its reproduction, migrating first from the desert to the Pacific coast and cities like Los Angeles. More recently it has moved north, south and eastward to occupy niches across the whole continent. Along the way, the Coyote has also interbred with both wolves and dogs to change its character. The modern Coyote is now larger, more aggressive and a more formidable presence, virtually invincible to any level of attack. The American public will be forced to make peace (at last) and to tolerate the continued presence of this wild animal in our lives.

(Just don’t feed it in your backyard).

A highly entertaining book, though Flores may occasionally lose you in mysticism along the way.
As Education Chair, one of the most important things I do is to help connect children with nature. I believe it is our job as parents, grandparents, teachers and caregivers to encourage children to spend time outdoors and unplug. Studies have shown that children who spend time outdoors achieve more in school. Not only is it important for children to connect with nature, it is also a great way for adults to reduce stress. Please introduce a child to nature, spend time outdoors together and enjoy the wonders of nature. One spark of nature can ignite a lifelong passion.

**AUDUBON ADVENTURES**

2019-2020 Sharing Our World With Birds Classroom kits. This year, BCAS will proudly sponsor 15 schools/groups with the environmental education program which comes in the form of a printed kit and is delivered to the school. The sponsorship of these kits will cost $1,454.25, the Spring Count donation dollars help us provide this wonderful program to schools absolutely free of charge to them. Please visit audubonadventures.org to learn more.

Welcome back to our renewing schools/groups: Bergen 4H Garden Club•Garfield, East Brook Elementary School•Park Ridge, Emerson Jr./Sr. High School•Emerson, Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen County•Bergenfield, Upper Greenwood Lake School•Hewitt, West Ridge Elementary School•Park Ridge.

Welcome to our newest schools/groups: Anna C. Scott School•Leonia, Bleshman Regional Day School•Paramus, Brownstone School•Saddle Brook, Dorchester School•Woodcliff Lake, George Washington Middle School•Wayne, Midland School #1•Rochelle Park, St. Mary's School•Pompton Lakes, Van Vleck House & Gardens•Montclair, Woodside Elementary School•River Vale.

**NATURE DISCOVERY KITS**

The introduction of our bird and butterfly Nature Discovery Kits was a great success. We were able to donate 18 kits to schools and nature centers helping children learn about birds and butterflies. We have a few remaining, if you are interested please contact Marie Longo MLongo8383@aol.com.

**CERTIFIED WILDLIFE GARDEN PROGRAM**

The program continues to be successful, we have certified 146 gardens! One of our most recent certifications is the Meadowlands Museum in Rutherford. A great way to help birds and wildlife is to plant native plants in your garden. Fall is a great time to plant because the roots have more time to become established. We have a native plant list [https://bergencountyaudubon.org/healthy-backyards/](https://bergencountyaudubon.org/healthy-backyards/) and application on our website [https://bergencountyaudubon.org/cwg/](https://bergencountyaudubon.org/cwg/). You may also visit the National Audubon native plant database, audubon.org/plantsforbirds, and enter your zip code to learn which native plants are best to plant in your area.

**BCAS SPRING FUNDRAISER, 147 SEPARATE SPECIES - $2630.00**

Thanks to the following people for their generosity so we can continue our mission of preserving and protecting the native wildlife in Bergen County and the surrounding areas.


Thanks for your patience, Peg.
Our 71st Annual Hackensack-Ridgewood Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 14. The official count period extends from December 12 through December 18. Our goal is to count all the birds within a 15 mile diameter circle, centered at the River Edge Railroad Station. We will count the number of species and the number of individuals of each species within this circle. This effort continues to teach us about the status and survival of our native birds, and helps to identify important bird areas in Bergen County. We have observed over 180 species over the past 69 years, including a record 97 species in 2014, plus several exotics. Every winter season is different, and with your help we can produce another outstanding result.

We need your help in the field or in your neighborhood on Count day. Feeder counts conducted in your yard on Dec.15th can be very valuable, and we welcome you to call in your feeder results to my home on the day following the count (973-226-7825). The event will take place in any weather – rain, sleet or snow will not cancel. Even if you can only participate for part of the day, every observer can be a valuable addition to our group effort. We invite you to join us and have a good time. We have experienced leaders assigned for most of the territories described below. Please make arrangements for participating with one of these leaders or signup at an upcoming BCAS meeting at the Puffin Center at Teaneck Creek.

If you would rather conduct a count in your local neighborhood or at a local park, please contact me in advance, so that we can coordinate your effort with that of our leaders. You don't have to be an expert to take part. If you can identify the common winter birds, you can be a valuable participant.

If you would like more information about the Christmas Bird Count, please contact David Hall at 973-226-7825 (eves.)

DAVID HALL

AREA LEADERS

Area I-A:  David Hall (973-226-7825)
Includes: Meadowlands district, Little Ferry, South Hackensack, Moonachie.

Area I-B:  Chris Takacs & Linda Mullaney (201-804-7817).
Includes: Teterboro Airport, Clifton, Hasbrouck Heights, Wood Ridge, Wallington, and Paterson.

Area II-A:  Steve Kuitems (908-630-0033) [leave a message] Includes: New Milford, Hackensack, Maywood, River Edge, and parts of Haworth, Dumont, Bergenfield, Oradell, Emerson, Teaneck, Bogota and Paramus.

Area II-B:  Gerry Byrne (201 262-0157)
Includes: United Water properties in Haworth and Emerson plus the Emerson Woods.

Area III:  Sandra Bonardi (201-784-0484) [daytime; leave message]. Includes: Tenafly, Greenbrook Sanctuary) and parts of the Hudson shoreline.

Area IV:  Marie Longo (201 498-0809) and Jimmie Macaluso
Includes: Leonia, Teaneck Creek and Overpeck Creek.


Area VI-B:  Peggy O'Neill (201-868-5829). Includes: Old Tappan, Northvale, part of Rockleigh, Norwood, Harrington Park, Demarest, Closter and parts of Cresskill.
As Members of Bergen County Audubon Society, we share a love for birds and a concern for the environment. Our mission is to promote and protect wildlife in their natural habitat by providing opportunities for observation and conservation.

All field trips and programs are open to the public and free of charge.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2019-2020

Please enroll me as a member of the Bergen Audubon Society (Q07) and/or the National Audubon Society.

My check is enclosed for

( ) $20 Individual or ( ) $35 Family Chapter Sustaining Member. All funds stay in our area, helping us to support local efforts and provide services in Bergen County. Make check payable to Bergen County Audubon.

( ) $20 - National Audubon Society Member. (1st year rate for new NAS members only). Includes Chapter membership. Make check payable to National Audubon Society.

Name: ___________________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________
City: ___________________ State: ___ Zip: __________
Phone: (____)___________________________________________

E-mail (I would like to be notified of upcoming events online and receive the newsletter electronically.)

_____________________________________________________

BlueJay will be mailed to you unless you request online version.

Please mail to: BCAS Membership Chair, PO Box 235, Paramus, NJ 07653-0235

Volunteer opportunities in local chapter activities or committees are available. Please circle your interest and mail with your subscription or see any officer or chair at one of the meetings.

__ Conservation  __ Membership  __ Publicity  __ Field Trips
__ Education  __ Newsletter/Website  __ Gardens/Events  __ Other ____________________________