From the President's Perch

THE MEANING OF BIRDING

After reading the title I am sure you are envisioning a birder climbing a secluded mountain into the clouds searching for the wise old all-knowing all seeing sage (looking strangely like David Sibley) who dwells high up on the peak. He only stops on that gallant quest to check EBird and argue with a friend online about the best spotting scope as they search for their lifelong pursuit to find the true meaning of birding. Well, OK that just may be me.

Of course if that birder ever managed to finally meet the wise old sage his answer to that question would be as different, diverse and unique as the birds of the Meadowlands. While this question is most often asked by curious non-birders, I think in the so called “new normal” of birding even birders themselves have become more retrospect and are discovering that birding for them may have a deeper more personal meaning than ever before. So in our wonderfully diverse multicultural world of birders I thought I would ask the eternal question, What does birding mean to you?

A friend Eric Mitchell told me “Since I got into birding it has given me a chance to connect to the nature around us in a urban environment. More importantly for me though, it has been a chance for me to teach and share something special with my two kids (ages 4 and 2) and show them beautiful spots in NJ to see nature around them! Especially during Covid when we couldn’t go anywhere. It gave us an alternative to playing around the yard and now both my kids can identify some birds by sight and even by call and they get so excited when they see one”.

My conversation with Karen Clemments brought more insight into how much birding means to us all. She said, “You asked what birding means to me personally. Well, here goes: it connects me to my parents (both now deceased) and our son, who is an amateur naturalist and enjoys seeing and finding birds in the wild. Feeding birds in the backyard, especially now that we are self-isolated with Covid, has created a true paradise right here at home. Inviting birds to our home feels like we’re doing a tiny bit towards supporting our environment and the NJ native critters.”

I also had a great conversation with Lindsay McNamara, Bergen County Audubon Society’s amazing field trip leader, “As my mom recently put it, birding is my salvation. I’ve always loved to go outside and spend time in nature but this year it has been especially important to me. Healing after a difficult end to an abusive relationship, I ran into the woods with arms wide open. Quarantine showed me just how beautiful and important my local patch is. During spring migration I went birding there every day and was amazed by all of the neotropical migrants using this small green space on their epic journeys. It completely rocked my perception of nature. I realized I was way too elitist before and am working to continue to shift my own perceptions as well as others’. As lockdowns continued, I soaked up all I could about the birds I love. Since we are able to safely walk in groups now, I love, love, love leading bird walks. The opportunities that have come out of all of this have been life changing for me. I love to bird in groups and lead folks, but I also love to bird with a small group of friends or my family and bird alone. They are all important and healing in their own ways. It’s hard to put it all into words, birding is much cheaper than therapy. As Scott Weidensaul once put it ‘each bird has been a revelation’,” she said.

Birding is the eternal constant, no matter what is happening in the world, or in our lives the birds are there waiting to embrace us, to connect with us, shouting quietly to some and loudly to others. If you allow yourself the honor of taking a moment to look and listen.

Cont. Pg. 2
IN MEMORY OF JILL HOMCY

My heart and the hearts of all our members and anyone that loved our birds and the natural world are broken at the passing of Jill Homcy.

Jill was my friend and a hero, she helped save our Eagles nest in Ridgefield Park with her photographs and videos and helped bring attention to the injured raptors from the methane burners in the meadowlands.

She brought joy to anyone that had the pleasure of knowing her and was a beacon of light even when things were at their worse. Her passion and love of nature will live on in all of us - she will soar with the eagles and raptors that she loved and will never be forgotten. Our hearts are broken.

Don Torino

PRESIDENTS PERCH (CONT.)

For myself birding connects me to the people I have loved the most - from my first birding partner, my little brother Todd who has long since passed - to the wonderful people that allowed me to tag along with them and learn from their years of birding knowledge. It is the link to my childhood growing up in the Meadowlands and the special times I spend with friends today, through illness and times of doubt, from sadness to joy - birding has been there for me waiting patiently for when I needed it the most. It’s never about how many birds I see, or how many I add to a list - rather now it is about the people that I have the honor and joy of introducing to a part of life that has helped me though these last 65 years of life.

Birding ultimately is about faith in the future and that the birds we have come to love will be there for our children and grandchildren, Keeping faith that the places we love that have renewed our souls and strengthened our hearts will be there for future generations as it was for us. The birds are now helping us through one of the worst times in our history, so the least we can do is to help them through it also. See you in the meadowlands.

DON TORINO

2020 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT-
This is a Nature Program Cooperative Event

Our 72nd annual Hackensack-Ridgewood Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 19. The official count period extends from December 16 through December 22. Our goal is to count all the birds within a 15 mile diameter circle,* (see below) 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.

Due to the COVID situation, our planning is somewhat different this year, but the show must go on. We need your help in monitoring your feeders, or in your neighborhood parks on count day. Feeder counts conducted in your yard on Dec. 19th can be very valuable, and we welcome you to send in your feeder results from that day to my email account (david.hall@einsteinmed.org) or to my home phone (973-226-7825). The event will take place in any weather – rain, sleet or snow will not cancel.

We have observed over 180 species over the past 71 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.

If you would like more information about the Christmas Bird Count, please contact David Hall at 973-226-7825 (eve.). I am still looking for volunteers to cover a few of our local Nature Centers.

DAVID HALL

*15 mile map on pg. 5.
MAKING A DIFFERENCE –
This column is dedicated to all those members who in some way have enhanced, preserved, conserved, protected, educated or elevated our experiences of those things we love, the beauty of the natural world.

This page is a celebration of our certified wildlife gardens and of you, our members, who have turned to your gardens during this crisis and sent some great photos of your fall plantings. Thanks for that. The Editor.

OVERPECK BUTTERFLY GARDEN

Like many of you, I seek out walks in nature which has an enormously calming effect during this pandemic. Sometimes I get lucky when heading to our Overpeck Garden and may meet Don Torino or one of the master gardeners. On this day, I met Tammy Lafferty who along with her skills in the garden is also a painter. How lucky are we BCAS!!! Now we can sit in the Butterfly Garden (in back of Equestrian Center) and take in the beauty of the art on table and in signs along with the fall colors of Goldenrod and Wild Ageratum also called Blue Mist Flower Eupatorium coelestinum. Wild Astors are another important fall plant.

Tammy pointed out that Pat Knight, our resident native plant expert, has documented a list of well over 100 kinds of plants that have been planted and nurtured there. And what’s as good as their beauty is—they bring a wide variety of wildlife to the garden!

Tracy sent me some photos and told me she’s blind so had a friend take some pictures of her newly certified wildlife garden. She said, “I love sitting out in my garden, listening to the fountain, the birds and bees, and, just now, a very busy squirrel. And I have lots of plants that smell great, including summer-sweet, passionflower, and common milkweed”. Thank you Tracy Carcione.

“I’m fairly new to BCAS, but have my heart in the right place, namely a true lifelong nature lover.” Madeleine’s potted swamp milkweed (at Left) located on her Eastern facing porch has moved several times with her and is now happy on her porch in Mahwah. Thanks, Madeline Giotta

Jimmy Macaluso sent this photo of his front yard. This one has two re-seeding annual native plants, Helenium amarum (yellow sneezeweed) that is overtaking his front walkway and the other is Bidens aristosa which is the taller yellow flowering one.

Jimmy says that both are enjoyed by pollinators and the Bidents is a favorite of late Monarchs—the seeds are relished by Goldfinches. The tall, aggressive blue flowers in the back are Salvia guaranitica that are South American native but he grows them for the Hummingbirds that love them. They are not supposed to be hardy here but have come back in this spot for years.

He is happy to share seeds or plants with anyone who wants them. Email jmacmetro@aol.com.

Marcia Strean sent this photo (l) of her fall garden. Vivid Physotegia and White Snake Root, early fall blooming.

Alicia Byer sent this photo from a DeKorte Butterfly field trip.

Below Marilyn Sadowski sent in photos of a Buckeye on Mountain Mint and Mexican butterfly weed also called blood flower. Summer blooming. Host plant for monarchs.

THANKS TO ALL OF YOU FOR SHARING YOUR GARDENS!
FIELD TRIPS - SUMMER 2020

Many thanks to Chris Takacs, our Field Trip Chair, who has continued to hold these trips for BCAS each week. Our trips are constantly updated each week so it's really important to sign up for our EMail List for updates or check our website. Also many thanks to Don Torino and Lindsey McNamara who have helped us enjoy this summer in a 'socially distanced' way. Here are some great memories with more to come in the fall.. Thanks to Joe Koscielny for many of these great photos.

Top column: Meadowlands Walk, Common Yellowthroat, BlackPoll warbler, Chris Takacs -Stateline Hawk Watch Board, Bottom column: Mill Creek Walk, Red Tailed Hawk with squirrel on Chapman Trail Walk. Tawny Emperor butterfly (rare in Bergen County), pair of Peregrine Falcons at Stateline Hawk Watch, Northern Harrier.

WHY BECOME A MEMBER OF BCAS?

JOE KOSCIELNY – MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

Growing up I knew about pigeons because my grandfather raised them and we often had Blue Jays, Sparrows and Cardinals in the yard. Little did I know that there were so many different types of Sparrows. Then I read an article in the New York Times about Bald Eagles nesting in New York along the Delaware River and the Mongaup Reservoir. My wife and I took a ride and saw our first Bald Eagle on a little island on the Delaware River eating a fish. That was it, I was hooked. I then read about organizations having guided trips in the Meadowlands. After going on some of the BCAS trips I decided to join. A great decision.

On our field trips it's not just about seeing birds. It's about learning about birds - their importance as pollinators, the differences between males, females and juveniles, seasonal differences in the type of birds in our area, their plumage, specific calls and mimicry as well as the beneficial plants that attract birds, butterflies and bees. Another plus is meeting people with similar interests like photography and botany. The knowledge gained from our field trip leaders is invaluable. They are like walking encyclopedias, eagerly sharing their knowledge and answering questions. To me, Chris Takacs is the master of the Meadowlands. His knowledge of the area, the different types of birds, their calls, traits and seasonal differences are amazing.

So where do your membership dollars go? Your membership dollars go to maintain many of the beautiful native plant gardens throughout our area, along with youth education in schools and efforts in conservation. There are many opportunities for members to help in yearly bird counts, activities in conservation, education and environmental programs. We also support other organizations with similar interests as well as avian rehabilitators. We offer monthly programs at no cost to the attendees. How much of our membership fees go to pay our officers and board members? None. All are strictly volunteers, there is no paid staff. Our quarterly newsletter, the Blue Jay, is filled with informative information about happenings and events.

So why wait? Sign up on our website www.bergencountyaudubon.org and click on JOIN and then click on E-MAIL LIST to receive updated information weekly on our events and field trips. Can't make a field trip, don't worry. We often post pictures of the various sightings here or on Facebook. Additional membership benefits include a 10% discount at purchases made at Wild Birds Unlimited in Paramus, NJ. As a member of BCAS, you can attend programs at the following organizations that belong to The Nature Program Cooperative at their member cost if applicable – Teaneck Creek Conservancy, Tenafly Nature Center, Bergen County Zoological Park, Bergen Swan, Closter Nature Center, Demarest Nature Center, Flat Rock Brook Nature Center, Greenbrook Sanctuary, Friends of the Hackensack River Greenway through Teaneck, Fyke Nature Association, Lorrimer Sanctuary, and the Native Plant Society of New Jersey. So, continue to support us so that we can continue on our mission to protect and educate everyone about nature and our environment.
Invisible Fire

Through the eyes of a Red-tailed Hawk, this is the perfect place to hunt. The landfill offers an expansive view with excellent habitat for small mammals and birds. There’s no sign of human presence. The irresistible feature is a perch that offers a resting place with a 360 degree view of the hunting ground. These are the last observations of a bird before it flies into a scorching and deadly invisible flame of 1,700 degrees Fahrenheit, a methane or sulphur dioxide burner common in landfills everywhere.

The burned bird discovered on the Keegan Landfill in September received care because the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority (NJSEA) and Bergen County Audubon Society (BCAS) have a strong relationship and the will to cooperatively protect wildlife. NJSEA staff called BCAS and the bird was delivered into the care of The Raptor Trust where it remains under treatment. Don Torino, called for action and countless BCAS members contacted New Jersey's Commissioner of Environmental Protection. The public outcry resulted in the issue of permits to safely enclose the flame, permits that had been requested by NJSEA, but had been delayed at NJDEP. A new burner enclosure is now in place, but requires evaluation.

Methane or sulphur dioxide produced by decomposing landfills is typically burned away using an intermittent or continually burning flare. Various designs for enclosures can protect birds that may perch on the burner or fly through the flame. The challenge is to identify the location of burner hazards. Landfills are typically private property and patrolled intermittently. Injured birds may be removed by scavengers, hidden by vegetation, or escape in a mortally wounded state.

Our members and volunteers play a critical role in safeguarding birds from these hazards.

These are our immediate goals:

- Survey and secure the Disposal Road burner enclosure. There have been new breaches and the structure needs improvement
- Determine whether the newly built Keegan Landfill barrier is effective in protecting birds from the burner
- Defend birds in our area and foster national awareness of this issue threatening birds everywhere

If you would like to help, please respond to future calls for action. Please help educate about this serious problem.

If you would like to volunteer to survey on Disposal Road, please visit http://bergencountyaudubon.org/monitoringobservations/

Christmas Count Cont....
Map of our 15 mile radius for the Christmas Count.
EDUCATION

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. Full 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/ and application on our website 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.

GREENER JC INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

This summer, in collaboration with Jersey City Recreation and Youth Development, Greener JC hosted a six week internship program that provided opportunities for 21 Jersey City students to gain valuable knowledge, experience, and mentorship in the fields of environmental science, sustainability, and biology. Bergen County Audubon Society provided scholarship funds for these students.

Students conducted surveys of the bird diversity in Liberty State Park’s Caven Point. Caven Point is particularly important for migratory birds, and given the ecological sensitivity of this ecosystem, access on the interior boardwalk and natural beach are closed between April and October in order to protect nesting habitat for seasonal birds. Greener JC has received approval from the NJDEP to access Caven Point for this project.
BCAS - HAROLD FEINBERG CONSERVATION AWARD WINNERS -- 2020

As Bergen County Audubon President I couldn’t be more proud to announce our 2020 Conservation Award winners. These two amazing women have dedicated themselves to protecting and preserving our environment and have created a better place not only for wildlife but also a healthier planet for all of us to live.

ALEXA FANTACONE

Alexa has been the Executive Director of Teaneck Creek Conservancy for the past five years. Within this role, and in her personal life, she is committed to conservation and inspiring others to protect our environment.

Alexa is a mentor and enthusiastic educator of students who visit Teaneck Creek. She makes environmental education exciting and captivates students with hands-on programs that engage them in STEM, water quality testing, invasive species removal and more. She goes out of her way to make personal connections with students and learn what they are passionate about. Alexa gives students a new passion for the natural world and many express an interest in pursuing careers in conservation, environmental science and STEM. She is particularly inspiring to young girls who come to see science as an exciting career option for women.

Alexa is also the Chairwoman for the Nature Program Cooperative where she works to bring together the knowledge and resources of nature centers, parks, and environmental educators in Northern New Jersey. In addition, she recently became a board member at EarthShare, a national conservation organization which connects environmental nonprofits with companies in order to increase the impact of donations and volunteer actions. During her free time, Alexa volunteers at Tenafly Nature Center’s aviary, feeding the raptors.

NANCY SLOWIK

Nancy serves as Urban Naturalist Program Coordinator at New York Botanical Garden. She also acts as lead consultant for the Restore Native Plants team, directing the propagation facility at the Ramapo Mountain Park Preserve since 2013. In that capacity, she provides guidance for native plant propagation and restoration projects. She also formulates planting patterns to attract wildlife and enhance biodiversity.

Nancy has been teaching natural history programs and leading guided walks in Bergen County and the greater metropolitan area for 35 years and is the author of A Naturalist’s Guide to the Southern Palisades (2006).

Many BCAS members may know Nancy as Naturalist/Director of Greenbrook Sanctuary where she taught and mentored for more than 25 years. Her contribution as a conservation educator and her stewardship of the Sanctuary established her reputation as a dedicated protector of the environment of the southern Palisades. Nancy’s tenure at Greenbrook helped foster many collegial relationships with local naturalists and cooperative programs, working with Bergen Swan, Stateline Hawkwatch, and training for the TCC Weed Warriors.

Nancy has been a research associate for Hudsonia Field Station, where she has contributed to biodiversity assessments and research projects. She was the co-founder of the Greenbelt Native Plant Center – the first native plant propagation program for the New York City Parks Department.
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.

www.bergencountyaudubon.org

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 ____________________________