

The Blue Jay



Bergen County Audubon Society
LOCAL CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Winter/Spring 2022

Volume LXXX, Issue 1

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH *WELCOME HOME ALICE*

Sometimes along life's journey something very special happens to us. Things that can't always be explained but stay with us and become part of us find a permanent place in our hearts forever. Things that we wish someone might share the story so in hopes it might be remembered. The times that you go over in your mind while sitting alone in the backyard or just walking down the trail. The times you think about when you want to know all is right in the world and hold dear forever. To remind yourself that good things are worth standing up and fighting for and have a purpose. The special ones that in the end make life worth living.

This is one of those times -- *Alice the Eagle is home again.*



Many of you might remember the story of Alice the Eagle, who first nested with her mate Al on the Overpeck in Ridgefield Park back in 2011. What was believed to be just about impossible and could have only happened in another time and place transpired right before our eyes: A pair of American Bald Eagles took up residence in one of the most densely populated areas of the country. These brave Bald Eagles would go on to defy the odds and thrive in an area that no one would have dared believe or thought conceivable. But just as these great symbols of our nation- known as Alice and Al began their astounding comeback they immediately came under a serious threat. Choosing to place their nest on private property that had been slated for a multi-million-dollar development project led the "powers that

be" to begin seeking the proper permits to have the nest removed in the name of cleaning up a former dumping ground and in the never ending quest for "so called progress." (Photo by Alice Leurck)

But as our Bald Eagles like Alice and Al began the return from the brink of extinction and struggled and fought to survive, the people that grew to love them fought back with the very same energy and spirit as these great birds. School children wrote letters and folks organized. Good people of all ages of every political party held signs, made phone calls, signed petitions and let it be known that these Eagles would stay and no big developer, government agency or anyone else was going to tell them otherwise. Even after many people and groups said we were wasting our time and could never win we did. And after a long hard struggle Alice and Al finally won. They were allowed to stay and over the years brought forth nine more Eagles into the world to the joy and amazement of all who came to love these two amazing raptors.

But as nature has always done and hopefully always will, the circle of life continued even at this very special place. Life ends and is renewed and despite our best human wishes and desires-- one day Alice the Eagle did not return to her nest. As everyone watched the skies in 2017 preparing for another nesting season and watching for the Eagle with the tracking device on her back and missing wing feather, sadly she did not return. Even as the vigil continued on and another Eagle took her place she would not be seen again gracing the skies of the Overpeck. Where had she gone? We, in all likelihood, thought we would never know.

Folks for years including myself still looked for Alice. We closely watched the skies hoping to get a glimpse of her so we could report to everyone that there is no need to worry, that she is doing fine and still patrolling the skies over her ancestral home. There were reports of her, well maybe just rumors, never a real confirmation. I felt in my heart that no matter how much I wished I would never see Alice the Eagle again. One of the last times I was blessed to see Alice the Eagle I was sitting at a picnic table near the Overpeck. I had just gotten off the phone with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. They gave me the news that Alice and Al's nest would be protected. Later I thought she may have flown over just to say 'Thank You' before she left. Then came February 8th 2021, "Don, We think we saw an adult Eagle along Valley Brook Ave. outside DeKorte". Chris Takacs said, "a female adult eagle seen flying from Berry's Creek had a backpack and antenna. She was spotted eating a duck in DeKorte Park sitting on ice!"

continued...

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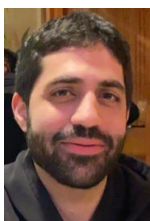
HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM 2021 BCAS BOARD MEMBERS.



From top : Julie McCall, Marilyn Sadowski, Karen Nickeson, Chris Takacs, Don Torino, Patrice

Torino, Joe Koscielny, Dave Hall.

Front row: Peggy O'Neill, Nancy Hall, Nancy Salvati, Marie Longo.



shown at left

Alicina Memar, Webmaster, Publicity

(Cont'd) President's Perch by Don Torino

Could this be? My heart raced. No, it must be another Eagle with a transmitter, it couldn't be Alice after all these years. I immediately contacted Kathy Clark at NJDEP. "No Don, we don't know of any other eagle with a transmitter - except Alice", she said. Then two days later another message from Chris "Berry's Creek, adult female eagle with backpack was seen flying! Wings outstretched she has a feather missing from her left wing. It's Alice from Ridgefield Park nest !!! It's Her, she is home !"

Where had she been all this time? Where did she go? Was she trying to get home? Through February all eyes in the Meadowlands were on the skies looking for Alice. Then like a story out of a children's book there were two Eagles, both carrying sticks around DeKorte Park and Berry's Creek. It looked like Alice found a mate and just like Alice, who never did anything based on pundits, books or experts - she decided to make her nest on an old osprey platform and just for good measure it would once again be on private property. Then we began to scramble to alert everyone we could to be sure she was protected and safe, the NJDEP, the NJSEA and the landowner. Yes, Alice the Eagle was finally home and once again we would be sure to give her the best chance we could to stay.

As any volunteer with the NJ Bald Eagle project will tell you - nesting time is when about three months of nail biting begin. Threats from everything - weather to predators to human interference can cause an eagle nest to fail. Alice was about 17 years old now, well up there for a Bald Eagle and of course we were given the job of protecting Alice and her nest. Yes we were worried much like mother hens but like the great mom Alice had always been - in March she had eggs and in April Alice and her mate brought two more Bald Eagles into the world.

Writing this story I still find it hard to believe as these things are not supposed to happen. The fact that Alice survived this long is amazing in itself, and then of all the places in the country she could have nested she came home. And not only did she come home but she made sure she brought two more Eagles into the world - and to make it extra special - she delivered them to our Meadowlands.

I'm sure if I searched hard enough I could find all the scientific reasons I want for the reasons Alice came home. But what I do know is that when I needed her most, when I thought I would never see her again she came home. Through the horrors of Covid to the fears of political unrest she came home. When we thought that there was nothing else to look forward too. When believing in the future or wondering if there would even be a future - Alice came home. Maybe she wanted to remind us that we should never give up. That there are things bigger than ourselves out there - still things worth standing up and fighting for.

Thank you Alice, and welcome home from all of us!

DON TORINO

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CONSERVATION

Karen Nickeson, Chair

A BIRD TO WATCH – THE RUSTY

Foraging in one of your favorite wooded wetlands may be a visitor that is fighting for survival. You could pass it by without notice thinking it's a Common Grackle or a stray Redwing. But if you look carefully, you may spot a Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*). The giveaway field mark is the bright yellow eye. The



brown feather edges give it the name. The female will be lighter brown with a dark eye patch and pale brow. The bill is slender compared to the Grackle and the tail smaller. Check out these id tips. <https://www.audubon.org/news/why-you-should-start-searching-rusty-blackbirds>.

A little over a year ago, Jim Macaluso from our Conservation team, attended *The International Wildlife Society 2020 Conference and the Rusty Blackbird Symposium* on behalf of BCAS members.

The following information is gleaned from his extensive report on the conference:-

The Rusty Blackbird species is in steep decline and researchers don't know precisely why. They nest in boreal forests and winter in wild wetlands. There are two distinct populations, an Eastern and Western. Both have suffered a precipitous drop (around 90%) in numbers since the 1970s, although the Western population has stabilized somewhat. Their winter migration through the Mississippi Basin is longer and slower than that of their Eastern counterparts into New Jersey and the Delmarva Peninsula.

One possible reason for the decline in Rusty numbers is wintering habitat loss. According to breeding surveys, fledgling success is high, but many fewer birds return from wintering grounds. Another suspicion is that climate change has favored a parasite, the Blow Fly, with warmer northern temperatures causing numbers to increase. The insects lay eggs in the nests of the Blackbirds and the larvae feed on the chicks. This can weaken the young birds that molt just before migration and are under stress during their long flight.

We can help. Seek out the birds and file an Ebird report at ebird.org. If possible, include a picture that may help researchers who study the condition of the birds through the images. There are fewer than 30,000 Rusty Blackbirds estimated in the eastern region. Every piece of information is valuable. Good places to look for them are at Teaneck Creek near Fyke Lane and in the wet ditches near the Overpeck stables near the entrance and railroad line. They are easy to spot when feeding in the muck, turning over vegetation to find invertebrates. Explore wet woodland areas in your town and you may find one of these little survivors. Also, plant native shrubs that offer berries they may use in migration, such as Dogwood, Holly, and Viburnum.

If you find a Rusty Blackbird, enjoy your luck! It's a fortunate winter start to a good birding year.

NOTE: Pollinators win!

Congratulations members, on your successful support for the NJ bill which banned neonicotinoids on non-agricultural New Jersey property. The biggest source of neonic pollution is now eliminated. Celebrate! Plant something native.

BCAS FIELD TRIPS - FEBRUARY – APRIL, 2022

Unless noted, contact for field trips is Don Torino (201) 230-4983 greatauk4@gmail.com

Mill Creek Marsh-Ground Hog Day

February 2 (Weds) 10am
Meet behind Bob's Furniture store-Secaucus

Harrier Meadow

February 6 (Sunday) 10am Join us for a special walk to a legendary area not open to the public.

Richard DeKorte Park – Super Bird Sunday

February 13 (Sunday) 10am

New Overpeck County Park

February 16 (Weds) 10am
Meet in the main parking lot near the bandshell

Frank Chapman Trail – Presidents Day

February 21 (Monday) 10am
Meet in lot at the corner of River rd. & Riverview Ave., Teaneck

NJ Botanical Garden – “Return of the Bald Eagle”

indoor program.
February 27 (Sunday) 1pm . Meet at carriage house

Losen Slote Creek Park, Little Ferry

March 2 (Weds) 10am
Meet in lot next to soccer field

Laurel Hill County Park – Secaucus

March 6 (Sunday) 10am
Meet in lot next to ball fields

Weequahic Park – Newark

March 10 (Thurs) 8:45am
Contact: Dave Hall (973) 226-7825 david.hall@einsteinmed.org

Frank M Chapman Trail, Teaneck

March 13 (Sunday) 10am
Meet in lot corner of River rd. and Riverview Ave.

Mill Creek Marsh – Secaucus

March 17 (Thurs) 10am
Meet behind Bob's Furniture Store

DeKorte Park – First Day of Spring Walk

March 20 (Sunday) 10am

NJ Botanical Garden – Ringwood “Owls of New Jersey”

March 27 (Sunday) 1pm
Indoor program, meet at Carriage House

New Overpeck County Park

March 30 (Weds) 10am
Meet in main parking lot near bandshell

Mill Creek Marsh – Secaucus

April 3 (Sunday) 10am
Meet behind Bob's Furniture Store

Mehrhof Pond – BCUA – Little Ferry

April 9 (Sat) 9AM
A limited number of 20 people will be allowed to attend.-
YOU MUST REGISTER
Contact: Dave Hall (973) 226-7825 david.hall@einsteinmed.org

Frank Chapman Trail – “Palm Warbler Sunday”

April 10 (Sunday) 10am
Meet in lot on corner of River Rd & Riverview Ave, Teaneck

New Overpeck County Park

April 13 (Weds) 10am
Meet in main lot near bandshell

DeKorte Park – Easter Sunday Nature Walk

April 17 (Sunday) 10am

DeKorte Park – Earth Day Walk

April 22 (Friday) 10am

NJ Botanical Garden – Ringwood – “Birding for Beginners”

April 24 (Sunday) 1pm. Meet at Carriage House

Borgs Woods – Hackensack

April 28 (Thurs) 9am
Meet on Allen St Entrance

BCAS PROGRAMS – These programs will be presented on zoom. Please check www.bergencountyaudubon.org for more updates and info on our speakers, with further descriptions and photos of the event.

Feb. 8, 7:30 pm. Al Batt, *Backyard Bird Watching.* A writer, speaker, storyteller and humorist, Al is an author of the book, "A Life Gone to the Birds" and a columnist for Bird Watcher's Digest and Watching Backyard Birds. He is a trustee of the American Bald Eagle Foundation in Haines, Alaska.

Mar. 8, 7:30 pm. *Creatures of the Night.* Ethan Gilardi, Wildlife biologist with Conserve Wildlife, works to protect NJ's resident bat species. Common myths and misconceptions about this valuable and beneficial animal.

Mar. 21, 7:30 pm. **Dr. Brooke Bateman, Director of Climate Science, National Audubon Society.** As director of Climate Watch, Brooke works with community volunteers to understand how climate affects bird populations in North America.

Apr. 12, 7:30 pm. Blaine Rothaus, Conserve Wildlife. *Beauty in the Ordinary. Odd Facts about Common Birds.* Blaine will show through photographic representations a wide array of bird behaviors that he hopes will help us to see diversity in behavior in our own backyards.

May 10, 7:30 pm Chris Sturm, *This Land is Your Land.*, a program about our national parks and lesser known refuges, forests and recreational areas.

Submit program suggestions to Marilyn Sadowski, VP at msadowskibcas@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Marie Longo, Chair

Certified Wildlife Garden Program-(CWG)

Spring is right around the corner! Our CWG program is going strong and we currently have 175 certified gardens. Homeowners, businesses, schools, libraries, parks and more can have their gardens certified by BCAS provided they contain native plants. The program is free and you'll receive a sign to display in your garden upon approval of your application. Visit bergencountyaudubon.org/cwg/ for an application and put your garden on the map.

While planning for the upcoming growing season please add some native plants to your garden. Visit Audubon's Native Plant Database, audubon.org/plantsforbirds, to find the best plants for your area to support birds, pollinators, butterflies and wildlife.

Attention all artists!! BCAS is hosting a Native Plants Save Birds Poster Contest this year. Birds depend on native plants to feed their young, to grow and thrive and for their survival. Your original design should celebrate native plants for birds and the relationship between birds, butterflies and bees, with our native trees, shrubs, flowers and ground covers. The contest is free to enter.

There are two categories; an individual category and a family category. The artwork must contain the words ***Native Plants Save Birds***. The winning posters will be made into banners which will be displayed at upcoming events and prizes will be awarded. Submit your best "Native Plants Save Birds" themed artwork as an email attachment to Marie Longo MLongo8383@aol.com. Contest begins February 1st and the deadline for submissions is March 31st. Winners will be announced the first week of April.

The 4th Annual Dick Engsberg Teacher Appreciation Award nominations will begin on February 1st.



If you know of a teacher or educator who connects their students to nature and the environment please consider nominating them. The nomination must include the teachers name, school, grade, phone number, email address and reasons why you are nominating them. Deadline for nominations is March 31st and the winner(s) will be announced the first week of April. Nominations may be sent to Marie Longo MLongo8383@aol.com. We will present the award to the winner(s) in May or June.

The 25th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count will take place from February 18th-21st. This is a free citizen science project and is easy to participate in and enjoy. The valuable information collected helps scientists and researchers learn where the populations of birds are or are not. This is a global event and you can count wherever you are for as little as 15 minutes. **Visit birdcount.org to learn more.**

This year, BCAS is hosting a **Great Backyard Bird Count Family Challenge** to encourage participation in the count and for families to enjoy birding together. You will be awarded points for a variety of activities on a list. The more you do, the more points you'll rack up. The family with the most points will win a prize. Prizes must be picked up and will not be mailed. Interested in participating? Contact Marie Longo MLongo8383@aol.com for the list of activities and if you have any questions.

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT ON DEC 18, 2021

INTREPID BIRDERS MARCH THROUGH THE GLOOM TO A GREAT RESULT



This year's 73rd Annual Hackensack/Ridgewood Christmas Bird Count was facing a forbidding weather forecast; all day rain instead of last year's fresh snowfall. I worried whether our volunteer squad would come out under such unfavorable conditions. But at the same time, I was pleased that we were not faced by ice or snow. As the day unfolded, we did have intermittent drizzle through the morning, with a very brief respite at mid-day before the rain resumed. Temperatures remained steady at about 40 degrees, but the air was often foggy and there was little reason for any bird to take flight. So cancel the raptors or any duck migrations, and hope that we could still identify the smaller birds in the gloom.

I am pleased to report that over 40 volunteers braved the wet conditions, travelling in 20 small groups to cover our whole count circle pretty thoroughly. And luckily, the birds were there to meet us. **We actually finished with a record high total of 96 species, exactly matching the previous high total from 2020!** As you will see on the full list on opposite page, many species were found in rather low numbers (especially hawks and some waterfowl), and there were fewer winter species (few finches or siskins, no redpolls or grosbeaks) than a typical December count. But the late fall was unusually warm, so we found a wide variety of holdouts from summer populations. These birds may eventually wish that they had migrated sooner, as true winter weather is finally setting in now. A Great Egret was the biggest surprise, still hanging out in the meadows near Overpeck Creek. One Snow Bunting showed up inside the fences at the BCUA. Most of our groups ran into some Kinglets. Woodpeckers, Brown Creepers and Winter Wrens were relatively easy to find. Fish Crows and Ravens were found almost everywhere. Yellow-rump Warblers were still around in good numbers, plus one Orange-crowned Warbler.

Our group leaders were stellar, and all of our volunteers helped to make this a very successful event. I thank them all. I am also grateful to BCAS members who reported the birds from their feeders and from their yards. Those included the only Cowbird and only Baltimore Oriole for the event, plus a friendly Merlin that was being seen daily from out the kitchen window! Some groups had more success than others, but almost all contributed something special to the total.

Looking forward for 2022 to turn out even better (some day). Enjoy the winter and come out on a field trip with us. *Happy New Year!*

DAVE HALL

FUNDRAISING OCT- DEC. 2021

Challenging times continue but our membership/ friends continue to help BCAS and the welfare of nature in Bergen County and the surrounding area. Oct- \$204, Nov. \$1697, Dec \$ 5649. **Grand Total \$7,550.**

Thanks to Donors: Anonymous- Network for Good. Hildegard Ampsslier, Isaac Auslander, Joan Bennet, Edna Berkovits, Susan Bernknoff, Janet Boyd, Dr. Ben Burton, Helen Cantor, Todd Christie, Karen Clemments, Holly Cowen, Celia Crehan, Degen Degen, Rebekah Diller, Robert Faro, Margaret Flannery, Lynnette Goodman, Carol Havers, Arthur & Ludmilla Johnson, Pattie Keenon, Joe Koscielny, Tammy Laverty, James LeMaire, Diane Louie, Jimmy Macaluso, Mary Matsui, Elaine McCarthy, Susan Mc Gibney, Kenneth Merz, John Moran, Carol Mueller, Rochana Muenthongchin, Dennis Murphy, Vera Olsen, Peg O'Neill, Steve Quinn, George & Julie Reskakis, Dena Ressler, Paul Rubock, Nancy Scangarello, Martin & Linda Stio, Catherine Tamasik, Miriam Taub, Marguerite & Gary Van Wowk, Patricia Vellas, Stephanie Walker, Ed Wegrzyniak.

I apologise for any mistakes and if contacted at omargarito@aol.com will correct in next Blue Jay .
Thank you everybody !!!

PEG O'NEILL, CHAIR

**THE BCAS 73th ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT-
ON DECEMBER 18, 2021**

by DAVE HALL

Pied-billed Grebe	6
Dbl-crested Cormorant	228 H!
Great Cormorant	2
Great Blue Heron	72
Great Egret	1
Blk-crowned Night Heron	1
Mute Swan	3
Canada Goose	5292
Wood Duck	12
Blue-winged Teal	2
Green-winged Teal	66
Am. Black Duck	48 L
Mallard	955
Northern Shoveler	15
Gadwall	20
American Widgeon	4
Ring-necked Duck	28
Greater Scaup	2
Lesser Scaup	140 H
Com Goldeneye	1
Bufflehead	34
Hooded Merganser	201
Common Merganser	4344
Red-br Merganser	1
Ruddy Duck	3817 H
Turkey Vulture	5
Black Vulture	7
Bald Eagle	44
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4
Cooper's Hawk	11
Red-shouldered Hawk	1
Red-tailed Hawk	25 L
American Kestrel	1
Merlin	5 H
Peregrine Falcon	4
Wild Turkey	5 L
Killdeer	2
American Woodcock	1
Ring-billed Gull	1471 L
Herring Gull	60 L
Gr.Black-backed Gull	11 L
Rock Dove	1070
East. Screech Owl	11
Great-horned Owl	6
Mourning Dove	879
Belted Kingfisher	21
Red-headed Woodpecker	1
Red-bel. Woodpecker	240 H
Yellow-b. Sapsucker	17
Downy Woodpecker	162
Hairy Woodpecker	45
Northern Flicker	42 H
Pileated Woodpecker	8 H
Blue Jay	383
Common Raven	24 H
American Crow	353

Fish Crow	430 H
Bl-cap Chickadee	129
Tufted Titmouse	58 L
Red-br. Nuthatch	2
White-br Nuthatch	71
Brown Creeper	11 H
Carolina Wren	45
Winter Wren	10 H
Golden-crld Kinglet	13
Ruby-crnd Kinglet	12 H
Eastern Bluebird	8
Hermit Thrush	2
American Robin	454 H
Gray Catbird	4 H
N. Mockingbird	54
Cedar Waxwing	74 H
European Starling	2129
Orange-cr Warbler	1
Yellow-rump Warbler	32 H
Northern Cardinal	217
Eastern Towhee	7
Am Tree Sparrow	4 L
Chipping Sparrow	2
Field Sparrow	2
Fox Sparrow	23
Song Sparrow	206
Lincoln Sparrow	1
Swamp Sparrow	1
White-thr Sparrow	1063 H
Dark-eyed Junco	615
Snow Bunting	1
Red-winged Blackbird	124
Rusty Blackbird	29
Common Grackle	5793 H
Purple Finch	4
House Finch	190
Pine Siskin	2
Am. Goldfinch	211
House Sparrow	560
Monk Parakeet	32

96 different species; 32,840 total birds
Count Period Species: Brown-headed Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole

H (relatively high number); L (relatively low); **bold** (unusual on our count)

BERGEN COUNTY AUDUBON SOCIETY
A CHAPTER OF THE
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
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Dated Material
February 2022

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 2022

Please enroll me as a member of the Bergen Audubon Society and/or the National Audubon Society. My check is enclosed for:

Chapter Sustaining Member. \$20.00 - Single or \$35.00 for Family Membership. 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.

\$20.00 - 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.)

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 the following and mail with your subscription or see any officer or chair at one of the meetings.

Conservation Membership Publicity Field Trips

Education Newsletter/Website