Scenes from the 2023 NYSOA/NYS Birders Conference

Top left: Croton Point Park field trip. Top right: Welcome to the NYS Young Birders photo quiz. Bottom left: Keynote speaker David Allen Sibley. Bottom Right: NYS Young Birders Club tallying results of the Friday Night Bird Quiz. Photos: Kara Mason
From the President

by Anne Swaim

What is NYSOA about? From our beginning, the objectives of the New York State Ornithological Association were “to document the ornithology of New York State; to foster interest in and appreciation of birds; and to protect birds and their habitats.” So, science, outreach, and advocacy.

We do science through NYSOA documentation of New York bird life with the work of the New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC) and by publishing NYSOA’s annual Checklist of New York Birds, supporting the third New York State Breeding Bird Atlas and the annual statewide waterfowl count, among other projects. Which of these science-based efforts has connected with you in the past year?

We do outreach through NYSOA events like the annual New York Birders Conference and NYSOA-sponsored field trips, and the work of our member clubs also spreads the word about NYSOA. How did you first connect with NYSOA?

As an individual birder in New York, maybe you like connecting with NYSOA just because you know NYSOA supports ornithology, the science of birds, in our state. As our tagline reads, “For the birders and birds of the Empire State.” How could we better connect with New York birders?

NYSOA advocacy efforts are carefully considered to add a reasoned, science-based voice and the impact of our statewide organization on issues affecting birds and their habitats. Do you know an important bird habitat issue in New York state that should be involving NYSOA?

Perhaps you are involved in an Audubon chapter or bird club in New York? Do you find yourself explaining why your group is paying dues to NYSOA? That’s a reasonable question!

In the coming months, we are planning a new outreach from NYSOA board members to our member groups: to join with you on field trips and programs, to connect with your group’s board members, to ask how we are doing on science, outreach, and advocacy, and to ask how NYSOA can make a difference for the birds and birders in your part of New York.

I am honored to serve as your NYSOA board president. Do you have some answers to the questions above to share with the NYSOA board? I invite you to send me a note at anneswaim@gmail.com.
Kid’s-Eye View: NYS Birders Conference

Rook Schucker Mallo  Age 13

I had an amazing time at the 2023 New York Birders conference this past weekend! My experience started Friday night with the NYS Young Birder’s Club bird quiz. The quiz really stumped me, and my fellow young birders did a great job in making it so difficult yet engaging. I was teamed up with a table of very experienced birders of all ages and they were highly challenged as well. We managed to place third however and received a very nice ribbon decorated with a beautiful illustration by NYSYBC vice president Emma Murphy!

The next morning, my mother and I braced ourselves for a morning of torrential downpour. When we arrived at Croton Point Park, there was a light drizzle and our group leaders were afraid that there wouldn’t be that many birds. Thankfully, the weather didn’t worsen and we had a great time! We saw a vast variety of birds thriving in many different habitats: grasslands, the Hudson River, and a heavily forested area. My favorite of the birds we saw was the Northern Harrier. They contrasted crisply against the light overcast sky, enabling me to see them in great detail as they flew close to our group. I also enjoyed seeing a pair of Field Sparrows (my favorite species of sparrow!) in the grasslands and a Nashville Warbler in the woods!

After we left, the rain became much heavier and I was grateful to return to the warmth of our hotel. I attended the workshops not too long after we returned. First, I attended the Bird Sounds Workshop, which I was very excited about. I am very bad at birding by ear, so I was eager to learn about the different methods that may help me improve this aspect. The presenter, Tom Stephenson, was great at explaining his techniques. He focused most on remembering bird sounds by associating the sound with an image and then further relating that image to the bird making the sound. I realized that I sometimes do this too, although not to the degree he does. For example, I associate the songs of the Carolina Wren with the sounds I hear when I visit my grandmother’s house in Southold, Long Island. Thus, I am able to better remember which songs are sung by the Carolina Wren when I feel a sense of nostalgia related to my many childhood summers spent at this home. I will definitely try to utilize Mr. Stephenson’s methods in the future and hopefully they will help me improve this skill.

After this presentation, I took some time to explore the various booths set up in the halls of the hotel. I was amazed by the plethora of birding materials (such as books, stickers, earrings, and information on preventing bird window strikes) and bought two stickers! Afterwards, I attended Dr. Shai Mitra’s workshop on sea watching. I was thoroughly engaged throughout this presentation, especially when Dr. Mitra was speaking about hurricanes and the amazing species they bring to our shores.

After Dr. Mitra’s workshop, I explored the stalls some more and had my field guide signed by David Sibley! Meeting him for the first time increased my pre-existing excitement for our meet and greet with him later, as well as his presentation after the banquet. At the meet and greet, it was amazing to hear what he had to say about his own experiences birding, especially in his youth. Additionally, it was fun to learn about his life list and his spark bird as this is a birding experience he truly shares with all of us young birders—it was a very nice way to connect. His presentation later at the banquet was fascinating. As an artist currently completing a visual arts thesis mostly on birds for my IB Art class, it was captivating to learn about Mr. Sibley’s own processes for ornithological illustration. I really learned a lot from somebody so experienced and skilled. Also, it was nice to hear how he worked together with gouache and digital art as these are media I use a lot as well.

Overall, I had an incredible time at the 2023 New York Birders Conference. I always love connecting with other like-minded birders, especially with those from all over New York State. I learned a lot about birding and the field of ornithology as a whole and I am excited to implement what I have learned into my future birding adventures!
My experience at the New York State Ornithological Association conference, including the field trips to Rockefeller State Park, the paper session, and the banquet on Saturday, was wonderful! At this conference, I feel like there were more young birders than I've ever seen at any single event, and I got to meet and get to know new members, and talk with some of the top birders in the state, and even the entire country! At the Rockefeller SP Preserve field trip early Saturday morning led by Anne Swaim, I didn’t get any lifers, but I got a bunch of first-of-year birds like Cape May Warbler and Merlin, and got a chance to practice my photography on fidgety warblers. Even in the rain, birds were abundant at Rockefeller, and having avid birders and a wonderful trip leader with me just made the experience more rewarding. On this trip, the group got 37 total species, with the highlight being a Cooper’s Hawk chasing a Merlin.

At the paper session, where there were presentations on the Merlin Sound Recording app, Belted Kingfishers, the Spark Bird Project, and identifying and remembering bird calls/songs, I was introduced to new ways of thinking about birds and birders, and I found the information given that afternoon valuable to both identifying birds and studying birds. I have used the Merlin Sound Recording app before in the field, and it is quite helpful for finding birds in the area and practicing identifying birds by ear. I have read Emma’s Belted Kingfisher slideshow before, and it was presented beautifully and with confidence. The Spark Bird Project made me think differently about birders, and I had never thought before about connecting birding to psychology. The presentation also led me to think about what my spark bird was (Mourning Dove), and the pair of birds that had nested on my fire escape and brought me into the world and life of the birds themselves. Since that first pair of Mourning Doves that nested successfully, we had one more pair attempt to nest (which unfortunately ended up with invalid eggs), and the next year, that same pair came back to nest in the same spot and had two babies that I loved to watch develop, change, molt, and learn to fly and forage! And finally, Tom Stephenson's presentation on identifying and remembering bird calls, which had been presented to us before at the NYS Young Birders Club kickoff event in January, continued to blow me away with the power of using imagery, objective terminology, and spectrograms to identify birds by sound.

At the banquet (which was quite delicious), I had some of my best experiences interacting with birders my age with my level of expertise in a situation where we weren’t all focused on birds, although much of our conversation was bragging about our life lists and photos. The banquet was a chance to get to know the young birders outside of the birding world, and to meet new members that I had never met before or hadn’t interacted with much. The raffle and auction were fun even though I wasn’t lucky enough to win anything. And as always, David Allen Sibley impressed me with his presentation on his life and dreams of making field guides and illustrating birds and trees. His speech got me back into being interested in making drawings of the birds I see, and I learned more than I had before about field sketching based on observation, and creating finished drawings or paintings based solely on those sketches.

All in all, with the field trip, the paper session, and the banquet, I had my perspective changed about the birds that I’ve been watching and studying for almost four years now, I got to know young birders my age that each have their own unique birding and bird stories, and I got to see and photograph birds that added to my year and month lists, plus birds that always make me happy to see. In this formal and fun experience, I had some of the best times that I have had in learning, birding, socializing, and most of all, what it means to be a birder.
Highlights of the 2023 NYSOA Delegate’s Meeting
September 23, 2023

Attendees: The meeting was attended by 39 delegates from 24 member clubs.

Treasurer’s Report and Audit Report

Mary Jane Dugan reported that NYISOA has a total fund balance of $185,506.82 and a cash balance of $63,778.48. An audit was conducted by Stephen Chang, Thomas Burke, and Peter Capainolo.

DEC Report

Angelena Ross, Mammal Unit Leader, NYSDEC discussed her work involving translocating Spruce Grouse from Northern Ontario to the Adirondacks to boost population numbers in New York. She found that translocated birds had 72% annual survivorship and similar nest survivorship as resident birds. DEC is now in its 3rd year of translocating birds and continues to monitor their demographics. If you see banded birds please email: angelena.ross@dec.ny.gov

Committee Reports

Conservation—Andy Mason

Andy noted that the committee had a full year of letter writing to support conservation initiatives for birds around the state. He put out a call for member clubs to continue to reach out to him regarding conservation issues in their local areas that NYISOA can support through letter writing and other methods.

Marketing and Publicity—Brian Dugan

NYISOA business cards and postcards have been updated and were provided in the registration packets. A NYISOA store was created on Zazzle so members can purchase wear and gear (https://www.zazzle.com/)
New York State Avian Records Committee—Shai Mitra for Willie D’Anna

NYSARC is currently working on reviewing eBird records not specifically submitted to the committee. There is a small lag in the writing of annual reports and they expect to complete 2019 by the end of this year. They are developing a more formal procedure for the review list and created a subcommittee to perform this so that it is not just based off of personal feelings. Willie D’Anna will be stepping down after serving for seven years as chair. Mike McBrian will take over as chair and Tim Healy will join the committee. Tim Healy will join the NYSOA Board of Directors subject to their approval.

New York State Young Birders Club—Rosanne Vinson (report by Carena Pooth)

The club is now in its 16th year. Current stats: 50 members and 37 supporting adults and 19 partner clubs. 17 youth leaders attended this meeting. Susan Joseph, the field trip coordinator is seeking a co-chair. NSYBC has given out ~$40k in scholarships since 2010 thanks to donors and supporting clubs. The treasurer will be stepping down and will need to be replaced. The club raised nearly $5000 to donate to two environmental groups, including the Grassland Bird Trust in New York and Birding Central Valley, a Costa Rican organization. If anyone has extra birding books or other items, email Emily Van Gelder to give to the club.

Publications

Kingbird—Shai Mitra

The next issue is imminent. The journal should be caught up by the end of 2024. Shai noted that regional editors do a huge amount of work and their submissions are used frequently. Consider giving encouragement to your local regional editor to keep these reports coming. Amish and Mennonite birders in CNY have become more connected with NYSOA recently and are a big fan of the printed kingbird. One of these birders, Reuben, was thrilled to take Valerie’s complete set of printed copies.

County and State Listing—Pat Aitken for Carena Pooth

Updates focus on the Goshawk split and re-lump of Pacific-slope flycatchers. The NYSOA checklists were updated July 2023 and the 2024 booklet will be available by early 2024.

Website and Information Services—Carena Pooth

A handout was available with information on top website activities in 2023 and the ongoing maintenance of other useful features that are most commonly accessed. Carena asks Christmas Bird Count Coordinators to email her CBC count date and contact updates for the website.

Research: Breeding Bird Atlas—Julie Hart

We have just finished year 4 of the 5-year atlas. There has been a lot of progress made so far: ~3700 Atlasers, ~500,000 checklists, 228 species confirmed breeding, 34% of priority blocks finished, and 1.9 million breeding behavioral codes used. However, there are still big gaps in block completion. The biggest gaps are in the southern tier, including the Catskills, and the Adirondack north country. All hands on deck are needed to finish this project. Targeted atlassing in priority blocks is especially needed. Julie suggests that member clubs host trips, talks, and trainings for the atlas to get people involved. There will NOT be a 6th year to the atlas as there is no funding. Email Julie at nybba@gmail.com with questions. This will be the premier conservation resource for the state over the next twenty years, so it is very important that it is completed.

Election of Officers and Directors—Charlie Scheim and Pat Aitken

The NYSOA 2023 Nominating Committee, consisting of Joan Collins (Chair), Bob Adamo, and Charles Scheim presented the slate below to serve as NYSOA Officers with terms expiring in 2024, and five Directors with terms expiring in 2025. There were no floor nominations.

**Officers:** (Terms expire in 2024)
President: Anne Swaim
Vice President: Sean Camillieri
Treasurer: Mary Jane Dugan
Recording Secretary: Alison Kociek

**Directors:** (Terms expire in 2025)
Pat Aitken
Craig Braack
Brian Dugan
Charles Scheim  
Tim Healy (Term expires in 2024)  
Pat noted that Mary Jane has expressed a request to step down and NYSOA is currently looking for someone to replace her. The slate of Officers and Directors was approved unanimously.

The following committee slates for 2023 were recommended from the NYSOA Board of Directors for the Delegates Meeting for approval:  

**Auditing Committee:**  
Stephen Chang  
Tom Burke  
Peter Capainolo

**Nominating Committee:**  
Anne Swaim  
Bob Adamo  
Charles Scheim  
The nominating committee and auditing committee were approved unanimously.

**New Business**

Pat Aitken announced that two groups have asked to become NYSOA member groups—Central Westchester Audubon Society and Putnam Highlands Audubon Society. They were approved unanimously.

*Visiting with David Allen Sibley at the New York State Birders Conference. Photo: Anne Swaim.*