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MEMORIES OF DIANA TETA
Linnaean Society Field Trip Leader
Society Member September 1992 – July 2014

Compiled by Dale Dancis

Diana Teta was an active field trip leader for the Linnaean Society of New York. She died unexpectedly in July. She brought her own style, enthusiasm, energy and most importantly her expertise to her trips. Her birding trips were always one of the highlights of the Linnaean field trip schedule. We went to Cape Ann, Massachusetts, Montauk New York, and Cape May, New Jersey. Day trips up to the Shawangunks in Ulster County, New York to see Short-eared Owls and Rough-legged Hawks were a yearly celebration. Diana would graciously drive for hours, starting early on Long Island and pick up people in New York City so that we could experience a full weekend of birding. She always did her homework and would nightly check the Rare Bird Alert and vary the trips depending on the birds that had been seen. She would often be tough on herself and her participants as her main priority was to get people to see the birds. She was famous for her driving, her knowledge of all the back roads of Long Island and her determination to catch the rare birds. Often she would remind the uninitiated to “get the bird first – then use the facilities!”

When she wasn't leading field trips, she participated in the Fire Island Hawk Watch, a number of Long Island Christmas Bird Counts, Duck Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys. Her knowledge of Long Island birds was well known. She spent hours tracking birds and her tenacity paid off. One Christmas Count, she and Lenore Swenson found a Mountain Bluebird at the Calverton Grasslands. This was a rare find on Long Island, or anywhere in New York State. It stayed around long enough for a number of people to photograph it and it even remained through the New Year.

After I retired from teaching, I became a birding bum for a year. Diana and I teamed together quite often and she helped me complete a New York State “Big Year”. We would often meet at the Patchogue train station near her house and go for the day either to Jones Beach or to points on eastern Long Island. We went to Cupsogue six times until we finally found some Marbled Godwits at 6:00 am. Dune Road was another favorite haunt of ours. On the seventh try, we succeeded with our quest to see an elusive American Bittern.



Diana Teta birding on Long Island: 2014

© Dale Dancis

Of course, all of this Long Island birding wouldn't have been possible without her legendary hospitality. Diana opened her house to her birding friends. We stayed out there and she always prepared dinner – even after a full day of birding. We would plan for our adventures, study the photographs and listservs on the Internet and discuss field marks of the birds we would see. At times there would be a few of us so it was always lively and entertaining.

It's rare to find someone to bird with who gets excited about what birds you see and goes to extensive lengths to help you improve your birding skills.



Willow Ptarmigan, April 27, 2014 © Dale Dancis

We went on a few chases for rare birds across New York State. Her legendary driving got us far and quickly. Our last adventure involved a chase to see the Willow Ptarmigan in Jefferson County, New York in April 2014. Diana picked up Lenore Swenson and me very early in the morning. She drove – rarely stopping – and we made

to hunt for it! Gail Benson snapped the photo of Diana, Lenore and me after the great view of the Ptarmigan. As I reread some of my e-mails from that time, I had written to Richard Zaineldeen, “Yes! Diana is amazing!! We got the bird – there and back again in one day!”



it up to Point Pleasant Peninsula on the shore of Lake Ontario, west of Watertown. We drove up to find a few New Yorkers and others staring at the bird! We got there while the bird was in view and did not have

© Gail Benson

Diana was a wonderful participant in the Great Gull Island Birdathon. As part of “Team Roseate”, she volunteered to do all the driving throughout the weekend. We left the city the evening before and would stay near Bashakill. At 4:00 am we started out for the causeway over the Bashakill marsh to listen for owls and the pre-dawn chorus. This year we met Joe DiCostanzo (not pictured), Ann Shaw, Chuck McAlexander, Sean Sime, and Jeff Kimball and enjoyed a wonderful morning hearing American Bitterns, Great Horned Owl, American Coot and Common Gallinule. Sean had a special whistle and could imitate bird sounds which was a unique experience. We also saw Common Nighthawks, heard a Whip-poor-will and saw a Least Bittern. Diana spotted an American Bittern fly over the marsh. It was some of the most exciting birding of the year. We drove from Bashakill to Blue-Chip Farms and found two Upland Sandpipers. We ended the day at Doodletown and ran out of time, but added a Hooded Warbler. Driving back to the city

Diana then drove back to Long Island where we spent the night. The next day, we left Patchogue at 5:00 am to drive to Jamaica Bay. We arrived at the Bay around 6:00 am. We picked up a Tricolored Heron, Clapper Rail and a Yellow-crowned Night Heron. We had a terrific morning and then drove out to Eastport and Shinnecock. Once there, we heard about a White-faced Ibis at Captree Marsh. Diana immediately set about driving back to the Marsh and we made it shortly before sundown. After lengthy search, we saw one with pink legs. This was confirmed by Mike Shiebel, a terrific Long Island birder – we finished this year’s Birdathon with an unusual New York State Bird! Our efforts were well rewarded. Our total number of birds seen was 153 species one of my all-time high counts!

Diana will be greatly missed by her friends and the Long Island birding community.

Dale Dancis





Diana Teta was one of the Linnaean Society's most eager and adventurous field trip leaders. Every year when I contacted leaders to set up the field trip schedule for the following year, Diana would quickly respond with a substantial list of trips she wanted to do. She was willing to go far afield, explore new areas, and do long weekend trips. She was willing to go far afield, explore new areas, and do long weekend trips. Some of her suggestions of where and when to go were quite unique. We would work to pare down her list to a more manageable level.

Diana was also very willing to drive people around. She often would pick up people at Long Island Railroad stations for trips to Jones Beach and eastern Long Island, and would drive from her home in East Patchogue into Manhattan to take carless birders on trips upstate and points west.

She was a very skillful driver, but was known for having a heavy foot and sometimes going off the road when she spotted an interesting bird. In 2011, while scouting her territory for the Central Suffolk Christmas Bird Count, and going sixty-plus miles per hour on Route 25A, she spotted a small bird flying up and down from a post on a snow fence. I didn't see the bird at all until Diana made a sudden U-turn and pulled off the road. The bird was a Mountain Bluebird!

Diana seemed to be out birding constantly, especially on her home grounds of Long Island. She participated in Christmas Bird Counts, Breeding Bird

Surveys and the Fire Island Hawk Watch. Very memorable for me are the pre-dawn hours spent in various small cemeteries near Sag Harbor at the start of the Orient Count, listening and looking for owls; and also the Breeding Bird Survey in Calverton, spending hours afterwards picking ticks off each other!

Diana was most proud of her New York State life list which topped at least 420 species. She thought nothing of going on long chases. Years ago, on one of the first trips I went on that she led; we spent a vigorous day visiting various sites on southern Long Island. At the end of the trip, she opened her trunk, passed around a large selection of candies, and told us she was heading directly up to Lake Ontario to look for a Yellow-billed Loon. More recently, last April, she picked up Dale Dancis and me in Manhattan, drove up for the Willow Ptarmigan and back in the same day.

The Italian mother in her always made sure everyone was well fed. She often packed lunches for friends she took birding with her, and cooked dinner for friends she invited to stay at her house to get an early morning start. She was very generous, always sending cards and giving gifts.

Diana lived in a lovely old wooden house, full of antiques, collectibles and a huge library full of bird books. Her house was next to a wooded Suffolk County Nature Preserve, Hedges Creek, which she was instrumental in helping to preserve. Before leaving on any birding trip, Diana

got up early enough to feed her four cats, make sure the bird feeders were full, and food was left out for the Wild Turkey and the two lame deer that visited her. She was always thinking of her animals: one farm stand left a bunch of somewhat ripe pumpkins out with a sign, "Help Yourself." Diana threw some in her trunk for the deer. She took a stand and actively worked on environmental issues such as fracking.

I will miss Diana's enthusiasm for birding, her intensity, energy, and stamina, her generosity, and her sense of humor. She was a wonderful birding companion for many of us.

Lenore Swenson

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It has been my good fortune to join Diana Teta on many field trips. She organized and led trips that were imaginative and daring and she did so with great enthusiasm, skill and incredible stamina. In particular I remember a pelagic trip in the summer of 2002 to North Carolina with Brian Patterson. Diana organized everything. She also drove the participants there and back, and booked the boat and the motel. She did all of this in spite of her propensity to get seasick. It was an unforgettable experience, especially for me as a relatively new birder. I will always remember Diana with great fondness and gratitude for everything she gave to the birding community.

Louise Fraza

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I have known Diana Teta since 1990 and have traveled many places with her, including Florida, where we disembarked at the wrong airport and California, where she put an enormous amount of work into researching the area and making all of the arrangements. Diana was indefatigable and loved her car. In an alternate life she might have been a racecar driver. She will be greatly missed by all of us on the Island.

Ellen Kornhauser

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I remember Diana not only as an excellent, dedicated birder and leader, but also as an environmentalist.

How many people would buy a house upstate with property for the purpose of preserving and enhancing habitat for birds and other wildlife? Diana was forever filling her bird feeders. She was very opposed to fracking and would send me multiple articles on the subject. She forwarded me petitions to sign to protect important habitat and ecological systems.

I am also grateful for all the trips she planned to places I would not have visited on my own. One trip that stands out in my mind was the arduous journey upstate to see the Lewis's Woodpecker. She drove back and forth in one day.

She would arrange trips to Montezuma and adjacent areas. Her Linnaean trips were creative and fun. She had so much to give.

I want to add that Diana was an excellent cook. We would help with the dishes and the salad, but Diana was the chef.

I have these wonderful memories and will always miss Diana.

Anne Lazarus

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It is with much sadness, I share with you the news of the passing of Diana Teta, PhD. Diana passed away at her home in East Patchogue, LI, of natural causes.

She was a very active birder, who compiled a Life List for NYS of over 417 birds, and was well known to many in the LI - as well as NYC - birding community.

Diana will be missed by all of us who's lives she touched, and our condolences to her family and dearest friends.

Eileen Schwinn,
Eastern LI Audubon Society

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Editor: Joseph DiCostanzo

Linnaean News-Letter

15 West 77th Street

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Production and mailing: Thomas Endrey