


THE LINNAEAN
NEWS



LETTER

Volume 68, Numbers 9

February 2015

THE NOCTURNAL SOUTHERN FLYING SQUIRREL

Leo Hollein

People install nest boxes to provide homes for birds to use for breeding and roosting. The surrounding habitat and the size of the entrance hole generally limit the number of species that could potentially use the box. A bluebird box is put up in an open area to attract Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) as the name implies. It should be expected

that Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*), House Wrens (*Troglodytes aedon*), Black-capped Chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*), Tufted Titmice (*Baeolophus bicolor*), and House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) might also nest in a bluebird box. However, it is quite surprising to open a bluebird box and gaze into the eyes of an attractive rodent.



The Southern Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*) is a common resident of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (GSNWR) as well as deciduous forests throughout Eastern North America. They are members of the squirrel family but are seldom seen since they are nocturnal. In the GSNWR they occasionally nest and roost in bluebird boxes but more often in Wood Duck boxes that are located inside the tree line. Flying squirrels can glide from trees to many of the duck boxes. Bluebird boxes are typically located on posts in open areas and are difficult for flying squirrels to access. Flying squirrels are also adept at nesting in suburban attics by entering quite small openings.

inspection and cleaning of a Wood Duck box. It was fascinating to watch while one by one they exited the entrance hole and glided to a nearby tree. In suburban areas bird boxes attached to trees are attractive to flying squirrels. I have a box attached to a White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) in my yard. It has been used as a nest by these squirrels in three different years.

Flying squirrels have large eyes and long whiskers. Both are very useful adaptations for their nocturnal life style. The Southern Flying Squirrel is about the same size and weight as the Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias sriatus*). They have also been called flying mice which is the English translation of their scientific name.



In the winter flying squirrels are known to congregate to keep warm. A group of six squirrels was found last winter during the

Flying squirrels do not fly but they are excellent gliders. They have soft, light, flat tails and can flatten their bodies into a rectangular

shape by extending membranes that stretch from the equivalent of their wrists to their ankles. The tail is used for balance and breaking as they land. They can leap and glide impressive distances.

Southern Flying Squirrels feed on fruit and nuts from oak, hickory and beech trees. Large caches of small Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*) acorns that were stored by flying squirrels for winter consumption are found on occasion during the annual inspection and cleaning of Wood Duck boxes. They also feed on insects, buds, flowers, mushrooms, carrion, bird eggs and nestlings. Flying squirrels not only prey on birds but are also prey items for birds. Owls, hawks, snakes, raccoons and other predators including domestic house cats might include flying squirrels in their diet. Flying squirrel remains are found in Wood boxes used by Eastern Screech-Owls (*Otus asio*) during the winter. The owls do not consume the tail.

Most nests of flying squirrels in the GSNWR are made of strippable bark. The adult squirrel makes a covered nest with the strips of bark. Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) is the bark of choice in the refuge. However, Northern White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) is used in other locations. Northern White Cedars are being reintroduced into the Refuge. In time they should become the preferred nesting material as they contain insecticidal oils that provide some protection for young squirrels.

Flying squirrels raise two litters of two to seven young per year. The young are born without fur and with closed eyes and ears. They are mobile in five weeks. The young are weaned at about nine weeks. They become independent after four months.

The average range of an adult female is about fifteen acres while the male has a larger range of about forty acres. The ranges of individuals overlap that of others.



MANNY LEVINE: 1921-2014

Joseph DiCostanzo

Long-time Linnaean Society member Emanuel (“Manny”) Levine died on March 21, 2014 at the age of 92. Manny was a member of the Society for 55 years, having joined in 1959.

By profession, Manny was a salesman, but his great love, after his family, was for birds and birding. After his retirement he worked for many years as a volunteer Research Associate in the Ornithology Department at the American Museum of Natural History.

For decades, until ill-health slowed him down, Manny was one of Long Island’s most active birders. During those years, his birding was not slowed by the loss of a leg in the Battle of the Hurtgen Forest in World War II. I had known Manny for years, and had been with him in the field I don’t know how many times, before I found out about his war wound. And then it was from his good friend Dick Sloss, who told me about a tour guide on one of their trips to Africa, who was stunned to see Manny in shorts one day. I was as stunned as that guide, interrupting Dick to ask him what he was talking about. I know others who were also surprised when they found out.

For decades Manny was a mainstay of the Long Island birding scene, particularly in western Suffolk County and his home county of Nassau. He and Dick Sloss were the compilers of the Southern Nassau Christmas Bird Count for several decades.

Manny’s contributions to the New York birding community were extensive, especially to the Linnaean Society of New York and the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs (now the New York State Ornithological Association). On first joining the Society he was the editor of the *Linnaean News-Letter* (1959-1962), with Lisa McGaw as his Associate Editor. Manny also served as Vice-president of the Society (1962-1963) and President (1963-1965). He remained active on

the Council after he finished his terms as President and he was the Society’s representative to the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs for many years. For his long service to the Society, Manny was made a Fellow of the Society.

I had the privilege of working with him in two of his other significant contributions to New York State birding. He was always helpful and supportive. Manny was co-editor, with the late John Farrand (another Society president), of *The Kingbird* (1975-1985) and later editor (1999-2003) – during his first stint, I served as Region 10 compiler for a few years. Later I worked with Manny again as a contributor when he oversaw the updating of the *Birds of New York State* by John Bull. First published in 1974, the update was published in 1998 as *Bull’s Birds of New York State*, edited by Emanuel Levine. Besides managing the herculean task of coordinating over eighty authors writing species accounts for the new book, Manny wrote nine species accounts himself. In 2004 Manny was presented the Gordon M. Meade Award by the New York State Ornithological Association for his years of work with the organization.

Manny will be greatly missed by his many longtime friends in the New York birding community. For younger birders who did not have the chance to know him, all I can say is you missed knowing a great guy, but you will benefit for years to come from his many efforts and contributions to local birding.

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### LINNAEAN NEWS-LETTER

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Linnaean News-Letter

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