

# THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

## Nature Notes from Central Park

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Vol. 10, No. 1

January ~February, 2004

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### Surviving Winter

Not since I was a child in Chicago do I remember a winter with so much snow and prolonged cold temperatures. Usually we see winter pansies or crocuses in the park but not this year. It is supposed to be the most wintry winter since 1977, when the park walks were so icy, New Yorkers slithered to the edge of the park and tossed seed and bread crumbs over the walls for the birds. When the ice melted and we could reach the Ramble, we saw battle-wary squirrel survivors with missing fur and tails, bitten ears and empty eye sockets. Now the park walks are shoveled and sanded and we can get in and out without broken limbs. Feeding continues in the Ramble.

On a couple of Wednesdays in February I went to the feeding station in Evodia Field for noon-time handouts and to see birds and birdwatchers. There were house finches, titmice, gold finches, hairy and downy woodpeckers, white-throated sparrows, fox sparrows, cardinals, juncos, a red-breasted nuthatch and finally, the female redpoll seen on the Christmas Count. Also Charles, Norma, Lee, Murray, Sylvia, Marianne, Neil (with scope), Elliott, Ardith, George and Lloyd.

Lloyd Spitalnik mans the feeders and supplies the feed. He said Irene Warshauer made a gift of seed early in the winter. Other than that, he does the buying in an upstate Wal-Mart and brings it into the park. He buys in bulk and pays \$9 for ten pounds of niger thistle seed, \$8 for 25 pounds of sunflower seed and \$3 each for thistle bags. He said he has used 20 thistle bags so far this winter. The fiberglass and aluminum pole used to raise and lower feeders cost \$40. So far they have spent \$300 this year and will continue feeding until mid-April.

Lloyd and Murray Liebman fill the feeders every Wednesday. They replenish on the weekend if the supply is low. That's been about half the time because the snow cover makes foraging difficult. They keep 20 feeders going: 8 plastic bottles with sunflower seeds, 8 thistle bags, and 4 suet feeders. Lee Stinchcomb brings in the suet (meat fat) from Lobel's on the East Side. The food attracted 10 pine siskins, the redpoll, 5 or 6 purple finches at a time, 3 hairy woodpeckers, lots of titmice, 40 goldfinches, and no chickadees. No birds come to the hand this year, which is unusual.

The bird feeding station is plagued by squirrels. There have never been so many, I'm told. George Muller made 12 feeders so far this winter to replace ones battered by gray squirrels. They have finally found out how to get into his plastic bottles. His latest innovation is to reduce the width of the entrance from 2" to 1 1/2"--wide enough for bird shoulders but too narrow, he hopes, for squirrels. He says they take about an hour to make. The empty plastic bottles he uses hold windshield washer fluid for cars. In this weather, more sloppy roads mean more fluid is used. Drivers toss away the empties; George collects and recycles them.

He rinses the bottle and gets the label off. Then he marks out the door on opposite sides of the bottle half-way between bottom and top. He cuts the doors out with a sharp penknife. He uses a hot soldering iron to make 5 drainage holes in the bottom and 2 at the neck for the wire hanger. He puts a larger hole under each door for landing pegs. George cuts squares from metal sheets, then cuts out the center of each square to make a half inch frame. He bends the metal frame over the opening toward the inside of the bottle to hold it in place and reinforce the entrance. Last, he puts a wire through the neck with a snap hook to attach the bottle to a hanger. Let's hope it works.

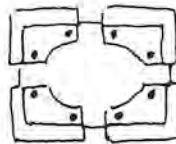
## An Avian Treasure Hunt

Between 59<sup>th</sup> and 79<sup>th</sup> Streets, there are nine locations where you can always see birds in the dark of winter. In fact, you can see these birds the whole year round because they are made of stone or metal. These bird statues are arranged in the **chronological order** of their installation in Central Park with **alphabet clues**. Some birds were part of larger projects and I could find no exact date for when they went up. The **numbered clues** give you more than enough **bird names and other words** to fill in the blanks. My thanks to Scott Sendow, Parks Dept. Historian for Arts and Antiquities, for his help with installation dates and the fate of some birds. Most of the **sketches** I made while wearing gloves on a bitter winter afternoon. As I was shivering and sketching a large bird, 2 saucy sparrows flew in and landed on its head and shoulder. They pecked around for food and stayed long enough to get into my drawing. Beside some of the sketches I have added several **mini-maps**, which may or may not help you in your search.

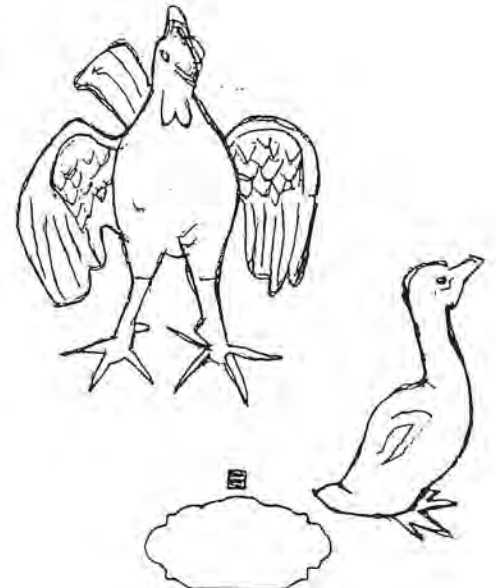
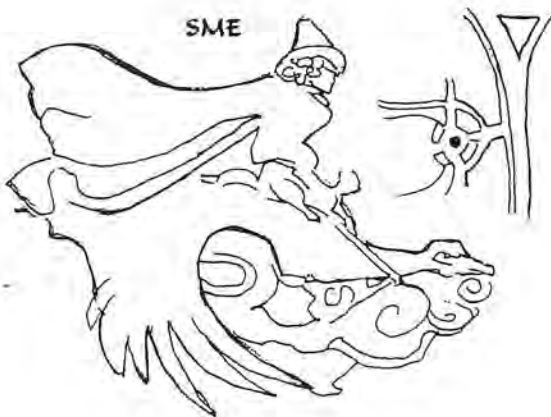
Study all the clues and on a separate sheet of paper, make a list of letters and numbers for each bird. You will have an unmarked newsletter to take with you when you find them all with children, out-of-town friends or other birdwatchers.

**Birds and Blanks:** 1. alike 2. Arsenal 3. Blockhouse 4. cygnet 5. cormorant 6. daytime 7. duck 8. stone eagles 9. metal eagles 10. face 11. falcon 12. flamingo 13. goose 14. nighttime 15. owl 16. peregrine 17. penguin 18. rooster 19. saxophone 20. spoonbill

A. Between the flagpole on a hill and the northeast corner of Sheep Meadow, 2 \_\_\_\_\_ prepare to eat their prey. This statue was the work of Christian Fratin in 1850, and was given to Central Park in 1863.



B. If Daniel Webster looked up, he could see a bronze \_\_\_\_\_ trying to escape the grasp of a young man in medieval clothes. If the young man looked down, he could see the Lower Lobe of Rowboat Lake. The statue by George Simonds was erected in 1872. The bird was stolen and, in 1957, a new bronze bird was fashioned and attached. But vandalism continued, and to protect the statue from further damage, it was incarcerated. In 1982-3, the 9 ft. statue was put up again with a new arm and a bigger bird.



C. At the north end of the Mall, 2 stone pillars guard the entrance to descending stairs. The east pillar shows \_\_\_\_\_ events, including a \_\_\_\_\_ by Jacob Wrey Mould. A century later, the stone bird was recarved and replaced in 1985.

D. South of a woman with wings and beside a mammal with wings is an \_\_\_\_\_ by Jacob Wray Mould. Over time the bird became battered. A replacement was carved and installed in 1985.

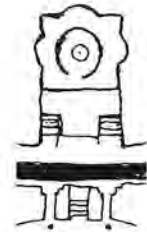


E. She's honored in two park statues. The one in granite was made by Frederick G. R. Roth in 1936. It is the center shaft of a fountain that was placed near Heckscher Playground but now stands in Levin Playground near Fifth Ave. She holds what she thinks is a croquet mallet but turns out to be a \_\_\_\_\_.



F. A powerful bird with graceful wings supports an old lady with a beautiful cape but in need of a nose job. They fly on a cloud with swirls which contain 2 kings, a chef and other famous people. The statue was created by Frederick G. R. Roth and installed in 1938. The \_\_\_\_\_ and all these characters are headed for Fifth Ave.

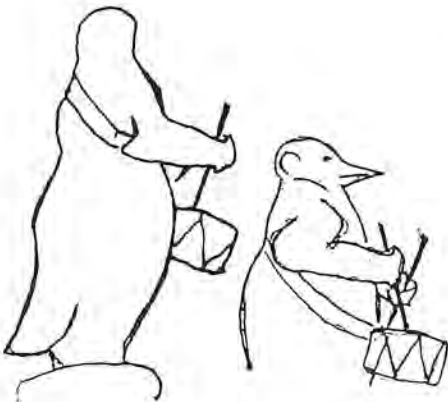
G. In winter, skaters glide over the ice of this pond with crenelated contours. Despite the cold, a large seated man holds a book and is watched by a \_\_\_\_\_ at his feet. This bronze statue by Georg Lober was installed in 1956. The fabled bird was stolen in 1973 but was recovered, returned and secured.



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H. Just northwest of the \_\_\_\_\_, the park's oldest (1851) building, are large bronze animals on an overhead walkway. They were created by Frederick G. R. Roth in 1937 and installed in 1965. From 8 AM to 6 PM they can move about. But in very cold weather they may slow, stop or play out of tune until the metal parts are repaired. The large, portly \_\_\_\_\_ is a member of the group.

I. In an oval pool, the public watch year-round swimmers. Four walkways to the pool are guarded by large \_\_\_\_\_. The birds once adorned the old Penn Station. In 1966, they were brought to the park and now \_\_\_\_\_ each other. All the birds look \_\_\_\_\_.





## Look, Don't Touch

The birders have been concerned about a plan to put up mist nets in Central Park, capture birds as they migrate through and tabulate numbers of each species. But maintaining nets and organizing a huge trained and skilled work force is a daunting task. Netted birds need to be extracted without twisting wing and leg muscles, snapping off flight feathers or leaving birds to die in the net.

Migration is still magical and mysterious. That may be why the number of hawk watches grows every year. Hawks are big and fly in daylight. But most of the migration consists of small birds that fly at night. Those are the ones some of us yearn to know more about.

Two years ago Dr. Bill Evans spoke to the Linnaean Society about his work tracking night migration by sound. As they migrate, birds peep repeatedly to keep together. 'Peep, I'm here, where are you?' 'Peep. Over here.' Dr. Evans (whose name is easy to remember if you love jazz, and he does) has learned to identify species of bird flocks by their peeps. That's no mean feat because the short sounds they make on a starry night sound nothing like the sounds they make on the ground in spring. Dr. Evans works at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, and has his own web site. Every fall he joins a group of high school students who record the sounds of birds passing from Texas into Mexico. Students who came to jeer stayed because it turned out to be thrilling.

I spoke to Bill Evans after his talk. It would be wonderful if we could do his study in Central Park: 1. At the Castle beside all the sky-scanning equipment in the Weather Station. And 2. down at the Zoo as well. Two years ago it was an idea whose time had not yet come. But now when I talk of it to birders they look alert and say they would come and be part of such a study.

I know nothing about radio dishes to suck in and tape bird sounds. I do not know if there is a wide-angle camera to film bird flocks in infrared light. If sight and sound were hooked together and recorded simultaneously, the results could be awesome. We could learn **a.** what species join each other in a flock and fly together, **b.** in what flight patterns, **c.** at what altitudes, **d.** the times of night, **e.** the weather conditions they tolerate during the flight. I feel positive there are people at the top of Sony, Canon, Disney and NASA, plus independent movie makers who might put up or share the cost of the equipment for the publicity. And what publicity! Joe Berger of the Times would be there in a shot. So would the networks and the BBC. It's an "evergreen" story: measure migration without harming the birds. If the results are conclusive we could urge the owners of bird-bashing skyscrapers to look beyond priapic pride, alter their lighting schedules and save thousands of birds every year. Let me know what you think and send suggestions for ways to make this plan work and succeed. My address is on the copyright below.

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People are calling about my spring bird classes: The **Wednesday Classes** start **April 14** at **9 AM**. We meet at **76 St. and 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.**, just inside on the benches. I give **5 sessions for \$35**. The **Sunday Classes** start **April 18** at **9 AM**. We meet at the **Boat House**. Again, **5 sessions for \$35**. Send **checks by April 8**. **Drop-ins for a single session pay \$10 cash**. PLEASE bring the exact amount. I will lead **Thursday walks in Battery Park City April 8 and all of May**. These walks are free. When I get flyers I will put them in the bird book at the **Boat House**. I'll do a **Linnaean Society Bird Nest Workshop May 25**. Please come and wow me. Go out in April-May, pick a pair of birds, watch them build a nest, hatch eggs, feed young. Sketch, take notes, dazzle friends.

# THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

## Nature Notes from Central Park

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Vol. 10, No. 2

March ~April, 2004

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### Rush Into Spring

After a long, cold winter, spring came in a rush. All the spring flowers came at once and many birds were early. A pine warbler arrived so early he had to spend a month hanging around the suet and seed feeders. Eventually the weather warmed enough so that this gorgeous yellow bird could be seen feeding on the ground. Almost immediately he was joined by several more male pine warblers. On April 21, a hooded warbler was seen and all the birders looked for it. I spotted it in Muggers Woods and James McCollough, age 8, saw it well with his new glasses. So did others in my Wednesday group. In fact, we thought there were two going off in opposite directions. This year there were more hoodeds, both sexes, than ever before, I think. The hooded was followed by golden-winged, Brewster's and prothonotary warblers, seen by a lucky few.

Except for hermits, there were fewer thrushes to see. Lots of eastern towhees were here. Usually the male towhee is here about a week before we see the female but this year she was here just a few days after him. All the towhees tossed aside brown leaves with a will to get at food on the wet ground. So did the grackles. We found a grackle nest at the tip of the Point. When first we looked she was sitting with beak and tail peeping over the shaggy nest. Almost immediately we saw the parents feeding and then a chick with dull feathers and a short tail, chasing after its parent.

A gray screech owl was discovered in a broken tree trunk on the Point. I was told the bird had a red stain on its chest to show it was part of a study group. I never saw the red dye, but its gray feathers blended perfectly with the trunk. Hundreds of people came to see, crowding round and peering up. The owl endured celebrity for about a month. It disappeared, then reappeared. The first Sunday I saw it, I also saw a little brown bat. The bat was resting upside down on a small sapling with its back to the water, out of sight of the owl. Both bird and mammal feed at night. I hoped the bat would fly early, before the owl was fully awake. Perhaps this is a bat mentioned in Sam Knight's New York Times article about the New York Bat Group. They plan to be out and about this summer searching for bats and I hope to be with them in Central Park.

On Sunday, April 18, I stood behind the willow at the north end of the Upper Lobe, watching a waterthrush. A northern, I said. The bird disappeared, then reappeared. Oh. No. A Louisiana. I looked away and when I found the bird again I felt sure it was a northern. This shifting identification continued until 2 waterthrush ran towards each other in the muck. Sure enough, bill-to-bill there was one of each. I told this to Lloyd Spitalnik at the Azalea Pond. He was about to leave to see both waterthrush when his cell phone rang. It was Alex Wilson at the Reservoir. He was looking at a non-mute swan and he thought it was a tundra. We arrived at the Reservoir to see a white blob like a plastic bag in the water. When it became upright we saw it had a white body with a tan neck and head. My Peterson guide is so old the bird there was named whistling swan. Some observers thought it might be a trumpeter swan, far, far from home. We peered at the shape of the black bill at the edge of the forehead. Was the border rounded or pointed? Hard to tell without a scope. Eventually, it was declared round, a tundra swan, our first to sit down in the park. A few days later I learned these swans are being raised at Montezuma Refuge in upstate New York. We should see more of them this fall. Deborah Allen has seen both swans in Washington state and sketched a top view of each.



1.

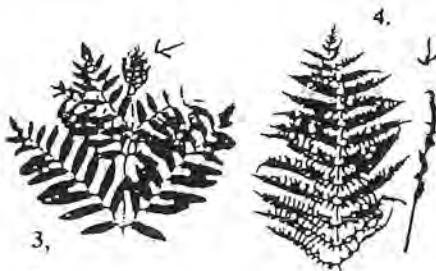
### Spring Wild Flowers in the Ramble

Regina Alvarez is Woodlands Manager for the Central Park Conservancy. She has been working in Central Park for 11 years and manages a crew in the middle of the park. In the last few years they have planted ferns, wild flowers and shrubs in the areas named on this map. This spring she gave me a tour of last fall's planting. We started at the top or source of the Gill, where they planted 1. **marsh marigold** on both sides of the stream. Look for plants with yellow flowers and green shiny leaves. From a distance you could mistake them for lesser celandine, but the flowers are larger and several grow on a stalk.



2.

Water flows down the hill and passes under the sidewalk and at this intersection are planted 2. **Christmas fern** in all four corners. Check the tiny leaflets on a leaf with your binoculars. You will see they are arranged alternately and each leaflet looks like a long mitten and tilts toward the stem.



3.

4.

As we worked our way counterclockwise around the Azalea Pond, we looked at the new island (white dot) planted with **swamp azalea** *Rhododendron viscosum* which will have white flowers and a tall 3. **royal fern**. Royal ferns wear tan spore clusters at the tips of their leaves, like crowns. More royal fern and 4. **cinnamon fern** line the area. Cinnamon ferns grow spores on long, separate stalks in May. The spore cases feel soft and look shaggy, like yarn on a stick. Rust-brown tufts grow at fern roots and under leaf stalks.

We rounded the corner to the row of benches. Stand at the trash bin and look through the fence in front of you. You will see a group of plants called 5. **golden Alexander**. Use your binoculars and you'll see they have three-part, rough, toothy leaves and tiny yellow flowers arranged in flat clusters at the top of the stem. As you walk along the fence, look for green umbrellas called 6. **mayapple** or **mandrake**. Mandrake root was used as a pain killer and thought to make women pregnant. John Donne mentions it in his poem "Go and catch a falling star." Just now the plants are putting out a single flower on the stalk. It will ripen to a yellow-white fruit shaped like a lemon. I'm told they make good pies.

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7.

The 7. **columbine** are blooming now. The leaves grow in threes and the flower is orange with a yellow center and hang-down stamens. Each petal has a long spur and together they rise to a five-pronged crown. Garden columbine come in many colors but the wild ones are orange.

"Tri" means having three parts and 8. **trillium** have lots of them. The leaves grow in threes, forming a single whorl. Several kinds have been planted, including large-flowered trillium that put out white flowers which turn pink as they age.

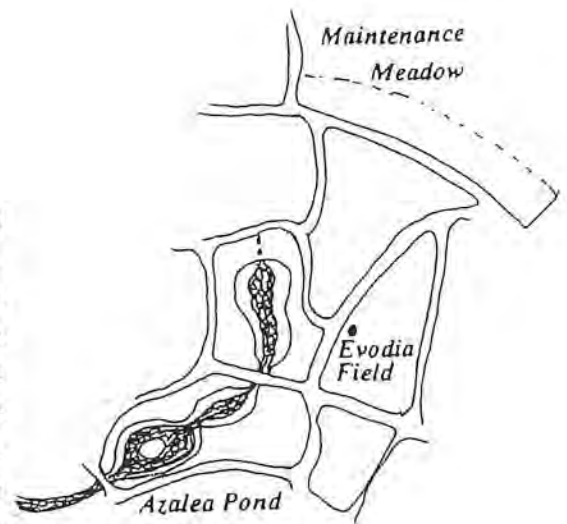
8.



The long stalks of 9. **Solomon's seal** bear leaves arranged alternately. Pale greenish-white flowers dangle in pairs from the underside. They remind me of peeling bells.



9.

Maintenance  
MeadowEvodia  
Field

Azalea Pond

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5.

6.



10.



11.

One of my childhood favorites is named **10. jack-in-the-pulpit** for its appearance. The jack is the flower and later seed cluster. The pulpit is a sheath or cover, a leaf that wraps over the flower on cold spring nights.



When you have walked east, past all of the benches, you will come to another sidewalk. At the corner are **11. Labrador violet**. Small dark purple flowers rise above purple-green leaves with purple veins. This small leaf silhouette is life size! Turn left at the intersection and follow the fence. Just beyond the Labrador violets is the **downy yellow violet**. It is taller, wider and the flowers are bright yellow. The plants have a soft, hairy stem. The undersides of the leaves are hairy, too, especially along the veins. As you move along you will see repeats of the wild flowers described here. You will also see 3 or 4 newly-planted shrubs of **sweet pepperbush**. When it blooms you should see butterflies on the flowers. Some ferns were planted in deep shade. I was told they are **12. marginal fern**. When Regina and I turned left again, we found marginal ferns near the fence; "marginal" refers to the spore cases which are dotted around the outer edges of the leaflet. At the corner are **yellowroot**. They are shrubs which will have purple flowers.

12.



Regina pointed out the leaves of **13. skunk cabbage**, a plant I know about but have never seen. The leaves smell bad when crushed, hence the name. Like the jack-in-the-pulpit, the flower is covered by a leaf. This one is striped brown and green. It opens to reveal the flower and then fruit sitting inside like eggs in a nest. These plants produce heat and, Regina says, can melt the snow around them and attract insects. They need to--- the flowers bloom in February or March. Our plants are new and young. Next winter and early spring we can all look for their strange flowers.

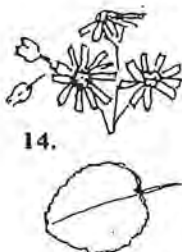
Regina led me to **Evodia Field**, which I named for the tree that is a small black dot on your map. She pointed out 3 shrubs called **arrowwood** *Viburnum dentatum*. "Dentatum" means the leaves are toothy. I learned this shrub years ago when a pair of wood thrush nested in one in Muggers Woods. They raised 2 clutches of fairly tame young.

In Evodia Field, red **blackberry** canes are growing well. They will provide good cover for smaller birds against red-tailed hawks, and dandy food for birds and their watchers. We regarded a large stand of **yellow archangel** *Lamium galeobdolon* pressing itself against logs. Regina said with a frown, it was not planted and is not native. The carpet of green with yellow flowers was handsome, but I'm told it is invasive. Along the fence near the evodia tree and beside the deeply-ridged trunks of the cork trees are **Canada violet**. They have heart-shaped leaves and white flowers with yellow throats. The underside of the petals are tinged with light purple.

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We stepped across the sidewalk to admire the south garden of **Maintenance Meadow**. We faced the buildings and looked at nearby flowers behind the fence. On our left we saw a group of **14. golden ragwort**. Seen from a distance, they look like two-level plants. On the ground is a thick carpet of round, heart-shaped, green leaves. In the air is a handsome layer of yellow, aster-like flowers. They are connected by long stalks with thin, deeply-cut leaves. Look at the flowers with your binoculars and you will see they grow in flat-topped clusters. Each flower has a large golden center surrounded by a thin ring of yellow rays. They will be there to see from May to July.

14.



Regina says they have planted **cardinal flower**. The red flowers should attract hummingbirds later this summer. The garden is filled with **15. ostrich fern** which were transplanted from Shakespeare Garden. They are bright green and grow narrow at the base, flare above mid stem and taper to the top. This garden, like many others in the park, has clusters of **16. Virginia bluebell**. The trumpet shaped flowers emerge as pink buds and turn sky blue with age. The leaves are egg shaped and rumple easily. The flowers are heaven to look at but hell to sketch! My first try was at Shakespeare Garden. I sat on the sidewalk beside some waving beauties and suddenly noticed a

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13.



15.



large tuft of hair. It came from a barbershop and was brought to the park as a gift from Chuck McAlexander for birds and their nests. Seeing the tuft of hair and knowing it would be collected made sketching these flowers less frustrating.

Now, when birds are scarce, you have wild flowers in the Ramble to look at. If you bump into Martin Calzadilla, the Zone Gardener, he will tell you lots of good things about his plants. But even if you are alone you will have help. Regina and Martin put out name plates when they were planting. Neil Calvanese said make the names darker so the public can read them. Now you can see common names and scientific names for the plants you read about on these pages. Enjoy!

### Whip-Chuck and a Wild Goose Chase

Leslie Beebe has been birding in Central Park about 10 years. On Saturday morning, April 24, she was walking through Muggers Woods when she heard a kinglet. She looked up and found 2 ruby kinglets giving rapid-fire calls and circling. Looking higher, she saw the bird they were mobbing was a goatsucker asleep on a branch. The kinglets lost interest and left. Mike Stubblefield and Chris Cooper came, saw and called Lloyd Spitalnik on his cell phone. Soon 50 people were there including Marty Sohmer, Jack Meyer and Phil Jeffrey. When about 100 people had seen the bird, an argument was well underway. Was it a foot long or less than 10"? Was it gray or warm brown? Were the outer tail feathers white to the tip or was there a margin of brown around and below them? Was the throat seeable? No, unseeable. A German TV crew came by, took their shot and left.

Arthur Le Moine arrived with a telescope. The bird looked sleepy. It had been called a whip-poor-will, then a chuck-will's-widow, both birds named for the calls they make. This bird did not utter, but it moved slightly, giving us a better view of its tail. With the aid of Art's scope, it was declared a whip-poor-will. Later that day as I was leaving the park I met Roger Pasquier on his way in with two guests. We exchanged greetings and I told him of the "whip-chuck" in Muggers Woods. He gave me a faint smile of comprehension.

The next day with my Sunday class, we stood on the rocks in front of the willow and wooden house at the Lower Lobe. Ed Fagan peered into the tree and said this was where he had first seen a cerulean warbler and hoped to see another. As we turned, a pretty strawberry-blond woman came peddling up on her bike. I had noticed her spotting birds earlier this spring. "What's a blue bird with a line across its throat?" she said. By way of explanation, she gestured slitting her throat. Members of the class showed her thrushes. No. Vireos? No. Warblers? No, the shape was OK but the bird was blue, not yellow. I suggested they show her a black-throated blue. No. Then, as I suspected, her finger dropped to the picture below. "That's it," she said, pointing to the cerulean. She offered to lead us to it. We followed her, making a great circle: to Willow Rock, Swampy Pin Oak, the Summer House and just above Warbler Rock she said, "Here it is! This is the place." She peered intently into a tree and added, "But the bird has gone." What was her name? Maria Schneider. Maria's walkabout was fun and some of the group had never been on a wild goose chase before.

A day or so later I heard that Roger Pasquier had seen a male cerulean warbler in the park a week earlier. Roger called the Rare Bird Alert to report his find. It is the earliest sighting of this warbler in the history of New York State. Now if Maria learns bird names and bird locations in the Ramble, she will be a wonderful addition to our crowd. God knows she's "got the eye." It's fast, sure, and it's green. On May 20, a dark, misty morning, we were looking at a Bicknell's thrush, a life bird for me. Maria arrived but had to rush off. Had she stayed, she would have nailed it.



# THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

## Nature Notes from Central Park

Vol. 10 No. 3

May~ June 2004

### Well-thatched Nests at Peep of Day

It was a strange migration. Thin on numbers but with a variety of rarer birds to see. Now the park is bulging with nests. The biggest belongs to the Fifth Ave. red-tailed hawks. For a decade they have added leaves and branches to the floor and walls of this nest and now it has sides high enough to hide the chicks until they are big enough to stretch for food, flap their wings and jump. Two young red-tails were born, and later a third, still being fed by its mother on Friday, June 11, but found dead the next day. This bird was collected and an autopsy revealed it had a concussion, and a broken rib which punctured a lung. Watchers think it was struck by a car and are glad the other two survive. Hawks mate for life, or the life of the mate. Pale Male has survived three mates and has been with this one three years. He's successfully fathered 24 birds in the past 10 years.

Uptown there is another red-tailed hawk on a nest, the first successful one in Central Park. She is pale and may be Pale Male's daughter. Her nest is in a grove of trees east of the Recreation Center and west of ballfield #12, near lamppost # 98.22 and a trash bin. You can sit on the benches near the Recreation building and watch this nest in (what else?) a London plane tree. I saw her come out of the trees, fly off with prey in her claws and return to feed young. Birders report 3 young, the third much smaller than the first 2.

Farther north you can hear the chatter of house wrens in the sloping meadow. The nest box near the Loch has a singing male that dives in and out of it. Halfway up the slope the box behind the blackberry patch is silent. The young are out of the box and are being fed by their parents in the bushes. But wrens nest twice a summer and mother may be back inside the box with the second set while father feeds the fledged young.

North of the Sloping Meadow, behind the Green bench (inscribed to honor a man by that name), is a brand new wren house. It was built and installed by Chuck McAlexander, who put his initial-logo and the year on the bottom. We visited the box and listened to silence. Chuck pulled out a long nail and removed a wall. Inside, sitting on a nest, was a surprised young bird who began flapping a wing full of tiny feathers. The rest of its body was still fuzzy. We admired it for a moment, then Chuck gently pushed the wing back inside the nest and closed the wall.

We moved to nearby rocks where I sat and made this sketch. As we watched, a parent collected insects but circled us until she decided to risk entering the box. We continued to sit, so the number of trips increased. Suddenly we saw a house sparrow dive at the hole. Its head disappeared then came out again. Chuck explained the sparrows want to take over the nest box but can't. Their heads go in but the hole is too small for their shoulders. Even so, they may have been snatching chicks, which would explain why there is only one chick in the nest. We hope this chick survives and that there will be more young in a second brood.

Chuck told of a fourth wren nest he found June 23. A wren was singing and going in and out of its "nesting hole" west and south of Lasker Pool. The nest is in lamppost E 0611. Wrens nested



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in a lamppost on the East Drive near the black walnut grove last year. Cavity nests protect birds from predators but living beside a lamp must be very hot in July and August.

Some tree swallows chose a huge cavity nest on the island in Turtle Pond. They settled into a nest box that was made for a wood duck. On April 13, I led a group of people on a National Audubon walk to see the box and the swallows zipping in and out of it. With or without binoculars, they all saw the swallows and learned this could be the first park breeding record for them since 1868. A reporter mentioned the tree swallows in the Times but within a week the box was empty. Now there are plans to put up tree swallow boxes next spring in the north end of the park. A shoulder-fit entrance hole will keep out all other birds except ones the same size.

Most of our park nests are cup nests, closed at the bottom and sides, open at the top. Some, like the robin, jam their nests into the crotch of trees and wedge them in place with sticks, mud and grasses. Robins are now on their second nests and some of them will do a third nesting before fall. I think most of them reuse the same nest. If birders pay attention, we can learn if this is true.

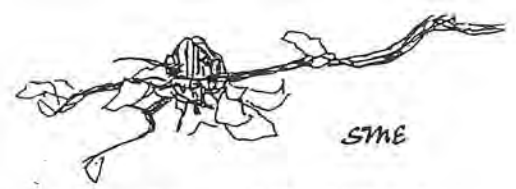
We are delighted to have another thrush with us this season. A pair of wood thrush arrived and we could hear their lovely song in Muggers Woods and around Azalea Pond. They made a nest high in a tall tree next to the evodia. Wood thrush like to add decoration like bell ropes to the bottom of their nests. I have seen long plastic streamers flutter in the breeze, or toilet paper, as is the case this year. At first the toilet paper was about 3 feet long. But prudence has changed the decoration and now it is tucked up under the nest. By summer solstice the young wood thrush had fledged. The young have duller brown backs and fewer spots than their parents. They also have big white bellies. On June 27, I saw a wood thrush and cardinal chick sharing the same branch and being fed by their parents. The light was so dim and the arrangement so amiable, I wondered if the parents accidentally fed the wrong chick. Wood thrush can nest twice a season and we hope this pair will do so.

At the Upper Lobe, green herons have returned to nest in the oak tree on the west side of the water. You can't see them from the sidewalk. But if you clamber down to the water and look up, you can see 4 young, fuzzy birds with long, pointed beaks. Soon they will be out all over the branches waiting to be fed. It takes a long time and lots of practice for a young heron to see a fish, aim, strike and catch it. When the young were smaller, a black-crowned night heron hung around hoping for a juicy morsel. Now that the young are larger, the night heron has flown away.

There has been a lot of nest activity along the West Drive. There was an early Baltimore oriole nest in April at 72 St. Transverse and a later one across the road in Strawberry Field. To the north, there is a warbling vireo nest. The nest is hidden in leaves but I hope to see parents going in and out. These birds can nest twice a season but they spend more than a month giving care to their fledged young. So maybe this pair will stop at one brood.

Also at the location is another Baltimore oriole. Lots of happy alums from Phillips Exeter Academy got to see the male and the nest in progress. I had them all whistle to get the oriole's attention then put out ribbons and laundry lint on the fence below. When I returned the next day, all but 2 ribbons had been taken and soon all the fluff and remaining ribbons were gone. Next fall, when the tree is bare, we should see an oriole nest decorated with ribbons and probably lined with fluff from the dryer.

Both warbling vireos and Baltimore orioles build hanging nests suspended from branches. They wrap vines and grasses around and around a branch, then another, and sometimes more small branches. The cup nest hangs from the wrapping. It's a shallow cup for a vireo and a deeper nest for an oriole. Orioles once used horse hair to weave their nests, which were long and graceful, swelling at the bottom. Now they search for something flexible and strong such as plastic fish line. The nests



are stronger, shorter, lumpier and last for years.

If you walk north along the West Drive to the 77 St. exit, you will see a nesting highlight of this season. Step inside a rectangle with stop lights, one at each corner. Stand on the cobblestones where the roads separate. Turn your back to lamppost W.7601 and look south. You will see the branches of London plane trees that bend over the drive. Birds going in and out will help you spot the nest. This is a cedar waxwing nest, and both sexes build it. If we are lucky they will stay mated and have 2 broods. Small groups of waxwings were around the park this spring passing berries from beak to beak. I have only seen this sight once before. As a child I wondered, when grownups kissed, where did the noses go? The memory made me watch a waxwing donor with head and bill upright, pass a berry to a receiver with head and bill held horizontally. It was a perfect relay—nothing dropped. Deborah Allen photographed a pair making an exchange and said it was an insect. Not a red berry? No, it was black and had legs. All this courtship with berry and bug passing has led to nesting. The sexes look alike on these beautiful birds. They are named for the red dots on their wings. But the long crest, black mask, stout bill and smooth feathers are beautiful to see.

As I was writing about this nest in the Bird Book at the Boathouse, Anne Cannarella came in. She mentioned another waxwing nest in Shakespeare Garden. "Shakespeare Garden," I cried. "Lead me to it!"



We stood on the terrace above the garden, our backs to the long, curving seat. I was directed to look into the London plane tree in front of us. On the north, or right side of the tree, at about eye level and not too far from the trunk was a cedar waxwing on the nest. It's hard to hold binoculars with one hand and sketch with the other but I managed to get something down. A bird left the nest and seemed to return, but maybe they were changing shifts. It felt like old times, seeing waxwings in this tree.

Gaye Fugate found a waxwing nest in this tree about 5 years ago on the south side of the trunk. I returned after a terrible heat wave and the tree looked as if it had lost half its leaves. One large branch was bare and the trunk was dark and wrinkled. Lightning? That evening was breezy on the ground and very windy at tree-top level. The nest was rolling and pitching and the bird was hunkered down. Only her tail was showing. I returned on a hot afternoon and managed to find the nest just as a parent came in with food. The chick facing me opened wide and stunned me. The mouth was bright red! Two waxwing nests in one season seemed like record for our park. Then I heard of another on the West Drive just near the pergola at lamppost 7223. Junko Suzuki discovered this nest but when I asked her about it she said that now the nest seems to be empty and a grackle was poking around in it. Well, if the parents were driven out, they could have joined the crowd at the 100 St. Pool. I went there looking for nests but was amazed by numbers. Perhaps 10 waxwings were swooping over the water catching bugs. I spent time watching 4 at the northwest shore of the Pool perching in 2's and 3's, then flying forth to catch insects and clash with each other for mates. As I watched there was an eruption of waxwings from trees at the other end of the Pool. I think it might have been caused by the pounce of a predator. If they are successful, we should know more about waxwing nests soon.

Many birders have been going to the wharf at Turtle Pond this nesting season. Behind the wharf are willow oaks. They stand between the shore and back wall of the theater. Besides robins and grackles, the trees contain 2 oriole nests. One belongs to Baltimore orioles. The gorgeous male, now silent, sang a snatch of the 1812 Overture in a nasal voice. In the next tree is a nest of orchard orioles. The male came out and displayed his deep rust breast, black head and back. Now all parents



are busy with young. Birders worry that grackles will nab oriole chicks. Orioles nest once a season, raise the young, then leave the park.

A male and female cowbird were seen earlier this spring. Lately we have seen a young cowbird feeding itself. What lucky parents got this changeling dumped on them? Perhaps song sparrows were foster parents to a cowbird whose agenda was to grab the food and kill off all other chicks in the nest. Let's hope the cowbirds don't make a habit of coming to the park. All in all, it's been a remarkable nesting season.

### Secret Garden

One day in Shakespeare Garden, I met John Anderson as he was photographing spiders and insects. I had been told about a pair of preying mantis in a yew. Gone, he said, but lots of young were around. We looked at a very young preying mantis. It was pale yellow-green, about an inch long and looked sway backed.



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Like other insects, young mantis grow a suit of armor. When the suit becomes too small it splits and is sloughed off, revealing a new cover ready to harden. The process is called molt, and mantis go through them enough times to double their size. Only in the last molt do they produce wings. Long, green and skinny, they sit still with front legs folded before the face, ready to strike out. When an insect comes by they grab and grip it in their spiked legs. As they eat it, their heads move from side to side looking for the next meal.

The bigger female is often a *femme fatale*. In return for her mate's sperm she may strike and eat him. Some females refrain from murder, while others mate with and devour several males. In fall the female squeezes gummy white material from the tip of her abdomen. Appendages, like propellers, whip the paste into froth. Slowly she moves back and forth building up an oval of foam and laying eggs in it as she goes. The froth turns rock hard. The completed egg case is the size of a walnut and can hold 100 eggs. It is attached to a plant or twig near the ground but above snow level. The young hatch in spring. They emerge from the egg sack on silken threads, from which they dangle and wiggle to get free. Their first meal is a small insect... or each other.

John took pictures of a tiny green insect with red spots on its abdomen which he said was some kind of katydid. Katydid's are green with 6 legs and are related to grasshoppers. They feed on leaves and flowers, molt, grow larger and get 4 green wings with the last molt.



SME

The hind wings are folded like a fan under the front wings. On the forewings of the male are a file and scraper that he rubs together to make sounds. One rasp produces "katydid." Two rasps add, "She did." The female listens through black ear holes in her forelegs. When the katydids grow wings to make music, you can enjoy their serenade of shrill chirps on summer nights.

John photographed a critter with 8 legs he called a jumping spider. They are small, 1/8-1/4", hairy, free running and hunt by day. With strong back legs, they can jump several feet to snatch a meaty meal. They have 8 eyes and when the males see a female, they wave their front legs, wag their abdomens and hop. Most jumping spiders have bright colors and this one wore a yellow margin around the abdomen like a hoop, and yellow on the head as well. John gave me permission to make a drawing from his grand photos. Very hard, but I saw they can change their yellow marks to orange-tan. Some of them have iridescent scales. When this spider stepped into sunlight, the yellow hoop and all the upper body turned to gold. Unfortunately, the spider did not see a meal walking by so I didn't get to see it jump. But, basking in the sun, it was golden gorgeous.



# THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

## Nature Notes from Central Park

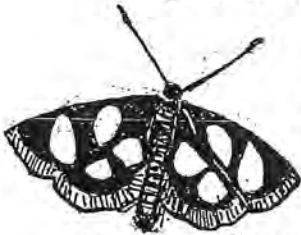
Vol. 10, No. 4

July~ August 2004

### The Everything Walk

On July 31, I led an all-Nature walk for New York City Audubon Society. We met at Conservatory Garden and started with the south or English Garden. We circled the perennial blooms of the outer ring of flower beds. We looked at *Nicotiana* or tobacco plant with horn-shaped flowers in white, pink, or deep wine. We saw cone flowers, daisy-like petals with a high dome in the center. The lime green creeper is African sweet potato and the gardeners eat the tubers at the end of the seasons. We peered at spider flowers with pink blooms and stamens (male parts) that stand out like cats' whiskers. Most plants produce flowers of one color but lantana grows flower clusters that are yellow on top, pale orange next and surrounded with bright rosy-pink at the outer edge. Gaudy but gorgeous. Hosta has wide, fleshy leaves with noticeable veins and stalks that end in a circle of small, deep-throated flowers in white or pink.

Looking higher we saw a Rose of Sharon, a shrub decorated with pink blooms that look like hollyhocks. On the east side near Fifth Ave. we peered at 2 buddleia or butterfly bush with not a single butterfly on them.



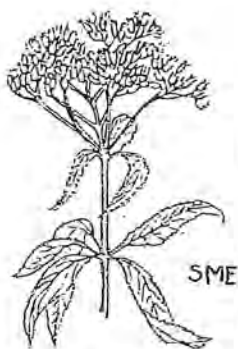
Over in bed 6 we saw cabbage whites, a silver spotted skipper and on a false indigo bush, what we believe is an indigo skipper. A moth landed on one of our group and was brushed off. It circled us but didn't land again. I called it a wood moth. Wrong. It was an 8-spotted forester. I hadn't seen one of them since the late 1980's, when they appeared in Shakespeare Garden. Being an environmentalist, I favor "wood" over "forester", which is probably why I misnamed it.

SME

On our way out of that garden we paused at a lamppost to admire a climbing clematis. Then we noticed 2 spider webs, one at the top and one at the bottom of the post. Both had a good sized web but when I tweaked the strings, we didn't see a spider run out.

We crossed the median strip of grass, flanked on both sides by walkways shaded by Siberian crabapple trees, planted in 1937 by WPA workers during the Great Depression and now about 77 years old. We climbed the Wisteria Pergola and circled the curve looking in the buddleia bushes for butterflies, without luck. On our way to North Garden, we saw a red admiral in lilac bushes. In the sunken North garden, we saw swarms of solitary wasps called cicada killers. Mostly they sip nectar from flowers, but in late summer they are ready to lay eggs and stock their nests with meat. As their name suggests, these wasps specialize. The females attack and paralyze cicadas, which they take to a nest, stow and lay their eggs on. Unable to escape, cicadas are the first meal for young wasps.

We came out of the garden at 106 St. and admired a pair of Turkey oaks and scarlet oaks flanking the entrance from 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. Turning to the Meer we saw a cluster of dragonflies: amberwings, blue dashers, black saddlebags and 12-spotted skimmers. Nestled in the pickerel weed we saw common forktail and what Lenore Swenson called a fragile forktail damselfly. Damselflies are small and fold their wings over their back. Fragile forktails wear a bright blue exclamation point on the left and right side of their back. Common forktails, mostly black, wear green on their face and blue at the other end.



joe-pye weed

Bob O'Neill found the empty shells of 2 freshwater snails. The shells spiral to a point and are white on the inside, dull brown on the outside but the brown is shiny just below the opening. One of them is 2" long, the other 2 1/4".



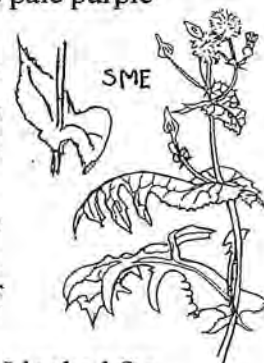
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We strolled along the shore to the Meer-side garden, across the water from the Dana Center. We saw tall joe-pye weed, short butterfly weed, cattails, Queen Anne's lace and a magnolia tree. Beside the garden were blue dasher and amber wing dragonflies zooming about over the water. As we turned from the Meer and climbed the steps I saw the white tail band of an eastern kingbird, the first I'd seen this year.

We climbed to the East Drive, crossed the road and went up the bank to the Green bench. We saw mockingbirds, and chimney swifts flickering through the clouds, but no wrens. I looked for them behind the Green bench but the new wren box I sketched for the last newsletter was gone. It was taken down when it could have been reused by the wrens for their second nesting. I heard the chatter of wrens at the roadway and thought they had nested in a lamp. What a good thing August was not hot enough to cook young wrens in their home. At our feet in the grass near the bench was a painted lady butterfly.

We made our way to the sloping or Wild Flower Meadow where we saw orange sulphur butterflies dancing over the green. In the wild flower patches we saw joe-pye weed in glorious color plus Queen Anne's lace, cone flower, aster and black-eyed susan. The field was covered with green spikes with pale green tips. Joyce Hyon told us it is *Physostegia virginiana*. I looked it up in Newcomb's Wild Flower Guide and find its common name is false dragonhead. It has pale purple flowers like snapdragons and grows to 5 ft.

We marched down the meadow path and when I was out of earshot, Joyce also pointed out a cup plant. It is tall, 4 to 8 ft. high, with yellow daisy-like flowers. The upper leaves, for which the plant is named, are memorable. They grow in pairs and merge around the stem to form a cup. After it rains these cups are visited by insects. At the base of the meadow I pointed out Virginia knotweed and deadly nightshade. We climbed over the low log fence and walked along the path beside the Loch or stream. Looking at robins and sparrows, we crossed the bridge and walked into the presence of the majestic red oaks. We turned right and moved along the stream.



cup plant

Joyce pointed to the bottle-brush grass *Hystrix patula* which we both admire. I looked for dragonflies in the stream, without success. We passed the waterfall and stepped out at 100 St. Pool. At the far end we saw a great egret. Across from us on a bare branch over rocks sat a cedar waxwing looking about. It stayed so long every member of the group got to see it. Further along the shore a monarch butterfly sat on a milkweed. They feed on the plant as caterpillars and absorb poisons. A bird may try to eat a monarch, but only once. They taste bad and the poison makes the bird throw up. This butterfly was rightly unconcerned about birds. The cedar waxwing saw the butterfly but stayed put. If you can't eat it, ignore it.



SME

### Summer Nights in Central Park

If it's fun to discover insects in daylight, it's exciting to search for them at night. We did this on August 3, 9 and 18 in three different park locations. Familiar locations are transformed. In the dark they seem strange, slightly ominous by the light of bobbing flashlights. The first tour began at 100 St. and Central Park West.

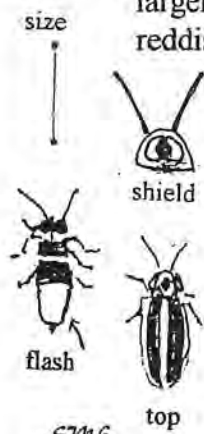
Before the first group assembled, Chuck McAlexander brushed the trunks of many trees at shoulder height with bait: a mix of stale beer, old fruit and sugar. As we circled the Pool anointing



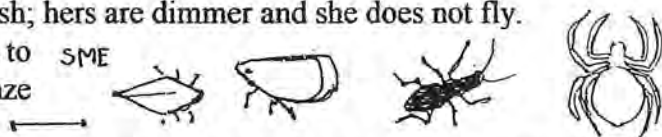
large trees, we encountered a group of thespians in fine costumes and wigs. They were giving a dress rehearsal of a Restoration drama by Aphra Behn, England's first professional female author, who wrote plays, novels and verse some 60 years after Shakespeare died. A group of people (the audience) followed changing groups of actors from place to place to see succeeding scenes of the play. As we moved from one tree to another we saw 2 young men in handsome attire thrust, clash, and shout out their lines at each other for extra practice before the audience arrived.

We slipped away to Central Park West and collected our group at sunset, about 8 PM. We retraced our path through the trees seeing no moths or anything else on the patches of bait. At the southwest corner of the Pool it was quiet and dark. We saw bats diving about through the trees. The larger ones were big brown bats. The smaller ones looked brown to some of us but 2 people saw a reddish tint to the brown, which would make them red bats.

As we circled the Pool we saw low, flashing lights: fireflies. I caught one and put it in a small plastic box. The flashes stopped at once. Later, when I sketched it, I studied the shield that covers the head and the first pair of legs. A yellow margin is on 3 sides of the shield, making a triangle. Inside is a rosy pink flower with a black spot in the middle. The shell that covers the back of this firefly is black with dull yellow margins around the sides and up the middle. The shell splits and parts behind the head to make room for a thin pair of wings. They unfold and this insect, which is really a beetle, is ready to fly. The marks on the shield and the color of the flashes—gold not green—make this a pyralis firefly. The male's flasher is on the underside. Both sexes flash; hers are dimmer and she does not fly.



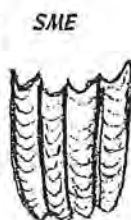
On an oak tree we found many little critters to study: a green planthopper (top and side view), bronze beetle and white spider. All are about 3/8" long.



Chuck painted more trees along the path beside the Loch. We climbed the Sloping Meadow, our flashlights picking out holes in the path. Moles? Probably dogs. When we reached the Green bench, Chuck put up a clothesline between 2 trees and I spread an old yellow couch cover over the line. We beamed our flashlights over the surface and attracted a few small insects but not many. We really needed a white sheet and a much more powerful light.

As we returned to the meadow, 2 cops in a car stopped to learn what we were doing. One of them looked surprised and pleased and got out of the car to see if he could hear what I thought were crickets. One sound was continuous, which may have been snowy tree crickets. The other was pulsing. When I stepped out on the road toward the pulses, he said better not. Some unsavory people hang out in that location. The cops wished us good night and rolled on. Down at the bottom of the meadow we climbed over the log fence and looked at a tree at the edge of the path. There were 2 beautiful underwing moths, dining, I think, on our bait. We tried to capture them but they flew away. They were the prettiest sight of the evening and I'm glad they escaped. We threaded our way around the Pool and out to Central Park West where we said good night.

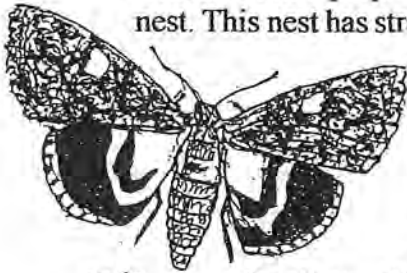
On our second night's outing, we walked to the trees, bushes and rustic house beside the Lower Lobe. We were lucky enough to see 2 wasp nests, both made by mud-daubers. One consisted of 4 neatly shaped rolls of mud the size of a man's fingers and arranged side by side. This collection was built by a female solitary wasp, known as an organ-pipe or pipe organ wasp, depending on the guide you consult. She stocks each roll with a paralyzed spider and lays an egg on it before sealing the tube. When the young are ready, there will be spider ready for the first meal. A nearby nest looked similar but messier. The tubes looked lumpy and laid out in all directions, even on top of each other. We decided it was a different kind of mud-dauber wasp. The tubes may have been



stocked with spiders and insects as well. They must have contained eggs because the tubes were sealed. We listened to crickets and other night critters but couldn't see them.

We crossed Bow Bridge and circled the Ramble. At Willow Rock we saw a raccoon mother with 2 cubs. Near the Point and Hackberry Hill we flashed our lights on a paper wasp nest about 14 inches long and maybe 10 inches across. The entrance is low on the side and wasps go in and out steadily. In the dark we saw wasps and other insects all over the nest surface. Paper wasps are social wasps. Like ants and bees, they live together in organized groups. They find and chew bits of wood and turn it into pulp. Then they spread out the pulp in thin layers of paper to build the walls of their nest. This nest has strands of many colors curving in all directions. They look like ripples on water.

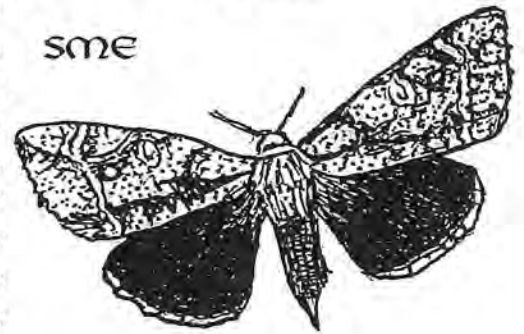
Our last stop that night was at the oozing English oak tree near the East Drive south of the Boathouse. We were surprised to see a group of bird watchers all studying moths on the tree and insects of various kinds on a white sheet nearby. I learned from Nick Wagerik that there are many underwing moths in Central Park, the ilia *Catocala ilia* being the most common. It has a 2" wingspan and was probably what we saw uptown.



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We all went "ooh" and "ah" as a widow underwing *Catocala vidua* came in and landed. The hind wings are dark brown with a pale yellow margin. The fore wings are a complex pattern of swirling dark lines. It's a large 3" beauty. At a white sheet with a blue neon light, many insects were at rest. Marie Winn said she thought I was looking at a house/field cricket, like ones she sees at her summer place. She dazzled me with pictures she's been taking with her new digital camera. She showed me tiny creatures in color. Then she pumped up the size and we saw them in stunning detail. How I hope the price comes down and I can begin to capture magic images.

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For our third night walk we began at the Castle, circled the Great Lawn and admired the moon and 2 stars. We stopped at an oak near the Obelisk where my friend and former partner, Lambert Pohner, found butterflies drinking the sap. No moths were there and the tree was not oozing. We gave it a swipe of bait along with some nearby trees. At a rocky outcrop near the West Drive, we stopped for a cricket Hallelujah Chorus. One stentorian soloist was in the grass at the edge of the rocks. Others were in a low bush. We flashed our lights all over the area for half an hour without spotting a cricket or anything else. How can anything so loud remain invisible?

We crossed the West Drive and visited the Mystery Oak. It was hit by lightning some years ago and wears a long, thick scar. Now there is a new scar on the opposite side of the trunk. Why is this tree struck by lightning when the trees around it are spared? Perhaps because it is nearest the iron fence around the children's playground. We daubed it with bait and retraced our steps. This night we were using my mixture of rum, rotten peach and sugar. The smell was powerful but didn't bring in moths. Over at the English oak we saw many of the same birders. They were using their flashlights to stare at the tree and consult out-of-print moth guides from the Peterson series. Nick asked me what guide I was using. A Dover reprint called "The Moth Book" by W. J. Holland, first printed 101 years ago. Most of the common and scientific names are still the same and the plates are photographs of specimens from private collections. They show a large number of the 70 or so North American underwings. But there are no life histories and no sizes given. Trying to be an insect detective is hard work.



# THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

## Nature Notes from Central Park

Vol. 10, No. 5

September~ October 2004

### Phenomenal Fungi

It has been a wet, cool summer and fall, and fungi finds have been rewarding. A new crepe myrtle was added to the two near the Alice in Wonderland statue. Rich earth covers the roots and a crop of mushrooms called stinkhorn appeared. I consulted Gary H. Lincoff's "Field Guide to North American Mushrooms" and discovered elegant stinkhorn *Mutinus elegans*. Each stalk is hollow, 1 inch wide, 5 or more inches high, pale white at the base, rosy-red above, tapering to the tip where a small opening is marked with a tiny, red cross (+). That's the elegant part. When the stalk is fully grown, the top third is covered with a slimy dark green mass of spores which puts the stink in stinkhorn. I brought a young one home and sketched it without slime and before it fell flat.

This fall, a tall oak opposite the entrance to the Point was festooned with a circle of fungi around its roots. I saw them on this oak exactly nine years ago but now there were more of them. In 1995, I asked Dave Patterson to come into the park and identify them. He told me they are artist's conk *Ganoderma applanatum*. Guides say they grow on dead hardwood and on the wounds of living trees. Their curved shelves called conks are wide, thick, hard and gray-brown. Dave taught me that you can scratch a picture on the underside of this conk and the image is permanent. That's how they get their name.

The most colorful mushroom of the fall was on the ground near the 79<sup>th</sup> St. Transverse. We took the southwest trail to Belvedere and stopped at the paved, circular lookout with bench. North of the pavement in rocks and roots, we saw a growth striped orange and shrimp about the size of a dinner plate. I am told this is a chicken mushroom *Laetiporus sulphureus* and that it is good to eat. One year, Norma Collin found a golden yellow one on the banks of Strawberry Field. She cooked and ate some of it, and says it tastes something like chicken. I found and sketched one in Hallett Sanctuary in 2000. It was bright salmon and I did not eat it. This one consisted of overlapping plates arranged in a circle. Each plate was thick, smooth, hard, wide with thinner edges. I brought one home and sketched it in color. My piece of mushroom is now hard, twisted and faded tan.

In the glossary of the Lincoff guide, I learned that all fungi are classified as part of the plant kingdom but they lack chlorophyll and they possess spores. The fruiting body of a fungus is called a mushroom.

Not all fungi live on the ground. You can see conks high on the trunks of trees all over the park. But one of the oddest fungi is draped over some white ash trees. White ash *Fraxinus americana* is a single sex tree as are Osage orange, Amer cork, holly, ginkgo and paw-paw. The male trees produce pollen-bearing stamens. When winds blow male pollen to female flowers, the pollinated flowers produce fruit.

This year the female ash trees were heavy with fruit. In October, their pinnately compound leaves turned glorious golden orange. Some compound leaves look crowded with leaflets. But ash leaflets spread out. Each leaflet has a long stem and is attached to the leaf stalk at a comfortable distance from the neighbors.

This October we saw 2 ash trees north of the 79<sup>th</sup> Transverse on opposite sides of the park. The one on the East Drive is large and, from the road, faces the back of the Metropolitan Museum. The other is on the West Drive south of the Swedish Cottage and is smaller. Both trees bear what




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look like clusters of black fruit. I took a sample of the fruit and tried to match it in tree guides. No luck. Then I remembered. Norma Collin found a tree with black dingle-dangle fruit near the larch trees west of Shakespeare Theater. She learned it was an ash but the dingle-dangles weren't fruit. They are fungi. Annette Fry pointed me to M.M. Graff's "Tree Trails of Central Park." Graff says the berry-like objects are male stamen flowers blackened by fungus disease. Michael Dirr writes that this disease is ash flower gall. The male flowers develop abnormally and the galls will be evident throughout the winter. These unsightly decorations are caused by a mite. They are not fatal and you have plenty of time to study them in the months to come.

### Frustrating Fall Migration

What's a wave? I asked that question around the park and it was a real conversation stopper. "Do you mean fluid dynamics or particle physics?" asked Chuck McAlexander. Neither. I meant birds. Tom Fiore said waves can mean big populations for a small number of birds in early April or late October. Or they can be small numbers of a huge variety of birds. On a wave day it's good birding early and you keep seeing new and different birds all day. Later you hear about many that you didn't see. The overflow is so great, you can see birds out in city street trees. Tom thinks Sept. 19 was a real wave day. That Sunday, people saw new birds early in the morning and more birds by early afternoon, all of them actively feeding.

Bob DeCandido defined a wave as a peak or spike in the migration season. He spent nights watching birds flying past him high atop the Empire State Building. One night he might see 50 birds. But with a change in the weather the number could jump to several hundred. In September and October, we see a high number of species of great diversity. But we can also see high numbers of certain species during the season and especially at the end of it.

Sept. 19 was a wave. Bob saw huge numbers going over the night before and huge numbers on the ground next day in the park. He reported a large influx of birds on the night of October 10 and even more on the night of Oct. 11. Was there a large fallout in Central Park for Columbus Day? "No," said birders who were there. Well then, what about Oct. 8? Reporting on the Rare Bird Alert, Tom Burke called it a wave day because of reports from Westchester, Brooklyn, Queens and Long Island. But not in Central Park.

In fall, said Bob, there are many more migrants because of the huge numbers of fall juveniles. As they fly they are subject to northwest winds which can push birds to the very edge of the ocean. Central Park, which is slightly inland, may miss some of the fallout. How wonderful it would be if we could see migration patterns on huge weather maps of our entire area. I believe we have all the tracking equipment to do it. Birders could rush to hot spots and spread the good news. It beats glumly saying there are no waves anymore.

When Lloyd Spitalnik said that to me we decided to have a bet. I bet him a nickel there would be more waves after Sept. 19. A wet summer and mild fall caused birds to dawdle on their way south. The park trees turned color so slowly that the sour gum or Tupelo didn't reach conflagration until Oct. 31, the latest date I remember by one week. I was right about more waves for the area, but Lloyd claimed victory because he didn't see any late waves in Central Park.

Lloyd bet a nickel that the pin oaks around the bird-feeding station in Evodia Field were 150 feet high. When he came up to me and said, "O.K. Nickel me," I replied, "Not so fast." One oak is 108 feet high and another is 98 feet. A third pin oak, about the same size, will be measured after the leaves drop and we can the top. No nickels changed hands but the talk was less gloomy. This fall I've seen more sapsuckers and waxwings than ever before. That's my 2 species wave.

### Supernatural Gift from Mother Nature

Martin Calzadilla, Zone Gardener in the Ramble, changed my life on Monday, Sept. 27, 2004. We were walking by, looking at birds, when I saw him raking a garden area and greeted him. I asked him what was new, and he said I would have to change the map. It wasn't just the Evodia Field any more. Now there was Evodia II. Where? He led me to an area near the top of the Point and across the sidewalk from the paper wasp nest. There, lined up along the fence, were 4 or 5 young trees. Martin pointed into the deep shadows and picked out one or two more. In fact, this glorious garden contained over half a dozen evodia trees. How did they get there? By air mail. Fall birds gorged on seeds from the tree in Evodia Field. They made a pit stop nearby and some of the seeds took root. It's stunning to think we have been passing this treasure trove for years and never knew it was there. Who, I asked, made the identification? Regina Alvarez.

I led everyone to the trees: the Sunday bird group, Wednesday bird group, park regulars and tourists. Chuck McAlexander, Ralph Holloway and I measured the height of several trees twice over. They were too short for the usual equipment. So the second time we used a folding yard stick. Chuck pushed a tree into an upright position while Ralph extended the ruler over his head until it was as high as the tip-top leaf. I called stop when the ruler was just high enough and took a picture. The bottom of the ruler was measured by a thumb. Then the lower part of the tree was measured down to the roots. One of these trees measured 18 feet high and the other 20 feet. At our first attempt, Jeff Kimball slipped my 2-sided measuring tape around the slender trunks at breast height (4 ½ feet). They measured 5 and 5 ½ inches circumference. We turned the tape over and on the other side found the diameter measurement. One tree measured 1.6" across and the other 1.7". We're glad to know their measurements but we want to know lots more about the young evodias. How old are they and when will they be old enough to put out flowers and seeds?

These trees are handsome, but for birds, it's the seeds that are the prize. All sorts of birds find them delicious. In the evodia near the Azalea Pond I have seen gray-cheeked, Swainson's and wood thrush, red-eyed and blue-headed vireo, downy and flicker, mourning dove, rose-breasted grosbeak, Baltimore oriole, and scarlet tanager. I visited the evodia near Columbus Circle this fall. It was just as popular, but the clientele were not so classy. More than 100 birds were gobbling seeds all over it. Unfortunately only one was a robin and the rest were starlings. These trees put out the banquet but they can't control who comes.

I went to see Regina. How in the world did she ever identify these young trees? She said that last winter she did a tabulation of the trees in Hallett Sanctuary. She found a number of young trees which she thought were Amer corktrees. But when she studied the buds, they didn't look right. She looked in her tree bible, "Manual of Woody Landscape Plants; Their Identification, Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Uses" by Michael A. Dirr. Both Amer corks and evodias have pinnately compound leaves with the leaflets arranged opposite each other. But when she looked at winter twigs without leaves she discovered naked buds at the tips of the branches. Following the trail of the bud she eventually got to evodia.

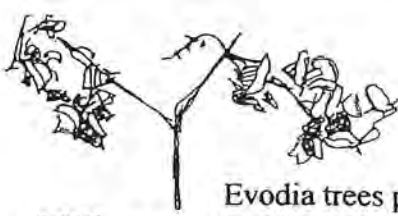
Fifty species of evodia live in South and East Asia: China, Korea, Australia and Polynesia. In 1905-8 several species were introduced in America. The bark of adult trees reminds you of beech trees. It is smooth, dark gray and speckled or streaked with brown. Some species grow 25 to 30 feet high and with garden attention may grow to 50 feet. Given the space, these trees can spread as wide or wider than their height.



17 leaflets  
3 to 4 ½"  
full leaf  
14 ½"  
long



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Evodia trees produce both male and female flowers on the same tree. They are arranged in same sex clusters scattered randomly over the tree. Huge quantities of small white flowers open in August and September. The bees love them and are there to pollinate. Borne on fuchsia clusters 4-6" wide, the female flowers grow into capsules. The capsules split into sections revealing, at last, the glossy black seeds inside. These tiny dots shown here are life size seeds. Birds stand on the cluster platforms and pick out the seeds. This tree is free of insect pests. As you watch you see a steady pecking motion, with no darting about for insects. How can any tree with seeds so small be so riveting to birds in the fall? Migrating birds need high-energy food to fly the marathon south and these seeds have the right stuff.

Some other seeds are just as popular. Hercules' club, a native American shrub, is also a magnet for fall birds. Like the evodia, it is a member of the Rue family. Hercules' club, named for its spines and prickles on trunk and branches, puts out fuchsia flower holders the size of dinner plates. When the flowers open the birds are right there for the seeds. We have a Hercules' club the size of a small tree. It is gorgeously displayed near the East 76<sup>th</sup> St. Children's Playground. There are some jolly scruffy ones on a hill south of the Castle. The shrubs go to seed in early fall and are stripped bare in just a few days. The feast in the larger evodia can last several weeks.

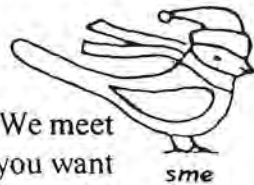
Evodias live about 15 to 40 years. The bark is somewhat weak and splits. The Evodia Field formerly contained 2 of these trees that were about the same size. One of them was struck by a mowing machine in the 1970's and got bark rot from the wound. That let in water and over several winters, the bark would freeze and split. Sadly, the tree fell over before the decade was out. The remaining evodia may have grown a third taller since then. It's wonderful to learn this tree is easy to propagate and isn't fussy about the soil. Currently, evodias are not very popular with park decision makers because they are exotic, not native. Regina, who very kindly planted evodias for the birders in the garden at Tanner Spring, says firmly, we don't need to order any more of them. Yes, I say, but evodia seeds passed through native birds so, by the magic of mother nature, the new trees are half exotic, half native.

### Remembering Charles

Charles Kennedy died of cancer October 20. His friends hoped he would make it to his birthday and he did. He was 67. The park will be grayer and less joyful without him. In the documentary "Pale Male" we saw his radiant smile and heard his beautiful voice. "Pale Male" aired again in New York just after his death. We saw him keeping watch and rescuing a young hawk. The life force streamed through and out of him as a fitting and glorious afterglow. There will be a memorial for Charles in May, where we can come together and give thanks for his life.

### The Christmas Count

The 105th Christmas Bird Count in Central Park will take place Sunday, Dec. 19. We meet at 8 AM at the Southeast Pumping Station of the Reservoir ( 85th St. near Fifth Ave.). If you want to be part of the count wear layers of clothes, hiking shoes, and a cap to keep the sun/rain/snow out of your eyes. Bring binoculars, a pen or pencil and \$5 exact for National Audubon. We divide into 7 groups and spread over the park to count every bird, including house sparrows, pigeons and starlings. At noon, there will be vans to carry you back to the Arsenal at 64th St and Fifth Ave. (beside the Zoo). Together we will compile our 7 section counts into one all-park record for this year. There will be a party to celebrate our efforts and I will also celebrate my 20<sup>th</sup> and last year as Park Count Compiler. The gala is free but you must RSVP to 212-360-1378. I'll see you there!



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# THE ELLIOTT NEWSLETTER

## Nature Notes from Central Park

Vol. 10, No. 6

November-December 2004

### Late Fall Delights in Strawberry Field

On Dec. 6, I went to the park to see all the exciting birds at Strawberry Field. I joined a group at the north end and saw nothing. But at the south end, beside the transverse, Jeff Kimball suddenly said, "I see it!" High up in a pine tree was a saw-whet owl staring back at us. We could see its face, eyes open, and belly with rust stripes on the sides but not the front. As we walked along the east edge something flew out of the bushes and landed under a holly tree. It was a yellow-breasted chat, a bird I had been missing all year. This bird was intent on berries and so we had a long look. There were 2 rusty lines across the chat's throat. I have never seen any color other than yellow on the throat and breast of a chat so this bird was surprising. It would be helpful if someone took its picture while it was in the park. Perhaps we could see if the bird was injured, has mutant feathers or was marked as part of a study group.

While others revisited the owl or searched for the wood thrush, Joe DiCostanzo and I stood watching the fence at the north end of Strawberry Field. I had been with Tom Fiore a week before when he called a hummingbird. I saw a small up-and-down blur of a hummingbird, but not its markings. Not a ruby-throat, I was told. Maybe Allen's or rufous. During the week birders snapped pictures and internetted them to people out West. Back came the verdict: rufous.

Suddenly the hummingbird came out of the bush and sat on the fence. The bird bent forward and the dark head seemed to be thrust through the center of a light-tan doughnut. The bird straightened up and the head looked lighter gray, the bill dark, with like most hummers, a white spot behind the eye. The feathers on the back were scalloped and emerald-green. On the throat was a dark spot which turned into a perfect triangle when the bird faced us. Joe called it a gorget and said that some birders had discovered a few red feathers in photos of it. The flanks were rosy-tan and the leading edge of the wing was very black. There was red behind the black, which I thought was on the wing but Joe thought was on the tail. There were white dots on the tip of the tail. Having said all these field marks out loud, I could remember them when I got home. I made sketches of what I remembered and then looked it up in Sibley. My notes led to a female rufous hummingbird.

We all admired a red-bellied woodpecker going in and out of its winter hole. I received a stunning picture of the bird from Beth Bergman via her new digital camera. She never understood the bird's name until she looked at her picture and saw all the rosy-pink on chest and belly. I have seen pink belly-wash above the male's legs in spring, but never the amount of color Beth captured. I put her pictures of the woodpecker, a red-tailed hawk and an owl up on the wall beside my computer, where I can enjoy them all winter. Thank you, Beth!

That day I saw a dark bird which others called a wood thrush. I returned and finally saw a thrush that did not cock a rust-red tail like a hermit, but had no rust-red head like a wood. The bird kept its back to me. I could see spots beside the wings but got no belly view. I believe this was the wood thrush. Was it too young for a red head? Had it come from a wood thrush nest in the park? It was wonderful to see all these birds in late fall and even better that some of them stayed around for the Christmas Count.

## A Blow Felt Round the World

For hawk watchers, Dec. 7 was "a day that will live in infamy." That morning, I received a phone call from Noreen O'Rourke telling me that workers at 927 Fifth Ave. were taking down Pale Male and Lola's nest. Who should she call? I said E.J. McAdams at New York City Audubon. I urged her to tell the volunteers she had to speak to E.J. in person and at once about an emergency.

I called Regina Alvarez of the Central Park Conservancy and gave her Noreen's report. Regina said she would tell Neil Calvanese and go right over to Fifth. She called back to say she and Neil had found the nest down and E.J. there. E.J. said when he got Noreen's call, he jumped into a cab bound for 74<sup>th</sup> St. and Fifth Ave. On the way he called Fish and Wildlife because he was sure this was a violation of the law. By the time he arrived he'd learned the act was not illegal and he felt lost. He saw that the nest and workmen were gone, the building entrance tidied up for Chanukah. Two people were standing on the street: photographer Lincoln Karim and Richard Pyle, a reporter for the Associated Press.

E.J. was sure that the people to witness this debacle and make it known were the press. He called the city Audubon office and urged Emily FitzGerald and Geoffrey Cobb Ryan to alert all their press contacts. News of the destruction of Pale Male and Lola's nest was on Ch 4 and Ch 7 that first night. By next day this story had taken on a life of its own. It was covered coast to coast in the U.S. and eventually in a dozen countries, including India and Saudi Arabia.

E.J. also called Adrian Benepe, Commissioner of Parks, and told him the nest had been destroyed. Adrian spent the first 24 hours determining that no environmental laws had been broken, something he and E.J. felt the co-op board had thoroughly researched before they struck.

On Wednesday, Dec. 8, E.J. wrote and sent letters to all city, state and federal elected officials. Adrian phoned Mayor Bloomberg's office and was charged to try and be an "honest broker" and use his "good offices" to work with 5 agencies: his own, the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the Department of Buildings, the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation and the NYC Department of Environmental Protection.

On Thursday, E.J. wrote the lawyer for the building and asked for a meeting with the co-op board. On Friday, he received a call from Richard Cohen, chairman of the co-op board. Cohen told him what they had done and why, with, he said, the interest of the birds in mind. He argued that when hawk parents fed their young the food was only partially eaten. Left-overs represented a health hazard. Also, the large nest on the front of the building had become too heavy for the structure and was a safety hazard. It could fall, striking people below. He asked E.J. to help them solve these health and safety concerns and they could begin working together, but not until Monday. Meanwhile, he urged E.J. to call off the vigils and protests in front of the building. E.J. said no.

The protests started with 40 people and grew rapidly. Over the weekend 300 people came and stayed and a thousand who passed through the protest area signed petitions. Ten thousand people signed an on-line petition on National Audubon's website.

E.J. worked with Adrian; John Flicker, President of National Audubon; Marcia Fowle, President of NYC Audubon; Barbara Loucks of NY State Dept. of Conservation; and Chris Nadareski, for the State Dept. of Environmental Protection. These concerned people joined Adrian and E.J. at the Arsenal early Monday morning. E.J. had called Richard Cohen and was granted a meeting at 10. At 8:30 the Arsenal gathering planned strategy for that meeting. Then E.J. went to 927 Fifth Ave. with John Flicker, Adrian, Marcia Fowle and others. They were taken to the basement of the building and ushered into a tool room, where they waited. And waited. Richard

Cohen arrived half an hour late and quickly became aware he'd insulted a number of important people. By the end of the meeting John Flicker led the negotiations. The building members were willing to put back the 3" anti-pigeon spikes which were still in the basement. But they wanted structural changes to strengthen the building. They had selected Dan Ionescu as their architect.

The group met with him next day. Ionescu showed them a sketch of the nest plan. He listened to their suggestions and incorporated them. E.J. said, "The design is a perfect balance of the hawks' needs and the building's concerns." It was fabricated by Champion Metal and Glass. They enclosed the anti-pigeon spikes in a mesh screen. The wall behind the nest area was strengthened to hold the weight. Then large, stainless steel spikes with blunt ends were installed. These spikes circle the nest edge. They lean outward at a 45 degree angle and are painted to match the color of the building ledge. The mesh and leaning spikes are placed to hold food and twigs in the nest.

The nest frame was installed on a humid, windy, rainy day. Despite the weather, the men worked with great cheer. E.J. was given a black garbage bag of twigs, none of them more than 15" long. Some of the twigs were collected by the Central Park Conservancy. Some of them were collected from Pale Male's first nest and kept by Charles Kennedy during his life. E.J. climbed down with the bag to dedicate the new nest. He'd been advised by Chris Nadareski to place the twigs in a thin layer at the center-top of the curve. Chris has experience working with peregrine falcons and their nests and E.J. placed the twigs as directed.

Looking out, he was thrilled by the view and their success. He says it was the good will of so many New Yorkers and people around the world that made their victory happen. Scaffolding stayed over the nest until the structure was determined to be sound. Then down came the rigging, just in time to celebrate the new year. Pale Male and Lola visit the structure and may begin work on a new nest in January or early February when red-tailed courtship begins again. My thanks to E.J. McAdams, Adrian Benepe and Lee Stinchcomb for their help with this story.

### Birds Count and So Do Counters

On Sunday, Dec. 19, people gathered at 8 AM at the Reservoir's South Pumping Station to begin our 105<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count in Central Park. About 80 people filled out name/address cards and handed in their \$5 to National Audubon. I was delighted to see six children ages 7, 8 and 10. As our crowd of counters ages, we need to invite more young people to join us.

We passed out colored sheets for tips & rules, and section tally sheets for every counter. We divided into groups to cover each of the park's 7 sections, and, to avoid omissions or duplications, each section leader was given maps for their area.

Because this year is my 20<sup>th</sup> and last as Compiler of this Central Park Count, I decided to celebrate by counting in the Northeast Section of the park. I was joined by lots of old friends including Bob Brophy, Ed Fagan, Chuck McAlexander, Anne and James McCollough, Jeff Nulle, Bill Valentine and Robin Villa.

We saw and delighted in cardinals, blue jays, red-bellied woodpeckers and a yellow-bellied sapsucker. James McCollough and his young friend Mattori Birnbaum counted pigeons, starlings and house sparrows, while Anne McCollough marked them down on her tally sheet. In the birdless places James gathered leaves and acorns and we named the oak trees they came from.

At Conservatory Garden some of the group saw a winter wren and most of us saw 2 mocking birds. But none of us saw the Wilson's warbler, although it had been seen early that morning. At the



Meer we saw lots of Canada geese, mallards, shovelers, ruddy ducks, buffleheads and a pair of gadwalls. At the northwest corner of the Meer, almost out on 110 St., we saw a red-tailed hawk in a tree. It looked us over and then returned to scanning the ground for bird breakfast.

On the return south, one of the Rangers told me I was wanted at the Arsenal for a press interview. They would get one of the vans to give me a ride. After a while a van appeared and everyone hopped into it. Sure enough, at the Arsenal 2 people wanted to know if I was Sarah Elliott. They were from the Daily News. As one of them asked me to pose watching a bird, Chuck McAlexander said, "Sarah, look up! A sharpie." I watched the hawk disappear and got Chuck to tell the reporters why it was a sharp-shinned and not a Cooper's hawk. The photographer left and I went inside to eat and get ready for the park-wide count. As I swallowed lentil soup the reporter asked about birds. I tried to answer but people kept interrupting to say hi or ask questions.

The reporter got a few sentences and I had half my soup when Adrian Benepe began to speak at the podium. He welcomed all the birders and said a few words about the history of our Christmas Count. Then he gave some of my background and said nice things about me while I slurped soup. He called me to the podium for sustained applause. Then he stepped down and took up a large plaque. At the top it said "Birds Count!" Under this vital message was my bird logo and a gold rectangle celebrating me for 20 years as Central Park Compiler, the month and year, and the names of Mayor Bloomberg and Adrian Benepe. He handed me the plaque, which is very heavy.

I felt cheery and rattled as I looked around at all the smiling faces. Then I saw a birder expressing his "no" vote. He sat looking at his hands on the table. His attitude made me notice his altitude. It was then I realized I was receiving a standing ovation, the first and last of my life. I thanked everyone from my heart and told them how glad I was to give up a job that requires bookkeeping and other skills I don't possess. And now, I was almost free at last.

We began the full bird count. We went through the birds, one by one, with people in the room shouting out each number for their section. A person at a computer entered the section numbers and the park total for each bird as we went. The numbers flashed up on a big screen for all to see, except me. We went through a list of probable birds, then possible birds and finally rare to never-seen-before birds. I told them that rare birds might require a sheet of description to be filed in 24 hours for Dick Gershon, compiler for the Lower Hudson Count. When we got to broad-winged hawk I was urged to pass out a sheet. Three people filled it out before they left the count. Tom Fiore got 2 sheets for the Wilson's warbler at Conservatory Garden and the orange-crowned warbler at the Zoo. Other birders saw these birds before or after but not on the day of the count.

When the count was over and people drifted over the park, Joan Weiss wrapped my very heavy plaque and gave me a ride home. I began to get phone calls. John Day called about the saw-whet owl found by James Demes and the counters of the Southwest Group. John Day said that when birders gathered at the Tavern on the Green some of them said this owl was too big to be a saw-whet. Discussion and argument ensued. Birders who lived nearby rushed home and returned with guides and scopes. They pointed to spots on the forehead and black markings that connected the eye and the eyebrow. Eventually they agreed that this was a boreal owl, never seen before in Central Park or New York City. So, for most of us, it is a **life bird** discovered because of the count.

I called E.J. and got the name and cell phone number of the reporter for the Daily News. I called, thanked her and urged her to include the boreal owl. She had just finished her article and was not pleased with a last-minute change. Next day the story appeared with the headline "Crowds rally for bird tally." Unfortunately I'd not spelled the name of the owl which came out "Boyle."

Here are the totals for the Central Park Bird Count of Dec. 19, 2004. Other birds seen in

the 3 days before or the 3 days after that Sunday are listed in the count period.

Pied-billed Grebe 1	Northern Saw-whet Owl 1	<b>Orange-crowned Warbler 1</b>
Double-crested Cormorant 1	<b>Boreal Owl 1</b>	<b>Wilson's Warbler 1</b>
Mute Swan 1	Red-bellied Woodpecker 25	Northern Cardinal 66
Canada Goose 129	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 16	Fox Sparrow 3
American Black Duck 4	Downy Woodpecker 39	Song Sparrow 21
Mallard 471	Hairy Woodpecker 4	White-throated Sparrow 146
hybrid Mallard 4	Northern Flicker 3	Dark-eyed Junco 14
Northern Shoveler 129	Blue Jay 114	Red-winged Blackbird 1
Gadwall 6	American Crow 17	Common Grackle 22
Bufflehead 24	Black-capped Chickadee 81	House Finch 9
Hooded Merganser 1	Tufted Titmouse 155	American Goldfinch 25
Ruddy Duck 121	Red-breasted Nuthatch 1	House Sparrow 758
Sharp-shinned Hawk 2	White-breasted Nuthatch 91	
Cooper's Hawk 4	Brown Creeper 2	<b>Total Species for count: 57 + hybrid</b>
<b>Broad-winged Hawk 1</b>	Winter Wren 2	<b>Total Individuals counted: 5597</b>
Red-tailed Hawk 9	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1	<b>Birds in Count Period: 7</b>
Peregrine Falcon 1	Hermit Thrush 7	12/16 Kingfisher 1, Field Sparrow 1
American Coot 3	Wood Thrush 1	Yellow-breasted Chat 1
Ring-billed Gull 957	American Robin 262	12/20 Snow Goose 170 overhead
Herring Gull 447	Gray Catbird 2	12/21 Long-eared Owl 1, Red-
Great Black-backed Gull 82	Northern Mockingbird 4	shouldered Hawk 1
Rock Pigeon 662	Cedar Waxwing 9	12/22 Great Blue Heron 1 overhead
Mourning Dove 66	European Starling 565	

The boreal owl stayed around Tavern on the Green for several weeks. Every day crowds gathered with binoculars, cameras and scopes. The owl looked unfazed, even by men hauling delivery boxes right under its tree. It hunted at night and returned to different trees with winter cover, such as pines and holly. The bird has not been found lately but could still be in the park. Sibley's behavior guide says that the considerably larger females are apt to migrate or wander. The smaller males are more sedentary, will accept nest boxes and stay on territory throughout adulthood. Rebeckah Creshkoff gathered 7 pellets under a pine tree where the bird was first seen, which means the owl was there a week before the count. Would it have been discovered eventually? Maybe not. The Christmas Count insures a thorough search of all the unlikely areas of the park.

On Dec. 22, I got an excellent view of the owl, thanks to Art Lemoine's telescope, and made a sketch of it. That day we also saw 2 saw-whets and a long-eared owl. A great story of the boreal owl appeared in the Daily News with a rhyming headline: "Big howl for rare owl." There was a photo of birders looking up and an insert of the owl from Lloyd Spitalnik. There's a quote from Dick Gershon and a good list of facts about the owl: it's about 10" tall with a 24" wingspan; females are larger and nest in tree cavities; males call in February and March. It's called Tengmalm's owl in Europe and Lars Jonsson's guide says the male's territory call is a series of fast, hollow, barking hoots that go "po po po po po" - always at night. What a gift this owl was for my last count!



Dear Friends and Readers,

It seemed as if 2004 would never end and here am I dragging along the last piece of business for that year. This newsletter is long because there was so much news, some of it complicated and difficult to write, especially about Pale Male and Lola. As E.J. said, that story took on a life of its own. It reminded me of the public reaction after the death of Princess Di. Aside from mounds of dead flowers all over London, that event brought money to some of the causes Diana supported. It would be nice if some hawk lovers show their thanks to City and National Audubon by sending them checks. Beside the memo space in the lower left corner, you could write "Pale Male and Lola."

To: E.J. McAdams, New York City Audubon Society, 71 West 23 St., NY, NY 10010

To: John Flicker, National Audubon Society, 700 Broadway, NY, NY 10003

I thank those of you who sent news clippings, photos and 2005 subscription checks for yourselves and for friends. Jeff Nulle suggested that if I've given up the Christmas Count after 20 years, maybe, to have time to write "the Central Park nature book", I should give up the newsletter after 10. I've told him I can't. I need the income. Jeff has corrected my copy all of the past 10 years. He's delighted this will be his last issue. I can't blame him. But the thought of doing this newsletter without him makes me glum. I will miss his business-like remarks about the punctuation and his witty asides. He tells me that if I have trouble finding a new proof reader, he'll help out in a pinch. I hope not to pinch him, as he's earned a rest and then some.

This year I have been approached by a young woman who makes her living in computer services and thinks my newsletter should be on the internet. She could set up a website and believes the number of subscribers would increase dramatically, especially among young readers. Do you know young readers who would read this news? Many of you use the internet and would scan or download the news. But many of you would prefer getting it in the mail and reading it a bit at a time.

The computer programmer knows how to make payment for subscriptions secure, but I don't and that fills me with dismay. Also the thought of putting out 2 versions of the bimonthly newsletter, one with sketches and one without, could make me crazy. We have not discussed the cost for her services nor how that would affect the cost of your subscription. I am in great need of your opinions and advice. I will not rush to make changes so in the meantime, please renew the newsletter in the usual way with a check for:

**\$20 to Sarah Elliott, 333 E. 34 St. # 17D, NYC 10016.**

Many Thanks! This long-eared owl is expressing his opinion of 2004, and the weather to begin 2005. Best wishes to you all,



*Sarah Elliott*