



Winter 2025

Winter Ducks, Loons & Geese On The Reservoir

The gentle lapping of water ebbs against the border of the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir. The only sound breaking the serenity is the slapping of dozens of sneakers against the gravel path as joggers run around the 1.2 mile scenic track. The Reservoir or “rez” as birders call it – is a New York City landmark. Once an active reservoir channeling water to the residents of Manhattan, the non-functional body of water is now home to migrating waterfowl and their predators; Peregrine Falcons and Bald Eagles. The most famous predator was a Snowy Owl that visited during the Covid pandemic bringing some joy into a rather serious year.

During the winter months, waterfowl who depend on diving or dabbling for their food - cannot feed on frozen water. So they migrate from north to south in search of open water. The Reservoir is a haven for ducks and other waterfowl looking for food and a place to land.

The months of November - April bring Northern Shovelers, Gadwalls, Hooded Mergansers, Bufflehead, Green-winged Teal, Common Mergansers, Coots, Ruddy Ducks, Pied-billed Grebes to the Reservoir - to join our resident Mallards and Wood Ducks. Occasionally, we get surprise visitors such as Common Goldeneye, Red-head, Common Mergansers, Red-breasted mergansers,





(who are usually on the East River), Common and Red-throated Loons, Red-necked Grebe, Northern Pintails, Greater & Lesser Scaup, Snow Geese, Ring-Necked Ducks and Black Ducks.

Some species of ducks have increased in numbers while others have declined. The Black Duck used to be spotted offshore drifting in large flocks or rafts. They were not a surprise visitor to the Reservoir but because of changes in the environment their sighting is now less common.

Flocks of Northern Shovelers have increased in numbers and travel to New York City's warmer water by the thousands.

Along with ducks, grebes and loons there are the ever-present gulls, Herring and Ring-billed being the most common. Occasionally, Black-headed gulls, Short-billed gulls, and Glaucous Gulls can be spied sitting on the berm that stretches the length of the Reservoir from the southern to northern Pumphouse.

These gulls become prey for Bald Eagles whose numbers have increased dramatically in the area. When the Reservoir partially freezes, Bald Eagles can be spotted



on the ice looking for gulls and coots who might be injured or weak to cull as prey.

The ducks have specific areas of the Reservoir that they like to frequent. Most of the loons are often found to the east where the water may be deeper. The dabblers are up against the sunny southwest side of the Reservoir. There the green moss grows on the face of the bricks - a tasty dabbler's treat!

The Mergansers and Bufflehead seem to favor the southeast corner where crayfish can be seen in a Hooded Merganser's saw teeth just before they slide down its throat.

Birding the Jacqueline

Kennedy Onassis Reservoir, in Central Park, is a rewarding experience for those who marvel at the sight of winter waterfowl that are uncommon to the area.

– Debbie Becker

Photos Debbie Becker - Common Goldeneye, Northern Pintail, Bufflehead, Red-necked Grebe, Red-breasted Merganser, Red-throated Loon, Snow Geese, Hooded Merganser, and the Berm at the Reservoir.

2024

A BANNER YEAR FOR GREAT GULL ISLAND

The 2024 field season brought exciting progress and record achievements for the Common and Roseate Terns on Great Gull Island (GGI). Thanks to plentiful fish in Long Island Sound and diligent conservation efforts, tern productivity was high, and Roseate Terns reached a record 2,223 nesting pairs, an 8% increase from 2023. Here are some highlights from the year:

Tern Success: Roseate Tern nests had exceptional hatching rates—95.1% in boxes and 92.3% in rocks—with fledging success of up to 100% in some nests. We also monitored Common Terns, achieving high fledging rates of 1.9 chicks per nest.

Conservation Innovations: Using radio tags, researchers tracked Roseate Terns to better understand their migration routes, providing critical insights into their full life cycle and wintering grounds in Brazil.

Habitat Restoration: Efforts to replace invasive plants with native vegetation paid off, with Seaside Goldenrod thriving and enhancing nesting habitats for terns. **Infrastructure Upgrades:** Two new cabins were built to house field crews, with plans to complete additional facilities in 2025.

Looking ahead, the Great Gull Island team aims to expand habitat management, address shoreline erosion,

and strengthen biosecurity to protect the colony. Your support is crucial for continuing these efforts. Contributions will continue to help fund habitat restoration, monitoring, and vital infrastructure.

To donate, make your tax-deductible gift to Great Gull Island Project-AMNH and mail it to Great Gull Island Project, American Museum of Natural History, 200 Central Park West, New York, NY 10024-5102.

You can also buy and proudly wear custom Great Gull Island merchandise designed by Bird Collective; it can be purchased at www.birdcollective.com. A portion of the proceeds goes to support Great Gull Island initiatives. The Linnaean Society will host its annual Bird-A-Thon fundraiser this May. More information on how to sign up will arrive in your mailbox soon!

The Linnaean Society's heartfelt thanks go to Joan Walsh, Margaret Rubega, and Peter Paton for leading the efforts to protect Great Gull Island. Together, we're building a brighter future for our terns and their habitat!

Get your gorgeous Great Gull Island gear at the Bird Collective Website. (see next page)

www.birdcollective.com/collections/great-gull-island

— Kristin Ellington



The Bird Collective

A conservation-minded apparel company, has designed a line of shirts and other products that feature images from Great Gull Island. A percentage of Bird Collective's profits will be donated to the Great Gull Island Project to support their ongoing tern research and conservation efforts.

Please check out their offerings at:

birdcollective.com

And purchase some items to support the terns.



Field Trips

The December field trips to Westchester and Long Island brought rewarding bird sightings and photographs to all who attended! Linnaean member Sandra Beltrão reports on the trips. “I met and connected with some amazing birders and learned so much from our great bird guides and trip leaders.

We saw the following in Rye:

- A beautiful courtship display of a pair of Mute Swans
- A Northern Harrier (gray ghost) gliding through the forest into the open field at Marshlands Nature Center and Wild Turkeys wandering through the brush.
- A Greater White-fronted Goose seen through Tom Fiore’s scope after the bird finally raised its neck post-siesta surrounded by 20 sleeping Canada Geese.

Highlights of the Jones Beach/Robert Moses State Park:

- A flock of Horned Larks, with a Lapland Longspur!
- Vagrant Sage Thrasher
- Yellow-rumped Warblers
- Common Eiders

Both walks were excellent and I learned to look carefully at flocks of Canada Geese and Horned Larks for rare birds in hiding!

Thank you Tom Fiore, Gail Benson, Joe DiCostanza, MaryJane Boland and Miriam Rokowski. And thanks to David Minoli and MaryJane for providing transport. Linnaean Society bird trips are just the best.”

-Sandra Beltrão

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Co-founder and Administrator
New York City Bird Photographers on
Facebook



Sandra Beltrão (photos above) - Surf Scoter, Mute Swans, Linnaean Members, & Horned Lark. (Photos below) Dominic Ricci - Common Eider, Sanderlings, Lapland-Longspur, Sage Thrasher, Harlequin Duck & Snow Bunting.



Minnesota Winter Birding Adventure

L recently spent four days birding in northeastern Minnesota. This was an organized trip with Sabrewing Nature Tours and the guides, fellow travelers, and the birds were all excellent! If you are interested in seeing lots of owls and you have the time and inclination, this is the year to head to Minnesota to try for some of the winter specialties you can find there.

Here's why: This year is an irruption year for Great Gray and Boreal Owls. Irruptions usually happen when there is a population boom, or, in the case of Great Grays when vole populations up north crash and more owls than usual have to travel farther to find food. This year many of these owls are traveling down from Canada to the Duluth, MN, area - notably the Sax-Zim Bog and around the town of Two Harbors, which is just northeast of Duluth. Our tour spent two days birding the Bog, one day around Two Harbors and the Superior National Forest area, and one day a bit west of Duluth in search of the elusive Northern Hawk Owl. In total we saw 21 individual owls of five different species, in addition to the species already mentioned these were Barred and Snowy Owls.

During our morning around Two Harbors the group found nine Great Gray Owls, many of which provided the chance to capture some amazing photos. We were able to observe all these birds from a respectful distance ensuring we did not disturb them - especially while they were hunting. We came across a field where 3 Great Grays were hunting and were even able to observe several of them catch mice or voles successfully!

Over the course of the week the weather varied a bit - we were at the end of the polar vortex that hit Minnesota in January. Temperatures were as low as minus 28 degrees on our first day out (luckily we birded from the cars a fair amount along the roadsides) and later in the week the temperatures warmed up a bit to the mid 20s which was about a 50

degree swing in temps! We also had a bit of snow on and off on several of the days, but it didn't impede our birding and actually provided a pretty backdrop for some of our photos.

In total our group saw 45 species of birds in the four days of birding with a few additional species added the last morning which including a Barrow's Goldeneye and a Mallard at Canal Park. Most of the group saw a flock of Snow Buntings at the airport (though a couple of us had left a bit earlier in the day and therefore missed those.) Notable misses for the group were Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, and Bohemian Waxwing which are on different irruption cycles and were not around the region this year in large numbers. Other highlights of the trip for me were the numerous flocks of Redpolls (now one species), Purple Finches, and White-winged Crossbills. Also seen but not in great numbers, were a Rough-legged Hawk, Evening Grosbeak, Boreal Chickadee, and an American Three-toed Woodpecker.

I highly recommend a birding trip up north if you would like to see some of these winter specialties, but be sure to pack your warmest winter gear!

-Amanda Bielskas



Photos: Amada Bielskas - Three-toed Woodpecker, White-winged Crossbill & Boreal Owl.

In Memoriam

Helen Hays, former president of the Linnaean Society and Chair Emeritus of the Great Gull Island Committee of the American Museum of Natural History, died on February 5, 2025.

Helen was a passionate and dedicated conservationist, widely recognized for her pioneering work on Great Gull Island, that began in 1964. Her tireless efforts to protect the Common and Roseate Terns that nest there and to improve their habitat made a lasting impact on the breeding success of these species. The most recent volume of the Transactions of the Linnaean Society contained research articles from Great Gull Island and the New York Bight and is dedicated to Helen.

Her career was marked by numerous accomplishments and the receipt of many prestigious awards. She mentored countless young scientists and helped shape the careers of many who continue her legacy of environmental stewardship.

Helen's dedication to conservation and her remarkable ability to inspire those around her will never be forgotten. She touched the lives of hundreds of volunteers, colleagues, and friends, and her memory will continue to live on through the many people she mentored and inspired.

Conservation Corner

AT SHIRLEY CHISHOLM STATE PARK

*Years ago I stopped here to watch
Gulls floating over a dumping site
Like feathers after a pillow fight....
Today that mound of urban trash
Sits stitched by nature trails,
Is covered by acres of clover.
Above them a pair of Kestrels
Ride air currents and hover,*



*One plummet to pluck its prey.
And Egrets in the shallows,
Each a flag of surrender,
Nonetheless strive to endure,
Resilient as that nest-building Osprey,
A gleaming fish in its talons.*

-Eric Mathern

The Mission Statement of the Linnaean Society of New York

The Linnaean Society of New York provides a forum for the sharing and advancement of science-based knowledge through a program of lectures and field trips. It fosters an appreciation of the natural world with a special emphasis on birds. Founded in 1878, the Society comprises dedicated amateurs and professionals interested in the study, preservation, and enjoyment of nature and the environment.

About the Society

Established by amateur naturalists in 1878, the Linnaean Society of New York has worked to foster learning about, and stewardship of, the natural world. Its original members included H.B. Bailey, E.P. Bicknell, Ernest Ingersoll, C. Hart Merriam, and John Burroughs. The Society focuses particularly on birds and their place in nature. It organizes regular birding field trips to various destinations in the New York City area and beyond, sponsors lectures from experts on birding

and natural history topics, and offers a variety of birding resources, including a rare bird alert. It also takes a leadership role in addressing local conservation issues of concern to birders and natural history enthusiasts. Its aspirations are reflected in its highest award, the Eisenmann Medal, which is given each year to honor "excellence in ornithology and encouragement of the amateur."

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Please visit our website for additional information

Linnaeannewyork.org