



# The Fledgling

Newsletter of the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society, Inc. (SAAS)

Vol. 38 No. 3, June - August 2021

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## Breeding Bird Atlas project continues

The third N.Y.S. Breeding Bird Atlas (NYSBBAIII) project continues for the second of five years.

Birders are monitoring assigned priority areas, looking for evidence of bird breeding activity. This can range from simply observing a bird in good habitat, to seeing clear proof of bird breeding: chicks!

Barbara Putnam of Queensbury took these photos while monitoring NYSBBAIII areas in Glens Falls, Queensbury and Kingsbury. More photos that may indicate breeding activity are on the back page.



Above: an alert **Killdeer** keeps a watchful eye over its territory.

Left: an immature **Red-tailed Hawk** might be guarding a catch.

Below: the nasal grunts of this **Virginia Rail** gave away its presence along the Towpath Road in Kingsbury. Rails have a unique ability to compress their bodies so they can squeeze between plants. For more about this bird including its calls, see Cornell's All About Birds page on [Virginia Rails](#).



Putnam has participated in all three atlas projects.

Explore current atlas results at [N.Y.S. Breeding Bird Atlas III](#), available through Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird database. The second atlas project, held 20 years ago, found evidence that 251 bird species were breeding in the state. This N.Y.S. Department of Environmental Conservation page: [New York State Breeding Bird Atlas](#), includes results from the first two atlases.

Many birds breed in the spring and summer, but some, like Great Horned Owls, breed during the winter. The [N.Y. Breeding Guideline Bar Chart](#) shows bird breeding time periods in green.



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**Southern Adirondack Audubon Society**

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Southern Adirondack Audubon Society (SAAS) is a certified local chapter of the National Audubon Society. SAAS has approximately 600 members in Warren, Washington, northern Saratoga and southern Hamilton counties in New York State.

SAAS's primary goal is to protect the environment by preserving natural habitats and promoting environmental education. Contact a board member to learn about SAAS volunteer opportunities.

**Meet our board members**

**Mark Silo**

Mark Silo joined the SAAS Board of Directors this past year.

Silo is a native of Yonkers who relocated to the Albany area after receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of Notre Dame and his master's degree from Cornell University, both in civil engineering. He spent his professional career in transportation engineering, most recently as an Assistant Commissioner at the N.Y.S. Department of Transportation in Albany. He has served his local community as a member of the Town of Colonie Planning Board and Conservation Council, and currently is a weekly volunteer at Habitat for Humanity and a member of his church council. Silo is also an avid student of American history and is the author of "The 115<sup>th</sup> New York in the Civil War," the unit history of a local civil war regiment, published in 2007.

He and his wife Kathy split their time between their home in Loudonville, their log cabin on the Schroon River in the Adirondacks, and various bucket-list locales. They have two grown children and a baby grandson.

Silo came to birding as an adult. He recalls being curious about the nature around him, around age 25, he bought a field guide and was proud to be able to identify a Black-capped Chickadee. He's been birding ever since.

He loves any activity that gets him outdoors, whether it's birding, kayaking, hiking, cross-country skiing, boating or sitting on the dock next to the Schroon River. He thoroughly enjoyed the SAAS trip to Costa Rica in 2018, as well as a trip with his wife to Belize in 2017. Other travels include Italy, Ireland, Scotland, British Virgin Islands, as well as a safari to Kenya. He and his wife have plans to visit Yellowstone National Park this year.

*Board member Mark Silo enjoyed birding at Lake Minneola in Florida this winter.*



# NYSOA Annual Meeting is going virtual in October

By John Loz, SAAS President

SAAS will be hosting the New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA) Annual Meeting virtually on Friday and Saturday, Oct. 1 and 2.

Please save these dates in your calendar if you'd like to attend. Our chapter very much wanted to welcome NYSOA members and delegates to the Southern Adirondack foothills and mountain region in the fall to enjoy our wonderful foliage, birding hot spots, and important bird areas.

The decision to make this event virtual made it feasible for our chapter to host this meeting for the very first time.



This online format is a good way to learn the basics of running a NYSOA Annual Meeting — a “fledgling first flight,” if you will, to hosting a larger in-person annual meeting sometime in the future. We are working closely with the NYSOA board to help plan this meeting to bring NYSOA members a quality online event.

For now, we can announce that the keynote speaker for Friday evening will be Jason Hill, Conservation Biologist at the Vermont Center for Ecostudies. He will be speaking on the “Effects of Climate Change on Montane Birds.” Details about the annual meeting will come in the SAAS September newsletter.

If you are not a member of NYSOA and would like to attend the annual meeting, head to the [NYSOA Membership](#) page to join. NYSOA membership brings you an online quarterly journal, *The Kingbird*, a quarterly online newsletter, *New York Birders*, and more benefits.

NYSOA is dedicated to documenting the ornithology of New York State and offers educational resources for birders and ornithologists.

Our Audubon chapter has been an Organization Member of NYSOA for over three decades and we are quite ready to take our turn hosting this event!

## President's Message Summer updates

By John Loz, SAAS President



In my wintertime President's Message, I wrote that I was “hopeful” for good things to come in 2021.

I can safely say that I am now “very optimistic” as we come out of this miserable pandemic. I'm not mincing words here! This global crisis has disrupted our lives in ways we couldn't have imagined. Stuff of science fiction movies come to life, right?

But we humans are resilient. We have adapted and found strength within us and through nature. This pandemic forced us to socially distance from our loved ones and people in general. Many people sought out other interactions, getting out in nature to view, listen and touch the natural environment. It focused our attention to leaves on trees, the wildlife around us, and fresh air.

Technology has connected us. Our SAAS board met every month virtually to plan our next projects and decide how we will emerge from this pandemic disruption, which suspended many of our regular activities. I think we've succeeded in adapting how we can reach out to you, our followers and chapter supporters, through online platforms, social media, and our spectacular newsletter.

There's always room for improvement, of course, when it comes to online communication. Here's what our board has planned for this year:

- First on the docket: we are in the midst of finally upgrading our SAAS website!
- We are currently planting a native species garden at the Bolton Free Library in Bolton Landing. We are hoping to secure locations in the near future in South Glens Falls and Ballston Spa.
- Our board unanimously voted to be the sole sponsor of an art exhibit at SUNY Adirondack's Visual Arts Gallery in Queensbury. The exhibit will focus on extinct birds, the lost beauty of icebergs, and biological realism of aquatic life. It will run February through April of 2022. We will be creating supportive programming around this exhibition and feel very optimistic that we will be welcoming you in-person at a reception next year!
- This summer, we will be working with Amarak Youth, a small non-profit that works with children and teens in the Hudson Falls and Fort Edward area that provides a variety of free activities in the arts, outdoor education, music and more. Our role will be focusing on bird and environmental education.
- And lastly, our chapter will for the first time host the New York State Ornithological Annual Meeting the first weekend of October. See details to the left.

There's a lot to look forward to and to be very optimistic about. Look at all that is in the works! Have a great summer and as I always say, especially in these times — Keep. Looking. Up.

## Tribute to Helen Mohr

By Nan Polunci, SAAS Member

*Helen Mohr, who passed away in December, bequeathed a generous donation to our chapter to advance our educational causes. Nan Polunci wrote this tribute to her so we learn more about her life and contributions.*

Helen Mohr was born on September 10, 1930 in the Bronx. She graduated from New York University in 1952 with a degree in accounting and a minor in law, and worked as an accountant for many years in New York City. She married Edmund Mohr, an engineer, and they relocated to Shel-

ter Island where they enjoyed sailing around the coast of southern New England. The Mohrs later moved to Granville.

The Mohrs traveled the country in their RV to visit the national parks and always brought their Golden Retriever along. One of those trips lasted a full year. Mohr loved to hike and camp, and snowshoed well into her 80s.

She was a gifted gardener. Mohr planted and maintained beautiful flower gardens at her church, the Chapman Museum in Glens Falls, and the Glens Falls Senior Center.

Mohr derived a great deal of pleasure throughout her life watching and feeding birds. She supported our chapter and enjoyed our public programs. To show her gratitude, Mohr bequeathed a very generous donation that was held in trust for the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society.

Helen Mohr died on December 12, 2020 at the age of 90. As a final gift, she donated her body to science. For her obituary and a photo, see <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/poststar/name/helen-mohr-obituary?pid=197350393>.

## Choosing bird-friendly coffee

By Mark Silo, SAAS Board Member

Can you protect the environment and the birds by sipping coffee? Yes, if you choose bird-friendly shade-grown coffee.

Traditionally, coffee was grown in the shade, the preferred environment of naturally-occurring coffee plants.

However, with staggering demands for coffee worldwide, corporate coffee found ways to grow coffee beans faster and cheaper by developing sun-grown, chemically-fueled hybrids, deforesting thousands of acres of mature tropical forest. Thousands of birds perished along with this critical habitat, including dozens of songbird species that winter in Central America and summer in the United States.

To learn more, see these articles:

- [Ecological Benefits of Shade-grown Coffee](#) from the Smithsonian Institution;

*Green coffee beans, Colombia.*

*Photo credit: By Felipe Quijano, Oct. 12, 2020. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.*

- [The Coffee-Songbird Connection](#) from Scientific American;
- [Tapping birdwatchers to promote bird-friendly coffee consumption and conserve birds](#) from the British Ecological Society.

You may have heard of or are already drinking fair trade and organic coffees. More options are now available to purchase bird-friendly shade-grown coffee. Shade-grown coffees are usually both fair trade and organic.

You can buy bird-friendly coffee online through sources such as these:

- The Cornell Lab of Ornithology sponsors Birds & Beans Coffee:

- <https://birdsandbeans.com/>
- American Birding Association aligns with SongBird Coffee: <https://www.aba.org/product-category/songbird-coffee/>
- Grounds for Change Coffee only sells fair trade, organic, shade-grown coffee at <https://groundsforchange.com/>.

Bird-friendly coffee is also available locally. Call ahead to make sure these stores have these items in stock:

- Wild Birds Unlimited in Saratoga Springs sells Birds and Beans Coffee.
- Trader Joe's has a "Shade-Grown Ground Espresso Blend."
- Target sells a Costa Rican shade-grown certified coffee by Gevalia.



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Production of this issue of *The Fledgling* newsletter is provided by Edward Jones, 34 Congress Street, Suite 102, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

## **Species Spotlight**

# **Chipping Sparrows**

*By Joyce Miller, SAAS Newsletter Editor*

Tiny, perky Chipping Sparrows are often seen and heard in our backyards in the spring and summer.

They are frequently seen hopping around yards, weedy fields or open woods, nibbling grass seed. They are only about five inches long, and can be mistaken for a mouse as they scuttle about in the grass. They will visit seed feeders.

They arrived back in our region by early May. In the fall, most migrate to southern North America and Central America for the winter.

A brave few will overwinter, though. One was spotted in January 2015 in South Glens Falls. A pair of Chipping Sparrows was reported in the Albany area for most of this past winter.



*Photos of Chipping Sparrows, courtesy of Gordon Ellmers of Fort Edward.*

height of three to 10 feet, and sometimes at the tips of low branches. The females' chestnut caps can have dark brown markings.

A study in Ontario discovered that these tiny birds may live active social lives. According to Cornell's *Birds of the World* chapter on Chipping Sparrows, "observations of color-banded birds show that once nesting has begun, males move through neighboring territories, where they may copulate with several different females." This

may ensure some genetic diversity in the species.

The male's song is an even trill that sounds like a tiny machine gun. The song, used to attract mates and defend territory, is actually about 55 chip notes delivered in less than four seconds, reports Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *All About Birds* website.

Their call, which acts as a contact note between birds, sounds like "chip," which gives them their name.

Females are in charge of building the cup-shaped nests. They often prefer to build nests in evergreen trees at a

During the year, all birds molt, shedding old tattered feathers and growing new fresh feathers, so they can fly and capture food easily. By studying museum specimens, scientists discovered that Chipping Sparrows may replace the feathers on their faces and throats as many as six times a year! Their other feathers are replaced only once or twice, according to *Birds of the World*.

Learn more about Chipping Sparrows and hear their familiar song at Cornell's *All About Birds* site: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chipping\\_Sparrow/id](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chipping_Sparrow/id).

## About Wildflowers

# Queen Anne's Lace

By Diane Collins

My wildflower choice for the June newsletter was decided after watching SAAS's engaging March Zoom program by Anne Swaim on "Bird Nest Architecture."

Any guesses why? The photo below gives the visual clue. When the flower goes to seed, the entire cluster dries and curls up to resemble a bird's nest. This accounts for one of its common names, "Bird's Nest."



Queen Anne's Lace is found along roadsides and meadows from May through August. It spreads itself from seeds. An individual plant can produce thousands of seeds.

It grows one to three feet tall with a tall hairy stalk, large flat-topped umbel (definition: short stalks spreading out from a main stalk, somewhat like umbrella ribs), and clusters of tiny white flowers, or florets. Its leaves are fern-like, resembling carrot tops.

Queen Anne's Lace is actually an

ancestor of our edible carrot. One of its common names is "Wild Carrot." When crushed, its leaves produce a carrot-like aroma.

It is in the Parsley (*Umbelliferae*) family, along with carrots, parsley, celery, fennel, parsnip, anise, dill, cumin, coriander, and deadly poisonous water hemlock, all having flat umbel clusters of small flowers. Poisonous water hemlock is very similar in appearance to wild carrot, but the stem of wild carrot is hairy and the stem of the hemlock is smooth.

The scientific name for Queen

septic and used for healing wounds. Today the plant is considered mildly toxic and should only be used by experts. And of course there's the issue of confusing it with the deadly water hemlock.

The common story goes that Queen Anne's Lace was named after Queen Anne of Great Britain. The tiny dark purple floret in the center of the flower is said to be a drop of blood from a pin prick as Queen Anne was making lace. The adaptive purpose of this one dark purple floret (not always present) is still a mystery. Experiments have shown that insects do not favor the flowers with the dark center floret.

Queen Anne's Lace acts as a host for the Black Swallowtail butterfly. Small bees, wasps, flies and beetles are attracted by the nectar and pollen. A north-west organic fruit farmer plants it to attract beneficial insects in his blueberry patches. The flower attracts a parasitic wasp that in turn attacks the drosophila fly that damages the fruit.

One last comment of interest to Audubon friends is that the foliage of Queen Anne's Lace (aka Wild Carrot, aka Bird's Nest) is preferred as nesting

material by the European Starling. The insecticidal properties of the foliage may be protective for the hatchlings by reducing lice and other parasites.

Wildflower photographer Diane Collins is the author of *Trailside Wildflowers in Cole's Woods*; see <http://www.wildflowersinyourownbackyard.com>. Cole's Woods is located in both the City of Glens Falls and the Town of Queensbury, next to Crandall Park. Collins sells her booklet for \$10; proceeds go to The Friends of Cole's Woods and our Audubon chapter.

Anne's Lace is *Daucus carota*.

Queen Anne's Lace is not a native plant, but is widespread across the United States. It is native to Eurasia and was brought here by settlers for medicinal purposes. It was traditionally used in tea made from the roots as a diuretic to prevent and eliminate kidney stones, and the seeds were used for centuries as a contraceptive-like "morning after" pill. Roots were dried and ground and used a coffee substitute like Chicory.

Grated wild carrot root was anti-



Left: American Goldfinches at a feeder.

Photo credit Wikimedia Commons. (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Birds0011.jpg>)

Below: White-breasted Nuthatch, one of the subjects of SAAS' Climate Watch project.

Photo credit: Audubon(White-breasted Nuthatch\_KK\_Susan\_Buttrick\_GBBC\_2015.jpg).



## Climate Watch continues to June 15

SAAS will again participate in the National Audubon Society's citizen science pilot project Audubon Climate Watch. It observes how specific bird populations are affected by climate change.

The SAAS survey focuses on two species: Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches. The survey is conducted twice a year: from May 15 to June 15, and Jan. 15 to Feb. 15.

Volunteers use a specific protocol established by National Audubon. Using grid maps of a specific area, birders conduct 12 counts, observing for five minutes each. They record the numbers and species of other birds identified within 100 meters.

Climate Watch started after National Audubon issued a report in 2014, *Birds and Climate Change*, on risks faced by North American bird species from climate change. SAAS joined the program in 2017. Contact Rob Snell ([birdbrane1@gmail.com](mailto:birdbrane1@gmail.com)) for details.

## Cleaning feeders

If you feed birds year-round, make sure to clean them regularly so birds don't get sick.

- For hummingbird feeders, "change sugar water at least every 3 to 5 days to prevent mold and deadly fermentation, and more frequently during hot weather," according to Cornell's *All About Birds* page [How To Clean Your Bird Feeder](#).
- Every two weeks, scrub seed feeders and clean with a mild bleach solution to avoid salmonella and other infections. Feeders should be dry before adding new seed. See Cornell's *FeederWatch* blog: [Preventing disease: What's the best way to clean your bird feeders?](#)
- Your seed feeder might inadvertently become a bear feeder in some areas. The N.Y.S. Department of Environmental Conservation "highly recommends that bird feeding activities cease by April 1 and resume November 30 if you live in bear country." See this NYSDEC page: [Bears and Bird Feeders](#).

## Watching BirdCams

The [Cornell Lab of Ornithology BirdCams](#) website shows many nest types from around the world: American Kestrels, Barred Owl, Bermuda Petrels, California Condors, Osprey, Lance-tailed Manakins in Panama, Northern Royal Albatross in New Zealand, as well as elegant White-tailed Tropicbirds in Bermuda.

The site also features feeder cameras in Ontario and Panama, a hummingbird feeder in Texas, and a Pond Cam in Ithaca. Great for virtual birding in rainy weather!

## Investing in binoculars

Comfortable, sharp binoculars can make a world of difference in helping you enjoy the sport of birding.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *All About Birds* site offers specific, practical tips on choosing your next binoculars: [6 Steps To Choosing A Pair Of Binoculars You'll Love](#). It also offers helpful videos about getting crisp focus with your binoculars.

## Ecuador in October: Payment due July 17

SAAS is hosting a birding trip to the Chocó-Andes Region of Ecuador from Oct. 20 to 29. The trip is organized by Holbrook Tours, which has organized previous successful SAAS trips to Costa Rica and Belize.

This Holbrook page offers details on the trip: <https://holbrook.travel/saas-ec21>. Final non-refundable payment is due July 17.

## Confirming breeding activity

Breeding bird activity can be confirmed in several ways for the N.Y.S. Breeding Bird Atlas III project, described on page one. Barbara Putnam's photos here demonstrate some types of breeding activity that birders would report for the survey.

Right: These two **Killdeer** are displaying mating behavior. Whether or not they produce offspring, it still shows breeding behavior for the atlas project.



Carrying food to chicks, instead of consuming it immediately, is also a confirming breeding activity. Ravenous chicks need lots of protein in the form of insects, to grow quickly.

Above, a **Northern Mockingbird** carries food to its nest in early May in a cemetery in Glens Falls. An **American Robin**, right, is about to deliver a fat caterpillar, perching momentarily on a granite headstone.

Cemeteries are often full of bird life. Birds find refuge in the quiet atmosphere and mix of habitats: grass, shrubs, mature trees and often, water features.



Right: On Towpath Road in Kingsbury, a pair of **Belted Kingfishers** exchange food, what appears to be crayfish. This might either be courtship behavior or an adult feeding an immature bird.

Belted Kingfishers are one of the few North American bird species in which the female is more colorful: she has a rusty belly band that the male lacks.

If you're near water, listen for the rattling calls of the kingfisher, and watch for these birds perched on overhanging branches. They often hover in the air over water, then plunge into the water beak-first to grab fish. Kingfishers excavate burrows three to six feet deep in earthen banks.

