



WINGBEATS

Newsletter of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region of New York State

NEW BIRD NAMES IN PROGRESS

(from an article by Ken Keffer, *Birds and Blooms*)

In late 2023, the American Ornithological Society (AOS) announced its decision to rename all English-language bird species in North America and Canada whose names originally referred to a person.

“The American Ornithological Society, formerly called American Ornithologists’ Union, has been establishing the names of all North American birds since 1886—giving us ‘official’ names like northern mockingbird and black-throated blue warbler,” Kenn and Kimberly Kaufman explain. “In the past, ornithologists often named new bird species after each other, or after their friends or patrons. That’s why we have birds with names like Bullock’s oriole, Wilson’s warbler, or Cassin’s sparrow. It’s still worthwhile to read about history and about these individuals, but the AOS has decided it would be better to apply names that convey something about the birds themselves.” They elaborate to say they agree with the AOS in that this could give species names a chance to better reflect the birds, rather than the people.

Think about the last time you saw a rufous-sided towhee. Technically, nobody has seen one of these birds for 25 years. That’s because in 1995, the species was reclassified. Rufous-sided towhees were split into two species. Now birders can see the spotted towhee in the West and the eastern towhee east of the Great Plains.

These changes aren’t simply taxonomic trickery. Instead, when making these decisions, the committee weighs evidence including plumage variations, differences in songs, DNA, and the amount of hybridization between closely related species.

Many birders celebrate the splits because they can add species to their life lists. But the committee is more concerned with getting the science correct. According to Kenn, “The committee doesn’t make changes without a specific reason.”

For more details and information, go to <https://americanornithology.org/about/english-bird-names-project/>.

UPCOMING FALL EVENTS

by Carol Quantock

ASCR and other organizations have several events in the works for this fall. Through the suggestions and recommendations of our administration, collaborations with other local groups, and inquiries from various organizations, we are keeping busy with educational projects and programs. We’re also beginning to receive requests for talks and presentations into the fall. Below is a list of what events have already been scheduled, along with others that are still in the works:

- ◆ September 9 — ASCR monthly meeting, 6:30-7:30 PM, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 510 Albany-Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211.
- ◆ September 14 — Helderberg Hawk Watch at Thacher Park, 10:00 AM-2:00 PM.
- ◆ September 21 — Native Plant Sale, 10:00 AM-2:00 PM, Wildbird Junction, 308 Delaware Avenue, Delmar, New York, NY 12054.
- ◆ October 11 & 12 — Pickup days for ASCR’s Annual Bird Seed Sale fundraiser, 11:00 AM-2:00 PM. Details are on page 4 of this newsletter and on the ASCR website.
- ◆ October 11 — Bird Walk, 8:30-10:00 AM at Vischer Ferry Nature & Historic Preserve, Riverview Road, Vischer Ferry, NY 12148.
- ◆ October 14 — ASCR monthly meeting, 6:00-7:30 PM, East Greenbush Community Library, 10 Community Way, East Greenbush, NY 12061. Damon Russo, speaker.
- ◆ October 24 — "Matrix Landscape Design" with Benjamin Vogt, 7:00-8:00 PM, online/virtual program hosted by Wild Ones National. Register at: <https://capitalregionny.wildones.org/events-calendar/>

As of this publication, we’re still looking for volunteers to assist with several of these events as well as future happenings such as bird walks and presentations. Email us at capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com to sign up, volunteer or find out more about our future plans.

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NOTES FROM THE BACK WINDOW

by Carol Quantock

And just like that, we're entering the fall season. This past summer, according to the experts, was the hottest summer on Earth in recorded history. Any people who still think that climate change is a hoax are really fooling themselves. The societal and geopolitical ramifications are already being felt, and we would be wise to pay attention and adapt to the inevitable changes that we have brought on ourselves, and do everything possible to mitigate the effects.

On a more positive note, we had an extraordinary bird adventure earlier this summer. A tiny male hummingbird had gotten into our garage, and was evidently in there for a long time before my husband found him bumping up against the ceiling. He finally got the little guy to land on a broom handle and was able to cup it between his hands. Of course, he called me out, and I took the bird in my hands while he went to get some leftover sugar water after I filled the hummer feeders. I dipped my finger in the solution and kept dabbing the bird's tiny beak, and after a few tries, he started licking my finger. It was a wonderful success story--about five minutes elapsed until he perked up enough to take off (backwards!) from my finger and land in a nearby tree. At least once a season, we'll herd a hummer out of the garage, but being able to hold one and nurse him back to "flyable" condition was the best ever! .

This year I haven't added very many plants to the garden beds, although that could change with so many plant sales going on in the next few weeks. There are places I want to fill in with new plantings, but I need to assess what I already have before making big decisions. A great deal of the soil at my home is clay and shale mixed with very poor "construction" soil from back in the 1960s when the house was built. One way I plan to try to improve the soil is to participate in one of the compost programs that are available. Also, if I find some native plants at reasonable prices during these upcoming sales, I'll be busy getting them into the ground before the temperatures take a deep dive.

Be sure to check out page 4 for information on this year's ASCR Bird Seed Sale! There's a lot to unpack, since just about everything about it has changed for 2024. Please look and please support ASCR and its programs. Your purchases are our biggest fundraiser, and without your help, ASCR wouldn't be able to do the essential work to protect birds and their habitat. Your donations stay local, too!

VISIT AN IBA NEAR YOU!

If you're new to birding, you may be wondering what an IBA is. The acronym stands for Important Bird Area, and the Audubon Society is constantly working to identify, monitor, and protect habitats critical to the success of bird populations. Across New York, more than 130 IBAs have been recognized as significant places for birds to survive and thrive. Here are a few of the Capital Region's IBAs that you can visit any time of the year to see a variety of birds in spectacular habitats:

- **Albany Pine Bush** — this 3,350 acre preserve offers visitors an experience rich in geological, natural and cultural history. Known for its gently rolling sand-dunes, the Albany Pine Bush Preserve is home to a unique variety of rare plants and animals, including the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly. Website: <https://www.albanypinebush.org/>.
- **Fort Edward Grasslands** — encompasses 13,000 acres of critical grassland habitat within the towns of Argyle, Fort Edward and Kingsbury. This unique area, located along the Atlantic and Hudson River flyways in upstate New York, hosts abundant populations of grassland breeding birds and wintering raptors, including Snowy owls and state-endangered Short-eared owls. Website: <https://www.grasslandbirdtrust.org/conservation/washington-county-grasslands/>.
- **Rensselaer Forest Tract** — a large and mostly unfragmented forest within the Rensselaer Plateau near Grafton, Albany, and Stephentown. This Important Bird Area comprises two state parks, an environmental education center, and a Wildlife Management Area. Website: <https://www.albany.com/birding/rensselaer-forest-tract/>.
- **Vischer Ferry Nature and Historic Preserve** — natural area and historic place of more than 700 acres of wetlands, floodplain, and amazing bird and amphibian habitat. Website: <https://cliftonparkopenspaces.org/locations/vischersferry/#:~:text=Welcome%20to%20Vischer%20Ferry%20Nature%20%26%20Historic%20Preserve&text=This%20linear%20greenway%20includes%20national,picnic%20area%20by%20the%20river.>
- **Black Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area** — about 450 acres of wetland and upland habitat in Albany County. Black Creek Marsh is primarily a freshwater wetland community. Wetland types include cattail marsh, open-water marsh, and flooded red maple swamp. Because of the abundance of wetlands, this WMA is an important area for amphibians and reptiles. Website: <https://dec.ny.gov/places/black-creek-marsh-wildlife-management-area>.



BIRD FEEDERS AND HELPFUL BIRD FEEDING TIPS

(from the National Wildlife Federation and National Audubon Society websites)

Bird feeders offer a fun and entertaining way to observe birds up close and connect with nature. They also supplement the natural food sources available for birds in your yard or garden. Different species of birds prefer varying types of feeder foods.

Nourishment for wildlife should come primarily from natural food sources such as native plants. Feeders should only be supplied to complement birds' natural diets. Many bird species will not eat from a feeder. Some species eat only fruits or insects. Provide for these species also by planting native plants and not using pesticides in your yard or garden.

1) Locate bird feeders at different levels

Sparrows, juncos, and towhees usually feed on the ground, while finches and cardinals feed in shrubs, and chickadees, titmice, and woodpeckers feed in trees. To avoid crowding and to attract the greatest variety of species, provide table-like feeders for ground-feeding birds, hopper or tube feeders for shrub and treetop feeders, and suet feeders well off the ground for woodpeckers, nuthatches, and chickadees. Provide multiple feeding stations in different areas of your yard to disperse bird activity.

2) Offer a variety of seeds in separate feeders

A diverse mix of seeds will attract the greatest variety of birds. To avoid waste, offer different seeds in different feeders. Black oil sunflower seed appeals to the greatest number of birds. Offer sunflower seeds, nyjer (thistle) seeds, and peanuts in separate feeders. When using blends, choose mixtures containing sunflower seeds, millet, and cracked corn—the three most popular types of birdseed. Safflower seed is a great favorite of cardinals and American goldfinches. Birds that are sunflower specialists will readily eat the sunflower seed and toss the millet and corn to the ground, to be eaten by ground-feeding birds such as sparrows and juncos. Mixtures of peanuts, nuts, and dried fruit attract woodpeckers, nuthatches, and titmice. A relatively few species prefer milo, wheat, and oats, which are featured in less expensive blends.

3) Provide suet during cool weather only

Suet (beef fat) attracts insect-eating birds such as woodpeckers, wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, and titmice. Place the suet in special feeders or net onion bags at least five feet from the ground to keep it out of the reach of dogs. Do not put out suet during hot weather as it can turn rancid; also, dripping fat can damage natural waterproofing on bird feathers.

4) Mix peanut butter and corn meal

Peanut butter is a good substitute for suet in the summer. Mix one part peanut butter with five parts corn meal and stuff the mixture into holes drilled in a hanging log or into the crevices of a large pinecone. This all-season mixture attracts woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice, and occasionally warblers.

5) Provide fruit for berry-eating birds

Fruit specialists such as robins, waxwings, bluebirds, and mockingbirds rarely eat birdseed. To attract these birds, soak raisins and currants in water overnight, then place them on a table feeder, or purchase blends with a dried fruit mixture. To attract orioles and tanagers, skewer halved oranges onto a spike near other feeders, or supply nectar feeders.

6) Provide nectar for hummingbirds

Make a sugar solution of one part white sugar to four parts water. Boil briefly to sterilize and dissolve sugar crystals; do not add red food coloring. Feeders must be washed every few days with very hot water and kept scrupulously clean to prevent the growth of mold.

7) Store seed in secure metal containers

Store seed in metal garbage cans with secure lids to protect it from squirrels and mice. Keep the cans in a cool, dry location; avoid storing in the heat. Damp seeds may grow mold that can be fatal to birds. Overheating can destroy the nutrition and taste of sunflower seeds. For these reasons, it's best not to keep seed from one winter to the next.

8) Discourage squirrels from consuming feeder foods

Squirrels are best excluded by placing feeders on a pole in an open area. Pole-mounted feeders should be about five feet off the ground and protected by a cone-shaped baffle (at least 17 inches diameter) or similar obstacle below the feeder. Locate pole-mounted feeders at least 10 feet from the nearest shrub, tree, or other tall structure. Squirrel feeders stocked with blends that are especially attractive to squirrels and chipmunks can reduce competition for high-priced foods offered at bird feeders. Place squirrel feeders far from bird feeders to further reduce competition.

9) Locate feeders to reduce window collisions

In the United States, approximately one billion birds die each year from flying into windows. Protect birds from collisions by placing feeders within three feet of windows, if possible. Mobiles and opaque decorations hanging outside windows also help to prevent bird strikes, or attach fruit tree netting outside windows to deflect birds from the glass.

10) Keep cats indoors

Cats kill hundreds of millions of birds annually in the United States, often pouncing on ground-feeding birds and those dazed by window collisions. Responsible and caring cat owners keep their cats indoors, where they are also safer from traffic, disease, and fights with other animals. Outdoor cats are especially dangerous to birds in the spring when fledglings are on the ground. Bells on cat collars are usually ineffective for deterring predation. Place bird feeders in locations that do not provide hiding places for cats and other predators. Place feeders ten to twelve feet from low shrubs or brush piles.

11) Clean feeders and rake up spilled grain and hulls

Uneaten seed can become soggy and grow deadly mold. Empty and clean feeders twice a year (spring and fall), or more often if feeders are used during humid summers. Using a long-handled bottlebrush, scrub with dish detergent and rinse with a powerful hose; then soak in a bucket of 10 percent non-chlorine bleach solution, rinse well, and dry in the sun. Keep areas under and around the feeders clean by raking up spilled grain and sunflower hulls.



It's Time for ASCR's Annual Fall Bird Seed Sale!



The Audubon Society of the Capital Region is pleased to announce its 2024 Bird Seed Sale and a new partnership with Wildbird Junction, 308 Delaware Ave., Delmar, NY 12054. The owners have graciously offered their location as a pickup location for the seed and suet products as well as expanding pickup days to two instead of one, giving purchasers more flexibility. Below is a rundown of the features of the sale for 2024:

- Sale begins online at the ASCR website on September 3, 2024 (capitalregionsudubon.org); click on Seed Sale tab
- Deadline for ordering products is September 29, 2024, at 5:00 PM
- Online sales only!
- Donations of seed and/or suet to our partnership with **Project Growth** at Lawson's Lake will be gratefully appreciated; please see order form to donate
- **NEW:** Expanded product list! See below for details.
- **NEW SEED AND SUET BRANDS:** Lizzie Mae's Bird Seed, Wildbird Junction exclusive blend, and Pine Tree Farms suet products
- **NEW PICKUP DAYS:** October 11 and 12, from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM
- **NEW PICKUP LOCATION:** Wildbird Junction, 308 Delaware Ave., Delmar, NY 12054
- **WILDBIRD JUNCTION COUPONS:** Wildbird Junction will provide two (2) discount coupons with each seed and/or suet order for future purchases at Wildbird Junction



PRODUCT	DESCRIPTION	WEIGHT	PRICE
Premium Black Oil Sunflower	Premium/ Double Screened - No empty shells, sticks, or dust	20 lb.	\$25.95
Premium Black Oil Sunflower	Premium/ Double Screened - No empty shells, sticks, or dust	40 lb.	\$49.50
Backyard Basics/Ground Feeding Plus	Premium Ground Feeding Blend w/Black Oil Sunflower Seed, Millet & Cracked Corn (NO Red Milo)	20 lb.	\$19.95
Wildbird Junction Blend	Premium General Blend great for all backyard birds w/ Black Oil Sunflower Seed, Peanuts, Safflower and only 15% Millet	20 lb.	\$29.50
Songbird Medley	A Chickadee Blend with Black Oil Sunflower Seed, Peanuts & Striped Sunflower (NO Corn or Millet). A great winter blend.	20 lb.	\$34.95
Cardinal Favorite	Safflower Seed, Black Oil Sunflower Seed, and Striped Sunflower Seed	20 lb.	\$34.95
Finch Favorite	Blend of Nyjer and Pine Sunflower Chips for Finch Feeders	5 lb.	\$13.95
Select Sunflower Chips	Whole Seeds; No Pieces; Shell Free	20 lb.	\$48.95
Safflower Seed	Cardinals Love It; Blackbirds Won't Eat It!	20 lb.	\$48.95
Suet - Pine Tree Farms Hi-Energy	NY Made; High Quality Protein and Calories	Individual Cake	\$2.50
Suet - Pine Tree Farms Hi-Energy	NY Made; High Quality Protein and Calories	Case of 12	\$27.00
Suet - Pine Tree Farms Fruit Berry Nut	NY Made; High Quality Protein and Calories w/Peanuts, Almonds, Millet, Corn & Dried Berries/Fruit	Individual Cake	\$3.95
Suet - Pine Tree Farms Fruit Berry Nut	NY Made; High Quality Protein and Calories w/Peanuts, Almonds, Millet, Corn & Dried Berries/Fruit	Case of 12	\$43.50

This year promises to be an exciting new venture, and ASCR looks forward to your support again. Your patronage is valued, and your purchases and donations remain local, helping us to provide quality programs and events for everyone!

THE ULTIMATE MILKWEED PLANT GROWING GUIDE

(Excerpted from an article by Deb Wiley, *Birds and Blooms*, January 9, 2024; originally published August 3, 2023)

WHY GROW MILKWEED PLANTS?

Monarch butterflies are rapidly declining due to loss of habitat and use of pesticides. Growing milkweed is the most effective way to help because it is the only plant that sustains a monarch through each of its life stages. It also produces a chemical that makes monarchs toxic and bitter-tasting to some of their predators. Home gardeners have a huge role to play in providing habitat for monarchs, pollinators and other wildlife. Residential properties have the potential to contribute many thousands—maybe even millions—of acres of habitat.

WHAT IS MILKWEED?

Milkweed, scientifically called *Asclepias*, is a huge genus, with more than 140 species throughout the Americas. It's the only plant that hosts and feeds monarch caterpillars. The name milkweed comes from the milky sap inside the stems and leaves.

WHAT DOES MILKWEED LOOK LIKE?

Milkweed doesn't look like much—until it blooms. Then you're treated to bright, colorful flowerheads rising up to 5 feet in the air. You can't miss them and, fortunately, neither can the butterflies.

WHICH TYPES OF MILKWEED PLANTS SHOULD YOU GROW?

What kind of milkweed should you grow, and where do you buy it? Not all milkweed species are the right fit for your garden. For instance, common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) has a wide native range and is the preferred food of the monarch caterpillar, but it can spread aggressively and may not be suited to a small yard. Be prepared to give it room or weed out unwanted plants. It spreads by seed and underground rhizomes. Remove pods before the seeds are released if you want to limit seedlings in next year's garden. Common names vary wildly, so use botanical names when you're researching. Since milkweed species have varying needs for sun, water and space, pay extra attention to growing requirements.

BEST MILKWEED PLANTS FOR OUR REGION

Call your county extension office to find out which milkweeds are best suited to your region, and take time to learn about their growth habits and requirements before deciding which to plant. Or visit plantnative.org to find out which varieties of milkweed are native to your area and where you can buy them. These are the best species for our area: Northeast/Midwest: common (*Asclepias syriaca*); swamp (*A. incarnata*); butterfly weed (*A. tuberosa*); whorled (*A. verticillata*); poke (*A. exaltata*). It's helpful to have a diverse selection of native milkweed, but avoid non-native tropical milkweed (*A. curassavica*). Although it's easy to grow, tropical milkweed types may encourage monarchs to stop short of their full migration. It also hosts a parasite that infects and harms monarchs.

IS MILKWEED A PERENNIAL?

Does milkweed grow back or does it have to be replanted every year? Common milkweed is a perennial that's hardy in your area and throughout Zones 3 to 8. Watch for plants to emerge in spring. Once established and flowering, plants spread by underground rhizomes (horizontal stems) and scattered seeds. Milkweed thrives in well-draining soil but struggles in overly wet and poorly draining areas. Although it's drought-tolerant, it needs sufficient water for the first two years.

WHEN AND HOW TO PLANT MILKWEED

Sow milkweed seeds in fall, set out milkweed plants in spring. If you're starting from seed, fall is the best time to broad-sow outdoors. Many varieties contain hard coatings that have to break down before the seeds germinate, and exposure to a winter's worth of snow and rain in cold climates will do just that. The easiest way to grow milkweed is to start with plants instead of seeds. Tuck them into the ground in spring after the danger of frost has passed.

HOW TO START MILKWEED FROM SEEDS INDOORS

Starting milkweed from seed indoors is tricky. Most seeds need a period of chilling called vernalization and stratification to germinate and then flower. If you want to start milkweed plants indoors, place seeds between moist paper towels inside a sealed plastic bag or plant the seeds directly into peat pots covered with a sealed plastic bag. Chill in a refrigerator at least 30 days. Plant cold-treated seeds in a moist seed-starting potting mix. Place the pots under a grow light or near a sunny window. Warning: Seedlings may take a long time to emerge or not grow at all. If the seedlings make it, start to transplant the 2-to-3-inch plants with the intact rootball after the danger of frost has passed. Most milkweed plants have long taproots that hate to be disturbed. A seedling may lose its leaves after being transplanted, or it could die.

WHERE TO PLANT MILKWEED

Some types of milkweed spread more aggressively than others. To contain the plant, grow milkweed in a raised bed or container and remove the seed pods. Or plant it only where it can run freely. Milkweed does not need to be fertilized.

Wear gloves when handling milkweed, because the milky sap may cause skin or eye irritation. In large quantities, the sap may be toxic to livestock or pets.

WHEN DOES MILKWEED BLOOM?

Look for the fragrant milkweed flowers to reach their peak in midsummer, typically between June and August.

LEARN TO RECOGNIZE MONARCH CATERPILLARS AND EGGS

Identify monarch caterpillars by their white, black, and yellow stripes. The pinhead-size eggs are white and are laid singly on the tops or bottoms of leaves. Plus, when you plant milkweed in your garden, you might find more than monarchs — you might see a milkweed tussock moth or caterpillar.

WILL APHIDS HURT MILKWEED PLANTS?

Milkweed may attract aphids and other insects. Milkweed aphids look like tiny yellow specks with black legs. They are usually found by the dozens clustered near the plant stem. A high concentration of aphids on milkweed may look bad, but these insects are not necessarily causing harm to monarchs. Unless they are in extremely high density, there are usually not enough to kill the plant. Because chemical pesticides or insecticides also kill monarchs, the best option is to remove the pests by hand, cut off stems with lots of aphids, or blast them with the garden hose if they're causing damage. You can also simply allow nature to take its course.

Not sure if you're dealing with monarch eggs or aphids? Learn how to tell the difference. Oh and, learn what milkweed bugs look like and whether or not you should be removing them, too.



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**Board Meetings are held on the second
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**Looking to have an impact in your
community?**

Become an Audubon Society of the Capital Region

Chapter Supporter!

As a Chapter Supporter, 100% of your membership dues stay local. This helps us support local conservation efforts, continue to promote birding and bird education, and to support other special initiatives, such as the construction of bird blinds. There are four Chapter Supporter memberships available:

Individual: \$20.00

Student: \$15.00

Couple (two persons residing in same home): \$35.00

**Family (three or more adults/children residing in same home):
\$50.00**

In return, you get:

- An official ASCR Chapter Supporter Membership card
- An ASCR Chapter Supporter window cling to prevent window strikes
- The satisfaction of knowing you are supporting local birds and their habitats

Click [here](#) for more information on how you can become an ASCR Chapter Supporter!!



Questions?

Email: capitalregionaudubon@gmail.com