



# Fyke Nature Association Winter Newsletter

Vol. 67 – No. 4 – 2021

**Due to Corona virus restrictions, member meetings will be online via Zoom, a link to register will be sent out in advance. If you are not on Zoom, you can register for free at <https://zoom.us/>  
Field trips will require face masks, social distancing, and no sharing of optics.  
Please check our website and emails for any updates on meetings and field trips.**

## **Calendar of Events**

Since mid-2015 Fyke's monthly speaker costs have been funded by a generous grant from the Winifred M. and George P. Pitkin Foundation.

## **Weekend Starting December 3, 2021, Friday – Members Night 2021, Kurt Muenz**

As things now stand, the usual first Friday in December monthly meeting cannot be held in person due to Corona Virus restrictions. In its place we're urging Fyke's many photographers to share nature pictures via email. So be on the lookout for these during and possibly beyond that weekend. Photographers able to share should contact Kurt, [elkumu@aceweb.com](mailto:elkumu@aceweb.com).

## **December 18, 2021, Saturday – Christmas Bird Count**

Lisa and Rob Fanning will be co-compiling the Ramsey CBC once again this year. It will be held on Saturday, December 18th. Please check Fyke's website and emails for updates on the CBC.



## **January 28, 2022, Friday -- Monthly Meeting: 8:00 p.m., via Zoom Amphibians of the Adirondacks, Ed Kanze**

Those who attended Ed Kanze's program at the October 2019 meeting thoroughly enjoyed his presentation. We're pleased that this noted naturalist, author, and lecturer will again be presenting to Fyke. This time he'll be doing so on Zoom from his Adirondack home in Bloomingdale, New York. Be sure to join and virtually meet the local frogs and salamanders.

***Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you.***

***~ Frank Lloyd Wright***

**Field and Feeder Notes**  
**By Judith Cinquina**

*...the Virginia Rail has the power of contracting its body to enable it to pass with more ease between the stalks of strong grasses or other plants. When observed unseen, it frequently jerks the tail upwards, in the manner of Gallinules, but the moment it notices any one of its enemies, it droops the tail, lowers its head, and runs off with the quickness of thought.*

*While at Charleston, in South Carolina, I frequently saw little strings of these birds exposed in the market, at a very low price; and they are excellent eating during autumn and winter.*

From *The Birds of America* by John James Audubon, Vol. V, Dover edition, 1967

Although many Fyke birders have seen Virginia Rails at the Celery Farm (CF), especially during winter when the marsh is frozen and the rail is restricted to a limited patch of open water, usually a Virginia Rail is a difficult bird to see, and often its pig-like grunts are all you get. Rochana Muenthongchin was gifted with the whole bird, August 28. She wrote that “it came with the wind,” a moderate northeast wind, at dawn. It was hunkered down among the flowers and herbs in a flower box on her Hackensack balcony. It stayed for five minutes, just long enough for her to take its photo, and went on its way.

Rochana’s photo captures its long, slightly decurved bill and short, thick neck. The base of the rail’s bill and its throat and upper chest are a pale, reddish brown and seem to match the color of the flowerbox it was in. Overall, it’s a dark bird, about Robin size but a bit plumper. John Workman commented, “I’ve heard of them as the occasional yard bird (for people living near a marsh), but never as a ‘window box bird!’” It probably wasn’t migrating. They usually move south along the east coast to our southern states or Central



© Rochana Muenthongchin

America starting in mid-October, although some have been known to stick around for Christmas Bird Counts, including those at the CF. Many, however, don’t survive very cold winters. Audubon mentions the rail’s ability to “contract its body.” A friend of mine worked for the NY Museum of Natural History cleaning bird skeletons and reported that rail bones were rubbery, an adaptation necessary for compressing the body to squeeze through dense reeds, phragmites, and grasses in a marsh. That’s where the expression “skinny as a rail” came from.

Quite a few Fyke members caught the C. Nighthawk migration at the end of August into early September. Valerie Moore observed two over Kings parking lot in Midland Park, August 23. That same evening, Stephanie Seymour counted 11 over her Ringwood yard, mostly singles. Jim Wright reported at least five over the CF on the 29th, and Amy Griffin stated she had seen “many” over the Waldwick Swim Club and considered them “a gift.” Nighthawks, like Chimney Swifts and swallows, hawk insect in flight. Nighthawks can be seen migrating in the middle of the day, although that isn’t common. In the fall, they appear magically at sunset and then vanish, like mythical creatures. Kevin Watson had the rare experience of finding three very real Nighthawks in his Hackensack yard, September 5. He wrote: “It’s been a few years since I’ve seen Nighthawks in my yard, typically hawking insects some distance away, but this evening

there are at least three roosting in an oak tree.” Nighthawks roost reclining lengthwise on a branch and resemble tree bark so closely that they’re difficult to detect. Kevin’s report continues: “What I found unusual, and what helped locate the first bird after it flew in, was that it was being mildly harassed by Robins and Blue Jays.” Kevin wondered why the Robins and Jays were so aggressive. To the Robins and Jays, the cryptically colored ball of fluff they observed lying on the branch may have looked much like a gray morph Screech Owl, a mortal enemy. And Screech Owls do consider Robins, and especially Jays, gourmet treats. I think they had good reason to get whatever occupied that ball of fluff out of the yard. Furthermore, I don’t believe Robins are that discerning when it comes to identifying dangerous creatures. I remember a flock of migrant Robins harassing a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers one fall at Ringwood Manor Park and pursuing them from tree to tree. Pileateds eat ants, not birds.

I always envy anyone who spots a Philadelphia Vireo in migration. They’re tough to come by. Doug Morel snagged one on September 7 at Mary Patrick Park in Mahwah. He reported it was among Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos and a few warblers. Moskoff and Robinson began their article on this vireo in Cornell’s Birds of the World, online, 2020, “Despite its abundance and wide geographic range, the Philadelphia Vireo remains one of North America’s most obscure birds.” The authors explain that the Philadelphia looks very much like a Red-eyed, although a bit smaller, and with a smaller bill and pale yellow throat. It also sings a very Red-eyed song that is a bit weaker and higher pitched. The authors believe the Philadelphia so closely resembles the Red-eyed that it is often not detected by even experienced birders. They further explain that the Philadelphia often breeds in the same habitat as a Red-eyed but manages to exclude it from its territory or modify its own behavior to avoid conflict with the Red-eyed. The authors label this an example of “adaptive interspecific territoriality.” The Philadelphia breeds further north than any other vireo and winters in southern Central America.

The drained lake at Crestwood Park in Allendale produced a number of good birds this fall. Probably the most unexpected was the White-rumped Sandpiper enjoyed by many Fyke members. According to Boyle, they appear inland after northeasterly winds and rain, which describes a good deal of our October weather. Alice Leurck photographed it on the 11th. Her photo shows the long wingtips that extend a bit beyond the end of the bird’s tail and gives the bird an elongated, ice cream cone shape. Alice also managed to



© Alice Leurck



© Alice Leurck

capture its definitive white rump in a photo as the bird stretched its wings. Other species enjoying the scattered puddles and mud at Crestwood were Solitary and Pectoral Sandpipers, Wilson’s Snipe and over a half dozen American Pipits. Pipits traditionally turn up in our area around Columbus Day on grassy areas and sparsely vegetated fields, a rare habitat in our area. They’re about the size of a Song Sparrow and breed north of us but may winter in NJ and south. In his Audubon Guide to Eastern Land Birds (1946), Richard Pough wrote: “The Pipits nod as they walk and when resting frequently move their tails up and down.” When they’re not moving, however, they’re a challenge to detect.

Quite a few Red-breasted Nuthatches were detected in our area this fall. Here's hoping some visit our winter feeders. Most were single birds: Lisa Potash at Halifax in Mahwah, October 8, Doug Morel and Nick Sweatlock during The Big Sit at the CF on the 10th, Doug Morel in Westwood, the 15th, and Stephanie Seymour in Ringwood most of August through October. My birding class enjoyed two at Ringwood Manor SP, October 21. The pair chatted back and forth constantly as they dashed here and there through hemlocks near the parking lot, until one finally took pity on us and rested on a tree trunk at eye level. Also, at Ringwood Manor that day was a Winter Wren who was in and out of a pile of logs and debris and was just as tiny and difficult to track as the nuthatches.

Lincoln's Sparrows were reported by a number of Fyke birders: one by Daniel Carola, September 15 and Loren Anderson, September 27, and Lisa Potash, October 6, all at Halifax, and two by Doug Morel in Westwood, September 30 and I had two at Parsons Pond in Franklin Lakes, October 20. Lincoln's Sparrows nest in wet places north of us and resemble Song Sparrows at a glance but have more delicate faces. Pough states that during migration they can be found "wherever there are dense thickets and weed tangles," but their skulking habits make them almost invisible. Although they're a common species, Pough believes "its regular occurrence on a 'birder's' year list is evidence of proficiency."

Charlie West and the Hour on the Tower crew enjoyed an "extraordinary" hour-long air show at the CF, September 19. "The Great Egret flock – some 6 to 8 birds – spent most of the time in flight, as did the gang of 4 to 6 Great Blue Herons," Charlie related. In addition, two Cooper's Hawks chased themselves or panicky prey through the phragmites, while a Belted Kingfisher "couldn't find a comfortable or effective perch." On October 3, Charlie and the Crew counted 25 – 30 Chimney Swifts and enjoyed their "constant and cheery chittering" over the marsh. According to Boyle's Birds of NJ 2011, Swift numbers peak in early September as they head south, but "stragglers" are seen through early November. Seems like 25-30 is more than a few stragglers.

Neil MacLennan's annual fall Robin roost count scored 300, October 21 at the CF. He counts the Robins as they come in to roost at dusk in the marsh. He noted two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers there on the 16th. Two more were at the Overpeck Stables in Ridgefield Park on the 7th and another two at Ringwood Manor on the 21st, and there were a number of reports of one at Halifax. Usually, we see males in the fall, and often its one adult with an immature who follows the adult around. The females tend to migrate further south. Males remain as far north as possible so they can make a quick run up to prime breeding territory as soon as winter breaks up. Laurie Neu discovered Sapsuckers in her huge oak tree in Montvale, October 13. They were high and spread out on two very large branches. Sapsuckers can be difficult to detect against a tree bark, but she managed to count six. "I was flabbergasted," she wrote. A very late male Rose-breasted Grosbeak spent 45 minutes feeding in beech trees in Stephanie Seymour's Ringwood yard, October 14. This species is usually gone by mid-October.

We all can enjoy a bit of knee-slapping bird humor. On August 29, Michael Sterling posted a photo entitled "Social Distancing" showing a Green Heron and a female Wood Duck, side by side, sans masks, at the CF. But some birds do enforce social distancing. I've noticed bathing Robins and Chickadees threaten anyone of their kind who dares join them in the bath. Yet, a mixed bag of warblers, a female Redstart, male Blue-winged Warbler and an immature Chestnut-sided seemed fine shoulder to



© Michael Sterling

shoulder, splashing and relaxing in my Upper Saddle River birdbath, August 30. Bob Thurston also posted a photo entitled “Where did all the birds go?” It shows a young Cooper’s Hawk perched atop his Allendale feeder with not a tasty little songbird in sight. The youngster has a lot to learn about hunting before winter sets in.



© Bob Thurston

If you haven’t already, it’s time to think about cleaning and setting up your feeders. Although we may see some Purple Finches and Red-breasted Nuthatches at our feeders, a big finch year is not predicted. Out in the field, the best places to find finches are hemlock and pine trees like those at Skylands and Ringwood Manors. Please keep your feeders clean and share your observations with us all. Join our discussion group at [fykenature@groups.io](mailto:fykenature@groups.io) where many of the reports for this column originated. Or send your observations to me at [judyinq@optonline.net](mailto:judyinq@optonline.net).

**The Big Sit! 2021**  
**By Carol Flanagan**

Thanks to all the members of our team, the Celery Stalkers, who participated our 26<sup>th</sup> Big Sit! on October 10, 2021. The Big Sit! is an event started by the New Haven Bird Club. The rules are simple, you sit inside a circle 17 feet in diameter for 24 hours and count all the bird species you see or hear. Our circle is centered at the Pirie–Mayhood Tower at the Celery Farm. Our total count this year was 38 species. We did not add any new species this year, so our cumulative total remains at 132 species. Unfortunately, due to the inclement weather our total species was the lowest count since we started The Big Sit! in 1995.



**Thank you to our Participants:**

John Bird, Bill Drummond, Brian Kenney, Doug Morel, Gaby Schmitt, Nick Sweatlock  
 Alan Pomerantz, and Charley West

**Species list:**

Double-crested Cormorant  
 Great Blue Heron  
 Turkey Vulture  
 Canada Goose  
 Wood Duck  
 American Black Duck  
 Mallard  
 Green-winged Teal  
 Great Egret  
 Cooper's Hawk  
 Red-shouldered Hawk  
 Merlin  
 Great Horned Owl

Mourning Dove  
 Belted Kingfisher  
 Red-bellied Woodpecker  
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
 Downy Woodpecker  
 Northern Flicker  
 Pileated Woodpecker  
 Blue Jay  
 Common Raven  
 American Crow  
 Black-capped Chickadee  
 Red-breasted Nuthatch  
 Carolina Wren

Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
 American Robin  
 Gray Catbird  
 European Starling  
 Yellow-rumped Warbler  
 Song Sparrow  
 Swamp Sparrow  
 White-throated Sparrow  
 Northern Cardinal  
 Red-winged Blackbird  
 Common Grackle  
 House Finch

**Prologue to an Hour on the Tower**

## COOx2 Aug'10 a.k.a. Charley West

The following story is perhaps true . . . . .

I'd gotten to the Pirie Tower early that Sunday, well in advance of the day's Hour x Tower. The humidity had not yet climbed to 'uncomfortable', and the gentle breeze felt good. The few birds that were singing were more than offset by a multi-voiced frog chorus that stemmed from every corner of Lake Appert.

I pondered as to whether they were talking to each other? What were they saying? And I wondered if somehow, a person could interpret their code and join in the discussion. Picture my dismay when the Schwarzenegger of all bullfrogs, from right in front of the Tower, croaked out an apparent Welcome. "Yo CooCoo, you're up & out early, trouble sleeping?" Startled though I was, I felt it best not evidence same and thus risk his displeasure and a cessation of a possible dialogue. I responded, "Naw, slept OK, I just like early morning and watching the sunrise. How about you? And you have me at a disadvantage, you know my name but I don't know yours?"

"Me? My folks call me 'Bennie', short for Catesbeina, a contraction from my diploma which reads: *Rana castebeina*."

"Your diploma? So you've graduated from a school or college?"

"Sure, all of us here in Lake A. have 'graduated' albeit it's more of a Technical School . . . it's where we learn to survive! There are a lot of critters out there that would love to 'invite' us to dinner, if you get my drift."

"To be honest with you *Catesbeina* . . ."

"Please call me Bennie."

"Sorry, well Bennie, I hate to seem indifferent but I never gave it much thought."

"Yeah! That's the trouble with you birder-types, you get all exercised over your feathered friends but all those Herons have it in for us Herps; not to mention the Raccoons, Snakes, Snappers, and the occasional myopic Osprey. Why just yesterday I was nearly breakfast for a GBH but I zigged when he zagged!"

"Wow! I'm glad he missed. I really like talking with you."

"Well that's nice to hear, usually it's only Pat-the-Nat that pays us any attention. Just last week, my cousins Greenie [*Rana clamitans melanota*] and Sylvia [*Rana sylvatica*] and I sent him a frogmail, it's like your e-mail, thanking him for instilling in a group of youngsters a respect for all of us Appert-ites. Speaking of 'youngsters', where's that Stiles guy? He's been a true friend too! We attempted to surprise him with a birthday cake, but with all those candles we nearly burned the Warden's Watch down!"

"I expect Stiles will be along any moment now, he really likes the HxT, unless of course he gets stuck in the mud in the brook again. Did you guys help get him out?"

"No. We would have but Allendale's finest got there first! Talk about Emergency Response!"

I inquired, “Bennie, do you and your friends have a pecking order here in the Lake?”

“Naturally! Pardon the pun he intoned with a smile; its basic premise is: Might Makes Right! We big guys get the best feeding stations and give the dregs to those panty-waist Peepers [Pseudacris crucifer crucifer] and the Toadies [Bufo americanus]. I guess it’s a little like your ‘system’.”

“Yeah. A little”, I offered meekly and with a tinge of guilt, acknowledging the subtle but accurate reproach.

Bennie countered, “Now I have a question for you, have you ever eaten frog legs?”

(Ouch! I should have suspected it might come to this) “Well’, I said, trying my best to diffuse the issue, “I have seen that item on certain menus.”

He smiled again (or was it a sneer?), “I won’t press the topic but I take your answer as a definite maybe.”

Seeking to appear magnanimous (and to shift the conversation), I queried, “Is there any message that you would like me to convey to the members of FYKE?”

Without hesitation he remarked emphatically, “**Tell them to treat CONSERVATION as if their life depends on it, IT DOES!**”

“I hear the Queen Bee and her entourage coming now, gotta go! Don’t croak on me!”

“What!!!”

“Just kidding.”

## **Holiday Shopping?**

If you are doing your online holiday shopping on Amazon, **Please DO NOT use Amazon Smile, use the link on the Fyke website.** It works for all purchases, and it doesn't cost you anything extra. Fyke does not endorse any particular merchant.

Log onto [www.fykenature.org](http://www.fykenature.org) and click on "Shop". On the next page, click on “Amazon”. Every month Amazon sends us a sales commission check.

The Smile program only contributes 0.5% to Fyke. The affiliate program contributes 1% to 10% depending on the items purchased.

Thank you for your participation!

## Dues Reminder from Fyke Treasurer Kurt Muenz

Thanks to those of you who are paid up for the September 2020 thru August 2021 Fyke year. However well over half of last year's members have not yet renewed their membership. If you are one of these, please immediately write yourself a note to pay your 2020/21 dues. That way you'll hopefully not forget to do so once you leave this newsletter issue.



Annual dues are \$20 for an individual and \$25 for a family. You can pay online at [www.fykenature.org](http://www.fykenature.org), or by check made out to Fyke Nature Association and mailed to Fyke Nature Association, Box 141, Ramsey, NJ 07446.

### Fyke Board of Trustees:

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**The Fyke Nature Association**, a 501 (c) (3) organization, meets eight times a year. The meeting dates for 2021 and 2022. All are Fridays.

November 2021 – no meeting	April 22, 2022	September 23, 2022
December 3, 2021	May 20, 2022	October 28, 2022
January 28, 2022	June - no meeting	November - no meeting
February 25, 2022	July - no meeting	December 2, 2022
March 25, 2022	August - no meeting	

Meetings and membership are open to all. Annual dues: \$20 for an individual and \$25 for a family. For further information, write to Box 141, Ramsey, NJ 07446, visit our website [www.fykenature.org](http://www.fykenature.org), or contact Mike Limatola, President, [mike.limatola@gmail.com](mailto:mike.limatola@gmail.com).

The Newsletter is published four times a year and manuscripts and artwork are welcome. **The deadline for the Spring 2022 issue is January 19, 2022.** Send material to Box 141, Ramsey, NJ 07446, or via e-mail to [carolflana@aol.com](mailto:carolflana@aol.com).

