

FYKE NATURE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

www.fykenature.org

Vol. 58 – No. 4 – Winter 2012



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November 23 - Monthly Meeting: 8:00 p.m., Allendale Municipal Building Members Night. Please come and enjoy an evening of short presentations by Fyke Members or better yet, be a presenter and share your own photos, prints, collections, stories, etc. For digital presentations, please contact Kurt Muenz at 201-447-0107 or elkumu@aceweb.com.

December 15 - Christmas Bird Count. An all day activity with a recap meeting open to all at the Allendale Municipal Building at 5:30 p.m. Details below.

January 25 - Monthly meeting: 8:00 p.m., Allendale Municipal Building Jim Wright presents *The Nature of the Meadowlands*. Jim Wright, deputy marsh warden of the Celery Farm, is the author of the new coffee-table book, *The Nature of the Meadowlands*. With a foreword by N.J. Governor Thomas H. Kean, the lavishly illustrated, 128-page coffee-table book illuminates the region's natural and unnatural history -- from its darkest days of a half-century ago to its environmental revival. Jim's slide show/talk offers highlights from the book, which combines striking nature photography with rare archival images. Jim has worked for the Meadowlands Commission since 2008. He also writes the Meadowlands Nature blog, the Celery Farm blog, and a twice-monthly birding column for *The Record* and *Herald News*. Copies of the book will be available for purchase and signing.

February 9 - Field Trip: The Teatown Hudson River Eaglefest at Croton Point Park in Croton-on-Hudson, NY. The hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Meet onsite. (Snow date February 10)

RAMSEY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT – 2012

By John Brotherton

Planning has started for our 61st annual Christmas Bird Count to be held Saturday December 15, 2012. The count is part of the 113th Christmas Bird Count a continent-wide program organized by the National Audubon Society. Last season our count was one of over 1,839 circles covered by 49,158 field observers who listed 60,502,185 birds in the US. Our group of 40 counted 16,438 birds of 81 species. As usual the leading counts in the US were in Texas and California where the top four counts had 215 to 244 species.

In New Jersey the leader among 30 counts was Cape May with 152 species. We can't expect to challenge that number, but we will be on the lookout for Cackling Goose (recently split from Canada Goose), Eurasian Wigeon, Eared Grebe, Wild Turkey, Spotted Towhee and Brown-headed Cowbird. We also hope for Northern Shrike,





Yellow-rumped Warbler, Common Redpoll, Pine Siskin and Evening Grosbeak. As most of you know we cover a 15 mile diameter circle centered on Lake Erskine, including all or part of Ramsey, Mahwah, Allendale, Wyckoff, Franklin Lakes, Oakland, Wayne, Pompton Lakes, Bloomingdale, Ringwood, West Milford, Greenwood Lake, Tuxedo, Hillburn, Sloatsburg and Suffern.

We will send at least eight teams to different sections of the area to count birds from dawn to dusk. Some teams will search for owls before and after daylight. The co-compilers are John Brotherton and Stiles Thomas. If you would like to join one of the teams call Stiles at 201-327-3470. For any other questions, call John at 201-327-1483 or jbro29@optonline.net.

The recap meeting, to which all are invited, will be held starting at 5:30 p.m. the day of the count at the Allendale Municipal Building Council Chambers, second floor. The Municipal Building is at 500 West Crescent Avenue, Allendale, NJ.



CLOUDS

By Judith Cinquina

Clouds are the breath of the earth, the exhalations of a sun-warmed giant. They express the moods of the earth, the lows and highs of its weather and sometimes the turbulence of its soul.

This may come as a surprise, but it is not the sun that warms our air. If that were true, mountain air would be hotter than valley air. It is the earth that creates our weather by radiating the sun's warmth back into the atmosphere. The earth's warm breath contains water droplets and other particles, and in the resulting clouds are a message for all to read about the mood of our planet.

But people don't remember how to read the sky anymore. According to folklore, we used to know. American Indians knew that cirrostratus clouds were precursors of a warm front and to expect rain. They had a saying: "When the moon wears a halo around her head, she will cry before morning and the tears (rain) will reach you tomorrow." Even during biblical times, people knew that the high, icy cirrus clouds that painted a sunset in brilliant colors were signs of fair weather and that weather traveled from west to east. One of our most familiar weather sayings appeared first in the Bible. In Chapter 16 of Matthew, Christ said, "When it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and lowering."

Clouds have inspired many artists, philosophers, writers and poets. In one of his plays Shakespeare implied that the earth's mood or weather could influence the day's events when he wrote, "Men judge by the complexion of the sky, the state and inclinations of the day." Clouds captured moods on canvases, especially during the age of Impressionism when many artists went outdoors to paint. Nineteenth century art critic John Ruskin urged artists to sketch clouds from nature instead of inventing them with blobs of paint. A connoisseur of clouds, Ruskin preferred the high cirri at sunset when "the sky does not remain of the same color for two inches

together” and the lower region rain cloud, cumulonimbus that electrified the imagination. The fair weather cumulus of the central region he found “comparatively uninteresting.” They were “quite good enough for all ordinary purposes...for cattle to graze, or boors to play at ninepins under...” but not the stuff of inspired artists.

Jasper F. Cropsey, a nineteenth century American painter, disagreed. He found the ordinary cumulus an invitation to fantasy. He described cumulus clouds as “grand masses of dreamy forms floating by each other, sometimes looking like magic palaces, rising higher and higher, and toppling over in deep valleys, to rise again in ridges like snowy mountains, with lights and shadow playing amid them, as though it were a spirit world of its own...” Cropsey, like Ruskin, was also inspired by lowering cumulonimbus. He wrote that the rain cloud or cumulonimbus is “in its grandest moods more impressive than all the other cloud regions...awakening the deepest emotions of gloom, dread, and fear, or sending thrilling sensations of joy and gladness through our being.”

In 1803, Luke Howard published an essay that classified and defined the basic cloud forms. Every school child is familiar with Howard’s fundamental classes of clouds: cirrus, cumulus, and stratus. There is even an International Atlas of Clouds whose many editions remain constant to Howard’s original paper. The United States Weather Bureau published a booklet entitled “Cloud Forms” based on this atlas. The Atlas classifies clouds by family, genus, and species. Sound familiar? Each family has its own specific habitat. Family A or High Clouds do not occur below 20,000 feet. This family includes three distinct genres: cirrus, cirrocumulus, and cirrostratus. The form and appearance of each cloud type is explicitly defined. Cirrus--- “Detached clouds of delicate and fibrous appearance, without shading, generally white in color, often of a silky appearance.” The description continues, “Cirrus clouds are always composed of ice crystals...Before sunrise and after sunset, cirrus is often colored bright yellow or red. These clouds are lit up long before other clouds and fade out much later...” The atlas even gives pointers on how to distinguish cirrus from other similar looking clouds. Habitat, description, habits, similarities to other species...sounds like Peterson’s field guide to the birds, but Howard published his observations more than a century before Peterson!

One attribute of the cloud has not yet been mentioned. In the Family of Clouds with Vertical Development, whose habitat ranges from the low stratus through the high cirrus, there is a species of cumulus cloud called “lenticularis”. I call it the companion cloud. Like a Red-tailed Hawk it can hang in the sky for long periods of time, seemingly motionless in spite of gale winds. Sometimes, when the sky has been high and dry and empty, and I have been alone on the lookout at Mount Peter, this cloud has kept me company. Created by a rising current of air caused by a mountain or other obstacle, this species refuses to sail on the wind. It can hover in one spot all day. Its secret is that it is continually growing at the windward edge and melting away at the leeward. A lenticular cloud is a comfort in an infinitely empty sky.

Clouds boil up and ride the sky all day as the earth heaves in and out its sun-warmed breath. Their ephemeral nature beguiles the artist and poet and confounds the weatherman. Without the ability to read their dark, lowering warning signs, our ancestors may not have survived. Without their ever evolving colors and forms, our vistas, our natural world, our lives would be greatly diminished. The *Peterson Field Guide to the Atmosphere* is a good place to start learning how to read the clouds. And, maybe some day when you are on a lonely vigil, a lenticular cloud will come to keep you company.





**Don's Jersey Birding: A life dedicated to the environment –
Jim Wright wins Bergen County Audubon's Conservation Award**

By Don Torino

I find it difficult to write about people I care about the most in life. I catch myself probing for the right words and deleting and rewriting sentence after sentence, agonizing in my quest, and struggling with my limited vocabulary to find the picture-perfect expressions and phrases that will help me convey to everyone why the person I am writing about is so extraordinary. Jim Wright is one of those remarkable people.

His many accomplishments portray an unspoiled example of a life dedicated to protecting and helping people learn about the environment. Jim is a remarkable person – a writer and author, serves on the board of trustees of the New Jersey Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, and also serves on their Conservation Committee. He is Deputy Warden at the Celery farm Natural area, Vice-President of Conservation for Fyke Nature Association, and Communications Officer for the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission.

Jim also has been active in the preservation of the historic Fell House and maintains the Celery Farm blog and the Meadowlands Nature blog. And yet all those titles and accomplishments are not what make him the exceptional man I have come to know. What makes him deserving of recognitions are the many times I have witnessed his determination and action when learning of a threat to our environment. I have seen him use patience and kindness when helping a youngster get started birding. Jim will write a great article and give everyone a new appreciation of nature, and then be on the trails pulling weeds, cutting branches, and picking up garbage. He is the real deal; his commitment to the betterment of the planet is unbending and his personal sacrifice to the environmental movement unquestioned.

I am very proud that Bergen County Audubon Society has chosen to honor Jim for the 2012 Harold Feinberg Conservation Award, but I am even more proud to call him my friend.

Note: Jim Wright will be presented with the award on December 19th (Wed.) 8 p.m. at Teaneck Creek Conservancy. Everyone is welcome to attend.

(Reprinted from the Wild New Jersey Blog, with permission of Don Torino.)



Hour on the Tower 9/2/2012, Stiles Thomas Labor Day Challenge

By Darlene Lembo

We started the hour with more observers than birds but ended it with 28 species, with the highlights being a Peregrine Falcon and American Kestrel. Not a bad total considering the overcast and humid weather, but still not enough to beat Stiles Thomas' team in Westport, Massachusetts, who had a total of 35 species, with their best birds being a Merlin and Wild Turkey.

Congratulations to Stiles and his team!!!

The Thomas List

Mallard
Wild Turkey
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Herring Gull
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Belted Kingfisher
Downy Woodpecker
Merlin
Blue Jay
American Crow
Tree Swallow
Black-capped Chickadee
White-breasted Nuthatch
Carolina Wren
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
Song Sparrow
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Grackle
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow

The HOT List

Belted Kingfisher
Blue Jay
Great Blue Heron
Gray Catbird
Mallard
Wood Duck
American Goldfinch
European Starling
Green-winged Teal
Northern Cardinal
Song Sparrow
Northern Flicker
American Crow
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Grackle
Rock Pigeon
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Cedar Waxwing
Northern Shoveler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Mourning Dove
Warbling Vireo
Carolina Wren
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Bobolink
Peregrine Falcon
American Kestrel



The Big Sit! October 14, 2012

By Carol Flanagan

Thanks to all team members of our team, the Celery Stalkers, who participated in this year's Big Sit! The Big Sit! is an event started by the New Haven Bird Club and now sponsored by *Birdwatchers Digest*. The rules are simple: you designate a circle 17 feet in diameter and sit inside the circle for 24 hours, and count all the bird species you see or hear. Our circle is centered at the Pirie Platform at the Celery Farm. This was the 18th year we competed in The Big Sit!



Our total this year was 57 species. This year five new species were seen: Great Horned Owl, Pine Siskin, Warbling Vireo, White-eyed Vireo, and Tennessee Warbler. They bring our cumulative total to 119 species!

Team members were:

Stiles Thomas – Team Captain
John Bird
Malcolm Chesworth
Barbara Dilger
Darlene Lembo
Mike Limatola
Doug Morel
Kurt Muenz

Gabrielle Schmitt
Suzanne Serafini
Simon Streatfeild
Michael Tat
Charley West
Penny Whitlock
John Workman
Jim Wright

List of species seen:

American Black Duck
American Coot
American Crow
American Goldfinch
American Kestrel
American Robin
American Wigeon
Belted Kingfisher
Black Vulture
Black-capped Chickadee
Blue Jay
Blue-winged Teal
Brown-headed Cowbird
Canada Goose
Carolina Wren
Cedar Waxwing
Common Grackle
Common Yellowthroat
Coopers Hawk
Double-crested Cormorant
Downy Woodpecker

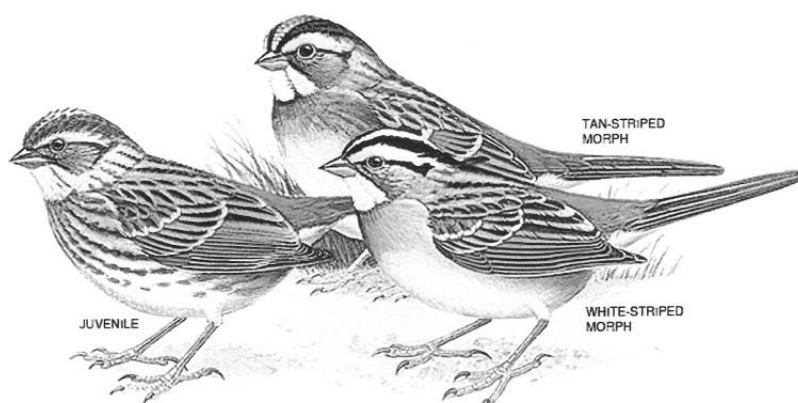
Eastern Phoebe
European Starling
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Great Horned Owl
Green-winged Teal
Lesser Yellowlegs
Mallard
Merlin
Mourning Dove
Northern Flicker
Northern Harrier
Northern Shoveler
Palm Warbler
Pine Siskin
Purple Finch
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-winged Blackbird
Ring-billed Gull
Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Rusty Blackbird
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Song Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
Tennessee Warbler
Tree Swallow
Tufted Titmouse
Turkey Vulture
Warbling Vireo
White-breasted Nuthatch
White-eyed Vireo
White-throated Sparrow
Wilson's Snipe
Wood Duck
Yellow-rumped Warbler



FIELD AND FEEDER NOTES

By Judith Cinquina



“This pretty little bird (the White-throated Sparrow) is a visitor of Louisiana and all the southern districts...

How it comes and how it departs are to me quite unknown. I can only say, that, all of a sudden, the edges of the fields bordering on creeks or swampy places, and overgrown with different species of vines, sumac bushes, briars, and the taller kinds of grasses, appear covered with these birds. They form groups, sometimes containing from thirty to fifty individuals...It is a plump bird, fattening almost to excess, whilst in Louisiana, and affords delicious eating, for which purpose many are killed with blow-guns.”

The Birds of America by John James Audubon

I was surprised that Audubon went on to state it was “impossible” for him to describe the White-throated Sparrow’s song, even though the song was “ringing” in his ear. Even new birders probably can describe its very beautiful but melancholy, whistled song. Richard H. Pough in his *Audubon Bird Guide: Eastern Land Birds*, 1946, described it phonetically as “Old Sam, Peabody, Peabody, Peabody, Peabody.” Although it nests in some of our northern states and occasionally in New Jersey, its primarily breeding range is across Canada, so I guess Chris Earley’s interpretation, “home sweet Canada, Canada, Canada,” is appropriate. Earley’s *Sparrows & Finches of the Great Lakes Region & Eastern North America*, 2003, is a great little guide for new and seasoned birders and can be ordered from Amazon. Unfortunately, when White-throats first appear in the fall, it means winter can’t be far behind, and Rob Fanning had five of them at the Celery Farm (CF) on October 5. Even earlier was another migrant snowbird, a Dark-eyed Junco found by Tom Nicastrri on Franklin Lakes corporate property, September 21.

Most exciting was the Clay-colored Sparrow that Rosemarie Widmer discovered at Crestwood Lake, Allendale, September 27. Very buffy and gray this time of year, it preferred to hug the phragmites border around the perimeter of the drained lake. Small like its close cousin, the Chipping Sparrow, it almost disappeared in the mowed grass. Clay-coloreds breed west and north of us primarily on the prairies. This or another one was still present there, October 7,

according to Rosemarie and was enjoyed by quite a few Fyke birders. At least seven others were reported in New Jersey, including one at Garret Mountain, September 11 and another at Ringwood Manor, October 9. A Lincoln's Sparrow was discovered at Halifax in Mahwah by Doug Morel, September 29. A bit smaller than a Song Sparrow, with finer breast streaks, a



sweeter face, and a shorter tail, the Lincoln's sports a buffy band across its upper chest and is comparatively shy and retiring. Except for those found in the New York Adirondacks, most breed in swampy areas west and north of us, from Alaska to Nova Scotia, and Rising (*The Sparrows of the United States and Canada*, 1996) states that the species seems to be increasing because people don't want its soggy real estate. Not unusual in our area during fall migration, three were reported by Rob in the CF, October 5, Doug's or another Lincoln's was seen by Jim Hayes at Halifax, October 11, and yet another turned up at Crestwood Lake, the next day. It's a skittish sparrow that flushes at the least disturbance and requires stealth and patience from its stalkers.

A Sedge Wren looked John Workman over for 30 seconds at Halifax, October 8 before disappearing into a matted tangle of wet grasses and weeds. An endangered species in New Jersey, this nomadic species is a bit smaller than our Marsh Wren and is an opportunistic breeder, rarely breeding in the same place from year to year. It all but disappeared as a nesting species in our state in the late 1900's. As its name suggests, this wren nests in wet sedge and grass meadows, preferably at the edge of a salt marsh. John wrote: "...people don't 'find' a Sedge Wren..." It selects a random birder and "pops up just long enough to keep its name on the local checklists." On September 11, John discovered a Connecticut Warbler at the CF near Phair's Pond where he's found them in other years. John shared his find with some very lucky Bergen County Audubon folks who were on a field trip at the CF. I guess the birding gods like John because they rewarded him with another Connecticut, October 6, at Mahwah Green Acres. A male Hooded Warbler made a surprise visit to my Upper Saddle River birdbath, August 24, and Fred Weber had one in his Sussex County birdbath around the same time. Hoodeds are early migrants. An Orange-crowned Warbler turned up at Halifax, September 29, Doug Morel reported. This very plainly attired species breeds in the West and across Canada, but singles are sometimes found wintering in New Jersey and recorded on some Christmas Bird Counts, especially along our coast. In 2011, one overwintered at DeKorte Park in Lyndhurst. Doug also found a White-eyed Vireo there that same day. And speaking of vireos, Rob got a "brief glimpse" of an uncommon Philadelphia Vireo at the CF, September 6, always a nice treat.

Migrant Blue-gray Gnatcatchers turned up in Ann Plaisted's Ramsey yard, September 5 and Barbara Urban's yard in Fair Lawn, the next day. Rob had three more at the CF, September 14. Smaller than our Chickadee and shaped like a miniature Mockingbird, this insect-eating bird has a prolonged fall migration. Once, one even stayed around long enough to be counted on Fyke's 2001 Christmas Bird Count, a first for our then 50-year-old CBC. Simon Streatfeild encountered a few Bobolinks in their golden winter plumage in the tall grasses below the Mahwah Sheraton, September 16. Rob was the first to detect Red-breasted Nuthatches and Purple Finches. He heard both at the CF, August 20 and was prescient when he wrote, "a great sign for a strong movement of these birds which were just about absent last fall." Both species have been noted moving south over Mount Peter, and others have been noted at the CF, Halifax, Ringwood State Park, and at feeders, including Rosemarie Widmer's in Allendale. On October 15, her feeders attracted both species along with 15 Pine Siskins. Tim Tedesco was the first to report a dozen Siskins at his Oakland feeders, October 5. Others were noted at Lorrimer Sanctuary in Franklin Lakes and Carol Flanagan's feeder in Hawthorne. Whether they will move south of us or stay depends on local cone crops.

Darlene Lembo reported a mini hawk movement from her Hour on the Tower watch, September 16. It's surprising that not a Broad-winged Hawk was seen. That date is, after all, the peak migration time for Broadwings. Regardless, her list included Sharp-shinned Hawk, N. Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, and American Kestrel. Not a bad haul. In addition to the CF, American Kestrels were found at Halifax (Tom Nicastrì, September 22), at least three pairs were at DeKorte at the end of August, and a pair hunted Crestwood Lake, September 28. John Workman noted a Merlin checking out songbird prey at Mahwah Green Acres, October 6.



Many birds are opportunists. They watch and observe where others find food and give it a try. But Downy Woodpeckers sipping nectar from a long hummingbird feeder tube seems weird. Nancy Drabik, however, provided photos of this behavior in her Wyckoff yard. She had to chase away both a male and female Downy repeatedly all summer so her hummingbirds could get to the feeders. Besides strong helmets and jaw muscles that allow woodpeckers to drill into insect infested wood, Downies also possess long, sticky tongues that can extract insects and larvae from deep crevices, so it's not a stretch for them to switch to slurping up sweet nectar from a tube. They also relish viburnum and poison ivy berries. Their varied diet enhances their survival.

Eight Pied-billed Grebes hung out on Sally Pond, Ringwood State Park on September 23. Eight were still there on October 14 when one dived and surfaced with a sunfish or "sunny." Sunnies are almost as wide as they are long and sport sharp spines on their dorsal fins to discourage predators, but this grebe was undeterred. For the next 15 minutes, it partially swallowed, then regurgitated that wide, pancake-like fish, dropped it and came up with it again, all to no avail. With each partial swallow, the grebe's head expanded, but never did the fish's tail disappear inside. Although grebes swallow feathers that shield their stomachs from sharp bones and spines, they also have strong jaws that can crush sunny and catfish spines, crustaceans, and crabs, so the meal goes down easier. During the entire struggle, a second grebe chased, dived after, and hounded the first. The pair even performed a quick run over the pond surface, kicking up water in the process. Finally the grebe gave up, dropped the fish, which was immediately retrieved by the stalker, and within minutes, the sunny disappeared down that grebe's throat, but not without some gyrations.

Please send your observations to me at judycinq@optonline.net or call me at (201) 327-1782. For information on the latest bird sightings, go to www.fykenature.org and sign up with our Yahoo discussion group where many of the reports for this column originated.



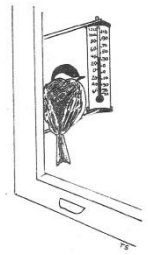
WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Lyn Birenbaum, Hillsdale
Maureen Casey, Waldwick
Debora & Dave Conley, Allendale
Diane Chambers, Waldwick

Dennis & Bette Karoly, Midland Park
Nancy Fanale & Joseph Porter, Oakland
Patrick Scheuer & family, Franklin Lakes
Craig & Irene Schriever, Waldwick

GIFT IDEAS!

The 2013 Celery Farm Calendars are available!
The donation of \$15.00 per calendar, after covering costs, will continue to fund the Stiles and Lillian Thomas Scholarship.



Celery Farm T-shirts and Celery Farm caps are also available!

DID YOU RENEW YOUR FYKE MEMBERSHIP?

The new membership year for Fyke starts September 1, 2012 and ends August 31, 2013. This means that annual dues should be paid now. As of October 17, 45% of our members have renewed. The dues schedule is: Individual -- \$15.00, and Family -- \$20.00. Checks should be made out to Fyke Nature Association, and mailed to John Brotherton, 249 E. Crescent Avenue, Mahwah, NJ 07430. Thank you!

FOR YOUR SEASONAL SHOPPING! HERE'S AN EASY WAY TO SUPPORT FYKE

Don't forget that we now have a direct link to AMAZON from our website. Fyke does not endorse any particular merchant but just log onto www.fykenature.org and you will find the link on the first page. Every month AMAZON sends us a sales commission check. Thank you for your participation.

The Fyke Nature Association, a 501 (c) (3) organization, meets the fourth Friday of every month except June, July, August, and December at the Allendale Municipal Building, 500 W. Crescent Avenue, Allendale, NJ 07401.

Meetings and membership are open to all. Annual dues: Individual -- \$15.00; Family -- \$20.00. For further information, write to Box 141, Ramsey, NJ 07446, visit our website www.fykenature.org, or call Mike Limatola, President, at 201-739-8062.

The Newsletter is published four times a year and manuscripts and artwork are welcome. Interim Editor: Carol Flanagan, carolflana@aol.com. Drawings: Nancy Bristow and Kathryn Sjolander. Production: Herb Gardener (labels) and Molly Gardener.

The deadline for the spring issue is January 23, 2013. Send material to Box 141, Ramsey, NJ 07446.

