



# Fyke Nature Association

## Summer Newsletter

Vol. 71 — No. 2 — 2024

[www.fykenature.org](http://www.fykenature.org)

### **Programs\***

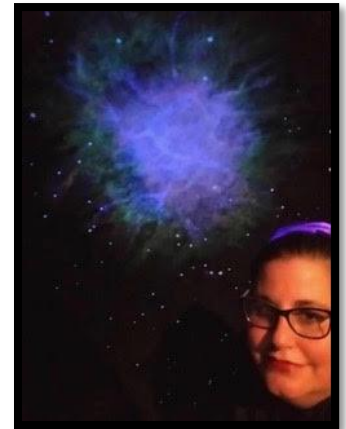
Since mid-2015 Fyke's monthly speaker costs have been funded by a generous grant from the Winifred M. and George P. Pitkin Foundation.

#### ***Friday April 26, 2024- Monthly Meeting, 8:00 pm via Zoom***

#### **The Connection Between Migration & Astronomy with Lisa Fanning**

Many people are familiar with the effects of solar eclipses on animal behavior, but what about the stars or moon phases? What is their link to the bird and animal world? How is migration impacted? Birder, conservationist, and amateur astronomer Lisa Fanning will explore these questions and more along with interesting case studies.

Lisa is a longtime member and volunteer for Monmouth County Audubon and other conservation organizations across New Jersey. She is also the compiler for the Ramsey Christmas Bird Count along with her husband, Rob. She is a recipient of the Explore the Moon and Explore the Universe Observing Certificates from the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, editor of the Halifax Centre's Nova Notes newsletter, creator of "Lisa's Look Up!" on Facebook, a member of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton and contributor to their monthly online newsletter, Sidereal Times.



Lisa Fanning

#### ***Friday May 17, 2024 - Monthly Meeting, 8:00 pm live at the Allendale Municipal Building***

Get together with fellow Fyke members and help close out our last presentation before we break for summer. Tonight, Fyke member and avid photographer and traveler Kumar Patel will present. As of press time, a topic hadn't been chosen. But you can be assured it will be eye-opening, educational, and entertaining. More to come.

### **Events & Field Trips**

#### ***Saturday, April 6, 2024, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM***

#### **Annual Spring Celery Farm Cleanup**

The winter snow melt reveals what has been left behind by certain visitors or blown in or carried down the flooded Allendale Brook. Many hands make light work. Meet at the end of [Green Way](#).

Bring gloves and a tool if you have one to assist in grabbing and picking up trash, such as a rake, broom handle with a nail at the end, or grabbers. Garbage bags will be provided.

Contact Mike Limatola [mike.limatola@gmail.com](mailto:mike.limatola@gmail.com) to let him know you are coming. Rain date Sunday, April 7.

\* Information is accurate at the time of printing. Please check [The Fyke Nature Association Home](http://The Fyke Nature Association Home) for any updates.

**Saturday April 20, 2024, 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM**

**Discover the Plants of the Celery Farm**



Trout Lillies

Enjoy finding early spring wildflowers and other plants. Meet at the end of [Green Way](#).

Mike Lefebvre is a naturalist who has led Plant ID Walks and Talks for the Fyke Nature Association, Friends of the Bonsal Preserve (Montclair) the Friends of the NJ School of Conservation (Stokes State Forest) and Bergen County Audubon Society. He is the Publicity Chairperson for the Fyke Nature Association and currently working as a teacher naturalist for NJ Audubon's Lorrimer Sanctuary. He kept a nature blog (now retired) which documented local hikes along with flora and fauna for many years. Mike's hobby is documenting the flora of local nature preserves including the Celery Farm.

Contact Mike LeFebvre [njurbanforest@hotmail.com](mailto:njurbanforest@hotmail.com) to let him know to expect you. Rain date Sunday, April 21.

**Saturday & Sunday May 4-5, 2024**

**Stepping Up For The Celery Farm**

Our annual fundraiser is based on the number of bird species observed over a two-day period by citizen-scientists like you. To sign up for the count, please contact Gabriele Schmitt at [gaby413@aol.com](mailto:gaby413@aol.com).



Pledges per species can be emailed to our Treasurer, Kurt Muenz, at [elkumu@acweb.com](mailto:elkumu@acweb.com) or mailed to:  
Fyke Nature Association  
PO Box 141, Ramsey. NJ 07446

**Stepping Up For The Celery Farm Pledge Form – 2024**

Yes, I want to support Stepping Up For The Celery Farm by making a pledge per bird species seen over the two-day period. I understand that 65 to 93 species have been recorded, however, the total could be higher if conditions are ideal.

My pledge is: \_\_\$1/species \_\_\$.75/species \_\_\$.50/species \_\_\$.25/species \$\_\_\_/species

Name:

Address:

Phone:

**Saturday, June 29, 2024, 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM**

**Discover the Plants of the Celery Farm**

Enjoy finding early summer wildflowers and other plants. Meet at the end of [Green Way](#).

Mike Lefebvre is a naturalist who has led Plant ID Walks and Talks for the Fyke Nature Association, Friends of the Bonsal Preserve (Montclair) the Friends of the NJ School of Conservation (Stokes State Forest) and Bergen County Audubon Society. He is the Publicity Chairperson for the Fyke Nature Association and currently working as a teacher naturalist for NJ Audubon's Lorrimer Sanctuary. He kept a nature blog (now retired) which documented local hikes along with flora and fauna for many years. Mike's hobby is documenting the flora of local nature preserves including the Celery Farm.

Contact Mike LeFebvre [njurbanforest@hotmail.com](mailto:njurbanforest@hotmail.com) to let him know to expect you. Rain date Sunday, June 30.



Buttonbush

Check for updates on Fyke field trips here: <https://www.fykenature.org/trips.php>

**Every Sunday 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM at the Celery Farm**

**Hour on the Tower**



Usually on the Pirie-Mayhood Tower platform.

Everyone is invited to join with the group of regulars who keep a list of every species of bird they can identify over the course of one hour. It's a good way to improve your birding skills and catch up on Celery Farm news. The location may shift between the Pirie-Mayhood Tower platform on the east side of Lake Appert and the Warden's Watch platform near the Franklin Turnpike parking area. .

[Contact Gaby Schmitt](#) to find out where to meet up.

**Self-Directed Exploration Open to Fyke Members**

**North Harpersfield Property**

George Rand and Pamela Ryder invite Fyke members to visit 135 acres of forest, field, stream, and pond in upstate NY. Please see the website to download and print [essential information](#) you must read before your visit, including directions, contact numbers, release and waiver document, lodging, and area attractions, as well as a [map of the property](#).

## The Fyke Nature Association at 2024 Super Science Saturday By Mike Lefebvre & Lee Stoeski

After a hiatus of many years, Fyke was once again present at Super Science Saturday in Ridgewood on March 2nd. Fyke was represented by Mike Lefebvre and Lee Stoeski. These Fyke volunteers took the opportunity to educate school-age children and adults about the wonders of the Celery Farm Nature Preserve and the work of Fyke volunteers.

One wonder that was discussed to visitors was a branch covered in lichen. Mike and Lee explained to visitors how lichen is a unique organism that thrives in symbiosis between fungi and algae. This fascinating fact about lichen and its significance as an indicator of air quality was also discussed. In addition to discovering lichen, visitors were educated about the various insects that inhabit the forest floor, particularly under branches and logs.



*Lichen at Super Science Saturday*

Mike Limatola and Sue Dougherty were in attendance and helpfully took over duties at the Fyke table for a spell to give Mike Lefebvre and Lee Stoeski a break.

Attendees were delighted to receive an educational handout created by Lee about the Celery Farm Nature Preserve's ecosystem. The handout highlights the relationships within ecosystems, using the Celery Farm Nature Preserve with its variety of habitats as an example. The document emphasized the importance of conservation efforts at the Celery Farm, which include installing nesting boxes, controlling invasive species, and creating a pollinator meadow and encouraged individuals to contribute by planting native species at their home. The link to the educational handout may be found here → [The Fyke Nature Association Celery Farm Ecosystem](#)

Many of the Super Science Saturday participants were already very familiar with the Celery Farm—including Boy Scouts, Allendale residents, and passionate birders—and we spoke to those who hadn't visited before about respect for nature, birdwatching opportunities, the positive effects of wetlands, and driving directions.

Participants were encouraged to visit the Celery Farm Nature Preserve on their own and were informed of the upcoming April 20<sup>th</sup> Celery Farm plant identification walk that will be hosted by Mike Lefebvre. This upcoming walk promises to be an exciting opportunity for nature enthusiasts to learn more about the local flora and develop their skills in recognizing and understanding the various plant species within the Celery Farm Nature Preserve.

## New Wood Duck Boxes at the Celery Farm

By Jim Wright

Wood ducks are among the world's most beautiful ducks, and like so many of Mother Nature's creatures, they often face a housing shortage. Thanks to Scott Weston, my co-author for "The Screech Owl Companion," I may have found an answer for the Celery Farm

A bit of background: The colorful waterfowl are called wood ducks because they once nested primarily in the hollows of trees. But as our human population expanded, the ducks were almost hunted to extinction by the late-19th century, and their habitat kept shrinking.

To remedy the situation, naturalists built large wooden nest boxes and put them high on trees near the water in their traditional nesting areas. The boxes also proved popular with raccoons that liked to pilfer duck eggs and with squirrels that wanted to nest there.

To thwart unwelcome intruders, the nest boxes were placed on poles in marshes and ponds. The only trouble was that these boxes were often hard to monitor and maintain, and the design's wooden roofs tended to rot over time.

Most of the Celery Farm's wood duck boxes, placed on poles on Lake Appert, were no longer functional. I asked Scott to design a critter-resistant nestbox on trees for wood ducks like he did for screech owls. Scott quickly designed a large nestbox with a steeply pitched roof, and recommended a new product called Acre board, made of recycled rice hulls. It's an effective building material for the boxes because the board's surface is too slick for the squirrels and raccoons to hold onto.

Another fascinating aspect of Scott's design is a nod to traditional wood duck boxes. Inside each box is a little metal-wire ladder. Using its egg tooth and the little claws on its webbed feet, a newly hatched wood duckling can climb to the opening, jump and enter that wide, wild world of ours.

The question is, how will the wood ducks take to their new digs? To field test the latest design, Carl Krag, a volunteer at the Celery Farm built eight prototype nest boxes, and several of us volunteers placed them about nine feet off the ground on trees around the preserve, hopefully in time for nesting season this spring.

With the help of selfie sticks, we plan to monitor the nest boxes to see which locations work best and how many eggs (fingers crossed) each nest box produces.

These are uncharted waters, and we'll learn more as we go along.

I plan to write about the project again after nesting season. In the meantime, I'd love to hear your thoughts.

*This article was adapted from Jim's March 14 Bird Watcher column in The Record.*



*Screech Owl expert Scott Weston designed this new Wood Duck box for the Celery Farm, and volunteer extraordinaire built eight of them for the preserve.*

*Photo by Jim Wright*



*Wood ducks are among the world's most stunning birds.*

*Photo by Jerry Barrack*

## Field and Feeder Notes

By Judith Cinquina

*The Pied-billed Grebe tried to swallow a sunfish, a pancake-shaped fish as wide as it was long, with 10 to 11 very sharp spines on its dorsal fin and three on its anal fin. The grebe got the fish partway down a number of times, throat expanding each time, fish tail hanging out of its mouth, then dropped the fish, retrieved it and tried to swallow it again. The process went on for 15 minutes, all the while a second grebe pursued it, diving and coming up behind. In defense, the lead grebe pattered across the water, kicking up a spray. Finally, it just gave up and dropped the fish, which the second grebe grabbed, struggled a few times but got the fish down, probably helped by all the tenderizing the first grebe had done.*

J. Cinquina, Ringwood Manor Park, October 14, 2012 Notes

Usually restricted to more southern haunts in winter in NJ, Pied-billed Grebes managed to find open water all winter in our area. John Coyle found one at Ramapo Valley County Reservation January 6, Doug Morel reported one at Halifax on the 15<sup>th</sup> and another at Parsons Pond, February 3, both Brian Kenney and Maryann Fahey noted a grebe at Oradell Reservoir both months, and Charlie West had yet another at Eagle Lake in Sterling Forest, March 7. Some photos were taken, but not one word of behavior was mentioned. Maybe, as Richard Pough suggests, it's the grebe's fault. In his Audubon Water Bird Guide (1951), Pough labeled the Pied-billed "one of our shiest of the grebes". He continued: it "manages to keep out of sight so well that its presence is often unsuspected. If surprised it can slowly submerge until only its bill is visible or swim under water to the nearest cover where it can emerge unseen". The Hell-Diver, as old timers called the Pied-billed, is distributed across the Americas from Canada to South America. Its behavior is interesting, if you can study it undetected. They hang out in freshwater marshes, lakes or sluggish rivers and will feed on whatever is available, including crustaceans, frogs, fish, tadpoles or insects. That sunfish the grebe swallowed at Ringwood Manor could have been lethal if the grebe's digestive track was pierced by the sharp Sunfish spines. But grebes practice preventative medicine and swallow their own feathers periodically to insulate their stomachs. In fact, the fist "meal" they give their young is feathers to protect them from sharp fish bones.

Males are larger than females and are aggressive defenders of their territories, attacking rivals and enemies from underwater, according to Llimona, del Hoyo, Christie, Jutglar and Kerwan (2016) Birds of the World online. To escape danger, they may crash dive and kick up water several feet into the air, or as Pough suggested, sink like a submarine among the water weeds. If they have young and sense danger, they will dive with the youngsters clamped under their wings. In the mid-1980's, the Kearny Marsh supported 150 breeding Pied-bills, but changes in the marsh caused the species to abandon the area. They are no longer known to breed in the Fyke area and are listed as "Endangered" by NJ. In spite of their heavy bodies and stubby wings and the need for a running start over the water, they are capable of extended flights and have reached the Hawaiian Islands and Europe. Ordinarily, we don't see them in flight because they migrate at night.

Other species that don't receive enough attention from birders are the gulls, and it's not because they know how to hide. It's because they become invisible among flocks of their kind and require a birder's patience and willingness to check each individual gull for the uncommon or rare find. John Coyle hit the jackpot with two at DeKorte in the Meadowlands. The first was a Lesser Black-backed Gull on February 23. He noted its dark mantle and that it was longer winged and more slender than nearby Herring Gulls. It resembles a Great Black-backed but is smaller and has bright yellow instead of pale gray legs, as an adult. John's gull, however, was a sub-adult, which makes its ID more difficult. This gull was very rare until the mid-80's and can now be found wintering by the dozens at Round Valley and Spruce Run reservoirs. An immature Glaucous Gull was John's second gull, found on the 28<sup>th</sup> on Dekorte's Saw Mill Flats. Larger and bulkier than a Herring Gull, it was overall

pale with white primaries. John noted its “bi-color” bill. Brian Kenney found the gull still present two days later. Boyle, in his Birds of NJ (2011), mentions that almost all of the Glaucous Gulls found in NJ are immature and that the best place to find one is at the Sussex County landfill.

Open waters attracted Great Egrets that usually aren’t here in the winter. The first report came from Brian Kenney of a Great Egret feeding in a pond in Northvale, January 27. Another was reported that same day at Teaneck Creek Conservancy and later seen by both Brian and John. Julie McCall had another fly into the Celery Farm (CF), February 21, where it was seen later by Doug Morel and Neil MacLennan. It’s odd to have a Great Egret on the Rare Bird Alert in our area. Usually, the first Great Egrets appear in mid-March. Knowing when birds are early, late or expected is a big part of birder’s important skills. The first Tree Swallows of the year also arrived early by a week. Julie McCall noted one seen by the CF’s Hour on the Tower crew, March 3, the same day one was spotted by Brian Kenney at Parsons Pond, Franklin Lakes, and by John Coyle at DeKorte. All these early birds suggest that we had a light dose of winter. Winter Wrens certainly benefited from the mild weather. Julie’s Tower crew noted one survivor that persisted through March 3 at the CF. Another was at Halifax February 9 and a third was at Rockland Lake, singing on the 27<sup>th</sup>.



*Photo by Bob Kane*

Northern finches were non-existent in our area this winter. The only exception was the lone Pine Siskin that appeared at Betty McDonnell’s feeder in Mahwah. She wrote that she hadn’t seen a Siskin in her yard in the last two years, but her Merlin app identified one in her yard on February 22. Then she discovered it on her feeder and noted its “fine little beak” and “notched tail.” It was probably a female. She didn’t notice any yellow on the bird. Doug Morel reported an early Chipping Sparrow in his Mahwah yard, March 10. They usually arrive towards the end of the month, so it fit the trend this winter. The first E. Phoebe reported was seen by the Tower crew, March 17. Now that bird was right on schedule. Julie McCall dubbed it the “Bird of the Day.”

A male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker returned to Gaby Schmitt’s Bergenfield yard, March 6. She was happy to see its return but happier when she discovered a second adult male in the same tree. They were at their “wells” sipping sap, she reported. The woodpeckers are on their way north to establish territories. The females, who winter further south, will arrive later. Boyle writes that Christmas Bird Count tallies for this woodpecker have increased in recent decades from 20 in the mid-1970’s to 200 recently. Since 1998 they have been breeding along the Kittatinny Ridge and in High Point SP.

Fyke’s annual Woodcock field trip produced three or four displaying males at Halifax, March 8. Mike Limatola led the trip and reported that most of the activity was short and close to the ground. Those present enjoyed views of one male Woodcock out in the open about 100 feet away. Amy Griffin and her son saw two Woodcocks there in early March and even more called and fluttered over their heads. Woodcock courtship flights begin about a half an hour after sunset, when males launch themselves high overhead, often out of sight, and spiral down, wings whistling eerily. That whistle is produced by modifications of its three outer primaries. This mild winter has made life easy for a Woodcock, too. The ground is saturated and easy to probe for worms, its favorite prey, with its long bill. The tip of its bill is as sensitive as our lips and can open independently from the rest of its bill and grasp dinner while still underground. Amy complained that the minute it’s too dark for photographs is when they choose to appear. On a still night, under a full moon, they might perform their courtship dances all night.

Spring has arrived. Prepare your feeders for the hummingbirds. Their food sources are few and far between in early spring. Maybe Gaby will find one at the wells her sapsuckers have provided. That sugary sap allows a hummingbird to survive cold snaps, especially up north where the sapsuckers breed. Devote a few days to enjoy the colorful parade of warblers, orioles, tanagers and others as they move through. It all happens too fast for us as the birds race to beat others to the best territories further north. Whether at your feeder or out in the field,

please share what you find with all of us at [fykenature@groups.io](mailto:fykenature@groups.io) where many of the reports for this column originated, or send your observations to me at [judycinq@optonline.net](mailto:judycinq@optonline.net).

## Website Notes

By Tom Mitchell

### Content additions and enhancements

Mike LeFebvre and Lee Stoeski represented Fyke at Super Science Saturday in Ridgewood and the handout that Lee produced for the event got repurposed as a new webpage explaining the concept of the [Celery Farm Ecosystem](#) with a sidebar link on the Celery Farm webpage.

The [Pollinator Meadow](#) under development is another new webpage that also has a sidebar link on the Celery Farm webpage. And the [Butterfly Garden](#) page has additional text with some history and a shout out to the volunteers who created and maintained it.

The [Celery Farm Annual Bird List Report](#) now includes a separate list of Recent Sightings to let you easily see new arrivals. This data will let us track historical arrival dates over time. Besides what has been seen, *what has not been seen* is informative. You can now run a report that shows which birds on the Celery Farm all-time list have not been seen yet this year. The individual lists also have an option to show the birds you have not reported yet this year, which will help people like me who lose track of what they have previously reported. The overall report shows 77 species have been reported as of March 18.

### A request

The Fyke Nature Association has a long and varied history since its founding in 1952 that is slowly being lost to the ages. Our senior members have stories to tell and perhaps also documents saved in storage that would be interesting and informative to make available to everyone today and into the future. I'd like to include as much as possible of this tribal memory on our website. If you care to share a few of your memories or think you may have an interesting document, please get in touch with me. Send email to [Tom Mitchell](#).

### Reporting Volunteer Hours

[Neil MacLennan](#) deserves recognition for what he accomplished beginning last Fall in making the idea of a [Habitat Restoration](#) project into a reality. More than a dozen new volunteers have joined the work team that Neil brought together. He will tell you that most of the credit goes to the team and their motivation for tackling invasive plants and replacing them with native plants and shrubs. Neil did it by speaking to people he encountered on the Celery Farm trails, persuading them to help out with the project. They have been out there working multiple times every month right through the winter. The website internal area timesheets have been used to keep track of their work since the beginning of the year. Of course, this covers only these particular projects and does not include all the hours that individuals contribute on their own. Here is a YTD summary report as of March 18, which adds up to almost the equivalent of a full-time worker:



## Celery Farm Projects Timesheets Report

Scope: All Direct Projects - All Volunteers  
 Summary Only Sorted By: Project  
 Date Range: Year-to-Date as of 03/18/2024

| Projects                       | Dates | Hours  | Volunteers |
|--------------------------------|-------|--------|------------|
| Brook Debris Cleanout          | 2     | 7:00   | 4          |
| Meadow Lane                    | 7     | 124:30 | 14         |
| No Name Culvert Phragmites     | 1     | 24:00  | 6          |
| Parnell's Path Dogwood Rehab   | 3     | 28:00  | 4          |
| Parnell's Path Phragmites      | 1     | 17:00  | 7          |
| Pirie Mayhood Tower Phragmites | 2     | 52:00  | 10         |
| Pollinator Meadow              | 4     | 46:30  | 9          |
| Trail Work Klomburg Bridge     | 1     | 8:00   | 8          |
| Vine Removal                   | 1     | 9:00   | 3          |
| Wood Duck Box Construction     | 10    | 30:00  | 1          |
| Wood Duck Box Installation     | 1     | 18:30  | 5          |
| <b>Totals:</b> 11              | 27    | 364:30 | 22         |

### Welcome New Members



Maureen Allen and Family, West Orange, NJ  
 Laura De Angelis Davis, Mahwah, NJ  
 Michael Levine and Family, Franklin Lakes

**Fyke Board of Trustees:**

President: Mike Limatola  
First Vice President: Gabriele Schmitt  
Second Vice President: Sue Dougherty  
Treasurer: Kurt Muenz  
Recording Secretary: Gloria Antaramian  
Corresponding Secretary: Mimi Brauch  
Trustees: Darlene Lembo  
Doug Moral  
Jim Wright

**Chairpersons:**

Celery Farm: Mike Limatola  
Gabriele Schmitt  
Jim Wright  
Conservation: Gabriele Schmitt  
Programs: Monica Cardoza  
Newsletter: Crista Trippodi Murphy  
Publicity: Mike Lefebvre  
Website Content: Tom Mitchell  
Kevin Watson  
Hawk Watch: Ken Witkowski

**The Fyke Nature Association**, a 501 (c) (3) organization, meets eight times a year. These are the meeting dates for 2024. All meetings are on Fridays.

January 26, 2024  
February 23, 2024  
March 22, 2024  
April 26, 2024  
May 17, 2024  
June – no meeting  
July – no meeting  
August – no meeting  
September 27, 2024  
October 25, 2024  
November – no meeting  
December 6, 2024

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 Fyke Nature Association Newsletter is published four times a year and manuscripts, artwork, news, features, articles on wildlife observation, conservation issues, book reviews, field notes, and humorous first-person bird/nature related stories are welcome. All submissions are gratefully appreciated!



**The deadline for the Fall 2024 issue is August 15, 2024.** Send material via e-mail to [crista430@gmail.com](mailto:crista430@gmail.com) or Box 141, Ramsey, NJ 07446