Fyke Nature Association
Winter Newsletter

Vol. 73 — No. 4 — 2026

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.

Fyke's Annual Social Get-Together Celebrates Members and Celery Farm Volunteers

Friday, December 4, 2026 - Monthly Meeting, 8:00 PM at the Allendale Community Center

Join us for our third annual social as we come together to celebrate the dedication and passion of our incredible volunteers and members. During this in-person meeting, we'll enjoy light refreshments and conversation. Fyke's social is a great opportunity to get to know one another. We look forward to seeing everyone, and celebrating the heart and soul of our preserve—you! All are welcome.



Fyke Get-Together December 2025

How the Preserve's Volunteer Team Restores the Green Way Meadow One Plug at a Time

Friday, January 22, 2027 - Monthly Meeting, 8:00 PM at the Allendale Community Center



Thanks to the Herculean efforts of its volunteer team over the course of just three years, the Celery Farm Nature Preserve's habitat has undergone immense transformation. Join us as Volunteer Coordinator Frank Alcaide and Habitat Restoration Coordinator Christian Alcaide walk us through the team's most recent efforts—58 volunteers contributing more than 900 hours to the fall planting of over 4,500 native plant plugs across 16 species in the Green Way Meadow. We'll be updated on last year's spring planting of 5,400 native seedling plugs, learn how volunteer work goes beyond planting to include trail maintenance and continued removal of invasives, and get a peak at what's in store for the preserve. All are welcome.

Celery Farm Volunteers

* Information is accurate at the time of printing. Please check The Fyke Nature Association Home for any updates.

Events & Field Trips

State Line Hawk Watch Alpine, *September 8 - November 15, 2026, 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM*

Directions: https://maps.app.goo.gl/iQ4oBAEiFgr6ngz4A



The Palisades Interstate Park Commission's Linn Pierson founded this hawk watch — the only major hawk watch in Bergen County — in 1997 and ran it until her death in 2007. In 2010, Stiles Thomas and the Park Commission got it going again, with Nancy Slowik as the coordinator. Stiles Thomas took over as the coordinator in 2011, with the help of Kurt Muenz. In recent years, Karl Soehnlein coordinated the hawk watch. Jim Wright is now the coordinator.

The hawk watch season runs from the day after Labor Day until mid-November from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. To volunteer to be a raptor counter, email Jim at wrightjamesb@gmail.com.



State Line Hawk Watch - *September 8 - November 15, 2026, 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM*

State Line Hawk Watch is located in the Palisades Interstate Park in New Jersey. Our observation point is 527 feet above the Hudson River in Alpine, NJ, the highest point on the Palisades in New Jersey. We are wheelchair accessible, and there are restrooms and a refreshment stand on site. We operate each day throughout the period, weather and volunteer availability permitting. Public education is the primary focus of this hawk watch, and all are welcome.

Directions: Google Map. From Palisades Interstate Parkway northbound, State Line Lookout is an unnumbered but well-marked exit two miles north of Exit 2. From Parkway southbound, take the well-marked median U-turn at Exit 3, then use caution as you merge onto the northbound Parkway, as you will have to move immediately to the right lane to exit for State Line exit.

New counters/leaders are always welcome. If you are available to be responsible for the count on one of these dates and you are all interested, consider becoming part of our hawk watch family and contact Ken Witkowski kenwitkowski@yahoo.com.

Celery Farm Volunteers Habitat Restoration, *Most Saturdays and Almost Every Sunday*

Register on the Fyke Nature Association website to be added to the email notification list for the times and locations.

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***** SAVE THE DATE- Saturday, December 19, 2026 Ramsey Christmas Bird Count *****

Hour on the Tower- ***Every Sunday 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM at the Celery Farm***



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.

Another Charley Story **By Mimi Brauch**

There are so many things for which I will remember Charley West: birding at the Celery Farm where it all started, laughter and jokes, his insisting that I make a point of going to Bosque del Apache (twice), getting to Corkscrew (13 times), running into him at the World Series of Birding in Cape May and being invited to the NJ Audubon cocktail party, probably a reward for finding his team's elusive magnolia warbler. The most memorable, however, is what follows.

More than 20 years ago, I bought a house in the Hudson Valley. When Charley found out about it, he asked me how the birding was up there. We talked about it, and I told him he was welcome any time, that I found it frustrating that I could seldom find the bobolinks that I knew nested down the road, and that the meadowlarks were never where I was. The conversation ended, and I thought no more about it.

Time passed, and one morning when I was there in the spring, the doorbell rang around 8 am. I had just finished a cup of coffee and was still in my robe. There was Charley. "Got your bobolinks and a meadowlark. Are you going to let me in and make me some coffee? I did. He came in, plunked down a bottle of gin and one of tonic water, and said he wanted a tour.

I collected myself and headed off for the required stops: a run up to Olana for elevation, down to the river for an eagle check and waterfowl, over to Clermont for warblers and woodland birds. I think we finished around

noon when Charley left. The gin and tonic sat on the coffee table.

Yesterday, I went to the liquor cabinet, reached all the way into the back, and pulled out the pristine bottle of Gilbevs gin. So here's a toast to a truly beyond special human being!

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A Painting in Memory of Stiles **By Jim Wright**

On Sept.16 at 2 p.m. in the cafe at Sate Line Lookout, a new painting of the Beast, the legendary peregrine of the Palisades, will be unveiled – and go on display – in memory of another State Line legend, Stiles Thomas.

The pastel painting, donated by a couple of Stiles' close friends, was done by Laura Sullivan.

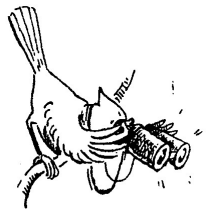


Stiles, one of the original stalwarts of the Fyke Nature Association, loved nature so much that he spent 25 years leading the efforts to save Allendale's much of Allendale's dwindling farmland to create what is now known as the Celery Farm Nature Preserve.

Sept. 16 was chosen because every summer Stiles would circle Sept. 16 as the day he thought was the most likely to be a "red-letter day" when broad-winged hawks would migrate part the hawk watch.

In the 1950s, Stiles started the Mount Peter Hawk Watch – the oldest all-volunteer hawk watch in the United States (and probably the world). Stiles also started the Hook Mountain Hawk Watch and help re-energize the State Line Hawk Watch.

Stiles' love of nature was measured not in the number of birds he saw but in all the birds he helped – most notably bluebirds and barn owls that he built nestboxes for. He also rescued great Blue herons, red-shouldered Hawks, and baby mallards (that found themselves stuck in a local church courtyard).



Big Sit 2026 **By Jim Wright**

For the 32nd year in a row, the Fyke Nature Association participated in the annual international birding competition known as the Big Sit.

The rules are simple: Count the number of species your team sees from one small area on one specified day in October, and then send your totals by email to thebigist.org.

As in years past, we did our count on the Pirie Platform, located on the east side of the Celery Farm's Lake Appert. Because of a last-minute weather-induced scheduling change, we counted birds for several hours

instead of a full day.

Team members Carl Krag, Jim Wright, Lynn McKenzie, Heidi Petri, and Mike Limatola count 42 species of birds in 5 hours and 45 minutes:

Incredibly, although we participated roughly three hours less than last year's Big Sit, we tallied only three fewer species (last year's event was also curtailed by the weather).

Here's what we saw, as compiled by Carl, who was there for several hours and was amazing:

Canada Goose. Wood Duck, Mallard, Black Duck, Mourning Dove, Solitary Sandpiper, Great Egret, Great Blue Heron, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk.

Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, American Kestrel, Merlin, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Ruby-Crowned Kinglet, Golden-Crowned Kinglet.

Catbird, Robin, Cedar Waxwing (flyovers), House Sparrow, American Pipit, Goldfinch, White-Throated Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Red-Winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Yellow-Rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal. (Merlin Sound I.D. recorded a Savannah Sparrow, but we couldn't confirm it.)
Thanks, Carl!

Celery Farm Rough-legged Hawk **By Jim Wright**

In late October, top Celery Farm birder Julie McCall saw an unusual-looking hawk over the Green Way fields. Although she had only her cellphone, she was able to get off a couple of pix for I.D. purposes.

The raptor was a light-morph rough-legged hawk -– the first time one was ever recorded on eBird for The Celery Farm – bringing the preserve's eBird species total to an impressive 259. (Congrats, Julie!)
With a little further digging, I found that John Bird had reported that the Hour on the Tower crew had seen one from the Warden's Watch some time in the 2007-2009 range, but it was never logged on eBird….. (One wonders how many other rare Celery Farm sightings "got away.")

As for rough-legs, a young light-morph was also seen the previous Sunday by Alyson Nilo at State Line Lookout. She said a light-morph had been reported at Quaker Ridge Hawk Watch the day before. We were all wondering if it was the same bird.

I wrote a recent "Bird Watcher" column for The Record about the sightings, and am sharing some of it here:

Dr. Neil Paprocki of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, who studies these raptors during their breeding season in the far north, said, "It's a good bet that it was the same bird, but it's hard to know for sure."

Why are they called rough-legs? "Their legs are feathered all the way to their toes," Paprocki explained. (So might yours, if you lived above the Arctic Circle. Rough-legs also come in you two plumages, a light morph and a dark morph, but that's probably more info than you need to know.)

As for why this young rough-leg was visiting North Jersey, "It was probably inexperienced, and it went a little farther south than it needed to," Paprocki said. "It may turn around and head north this winter, or keep going south. Where you are [North Jersey], they don't go as far south as they do in other parts of the country. Sometimes they go as far as Virginia, but that's pretty unusual."

Wintering rough-legs are uncommon around here in part because they are birds of the open country, and North Jersey doesn't offer a lot of good habitat for them. That's why, in winters past, one of the few places you might see them was in the Meadowlands, where open space is (sadly) in increasingly short supply.

Rough-legs, by the way, belong to the raptor family known as buteos, which include red-tails, red-shoulders, and broad-wings. Most of the year, red-tails are by far the most common buteo in North Jersey – except for in September, when broad-wings sometimes soar past our local hawk watches by the thousands as they migrate from the northern boreal forests to Mexico.



Rough-legged Hawk
By Ron Shields

Field and Feeder Notes **By Judith Cinquina**

Connecticut Warblers leave their winter home in Venezuela and Brazil in the spring and head north to the Florida peninsula where they change course and fly diagonally westward to the Mississippi basin. A flight up the Mississippi Valley takes them to their breeding grounds. In the fall, they fly eastward a thousand miles to New England and thence south along the Atlantic Coast to Florida and the West Indies, and S. America.

Hal Harrison, Wood Warbler's World, 1984

Sightings of an elusive Connecticut Warbler in the East are possible during a few weeks in the fall, and then only if you put in the time and effort and, most important, are lucky. Early on August 30, Julie McCall chanced upon a Connecticut Warbler walking along a fallen limb near the Allendale Brook at the Celery Farm (CF). Julie described it as a large warbler, drab yellow underneath with a tan/gay complete hood and a complete eyering/It flushed into a few low shrubs but remained below eye level until it disappeared.

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Connecticut Warbler by Loren Anderson



Julie attempted to "refind" the bird for over an hour without success, not a surprise. According to William Brewster (1906), Connecticut Warblers "spend most of their time on the ground under or among the rank vegetation, where they would often remain securely hidden until nearly trodden on". Chunky, large-billed, and long-legged warblers, Connecticut Warblers hunt the woodland floor like an Ovenbird but, when flushed, appear thrush-like, often sitting on a branch for an extended period (Dunn/Garrett, Warblers, a Peterson Field Guide, 1997.) Loren Anderson's Connecticut photo taken last year at Halifax Road in Mahwah depicts this thrush-like behavior.

A Hudsonian Godwit, another uncommon fall migrant, visited Piermont Pier September 7. Doug Morel reported it "lounging" on the cement extension at the end of the pier. The tide was high and probably this large shorebird with a long, up-turned, pink and black bill had nowhere else to rest. It was enjoyed by a long list of birders until 11:30 a.m. when a birder reported the resident Fish Crow flew at it, hit it on the head and caused the Godwit to fly across the Hudson River. The pier had a long list of rare avian visitors this fall, beginning on August 20 with a Marbled Godwit and followed ten days later by a MEGA- RARE Brown Booby. According to the 2023 NY State Avian Records Committee, Mid-Atlantic States have witnessed a "dramatic increase in the occurrence of Brown Boobies along the coast in the past decade" (The Kingbird, Vol. 76 No. 1, 2026). Unfortunately, the booby was a one-day wonder. A Sanderling, a sandpiper common along the jersey shore but uncommon inland, hung around the pier for a good part of September. Doug observed it September 12, "foraging in a puddle with peeps near the end of the pier." Other days it hung out on the breakwater at low tide.

On September 18th, I finally made it to the pier. The Hudson River was churned up by a north wind sending small waves into the north side of the breakwater when two tiny, slim Red-necked Phalaropes dropped in. Through my scope I noted their sharp, medium-long bills, black crowns, white throats and faces with black cheek patches and hints of buff up their long necks and upper chests. Both had dark and buff back stripes and dark rumps. They worked their way east along the north side of the breakwater, dabbing at the water surface, probably picking up insects and tiny crustaceans trapped there by the waves and breakwater. Every so often, the pair flew out, revealing their conspicuous white wing stripes. I finally lost them at the east end of the breakwater. Red-necked Phalaropes should be in flocks out at sea this time of year.

September 23rd, Doug returned to Piermont for the American Golden Plover that was reported foraging in some grass near a puddle at the end of the pier. Brian Kenney described it as slender, long-winged with a black bill. Another birder reported it was feeding on worms, crickets and other small invertebrates. Jeanne Cimorelli generously contributed her photograph of the Golden Plover at Piermont Pier. On the 27th, Storm Petrels, seabirds usually seen pattering over the ocean, were driven inshore by the nor'easter that brought strong gusts and intense rain along our coasts and explained the unprecedented, Leach's Storm Petrel seen off Piermont Pier that day.



American Golden Plover by Jeanne Cimorelli

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Since 2010, Red-headed Woodpeckers have been almost annual in the fall at State Line Lookout on the Palisades. Brian Kenney observed an adult and a juvenile there, September 18. They were perched on the famous "snag" where local Peregrine Falcons pose for photographers. Boyle in his Birds of NJ, (2011) states that during September and October, Red-headed Woodpeckers may be encountered anywhere in the state, but they only nest "sporadically and unpredictably" in northwestern NJ and the Pine Barrens. Migrant Glossy Ibis are rare after mid-September, and a few Little Blue Herons may linger through December until marshes freeze over. Both make news when discovered, like the Glossy Ibis seen by John Coyle and the Little Blue spotted by Doug Morrell, August 9th at DeKorte. Both Glossy Ibis and Little Blue Herons were never common in north NJ. A Black Scoter, a sea duck that prefers salt water, loafed around Piermont Pier for almost four months, May 11th through August 12th and was seen by many birders, including Doug Morel. The all black male was distinguished by the bright golden knob on the base of his short black bill. His prime food is mollusks, especially mussels, and the Hudson could have provided him with a variety, like the invasive Zebra mussel that colonized the river starting in the 1990's, or clusters of Ribbed Mussels thriving in Piermont's brackish tidal marsh, or American Oysters installed in Piermont Marsh by NY State, and finally the native freshwater Pearly Mussels that live in the river sediment.

Common Nighthawks made a pathetic showing this fall, with most reports of single birds. John Tworsky's 10 Nighthawks over the CF, October 1st, turned out to be a highlight. CF birders reported single Bobolinks, mostly heard only, but Julie McCall counted a dozen at the CF, September 7th. John Coyle found a "very early" Lincoln's Sparrow at DeKorte in the Meadowlands, September 6th. Most pass through NJ in early to mid-October, so Loren's Anderson's Lincoln's Sparrow at Halifax in Mahwah was just plain "early" on September 11th, while Julie McCall's Columbus Day Lincoln's was on time. Not as chunky as a SongSparrow and with paler stripes on its buffy chest and a shorter tail, the Lincoln's Sparrow has a habit of raising its crown feathers. (See John Coyle's photo.) They like to hide out in tangles along ponds and streams and in dense, weedy fields. They breed in Canada and our northern tier of states and even the NYAdirondacks and winter in Florida and south to Central America.



Lincoln's Sparrow by John Coyle

Neil MacLennon found a Marsh Wren at the CF, September 23rd. They breed at DeKorte Park in Lyndhurst and sometimes linger into winter, but the Sedge Wren found by Loren Anderson and Alice Leurck at Halifax, October 10th is rare and a NJ Endangered Species. It is smaller and shorter-billed than a Marsh Wren. Loren noted its "cinnamon flanks" and barring on its back and shoulder. Alice noted its fine crown streaks, buffy chest and pale underparts. Photos were taken, revealing bits and pieces of the tiny wren, but it refused to sit still for a portrait. Loren saw her first Sedge Wren at Halifax in September 2019, but for Alice, this was a life bird. Unlike the Marsh Wren that prefers wet marshes, Sedge Wrens prefer weedy fields or the drier upper edges of a marsh where Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows used to breed in NJ. All are now considered Endangered in our state as are the weedy farm fields they were found in. Cruickshank (1942) stated that the Sedge Wren disappears as a breeder if its nesting site becomes too dry through draining or too wet through flooding. It will also move out of any area if the grass grows up to scrub. John Bull (1964) considered it to be "exceptionally secretive and about as easy to study as a mouse".

Chimney Swifts still gather in Ridgewood during the fall before continuing their migration to South America. Tom Mitchell found them using the chimney at the Willard School on California St on September 2nd. He reported several hundred between 7 and 7:30 P.M. circling overhead before finally dropping down to roost inside the chimney. Ann Anello visited the site on the 4th and recorded the event in a video. You can watch it here - https://www.youtube.com/shorts/fFfUnn_ovCE.

Sparrows, late warblers, hawks, geese and ducks are moving through, and you never know what a well stocked feeder may attract. We would all like to know what you're seeing in your yard or in the field. Please share your observations with all of us at fykenature@groups.io where many of the reports for this column originated, or send your observations to me at judycinq@optonline.net



Website Notes Winter2026 **By Tom Mitchell**

The website appearance continues to evolve through incremental changes.

Our website design originated with margins set similarly to the printed page in order to keep the text line length reasonable for readability. It was originally done for desktop computers, but it also fits well with cellphones typically held in portrait orientation. However, it leaves empty space on each side when viewed on a desktop computer or tablet in landscape orientation. That empty space now has content in it if you are viewing the website on a wide screen. Moving the sidebar menu off to the right panel allows the page top images in the central area to expand. Moving the page footer content up to the left panel means you can now see it without having to scroll down.

There is a new way to make online donations.

Zelle is a mobile option available with many banks. The Dues and Donations page now has a link to the Zelle Donation Instructions. You need to have Zelle set up with your bank and have the bank app on your cellphone to do it, so it is not for everyone. And you need to pass us information in the Memo, so it is more involved than using PayPal or a credit card. But Zelle does not charge a transaction fee, which is good for Fyke, and you will not be patronizing PayPal, which is important to many people.

There is a new species ID game, a simpler version inspired by something done by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It leverages the ID Quiz and Concentration and the result is the Celery Farm Mystery Species.

The website now includes over 200 pages, including many needing regular edits to be kept up-to-date.

The recent period has been mostly maintenance mode. In particular the pages that document the ongoing volunteer activities need periodic updates to include information about the latest projects. If you look at What's New and Different you will see a list of pages that have been updated recently. You don't need to look at the list to find that the Home page, Programs page, and Events page have the most updates. But unless you

pay attention to What's New and Different, you will probably miss seeing the Bob Kane photos added at the top of the Newsletter Archive page and other new items tucked away here and there.

The extent of material on the website about the past and present of the Celery Farm and the Fyke Nature Association keeps growing. The website serves to provide both a source of current information and as an archive for all things Fyke that is available to everyone.



Welcome New Members:
Michael Shinkar
Barbara Bodden

Fyke Board of Trustees:

President:	Mike Limatola
First Vice President:	Mike Lefebvre
Second Vice President:	Sue Dougherty
Treasurer:	Ivan Kossak
Recording Secretary:	Gloria Antaramian
Corresponding Secretary:	Mimi Brauch
Trustees:	Darlene Lembo
	Doug Morel
	Jim Wright

Chairpersons:

Celery Farm:	Mike Limatola
	Gabriele Schmitt
	Jim Wright
Conservation:	Mike Lefebvre
Programs:	Monica Cardoza
Newsletter:	Crista Trippodi Murphy
Publicity:	Mike Lefebvre, Pam White
Website Content:	Tom Mitchell
Mt. Peter Hawk Watch:	Ken Witkowski
State Line Hawk Watch:	Jim Wright
Volunteer Coordinator:	Frank Alcaide
Habitat Restoration Coordinator:	Christian Alcaide

The Fyke Nature Association, a 501 (c) (3) organization, meets eight times a year. These are the meeting dates for 2027 All meetings are on Fridays.

January 22, 2027
February 26, 2027
March 26, 2027
April 23, 2027
May 14, 2027
June – no meeting
July – no meeting
August – no meeting
September 24, 2027
October 24, 2027
November – no meeting
December 3, 2027

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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, or contact Mike Limatola, President, 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 Spring 2027 issue is February 15, 2027. Send material via e-mail to crista430@gmail.com or Box 141, Ramsey, NJ 07446

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