

October 2013
Volume 73 No. 5

*Bi-monthly publication of the
Hudson-Mohawk
Bird Club, Inc.*

Feathers

A PUERTO RICO GETAWAY

by Gregg Recer

This past December, Cathy Graichen and I made our first foray into birding in the Greater Antilles with a short trip to Puerto Rico. We had the good fortune of getting away early in the day on December 26th, just a few hours ahead of the season's first major snowstorm that eventually brought around a foot of snow to the Albany area. While winter was doing its thing up here, we were driving from San Juan to the southwest corner of the island and getting settled into our *parador* located just outside the town of Guanica.

As a tropical birding location and as a spot for a leisurely winter-time break, PR has a lot going for it. Access is as simple as getting to many other parts of the US (it's not quite the 51st state, but a 2012 referendum nudged things in that direction). The east end of the island holds the only true tropical rain forest habitat in the US National Forest system (El Yunque). The PR state forest system protects several other excellent rain forest patches throughout the island's mountainous interior. At the southwest corner, the rain shadow produced by the mountains results in remarkably arid lowland conditions, including a unique patch of tropical dry forest at Guanica. Some of the best wetland areas on the island also occur in the southwest. The travel infrastructure is excellent, there's some of the best surfing in the Americas at Rincon and there's a lot of interesting history as well, especially in Old San Juan.

PR is the smallest of the Greater Antilles, with a land area slightly less than Connecticut. Nevertheless, there are 14 endemic bird species on the island, plus a number of other regional endemics, and a nice assortment of other neotropical species. We stayed in the same hotel for five nights, and concentrated our birding efforts on the west half of the island.

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President's Corner

[[LATE-BREAKING NEWS: On Monday, September 16, The board voted to host the 2015 NYSOA Annual Meeting. Our club has a tradition of hosting this important event every 10 years. By all accounts we've hosted excellent meetings in the past, attracting birders from all across the state. You'll be hearing more as our planning starts up shortly.]]

September is a month of change with the end of summer and the beginning of autumn. For us humans, September marks the end of summer vacations; back to school; apple picking; and looking forward to leaf colors changing. For the birds, September ... what is it like for them? The young ones growing up, the start of migration. And for us birders, we get to walk out our doors, look around and see the migration. The fading colors of the birds, the birds we see only in passing, the warblers, shorebirds, ducks and geese, Peterson's "confusing fall warblers". It's a time of wandering birds and late finds, such as Little Blue Heron, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Philadelphia Vireos.

Right now we are getting ready to participate in the Raptor Rapture at the State Museum on September 21, organized by the Friends of the IDA. And, as always, our well-attended and varied program schedule continues on the first Monday of the month. Scott Stoner has arranged a full line up of these monthly programs for the fall and into the winter. And, as always, our field trips continue as well. Don Gresens has organized an outstanding set of field trips, numbering about 50 excellent trips per year.

Be well, enjoy the beautiful fall weather, colors and birding.

Jory Langner
president@hmhc.net

Newsletter Contributions Desired

- Have anything you think other birders would be interested in?
- Have a favorite birding spot you want to share?
- Are there any stories or photos that would inspire others?

Share them with the HMBC membership by submitting them to the addresses below:

HMBC Contact Information
BIRDLINE of EASTERN NEW YORK:

E-mail: contact@hmbc.net

HMBC website: <http://hmbc.net>

Please send all electronic submissions for Feathers via e-mail to: Chris Grossman at bgrossman@nycap.rr.com. Send all paper submissions to:

Chris Grossman

7 Nott Rd.

Rexford, NY 12148

2013 Century Run Correction

In the FEATHERS article (Vol.73, No. 4) there was an error in including Golden-winged Warbler in David Harrison's Group D compilation. This species should be deleted reducing the overall species count to 152 species. Apologies for the mistake. --Bob Yunick

Check-list Request: I have run out of HMBC check-list "Birds of Upstate New York." It is 8 1/2 X 11 inches, species listed on front and back, with 12 vertical data columns, and in the upper right corner of page one has the identification: "HMBC 1984." If anyone has a blank copy that he or she could spare, please contact me so that I may make copies to continue tallying the Century Run. Make sure it is the **1984** version.

Thanks, Bob Yunick, 377-0146 or anneboby@aol.com

Liz Neill - In Memorium

Liz Neill, one of our HM Bird Club members, recently died. Liz was a great birder with an exceptional ear and fun to bird with. She had developed her love of birding as a child from her mother who taught Liz about the birds in their backyard. Liz enjoyed working with Junior birders at Thacher Park, Thursday morning birding with Bill Lee, weekend field trips and just going for a walk and enjoying the birds she would see.

She has been an inspiration to the people who knew her by how she lived her life. Liz loved her family and friends. We will miss her.

Carol Blackwell

Field Trip Reports

Camp Pinnacle

Saturday, September 14, 2013

The HMBC field trip to Camp Pinnacle had success in finding both migrant songbirds and raptors. Walking from the hawk watch site up to the transmission/relay towers and back, two mixed flocks were discovered. The first contained a BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER, and two BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLERS. The second group was much larger, and consisted of many YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS, a BLACKPOLL WARBLER, and at least a dozen other small birds just out of view. A HERMIT THRUSH was also observed near the towers.

The hawk watch produced OSPREY (2), BALD EAGLE, BROAD-WINGED HAWK (100), NORTHERN HARRIER (2), and an AMERICAN KESTREL.

Thank you to all the participants, it was a busy three hours.

- Tom Willilams

Upcoming HMBC Programs

Birds of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve

Speaker: Neil Gifford

October 7, 2013 - 7:00pm - 8:30pm

William K. Sanford Colonie Town Library

629 Albany-Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

MAPS Banding Program

Speaker: Jenny Murtaugh

Jenny Murtaugh

November 4, 2013 - 7:00pm - 8:30pm

William K. Sanford Colonie Town Library

629 Albany-Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

Birding in Ecuador

Speaker: Greg Recer

December 2, 2013 - 7:00pm - 8:30pm

William K. Sanford Colonie Town Library

629 Albany-Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

Upcoming Audubon Programs

The Albany Pine Bush NYS Bird Conservation Area

Monday, October 7, 2013, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm

Location: William K. Sanford (Colonie Town) Library 629 Albany Shaker Rd Loudonville, New York

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve is an important staging area for migrating bird species, some traveling more than 1,000 km to rest and feed here as they travel to Central and South America. Albany Pine Bush Conservation Director, Neil Gifford, will present and highlight recent avian research in the Preserve and discuss the conservation implications of managing a globally rare habitat in the heavily urban landscape of New York State's capital. Published in the Wilson Journal of Ornithology, and Landscape and Urban Planning, his bird research in the Preserve lead to its designation as a NYS Bird Conservation Area.

In addition, Shrubland birds are among the many important targets of these efforts and are the most conservation reliant bird group in the region. The Albany Pine Bush Preserve supports abundant breeding populations of regionally-declining shrubland birds, as well as a strong site fidelity, survival and fecundity of one of the most specialized shrubland species, the prairie warbler.

This fascinating presentation is co-sponsored by the Audubon Society of the Capital Region and the Hudson Mohawk Bird Club. **FREE and always open to the public!**

Super Science Weekend! At Museum of Innovation and Science - miSci

Saturday, November 9, 2013

Sunday, November 10, 2013

Monday, November 11, 2013

Location: **miSci address:** 15 Nott Terrace Heights, Schenectady, NY 12308

This brand new full weekend of activities and presentations will hit every aspect of science! Learn and participate in activities about all the different fields of science from Chemistry and Biology to Physics and Engineering!

Your Capital Region Audubon Chapter has been invited to participate in the Natural Sciences portion of this amazing three day - Family Friendly Super Science Weekend of exhibitors and presenters!

Audubon reps will be conducting Owl Pellet Dissections! Giving Bird Feeding Basics Tips! How to select binoculars and to help you look for birds around the miSci grounds!

Upcoming Audubon Programs *(continued)*

Come to this amazing science center that overlooks the city of Schenectady and the Mohawk Valley beyond for a weekend of FUN!

(Owl Pellet Dissection workshops require reservations....details coming soon!)

Improvements in Reist Sanctuary Completed

by Michael Gann

During the period April through June, 2013, two projects were completed in the Reist Sanctuary by young Josiah Schmidt, as "Community Benefit Projects", under the guidance of HMBC Reist Sanctuary Steward Mike Gann. The first project involved the systematic removal, refurbishing, and replacement of each of the four entry trail "Welcome" signs. Each sign was removed, taken home, dismantled, cleaned, sanded, finished with wood preservative/stain, reassembled and replaced in its' original location. The signs are now mounted on new 4" x 4" posts and should last many years into the future. The second project involved the reestablishment of the network of numbered ecological markers along the trail system. Over the years many of these had disappeared, rendering the descriptions contained in the Reist Preserve Brochure somewhat meaningless. By reestablishing these markers, persons using the trails will once again be able to educate themselves on the many interesting ecological aspects of the Preserve, both natural and man-made.



Josiah Schmidt refurbishes one of the Reist Sanctuary "Welcome" signs, at home, while sister Rachel watches



Last refurbished "Welcome" sign is installed at the Adirondack Center trailhead. Josiah Schmidt, his father Stephen, sister Rachel, and Reist Sanctuary Steward Mike Gann celebrate completion of the project

Improvements in Reist Sanctuary Completed *(continued)*



Reist sanctuary Steward Mike Gann presents Josiah Schmidt with a "Certificate of Appreciation" on behalf of the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club, July 17, 2013

For his diligent efforts in completing these worthy projects, Josiah was presented with a "Certificate of Appreciation" by the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club.

On Nature

My Favorite Woodpecker

by Denise Hackert-Stoner and Scott Stoner

One of the first entries in my Life List is Red-Headed Woodpecker. It reads simply "Spring 1964 Brookhaven, NY. At home. Stayed about 1 week."

I must have been impressed with it then; perhaps it was its dark red head; maybe its rarity there on Long Island maybe the bright white patches on its lower backside. Or maybe it was just because my parents, both birders, were so excited about it. For whatever reason, unclear to a 6 year-old, or at least lost to the passage of time, that bird made an impression on me!

There were other (for their time) unusual birds in our small town, in other years that drew excitement then but have become common today, such as the Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and perhaps even Northern Mockingbird. But they were all expanding their range, and eventually became commonplace, but the Red-headed was not. In fact (per NYSDEC), its population is dwindling. That makes the 1964 sighting – and the most recent one, all the more special.

I saw them occasionally over the years; once was when Denise got her first, in the Congaree Swamp in South Caroline in 1998, and we saw them again in Ohio, on trips to Magee Marsh in 2011 and 2013. All of these were exciting, but somehow not completely fulfilling.

On Nature *(continued)*

Then, in early August, came a report from the Albany Pine Bush, that first one and then two Red-Headed Woodpeckers had been sighted! They were in a parcel of land along the west side of Rapp Road, near the Albany landfill. Neil Gifford, Conservation Director of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, reported them, and word spread quickly online.

After a brief delay to allow some access issues to be resolved, Denise and I went over to see the Pine Bush's newest residents. Our first morning got us a brief view of both birds; an evening visit was a 'bust' but our return a couple days later, with more information, and better light, yielded some great long views and the photo seen here.



According to the Pine Bush Commission, Red-headed Woodpeckers are both "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" in New York and listed as a "Special Concern" species on NY's list of Threatened and Endangered Species. Neil observed the birds in an area where the habitat is being thinned and restored by the City of Albany in partnership with the Pine Bush. The closed canopy forest is being restored to a more open savannah and barrens (described as a "young forest.") Much of this work had just been conducted in the spring, so Neil (and everyone else!) was overjoyed that the birds found this location so quickly. The birds were carrying food, which, to Neil, confirmed breeding!

This sighting has offered a great opportunity for partnership between the Albany Pine Bush and our Bird Club, as we have collaborated in publicizing and documenting this exciting local find. What is especially encouraging is that the Pine Bush had just this spring completed some habitat restoration of this parcel – and within a few months, two of these special birds had

already found it to their liking.

With additional pine bush forest (on the east side of Rapp Rd.) scheduled for similar restoration in the future, we hope that my favorite woodpecker will continue to live – and breed, in this wonderful preserve right here in the heart of the Capital Region.

Happy Birding to all,

Denise Hackert-Stoner and Scott Stoner

A Puerto Rico Getaway *(continued)*

We found our first PR endemic right at the hotel, where a pair of PR Woodpeckers was investigating a nest hole in the top of a utility pole. Unfortunately, several later attempts to stalk them there with the camera proved fruitless. Other birds around the hotel grounds included GREATER ANTILLEAN GRACKEL, GRAY KINGBIRD, WHITE-WINGED DOVE and MONK PARAKEET (introduced). The hotel sat on the edge of a mangrove-lined bay patrolled by BROWN PELICANS and ROYAL TERNS. COMMON GALLINULE, SPOTTED SANDPIPER and CATTLE EGRETS were regular in the mangroves.

We spent our first morning in Guanica state forest -- the best preserved patch of tropical dry forest on the island. It got surprisingly hot by mid-morning, but the birding was good. Highlights included ANTILLEAN MANGO, COMMON GROUND-DOVE, BANANAQUIT, PR BULLFINCH, PR FLYCATCHER and the very pretty ADELAIDE'S WARBLER (a near-endemic). Top honors went to our first of numerous encounters with the PR TODY, Puerto Rico's representative of one of two Caribbean endemic bird families (the other being the monotypic Palmchat of Hispanolia). Todies are related to kingfishers and motmots. Fossil evidence shows the family was once widespread across North America, but there are now only five species restricted to the four Greater Antilles islands. They have a very fast direct flight from perch to perch and can be hard to follow. Firing away with the camera as our first one zipped across the trail in front of us, I was very lucky to capture one sharp frame while the bird perched momentarily.



Puerto Rico Tody

A Puerto Rico Getaway *(continued)*

We made multiple trips up into the forested interior north of Guanica, covering Susua and Maricao state forests. The forest here is wet and similar to the habitat further east at El Yunque, although we did get into any true elfin forest. Around Susua, we found some nice forest birds, including PEARLY-EYED THRASHER, LESSER ANTILLEAN PEWEE, RUDDY QUAIL-DOVE (heard) and both endemic hummingbirds -- GREEN MANGO and PR EMERALD. MANGROVE CUCKOO occurs in the interior forest as well as at the coast here and we saw several. Best of all at Susua was a single PR LIZARD-CUCKOO perched in the sunshine at the top of an emergent tree above the canopy. These huge cuckoos are spectacular and we had long looks at this one individual -- our only one of the trip. We visited Maricao once late in the afternoon and added a few new species including PR VIREO, PR SPINDALIS and PR ORIOLE. A little bit of night driving through patches of dry forest near the hotel eventually produced a calling PR NIGHTJAR.

Another day we toured around the west end from Cabo Rojo up to Rincon. Cabo Rojo, at the extreme southwest corner of the island, has a pretty lighthouse and beautiful cliffs and sea stacks facing the Caribbean. The walk up to the lighthouse was birdy with a nice mix of wintering shorebirds, CARIBBEAN ELAINEA, LOGGERHEAD

KINGBIRD, SHINY COWBIRD and the long-established VENEZUELAN TROUPIAL. A little north of the point is Laguna Cartegena National Wildlife Refuge, a permanent freshwater wetland area

Pearly-Eyed Thrasher



Cabo Rojo

surrounded by mixed agricultural land and forest edges. Getting there takes a little intestinal fortitude as the "road" is at best a muddy track, but it was worth it.



A Puerto Rico Getaway *(continued)*

Highlights included WEST INDIAN WHISTLING-DUCK, WHITE-CHEEKED PINTAIL, and a single female MASKED DUCK mostly submerged among the floating vegetation. Many species of herons, egrets and rails were present including a nice comparison of AMERICAN and CARIBBEAN COOTS. The scrubby woods around the lagoon were good for native and introduced landbirds including YELLOW-FACED and BLACK-FACED GRASSQUITS, SMOOTH-BILLED ANI and several introduced weavers and estrilid finches including ORANGE BISHOP. Rincon was mainly a spot for scenery, including a striking lighthouse. This is a big surfing hotspot. Watching the hoards of surfers there is the other local pastime.



Rincon Lighthouse

We knew our only good chance to find ELFIN-WOODS WARBLER was at Maricao, so we headed straight up to the mountains on our next-to-last morning. The accessible birding area here is just a short service road off the main route through the mountains, but the road cuts through the forest along the mountain side. This makes viewing pretty easy. We walked up and down the road for a couple of hours and added a few new birds including PR TANAGER and RED-LEGGED THRUSH, along with more good views of the endemic bullfinch, tody, spindalis and vireo. We were close to giving up when we finally hit a little flurry of activity and were able to pick out first one, and then several ELFIN-WOODS WARBLERS working some vines strung through the trees. This is not only an endemic, but is the most-recently described parulid warbler, only being first recognized in the scientific literature about 40 years ago. It's a pretty bird, something like a BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER, but with a distinctive broken eye-ring rather than the white

supercilium.

On our last day we drove back over to San Juan early enough to do a little exploring in the old town. We toured two forts that are part of San Juan National Historic Park -- Castillo San Cristobal and El Morro. These are the oldest European structures in the National Park system, with the original foundation of El Morro dating to 1539. Both forts have multiple levels and a hodgepodge of tunnels and interior connections between different sections that are interesting to explore, and the views toward the Atlantic are excellent. The sentry

A Puerto Rico Getaway *(continued)*

towers around the exterior of El Morro are so iconic that they appear on some versions of the PR license plate. As a bonus while we toured the forts, we added MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD and BROWN BOOBY to our trip list.



El Morro

San Cristobal

We eventually had to board our afternoon flight back to the mainland and to the reality of winter in Albany -- arriving just after midnight on New Year's Day. Our total species count for the five-night excursion, at 84, was not large, but 30 of those were lifers, and we were able to find 12 of the 14 PR endemics. A nice way to wrap up 2012.

Upcoming Field Trips

October

Saturday, October 5 WOODLAWN PRESERVE (Schenectady County; morning)

Coordinator: Don Gresens 370-3923 dgresens@nycap.rr.com

The Woodlawn Preserve is located in the Southeast corner of Schenectady County abutting the western edge of the Pine Bush. The area contains a flood control pond, forested sand dunes and general wetland habitat. Trips in prior years have seen migrating warblers and sparrows. The pond may attract various waterfowl.

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in front of Barnes & Noble in Mohawk Commons at the corner of State Street and Balltown Road (State St side). We will carpool the short distance to the preserve.

Sunday, October 6 FIVE RIVERS ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER (Albany County; morning)

Coordinator: John Kent 424-2234 jwkent@fastmail.fm

We'll walk about 2 miles over generally flat terrain with some small hills, passing through a variety of habitats. Previous trips have come up with 6 species of sparrows and 5 species of woodpeckers as well as both species of kinglets. Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Wood Duck and perhaps other waterfowl may be present. Wet grass and muddy spots may be encountered.

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot by the visitor center.

Saturday, October 26 COLLINS LAKE (Schenectady County; morning)

Coordinator: Don Gresens 370-3923 dgresens@nycap.rr.com

We will visit Collins Lake for late migrating waterfowl from the beach and the east side of the lake. We will also take a walk going east along the north side of the Mohawk River for fall sparrows. Fox Sparrows have been seen in previous years. Foliage will be off of the trees to make finding LBJ's (Little Brown Jobs) a bit easier.

Meet at Jumpin' Jacks in Scotia at 8:00 a.m. Bring a scope if you have one.

Upcoming Field Trips

NOVEMBER

Saturday, November 2 ROOSEVELT TRUCK TRAIL (morning thru mid-afternoon)

Coordinator: Bernie Grossman 399-9159 bgrossman@nycap.rr.com

The Truck Trail is a recently popularized place to look for boreal species. It is located about two hours north of the Capital District on Route 28N, and it is an old, moss covered road that passes through a spruce forest. We will hike the gently rolling trail looking for Gray Jay, Pine Siskin, Boreal Chickadee, Black-backed Woodpecker and crossbills. The walk is about 4 miles round trip and waterproof boots are a necessity. We can't be sure of the conditions, so snowshoes may be required. Call the leader for details. If there is time and interest, we can also visit the Newcomb Visitors Interpretative Center or hike the relatively flat first part of the Goodnow Mountain trail.

Meet at the Northway Exit 9 Park and Ride at 7:30 AM or the Warrensburg McDonalds at about 8:30 AM to form carpools.

Saturday, November 9 TOMHANNOCK RESERVOIR (Rensselaer County; morning)

Coordinator: Larry Alden 861-6087 overlook@nycap.rr.com

Join us for a morning trip around the Tomhannock Reservoir. We should find a good variety of waterfowl as well as resident and migrant passerines and possibly shorebirds. Rarities such as Ross' Goose and Gray Kingbird have turned up at the Tomhannock in the fall and we often find Bald Eagles.

Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the parking area at the intersection of Lake Shore Dr. and NY Route 7 at the west end of the causeway. Bring a scope if you have one.

Sunday, November 17 VISCHER FERRY (Saratoga Co; morning)

Coordinator: John Hershey 371-3114 hershey@nycap.rr.com

On this trip we'll be looking for migrant waterfowl and winter residents. Sometimes there are surprises such as a Eurasian Wigeon that showed up in November 2010. We will start at the main entrance. We will also explore some of the lesser known areas of the Preserve, such as Ferry Drive and the area around the Vischer Ferry Power Plant where Bald Eagles and migrant waterfowl are often seen.

Meet at the main entrance at 8:30 a.m.

Upcoming Field Trips *(continued)*

DECEMBER

Wednesday, December 4 RESERVATIONS DUE FOR CAMPFIRE AND OWLING AT FIVE RIVERS

Coordinators: Scott Stoner 765-6760 scottjstoner@aol.com
 Peggy Rudis 371-5051 peggyrudis@msn.com

Saturday, December 7 CAMPFIRE AND OWLING AT FIVE RIVERS (Albany County; late afternoon / evening)

Coordinators: Craig Thompson 475-0291 (daytime)
 Scott Stoner 765-6760 scottjstoner@aol.com
 Peggy Rudis 371-5051 peggyrudis@msn.com

Joint program with the Audubon Society of the Capital Region and Five Rivers Environmental Education Center.

Great Horned Owls are often heard calling around dusk at this time of year in the deep pine woods at Five Rivers. In this special joint program, we will meet at 4 p.m. at the visitor center at Five Rivers for a brief introduction, then walk about 1 mile out to a woods that has been productive for owls in the past. Along the way or on the way back, stop around our blazing campfire and enjoy a hot dog and a cup of hot chocolate. The owls are not guaranteed, but a good time is nearly a certainty in this popular event on the HMBC schedule.

Reservations are needed in advance so we can plan how much food will be needed.
 Contact Craig Thompson 475-0291 (daytime) by December 4th

Saturday, December 14 SCHENECTADY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT Coordinator/Compiler: : Larry Alden
 861-6087 overlook@nycap.rr.com

Monday, December 28 SOUTHERN RENSSELAER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Coordinator/Compiler: Jim de Waal Malefyt 283-2362 dewaalmalefyt@gmail.com

Saturday, January 4, 2014 2013 TROY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Coordinator/Compiler: Larry Alden 861-6087 overlook@nycap.rr.com

Feathers

Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club

c/o Five Rivers EEC

Game Farm Road

Delmar, NY 12054