President’s Message

By Jeanne Woolley

Litchfield Hills Audubon Society wishes you a Happy New Year and best wishes for health and happiness in the months ahead!

These wishes are more than just wishes; it appears health and happiness are within our power to achieve. Many recent research-based reports confirm something we have long experienced personally: Birding improves our health and happiness.

Here are some powerful nuggets gleaned from the reports:

“Being in the moment” while watching birds reduces stress, whether you are watching from a window or in the wild. It leads to increased introspection and reflection. Also, the activity requires being unplugged from most technology. Just the act of indentifying a bird improves brain function.

When bird watching outdoors in nature, the health gains are even greater. Reduction in depression and lower levels of stress by “forest bathing” have been documented. A sense of well-being was reported by many participants taking part in the studies. Add to that the exercise involved in hiking or walking to birding sites, and a healthier you is possible.

Making friends is another outcome of being part of a bird-watching community. Experiencing camaraderie is a life extender.

Yes, birding takes you places, helps keep your brain strong, reduces stress, keeps you physically active, and helps you make new friends from all walks of life. Basically, birding helps keep you healthy and happy. Keep bird watching and enjoy all the benefits!

So, here’s to a healthy and happy year ahead by being an active member of Audubon.

Best wishes,

Jeanne

LHAS birders on the lookout in Cape May. Read the related article on page 8.

Photo: Paul G. Edwards
**NEW MEMBERS**

By Doreen Orciari, Membership Records Chair

Sharon Baines .............................. New Milford
William Brinigar .......................... New Milford
John Brothers .............................. Barkhamsted
Thomas Chase ............................. Gaylordsville
Theresa Fair ............................... Terryville
Mercedes Frank ............................ Watertown
Alex Gros ................................. Brooklyn, NY
Helga Hershey ............................. Washington Depot
Karen Hubbell* ............................ Northfield
Angela Lauretano ........................... Thomaston
Elizabeth Pavlik ........................... Torrington
Norman Rogers, Jr.* ...................... New Hartford
George & Teri Savage* ................. Goshen
Florence Stentiford ...................... Torrington
Karen Thorn ............................... New Preston
Martha Tillmann ........................... Goshen
Katherine Vinal ............................ Torrington
Lara Ward ................................. New Milford
Lisa Warren ............................... Torrington
Diana Wilcox .............................. Torrington

* Welcome back

LHAS membership is at 596.

If your newsletter is addressed incorrectly or if you fail to receive one, send a postcard to LHAS, P.O. Box 861, Litchfield, CT 06759-0861 or send an email to Doreen Orciari at doreen.orciari@gmail.com.

This newsletter and other LHAS features can be seen IN LIVING COLOR on at www.lhasct.org.

Scan the QR code at left with your smartphone to go to www.lhasct.org.

Follow us on Facebook:
facebook.com/LitchfieldHillsAudubonSocietyLHAS

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Special thanks to Janet Baker and Doreen Orciari for proofreading this newsletter!
Zwick Land Preservation Initiative

By Rich Martin, Boyd Woods Sanctuary Co-chair

A beautiful piece of property in Northfield, a section of Litchfield, went on the market in September of 2017. The Realtor listing the property calls it the “Sunrise Farm,” for the spectacular sunrises that can be seen from its location, at an elevation of approximately 1,050 feet.

The owner, Walter Zwick, a dairy farmer and avid gardener, passed away on December 3, 2015. The property, at 201 East Chestnut Hill Road, amounts to a little more than 130 acres. It consists of woodlands and many large sprawling meadows. There is approximately 4,000 feet of road frontage along East Chestnut Hill Road and Richards Road. The property’s eastern border, for the most part, follows Wigwam Brook with the exception of about 8.5 acres that crosses over the brook, jutting into LHAS’s Boyd Woods Audubon Sanctuary.

Mr. Zwick, whose wife passed away before him, had quite a large family, and they insist that the property be sold as a whole and not be divided into individual parcels. Initially, the listing price for the property was $2,750,000 (yes, that’s seven digits), but since then, the price has been reduced to $2,199,000.

So, you may be asking why are we even mentioning this in the Chickadee Chatter newsletter. Conservation is one of the core values of LHAS. We have done an outstanding job in this area over the years with the acquisitions of the Kalmia, Boyd Woods, and Wigwam Brook Sanctuaries. All of our sanctuaries are well managed and maintained and offer great habitat for wildlife and recreation for our members and the public. But, we’re not done yet. Since we learned about the Zwick property going on the market, a number of conservation-minded LHAS members started making an effort to see what can be done to preserve this wonderful piece of land. There are so many reasons for wanting to do this! It’s great habitat for wildlife, especially its hayfields for nesting Bobolinks, a species of special concern. The woodlands provide food and shelter for hawks, owls, and many other birds and mammals. Another important reason for preserving the property is its proximity to other protected lands, such as the White Memorial Foundation lands and Topsmead State Forest, and how it could create a greenway corridor, having the potential of connecting Torrington to Watertown. These are just a few reasons for preserving the Zwick property. There are many more, but ultimately it will ensure a healthy future for generations to come, by safeguarding the natural resources that benefit both wildlife and humans.

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While exploring the various ways of trying to purchase the Zwick land, LHAS learned about the resources and expertise available through the Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collabora-

(continued on page 4)

This map shows the Zwick property in relation to our Boyd Woods Sanctuary and other surrounding areas.
Declining Mallard Numbers Prompt DEEP to Cut Bag Limit for Hunters

The Mallard may be one of the most abundant duck species in eastern North America, but in the past 20 years their numbers have been declining. As a result, the 2019–2020 Mallard bag limit is being reduced from four Mallards per day to two per day. The 2018–2019 bag limit will remain at four per day for the current season.

New England Cottontails Found at Macricostas Preserve

DNA testing of rabbit droppings collected in Steep Rock Association’s Macricostas Preserve in New Preston prove that at least a few New England Cottontails live there. The droppings were collected by volunteers and analyzed by CT DEEP. The New England Cottontail, Connecticut’s only native rabbit species (the rabbit we usually see is the non-native Eastern Cottontail), had been a candidate for the endangered species list because of habitat loss, but efforts by our federal and state governments as well as non-profit groups — including LHAS — have helped the rabbits rebound. Several years ago, LHAS created suitable, young forest habitat (which we affectionally call our “rabbitat”) at Boyd Woods Sanctuary with the help of a government grant.

Constitutional Amendment on Public Lands Gets Resounding “Yes” at the Polls

Nearly 85% of voters in our state voted “yes” on Question 2 on the election ballot in November. Now, the legislature can no longer sell, transfer, or give away state-owned public lands without first holding public hearings and obtaining a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers.

CT Bird Atlas Winter Surveys Underway

The first round of winter surveys for the Connecticut Bird Atlas project took place in November and December. Next, bird counters will spend 10 hours during January and February. Chris Elphick, volunteer coordinator for the project, says, “The core data collection involves conducting a series of timed one-hour surveys in varied habitats throughout your block. If you are unsure where to begin, start by identifying up to 10 sites where you think you can spend an hour birding. These sites should span the range of habitats in your block to maximize the variety of species that you will find. They also should not simply be the places that people think of as ‘good’ birding sites, because we want the atlas to be representative, a program of the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA). The Greenprint’s overall mission is to provide expertise in conservation funding and transactions to achieve ambitious goals such as the one LHAS is looking into. LHAS has recently become a member of the Greenprint Collaborative and will be consulting with their experts as we move forward. Preliminary discussions with them have proved very beneficial, providing us with some initial direction and words of encouragement and hope. In the meantime, LHAS will form a committee, with Debbie and Rich Martin as chairpersons, to research and review the various ways, individually or through a collaborative effort with other conservation organizations, we might preserve the Zwick land.

The Chickadee Chatter newsletter reaches out to more than 600 people, comprising LHAS members, donors, friends, and other organizations. If you or someone you know would like to help us explore the possibilities for this endeavor, by providing expert advice and/or support, please contact me at martins283main@mac.com, or any of our other officers. Their contact information is on page 2. We would like to hear your thoughts regarding this matter.

The map provided with this article (see page 3) shows the location of the Zwick property in relation to our Boyd Woods Sanctuary and other surrounding areas. If you would like to see aerial views of the Zwick property, type the following link into your web browser’s URL field: https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-detail/201-E-Chestnut-Hill-Rd_Litchfield_CT_06759_M37352-90494, or just use Google to look up 201 East Chestnut Hill Road, Northfield, and you will find it listed in the results. You will be amazed at the vastness and beauty of this property.
data to represent the full range of conditions found in the state.” For more information about the project, visit ctbirdatlas.org.

State Had Record Number of Bald Eagle Chicks in 2018

According to DEEP, the 2018 Bald Eagle breeding season was hampered by severe storms in May that destroyed three eagle nests and caused another one to fail. Nevertheless, eagle nests in Connecticut produced a record 68 chicks. This year, DEEP volunteers will conduct the annual Midwinter Eagle Survey in January. Last year’s survey count was a record high of 166. Note: LHAS member Russ Naylor will lead a trip to the Shepaug Bald Eagle Observation Area in Southbury on January 6; see Page 6 for details.

Year Two of Bobcat Tracking Program: Reports of Sightings Still Wanted

CT DEEP’s Wildlife Division reports that their biologists are gearing up for the second year of the Bobcat Project. “Efforts are underway to live-trap more bobcats and fit them with GPS tracking collars. Data collected from this project will be used to determine the abundance and distribution of bobcats, as well as habitat use. You can assist the project by reporting observations of bobcats. Eligible reports can be live sightings, road-killed or deceased bobcats, or signs and tracks. When reporting an observation, please provide the date of the sighting, town, number of individuals observed, and whether any individuals had ear tags or a collar. Observations can be recorded on iNaturalist; by sending an email to deep.ctwildlife@ct.gov; or by posting a message or photo on the Connecticut Fish and Wildlife Facebook page.” (Source: DEEP’s November 2018 Wildlife Highlights e-newsletter.)

Take Part in Great Backyard Bird Count

This four-day event takes place this year from Friday, February 15, through Monday, February 18. To participate, you simply count birds for as long as you wish (even as little as 15 minutes) on one or more days of the event and report your sightings online at birdcount.org. Data submitted helps researchers at National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology better understand how birds are faring and how best to protect them. For more details, visit birdcount.org. Also see page 7 for Debbie Martin’s bird count on February 16 at Boyd Woods Sanctuary.

How Birds Survive Harsh Weather

Several strategies help birds survive New England’s harsh winter weather:

- **They seek shelter.** Thick hedges, dense evergreens, tree cavities, and even the downwind side of trees can protect birds from wind, rain, snow, and frigid temperatures.

- **They fatten up.** Birds can sense changes in air pressure (dropping pressure indicates worsening weather), which leads them to seek more food.

- **They rely on evolutionary advantages.** Bird legs and feet have counter-current circulation, which means they have cold blood in their feet. That way, they lose little heat when standing on snow or ice. In addition, their feathers provide insulation by trapping warm air near their bodies and preventing cold air from reaching their skin. Puffing up their feathers increases the insulating effect.

(Source: “Gimme Shelter: How Do Birds Survive a Snowstorm,” by Emily Silber, National Audubon website, January 16, 2016.)
MEETINGS

January 7......All About Our Bald Eagles..............................................Monday, 7 PM
The sight of a soaring Bald Eagle never fails to delight us. What is the status of this majestic bird in Connecticut? How can you tell an eagle’s age? What field marks differentiate males and females? Find out all about Bald Eagles at this presentation of a CT DEEP program by Master Wildlife Conservationist (and LHAS President) Jeanne Woolley.

February 4......Cuban Odyssey .........................................................Monday, 7 PM
Last January Angela Dimmitt traveled to Cuba with a group in a program managed by the Caribbean Conservation Trust. Their mission was to study the 25 endemic bird species found only on the island. Under the direction of an official government guide as well as local scientists and naturalists, the group traveled to different parts of the island where these species were most likely to be found. Angela says it was “totally fascinating learning about Cuban culture and life, and the birding was superb!”

March 4......Hummingbirds: Magic in the Air..................................Monday, 7 PM
World-traveler Gina Nichols of Sunrise Birding returns with another tantalizing program. With 330 species known in the world, hummingbirds are the second largest family of birds after flycatchers. These tiny aeronautic marvels have the ability to hover, fly backward, and migrate long distances. The physiological capacity of hummingbirds to raise and lower their heart rate and body temperature to survive cold nights is unmatched in the animal world. This program illustrates the amazing adaptations of these glittering gems and describes their fascinating life histories. Vivid photographs of hummingbirds in the United States, Costa Rica, and Ecuador tell the story of how these birds survive in habitats that range from tropical forests to the forests of the Andes Mountains.

BIRDING EVENTS AND FIELD TRIPS

January 6......Shepaug Dam Bald Eagle Observation Area.......................... Sunday, 9 AM
Russ Naylor will lead this outing to observe Bald Eagles wintering along the Housatonic River. Eagles often roost in the trees and catch fish (and the occasional duck) just below the dam. Meet at 9 a.m. by the Canfield Corner Pharmacy at 2 Main Street North in Woodbury, at the junction with Route 6 (Main Street) and Route 47. Directions: From points north and east, take Route 6 west to Woodbury’s town green just past the intersection of Routes 6 and 47. Rain or snow cancels. Note: Reservations are needed to enter the eagle observation area; Russ will make the reservations. For more information, call Russ at 203-841-7779.

MEETING CHANGES OR CANCELLATIONS

Bad weather? Meeting and event cancellations or postponements are broadcast on WFSB TV Channel 3 in Hartford and on radio station WZBG at 97.3 FM. Notices are also emailed to members on our email notification list; if you want to be added to our email list, send an email to lhasct@me.com.
January 19 . . . . Shorebirding in the Stratford Area . . . . . . . Saturday, 8:30 AM
Shorebirds and other winter birds — Snowy Owls, perhaps? — frequent the Connecticut coast. Angela Dimmitt will lead us to a few hotspots to see which species are braving the cold. Dress warmly! We will meet in Stratford (exit 30 off I-95 north) at the Dunkin Donuts (now simply called Dunkin) on Route 113/Lordship Boulevard at the corner of Honeyspot Road. Please contact Angela ahead of time to let her know you will attend: 860-355-3429 or angeladimmitt@aol.com.

February 16 . . . . Great Backyard Bird Count at Boyd Woods Sanctuary . . . . . Saturday, 9–11 AM
Last year Boyd Woods was the number-one hotspot in Litchfield County for bird species counted over the entire four-day period of the Great Backyard Bird Count. Please join Rich and Debbie Martin as we try to retain this title while counting the birds we see at the feeders and along the sanctuary’s trails. Meet at the Boyd Woods Sanctuary parking lot on Route 254 in Litchfield. Dress warmly, wear boots, and bring binoculars. Snow or rain will cancel this walk. For more information contact Debbie Martin at barnowl524@hotmail.com or 860-819-7462.

February 22–24 . . . . Birding at Newburyport and Cape Ann, MA . . . . . . Friday–Sunday
Dave Tripp will once again escort LHASers around the Newburyport, Amesbury, and Salisbury areas in search of wintering northern birds. In the past this trip has seen rare birds like Great Gray Owl, Boreal Chickadee, Varied Thrush, Townsend’s Solitaire, and Harris’ Sparrow. Last year we saw four Snowy Owls and got great looks at a Dovekie! Other uncommon birds encountered in the past are Short-eared Owls, “white-winged” Gulls, Barrow’s Goldeneye, Rough-legged Hawks, and Northern Shrike. An added bonus is a day trip to Gloucester and Rockport on Cape Ann, which may add Razorbills, Thick-billed Murres, Harlequin Ducks, Black Guillemots, and more gulls and waterfowl. If you are interested in going, email Dave at dtrippjr@gmail.com. We will stay at the Fairfield Inn at Amesbury. Check websites like kayak.com or hotels.com to find the best rate.

Trip Report: October 13 Sparrow Search
Singing in the Rain ...
By Russ Naylor

... That’s what many birds were doing during our Sparrow Search, a joint trip I led for LHAS and the Western Connecticut Bird Club. As we started off we heard a calling Green Heron, and the fields at Bent of the River Audubon Center in Southbury swarmed with birds in a migratory fallout after a day of northwest winds. Some birds sang their autumn songs despite light rain. North Field teamed with warblers — Palm and Yellow-rumped — plus Chipping Sparrows. 

Althea’s Meadow was hopping with 10 species of sparrows, including Savannah, Lincoln’s, White-crowned, and even an early Fox Sparrow, with the season’s first juncos putting in appearances among the chorus of Song, Swamp, and White-throated Sparrows. At one spot, a Song, Swamp, and Lincoln’s Sparrow perched together — a fine Melospiza medley (Melospiza is the genus to which those three birds belong) to an audience of Indigo Buntings and Purple Finches.

White-throated Sparrow
Photo: Diane Friend Edwards

West Flat Hill Road hosted flocks of Palm Warblers, Swamp Sparrows, and singing Purple Finches, plus a Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Southbury Training School on Cassidy Road also held legions of migrants — Field, Savannah, Song, and other sparrows mixed in with an abundance of Palm Warblers and various finches. The first bird to pop up at this site was a Lincoln’s Sparrow at close quarters — one of five of these streaky skulkers — to a chorus of at least eight White-crowned Sparrows tuning up their voices in rehearsal for the Woodbury/Roxbury Christmas Bird Count. Bonus birds in the wings included 10 hen turkeys out for a stroll, a hunting Northern Harrier, two dapper American Kestrels, two raucous ravens, and an Eastern Meadowlark — once so common but now so rare.

Janie Pierce Park produced yet another wave of Swamp Sparrows, plus a colorful palette of fall waterfowl — Wood Ducks, Gadwall, Canada Geese, and others. Here, our trip finished with a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, plus a Blue-headed Vireo doing a solo finale to close out a tally of 62 species.
In a flush of royal magnificence, Birding King Dave Tripp led our LHAS group in a truly princely peregrination into the maelstrom of migration overflowing the hallowed habitats of Cape May, New Jersey, that mecca of birders everywhere. For starters, several lucky birders able to get an extra day off joined Dave on a bonus jaunt into Delaware to celebrate his birthday on Thursday with some avian treats — an assembly of avocets at Bombay Hook and a clan of Brown-headed Nuthatches at Cape Henlopen State Park.

But then the real fun began when the whole group mustered together on Friday in and around Cape May. We meandered through swirling tornadoes of Tree Swallows and rivers of Yellow-rumped Warblers to discover myriad winged wonders. On the coast we witnessed a steady flow of migrants in passage — Brants, scoters, cormorants, Laughing Gulls, terns, gannets, and loons. A wide variety of other species winged by overhead, from ducks and Peregrines to Purple Finches. As always, our traditional hotspots produced feathery tidbits that whetted our cravings for more. South Cape May Meadows featured blue-morph Snow Geese, White-rumped Sandpiper, Rusty Blackbird, Orange-crowned Warbler, and as a bonus, pods of Bottlenosed Dolphins just offshore. Cape May Bird Observatory hosted Eurasian Wigeon, Tennessee Warbler, and White-crowned Sparrows up close. The Stone Harbor area gave us Marbled Godwits amid abundant Oystercatchers, Western Sandpipers, Lesser Black-backed and Bonaparte’s Gulls, plus Caspian Terns.

The Stone Harbor Wetlands Institute had Little Blue Heron and Western Willets, plus a wayward Brown Creeper. Hidden Valley yielded up Magnolia Warbler and Pine Siskins.
The Cape May Birding Festival inside the exhibition hall led birders of all plumages to try out new optics on a worthy sighting: a flock of about 120 Black Skimmers on the wing outside.

The Brigantine section of the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge gave us Blue-winged Teal, a brace of American Bitterns, Glossy Ibis, and many other treats. Our “jaegermeister” Fran Zygmont helped us to home in on Parasitic Jaegers — true winged pirates — chasing gulls and terns at several locations. And everywhere we went were Bald Eagles in record numbers — an embarrassment of riches! Indeed, on our way out of Brigantine at the end of King Tripp’s trip, we were escorted by an honor guard of one magnificent Bald Eagle — a most excellent way to wind up a journey that tallied 132 species. Huzzah and a bow to our sovereign leader Dave Tripp for a royal idyll well-led. Long live the king!

**Trip Report**

**November 17 Duck Ramble**

*By Russ Naylor*

Butterballs Anyone? Bufflehead Ducks, that is, not turkeys!

Greg Hanisek’s white Thanksgiving Special Bantam Lake Duck Ramble had Buffleheads and Hooded and Common Mergansers by the dozen as the main course on our avian menu, on which our eyes feasted.

Litchfield Town Beach served up a Red-necked Grebe and a Bonaparte’s Gull. Point Folly treated us all to Greater Scaup, Ring-necked Ducks, Pied-billed Grebes, a Great Blue Heron, and other wetland birds, with a Brown Creeper and Rusty Blackbird as visual dessert. A pair of ravens croaked loudly as they flew over.

Morris Town Beach provided the final entree with a gadabout Gadwall and a preening Common Loon.

Let’s all give kudos and thanksgiving to Greg for an avian feast of some 43 species. Now there’s a birder with a sense of good taste!
A Few Changes in Who Does What at LHAS

In the coming months, you will see some different LHAS members playing new roles in our organization.

Irek Rychlik Now on LHAS Board
The board has voted to have Irek replace Nancy Nichols, who has moved out-of-state. Nancy’s term on the board ends in June. Many thanks to Nancy for all she has done for LHAS over the years. We wish her well. And a big “Welcome!” to Irek.

Rebecca Purdy Overseeing Nest Boxes
Rebecca has agreed to succeed Marie Kennedy as the coordinator of the LHAS Bluebird Nest Box research project. Kudos to Marie for overseeing this project since 2013. The coordinator and other volunteers maintain and monitor 37 bluebird nest boxes at our Boyd Woods, Wigwam Brook, and Kalmia Sanctuaries. During the breeding season, the volunteers visit the boxes once every other week to determine which species, if any, is nesting in each box; how many eggs they lay; the number of chicks they hatch and rear; and how many of those chicks successfully fledge. After the breeding season, the volunteers clean out the boxes. The coordinator sends the results to the Connecticut Bluebird Restoration Project.

Martins Will Coordinate Field Trips
Rich and Debbie Martin are taking over the task of contacting potential field trip leaders, coming up with fun outings, and getting all the trip details into the hands of the newsletter editor. Thank you, Debbie and Rich! And thank you to Michael Audette for recently filling in as trips coordinator.

Will You Help?
We need a few more volunteers to help us with the following:

Fund-raising Chair and Committee Members: For many years, Janet Baker has overseen our Annual Appeal. It’s time to give her a break — as well as applause! Besides the Annual Appeal, there are other fund-raising opportunities we would like to pursue so we can expand our efforts to conserve more land, continually improve our sanctuaries, and educate more young people and adults about nature and the need to nurture it. If you would like to help, contact LHAS President Jeanne Woolley or any of the board members listed on page 2.

Member Outreach Chair and Committee Members: We have decided to split up some of the functions of our membership tasks. Doreen Orciari will continue as our Membership Records Chair, maintaining our mailing lists and membership records, and sending out information packets to new members. Doreen has done a superb job in that role, and we thank her for staying on. We now want to create the role of Member Outreach Chair to attract new members. Doing that will be essential for LHAS to continue being a vibrant and effective conservation group. So, if you enjoy talking to people at our meetings and outings, please consider stepping up as our outreach chair or a member of the membership committee. Your “duties” would include making guests feel welcome, handing out membership brochures, inviting folks to visit our sanctuaries ... not too hard! If you want to help, contact LHAS President Jeanne Woolley or any of the board members listed on page 2.

Walking Off Thanksgiving Calories at Boyd Woods

Photos: Rich Martin
In My Garden (And WAY Beyond)  
A Journal — November 2018

By Angela Dimmitt

One week at home, one week away, The Storm — Fall to Winter overnight, with a Spring Break in Argentina!

The first week of November saw the leaves falling before any serious color had shown itself this fall. I put more feeders up after the bear visited once again October 22 — he checked it out and shook an empty tray feeder hanging within his reach. Checked the ones on the wire — could not reach. Back to the tray, still empty — so he sat down beside it, raised a paw, and started to push the pole over, at which point I opened the kitchen window and yelled. He toddled off.

But there were some very interesting winged visitors in late October. A White-crowned Sparrow, Pine Siskins, two Purple Finches, exciting! Four bluebirds checked out the boxes — the summer’s family returning? An immature Red-headed Woodpecker (the real Red-headed, not the Red-bellied with the red head) visited a friend in Sherman for a couple of days, gobbling black-oil sunflower seeds before moving on. November 3 a flock of 78 robins passed through my garden along the stream. Lots more siskins — they are being reported everywhere, so we’d better stock up on thistle/nijer seed for them and the goldfinches. Fox Sparrows also fed on the ground with White-throated and Song Sparrows and juncos.

Argentina! My English nephew is living in Mendoza with his wife and two children — the time was finally ripe to visit them. It’s spring there, except all the trees are fully leafed out and flowers are flowering even though it’s basically desert so there are not that many, even in the town. Arriving in the early morning, the first thing you see is the Andes stretching along the horizon, all covered with snow gleaming in the rising sunlight. Mendoza is a pretty town with streets lined with trees meeting overhead to shade them in the hot summers. My nephew found an English-speaking birder who took us up into the mountains — we hiked up to a lake at the snow line: high Andean birds like Silvery Grebe, Andean Goose, Gray-breasted Seedsnipes, several raptors, and yes, condors. Ray Belding’s favorite bird was there in abundance — Zonotrichia capensis, aka Rufous-collared Sparrow, brazenly asking for food in the parking lot!

Of course we visited a couple of wineries where family members worked — rows of vines neatly laid out across the plain at the foot of the mountains, so beautiful. The winery buildings were too, and it was all very luxurious. Lunch was an amazing five-course affair overlooking the vineyards — five different wines were served, Malbec being only one. Martins were nesting under the eaves, also Chimangos, a small brown caracara that is very common everywhere. There were many other birds, the most fun being Burrowing Owls sitting on the vine posts. A newborn Southern Lapwing was the cutest thing you ever saw, scurrying around while Mom tried to distract us just like a Killdeer! I saw only one hummingbird, a Glittering-bellied Emerald, flashing as it flew. Wow!

In the city there were lots of birds, pigeons galore, ditto to House Sparrows (yup, the same as here); also several thrushes and the Rufous Hornero, which builds its iconic oven-shaped mud nest on posts, in trees, everywhere, including outside my nephew’s house. Many birds were carrying nesting material — it’s May-like there, after all. Not many flowers, possibly because it’s so hot in summer (next month) — bougainvillea, hibiscus, etc., but also gorgeous roses anywhere there was a garden, and beds of succulents. Other than lunch at 4 and dinner at 10 p.m., I can’t wait to return to what seemed like a gentle, slower life!
Enjoying Cape May

Eighteen of us, led by Dave Tripp, ventured south to the Cape May, NJ, area for a fun weekend of fall birding.

Photo: Diane Friend Edwards