

THE URBAN BIRD CALL



**BLACK-CROWNED
NIGHT HERON:
YOUR STORIES**

**BIRDING BY SUBWAY
EN ESPAÑOL**

**SPECIES PROFILE:
PIPING PLOVER**



MISSION & VISION

NYC Bird Alliance protects birds and their habitats, strengthening urban biodiversity through science, advocacy, and community engagement. We envision New York City as a leader in urban bird conservation, where nature thrives and all New Yorkers appreciate and care for the City's biodiversity.

COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY

NYC Bird Alliance believes all people have the right to a close connection to the natural world and the right to a healthy environment. Preserving our environment is only possible if we all feel that connection. For more information, visit go.nycbirdalliance.org/edia.

THE URBAN BIRD CALL (FORMERLY THE URBAN AUDUBON)

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PHOTO CREDITS

Cover Photograph: Look closely enough at a Rockaway beach this beach season and you might catch one of these: a Piping Plover, mid-sprint, on legs that seem to vibrate rather than move. These federally threatened shorebirds nest along a one-mile stretch of city coastline each summer, sharing the shore with millions of beachgoers. About 100 have nested in the City in recent years, a fragile foothold that depends on the work of rangers, outreach teams, and the communities who call these beaches home. Photo © Harry Collins



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

This April marked a pivotal moment for our organization's conservation impact, when Senior Director of Conservation and Science Dr. Dustin Partridge announced news years in the making: our pioneering research on the disappearance of Black-crowned Night Heron would be published in the journal of *Conservation Science and Practice*.

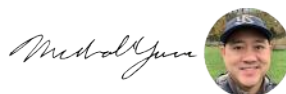
At NYC Bird Alliance, everything we do is grounded in science. Publishing this research in a respected peer-reviewed journal is critical to give credibility to our advocacy and action.

We need that conservation action, because the findings are sobering: after analyzing decades of Harbor Herons data – a monitoring effort that began 41 years ago, which we celebrated at last year's Fall Roost – our scientists discovered a dangerous decline in Black-Crowned Night Heron (read more on pg. 3). If the current trend continues without protective intervention, this beloved bird could vanish from New York Harbor in just over ten years.

This is precisely why NYC Bird Alliance invests in long-term studies. Tracking bird populations over decades allows us to understand trends that would otherwise go unnoticed and gives us the evidence needed to act before it is too late. We know biodiversity is an intricate system; what happens in our harbor has regional implications, and because New York's population of Black-crowned Night Heron is the largest in the Northeast, local disappearance could lead to widespread decline.

The good news? Turning research into conservation action is what we do. From protecting Central Park's Ramble nearly 50 years ago to advancing bird-friendly buildings today, NYC Bird Alliance has always translated science into action. We are already working with partners, government agencies, and advocates like you to ensure these findings lead to meaningful protections for this iconic species.

The Black-crowned Night Heron is a quintessential New Yorker, beloved by lifelong and beginner birders alike. We invite you to read stories from fellow NYC Bird Alliance members and local birders on the following page and share your memories by emailing us at bcnh@nycbirdalliance.org. ■



Michael Yuan
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Jessica G. Wilson
Executive Director



On an island in the East River, NYC Bird Alliance scientists begin the annual Harbor Heron surveys, documenting the presence of nesting wading birds.

SAVING THE BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON

Critical Decline Demands Action

The Black-crowned Night Heron (BCNH) has long been the most abundant wading bird in New York Harbor, seen hunched over ponds and fishing shorelines across the boroughs. But this is changing fast: analysis of our long-term Harbor Herons nesting survey dataset, published this spring in *Conservation Science and Practice*, shows a 55% decline since 2000 – a warning sign for the Harbor's health. As this beloved species faces alarming local population drops, potentially disappearing from New York City as soon as 2037, we are taking immediate action to save it: as we research causes of its decline, we are pushing for Endangered status for BCNH in New York State, working with harbor partners on active colony management, and mobilizing New Yorkers to help protect this species before the window closes. We're sounding the alarm to save this iconic bird, and we hope you'll join us. ■



Black-crowned Night Heron is one of ten species of wading birds that nest on New York City's Harbor Heron islands. Their decline serves as a warning signal for the entire harbor.

VOICES FOR NEW YORK CITY'S NIGHT HERON

In Queens: A few years ago, I caught sight of a vaguely familiar hunched figure on the shore and was amazed to see that it was a Black-crowned Night Heron. Like all birds, seeing it was a gift, but the heron brought a special sense of magic and wildness to that over-developed shoreline. It made me think of the true, now-hidden identity of our city as a natural landscape rich in a stunning variety of wildlife.

– Stephanie Beck, member

In Brooklyn: Almost every single day the past two summers, the Black-crowned Night Heron was the most reliable bird I would spot in Prospect Park, favoring the Lullwater just south of the bridge across from the boat house. Reliably at 5pm, there he would be. Unbothered. Majestic. Being large, somewhat exotic to those new to birdwatching in New York, and easy to spot during hours that most people are available, he's become the spark bird for more than one friend of mine.

– Joshua Multer, birder

In Manhattan: Some years ago, we were walking in Central Park and saw a spiffy looking, decent-sized bird, gray white and black, hanging out in its characteristic behavior of ... doing absolutely nothing. My husband and I would be sad to see such a handsome bird leave NYC forever. We have a soft spot in our hearts for the Black-crowned Night Heron, and it has become part of our shared memories.

– Valerie Wald, program participant

YOU CAN HELP!



SIGHT AND REPORT

Have you noticed Black-Crowned Night Herons in your local park?



SHARE YOUR STORY

We want to hear from readers. Tell us why Black-crowned Night Herons matter to you!



ADVOCATE

Sign our petition to call for NYS and NYC agencies to support conservation action.



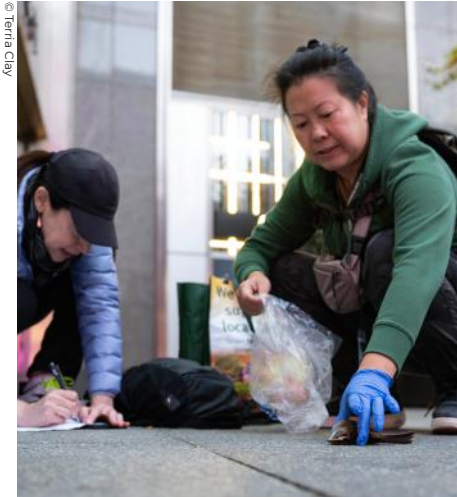
LEARN MORE

Visit go.nycbirdalliance.org/bcnh and use [#nycnightheron](https://twitter.com/nycnightheron) to learn more, sign the petition, and lend your voice.

SHAPING A BIODIVERSE, BIRD-SAFE CITY

REDUCING COLLISIONS

NYC Bird Alliance's collision-reduction science, research, and advocacy have saved hundreds of thousands of birds, emerging as a national model for bird-friendly buildings and legislation.



Project Safe Flight volunteers log a collision victim in Lower Manhattan.

RECORD NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS JOIN PROJECT SAFE FLIGHT

Volunteering with NYC Bird Alliance can vary wildly across the seasons, from tagging horseshoe crabs in early summer to counting birds each December. This spring, as with every migration season, Project Safe Flight volunteers dedicated their early morn-

ings to search for dead and injured birds that had collided with buildings. A record number of volunteers – over 200 New Yorkers – joined Project Safe Flight, collecting important data to help our community advocate for a bird-safe New York City. From saving a Belted Kingfisher at Queensboro Plaza to identifying highly hazardous buildings across the City through careful monitoring, our volunteers make a measurable difference.

RALLYING SUPPORT FROM ALBANY

This May, Director of Advocacy and Engagement Saman Mahmood traveled to Albany, NY, to meet with state representatives and secure new co-sponsors for bird-friendly legislation. Saman met with Senator Patricia Fahy, who introduced the Dark Skies Protection Act establishing limits on the use of nighttime outdoor lighting that causes many deadly bird collisions. Alongside our partner Audubon New York, NYC Bird Alliance secured several new co-sponsors for the Dark Skies Protection



Director of Advocacy and Engagement Saman Mahmood (left) met with State Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton (right) to discuss the need for bird-friendly legislation in NY State.

Act and the FLACO Act. Inspired by the beloved Eurasian Eagle-Owl who tragically died after colliding with a building, the FLACO Act would require new or significantly altered state buildings to use bird-friendly designs. ■



SAFEGUARDING WATERBIRDS

Through long-term scientific monitoring and evidence-based advocacy, NYC Bird Alliance works to protect nesting sites and coastal habitat critical to the health of the harbor's ecosystem.

ROCKAWAY BEACH AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER RETURNS TO BREED

NYC Bird Alliance's Field Biologist Emilio Tobón began monitoring American Oystercatchers (AMOY) and other nesting shorebirds of the Rockaways in 2011, making this his 15th season surveying the ten-mile stretch of critical beach habitat. Each season, Emilio watches as the birds arrive, scratch a simple nest ("This is no two-room apartment," he says), and raise their chicks despite myriad threats, including hungry possums, imposing trash, negligent beachgoers, and dogs (which are prohibited



American Oystercatcher defends its nest against wayward litter, captured via Rockaway Beach camera trap.

on city beaches after Memorial Day). In 2024 and 2025, 52 recorded breeding oystercatcher pairs were nesting in the Rockaways. This summer, as Emilio traverses the beachfront

twice a week, he will track productivity (number of chicks per number of pairs), hatch success, and threats facing this Species of Special Concern in New York State. In April, Emilio documented a major milestone: the return of "YA3," an oystercatcher banded by Emilio at Riis Park in 2018. YA3 is the first confirmed oystercatcher born at this beach to return home to breed and, as of May, has built a nest and laid eggs.

"They're very persistent birds," says Emilio. "Very faithful. They return to the same place, same territory – and usually the same partner." ■

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS & PROJECT UPDATES

PROTECTING HABITAT

NYC Bird Alliance protects and enhances bird habitat across New York City's parks, rooftops, shorelines, and neighborhoods to strengthen biodiversity and climate resilience.

BRONX RIVER SURVEYS FIND MORE HERONS POST-RESTORATION

In 2010, NYC Bird Alliance conducted an ecological survey of the Bronx River to assess the presence of Harbor Herons: long-legged wading birds that include Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Green Herons, and others. The Bronx River, which feeds into the East River and is near several Harbor Heron nesting islands, had the potential to be vital habitat and fishing grounds after years of recent restoration work, led by Bronx River Alliance and New York City Parks.

In 2023 and 2024, our science team returned to the Bronx River to determine the long-term impact of this restoration. Field Biologist Emilio

Tobón conducted weekly surveys each summer, biking eight miles from just east of Van Cortlandt Park down to Soundview Park to record observations at 30 survey points. Data included the number of wading bird species, fishing activity, and any notable interactions between birds. After improvement in water quality, investment in green infrastructure, and introduction of new native plants, we recorded a significant increase in the number of birds engaging with the river habitat since 2010, with Great Egrets sighted as the most abundant species. This promising data reinforces the knowledge that ecological restoration and investment in urban green space is crucial for birds and people.



© Leah Allen

New Yorkers bird along the Bronx River during Black Birders Week 2025.

These surveys will continue in collaboration with Rocking the Boat, a local organization that engages over 200 Bronx teens to teach boatbuilding, environmental science, and sailing – all centered on the Bronx River and inspiring local stewardship. ■

MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES

NYC Bird Alliance inspires New Yorkers to connect with nature and take action for birds and biodiversity. Our inclusive programs turn a love of birds and nature into stewardship and effective advocacy.



© NYC Bird Alliance

Our third edition of *Birding by Subway* is now available online and at NYC Bird Alliance festivals.

AVES ARE FOR EVERYONE / LAS AVES SON PARA TODOS

To ensure birding and conservation science is accessible to all New Yorkers, NYC Bird Alliance has expanded our multilingual outreach. Our team has created Spanish and Mandarin flyers to promote our regular bilingual outings, and our *Las Aves de la*

Ciudad de Nueva York can now be downloaded free from our website. In addition, the third edition of our *Birding by Subway* brochure – highlighting 40 birding hotspots across the boroughs accessible by public transit – is now available in Spanish. Visit us at festivals this summer to pick up your own copy, or learn more at go.nycbirdalliance.org/bbs.

Para garantizar que la observación de aves y la ciencia de la conservación sean accesibles para todos los neoyorquinos, NYC Bird Alliance ha ampliado su alcance multilingüe. Nuestro equipo ha creado volantes en español y chino mandarín para promocionar nuestras salidas bilingües habituales, y nuestra Las Aves de la Ciudad de Nueva York ahora puede descargarse de forma gratuita de nuestro sitio web. Además, ahora está disponible en español la tercera edición del folleto Birding by

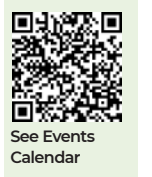
Subway, que destaca 40 lugares con gran presencia de aves en los distritos accesibles con transporte público. Visítenos en festivales este verano y consiga su copia, u obtenga más información en go.nycbirdalliance.org/bbs-es.

CONNECT WITH OTHER BIRDERS

In addition to our year-round calendar of free, guided bird outings, summer in the City brings festival fun for families.

- Governors Island Bird Tours (every Saturday throughout the summer)
- NYCHA Family Day Festivals (Jul-Aug)
- City of Water Day (Jul 25)
- Kingsland Wildflowers Festival (Aug 1)
- Shorebird Festival at Jamaica Bay (Aug 16)

Visit go.nycbirdalliance.org/cal to find events near you. ■



See Events Calendar



Left: Rita Legro, senior manager of strategic initiatives; Right: Karin Nilo, senior manager of donor engagement and events.

OUR STAFF CONTINUES TO GROW

As our community expands and the need for conservation action grows more urgent, NYC Bird Alliance has welcomed two new staff members to help make the City safer for birds. Senior Manager of Donor Engagement and Events **Karin Nilo** will lead our signature fundraising events, including the Fall Roost, and build meaningful relationships with supporters like you. Senior Manager of Strategic Initiatives **Rita Legro** will primarily serve as project manager for our flagship Biodiversity District initiative in Manhattan's Lower West Side, which will bring together nearly 40 organizations committed to protecting and enhancing habitat for birds and biodiversity. More details on this project coming soon! You can read more about our dynamic staff at go.nycbirdalliance.org/staff.

BOARD MEMBER FAREWELLS AND CONGRATULATIONS

On Wednesday, June 3, NYC Bird Alliance leadership welcomed members to our virtual annual meeting, sharing an inside look at our work protecting birds and urban biodiversity, particularly our campaign to save the Black-crowned Night Heron. Watch the presentation at go.nycbirdalliance.org/2026meeting.

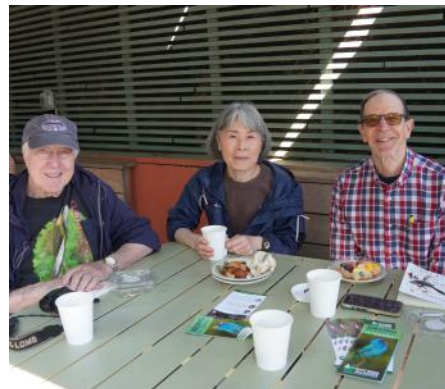
At the Annual Meeting, we also announced the results of this year's board of directors elections. Congratulations to **Pepper Evans** and **Steven Dean** on their elections as executive vice president and vice president, respectively, and to the six other board members re-elected to their positions. We thank outgoing Executive Vice President **Linda Freeman, MD** for her stalwart leadership through the strategic planning processes and are grateful she will continue to serve on the board.

Five board members retiring from service have been vital to our work. Read more about the legacies of **Marsilia Boyle**, **Shawn Cargil**, **Christian Cooper**, **Deborah Laurel**, and **Mike Tannen** by visiting go.nycbirdalliance.org/board.

Our full board list can be found on this publication masthead on page 2. ■



All photos © NYC Bird Alliance



Photos from our spring Member Events, including a horticulture tour of Riverside Park and Birds & Breakfast with our Kestrel Circle in Central Park.

THERE'S MORE ONLINE! DIGITAL URBAN BIRD CALL STORIES

Visit go.nycbirdalliance.org/digital-ubc to find more bird-filled stories.

PLANNED GIVING

If birds matter to you, make sure they're in your plans.

A planned gift to NYC Bird Alliance is a simple but significant way to protect birds for generations to come.

Join our Nest Egg Circle – a community of people who have chosen to invest in the future of New York City's biodiversity. Together we can ensure birds thrive in NYC.



LEARN MORE

TWO EASY WAYS TO LEAVE A NEST EGG

- INCLUDE US IN YOUR WILL
- NAME US AS A BENEFICIARY

You will be thanked with a lifetime membership, an invitation to yearly gatherings, and public recognition (if you wish).



ALREADY INCLUDED US?

Please let us know by emailing Matthew Coody at mcoody@nycbirdalliance.org.

2026 FALL ROOST GALA

Honoring Google and Dr. Eric W. Sanderson
Tuesday, October 13

Scan for more





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**NYC BIRD
ALLIANCE**
A CHAPTER OF NATIONAL AUDUBON

DATED MATERIAL:
Summer 2026 Issue

PIPING PLOVER

By Olivia Liang, Senior Associate, Marketing and Communications

If you've ever visited the Rockaways, you may have noticed some local cele-bird-ies. They're stocky, stubby-billed, and big-eyed with legs that dart so quickly they appear to vibrate.

The Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is a sandy grayish bird with white underparts and a narrow, black collar that breaks and fades to gray in the nonbreeding season. Arriving to our shores in mid-March and staying through August, these plovers can be nearly invisible on the beach, as can the shallow pits they make for nests, sometimes lined with pebbles and shells. Spanning Breezy Point to Far Rockaway, about 100 Piping Plovers have nested in New York City in recent years.

Plovers are a beloved species to many New Yorkers, and they are in need of our help. Once hunted for their feathers, the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act supported their recovery, but these sensitive shorebirds once again face decline due to coastal development, disturbance, and threats to weaken the Endangered Species Act. Now listed as Endangered in New York State and Federally Threatened, these tiny shorebirds rely on the coordinated efforts of National Park Service, NYC Department of Parks, and NYC Plover Project – all working to educate and engage beachgoers on how to enjoy the coast without disturbing



© Paul Tessier

Piping Plovers camouflage well with their surroundings, so tread carefully this summer.

these small shorebirds with a big conservation history.

NYC Bird Alliance's outreach team has been heartened by our recent engagement with members of the Edgemere and greater Rockaway community, who live along the Rockaway Beach Endangered Species Nesting Area (RBESNA). Each summer, this one-mile stretch of beach transforms into protected nesting grounds for five species of state and federally threatened and endangered species, including Piping Plover, American Oystercatcher, and Least Terns. For a community that

has navigated years of systemic divestment, the seasonal closure of RBESNA represents a significant loss of beach access and the recreational and economic opportunities that come with it.

As our work is rooted in the principle that conservation is most effective when it is inclusive, we're working with on-the-ground community organizations and engaging Edgemere residents so they are part of the long-term conservation success for this site.

Whether you're a Rockaway resident or summer visitor, remember to share the shore this summer by respecting fencing, keeping your distance, cleaning up trash, and keeping dogs off the beaches. Learn more at go.nycbirdalliance.org/rbesna. ■