

THE URBAN AUDUBON

**NEXT BIG STEPS FOR
LIGHTS OUT LEGISLATION**

**THE HAUNTING SONGS
OF THE WOOD THRUSH**

**BROOKLYN-BOUND FALL ROOST
HONORS JEFFREY KIMBALL**



MISSION & VISION

NYC Audubon is a grassroots community that works for the protection of wild birds and habitat in the five boroughs, improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers. NYC Audubon envisions a day when birds and people in the five boroughs enjoy a healthy, livable habitat.

COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY

NYC Audubon 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. We commit to building an equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible organization, dedicated to protecting nature for all of the City's people and its wild birds. For more information, visit nycaudubon.org/edia.

THE URBAN AUDUBON

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PRESIDENT'S PERCH

By Karen Benfield,
Board President



The bright lights of the big city are an enormous problem for migratory birds. As they migrate at night, birds are attracted to our City's mesmerizing artificial light, becoming disoriented, exhausted, and more susceptible to crashing into building windows. Close to a quarter of a million birds die in our city every year after colliding with our built environment.

For decades, NYC Audubon's Project Safe Flight has monitored this lethal problem and gathered collision data each spring and fall during migration. Our data drives solutions. You can read more in this issue about NYC Audubon's work to reduce collisions through bird-safe building retrofits.

This fall, we are delighted to shine a spotlight on 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge, where efforts to mitigate collisions resulted, with NYC Audubon's help, in a significant drop in bird fatalities. We will hold our Fall Roost fundraiser at 1 Hotel this October—our first Brooklyn Roost!—and honor its work on behalf of birds and a sustainable environment. See page 6 for details about this year's Roost. We will also celebrate former NYC Audubon board president Jeff Kimball, whose leadership and vision allowed us to expand our work and impact. Jeff's film *Birders: The Central Park Effect* introduced many to the City's avian biodiversity, and he continues to work to protect the birds who live and visit our City.

In addition to working with buildings across the City to voluntarily design and enact bird-safe solutions, we are tackling the problem through legislative change. After our advocacy success in 2019 helping to pass Local Law 15 (which requires bird-safe glass in the first 75 feet of newly constructed buildings), we are thrilled about the recent introduction of Lights Out legislation in the City Council, Int. 1039, another powerful component of our work to reduce collisions in our City. Read more about our critical work advocating for this comprehensive Lights Out bill on pages 2 and 3 of this issue.

At NYC Audubon, we are focused on bright ideas to make life safer for migratory birds in our City! ■



© NYC Audubon

The entrance to "The Osprey" restaurant at 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge, with windows retrofitted with a Feather Friendly® solution. The bird-safe window treatments installed at the hotel led to a drastic decrease in bird collisions.

NEXT BIG STEPS FOR LIGHTS OUT LEGISLATION

By Suzanne Charlé

In late 2021, NYC Audubon and the Lights Out Coalition celebrated the passage of Lights Out bills Int. 274 and 271, requiring City-owned and -managed buildings to turn off non-essential outdoor lights at night during peak avian migration periods. This was a big step in making the City safer for the millions of birds that pass through during fall and spring migration.

Now, NYC Audubon and its partners are encouraging the New York City Council to consider expanding the “Lights Out” program to privately owned commercial and industrial buildings, as well as other buildings such as U.S. post offices, labs, and outpatient clinics.

“I strongly believe in legislation that not only benefits our environment but our wildlife as well,” said Councilmember Francisco Moya (Queens District 21), who introduced Int. 1039 in May. “We see a huge number of bird deaths in New York City each year. Why walk past these dead birds on the sidewalk, when we can do something as simple as flick a light switch to prevent it? This is a no-brainer.”

Int. 1039 would require buildings to limit non-essential interior and exterior lights from sunset to sunrise year-round. If passed, this would be landmark legislation, first of its kind in the country, with the potential to save thousands of birds. According to NYC Audubon Director of Conservation and Science Dustin Partridge, PhD, more than 100 species, including most songbirds, migrate at night. Bright artificial lights act like a trap, pulling the birds to the City, where they become disoriented and exhausted. It’s estimated that nearly a quarter of a million birds die annually as a result of collisions in New York City.

Kathy Nizzari, the founder of the Lights Out Coalition, a consortium of local conservation and animal welfare organizations, was instrumental in convincing Councilmember Moya to introduce the legislation. Nizzari stresses that many other animals, including humans, are affected by bright lights; organizations including the American Medical Association support efforts to control light pollution. Limiting light will also help reduce the City’s carbon footprint and save money for building owners. As of the time of writing, in August 2023, 10 council members are sponsoring Int. 1039 and NYC Audubon, with the Lights Out Coalition, is working to secure additional co-sponsors.

Int. 1039 answers many complaints that the real estate industry has had about “Lights Out” proposals in the past: small businesses that occupy less than 4,000 square feet are exempted, as are landmarked buildings; those that are 20 stories or more may apply to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission for relief. Also, buildings that have significant security risks without nighttime lighting—such



NYC Audubon Executive Director Jessica Wilson speaks at a rally outside City Hall in support of Lights Out legislation, Int. 1039, on May 11, 2023.

as those that need to be visible to aircraft—may apply for exemption. Another concern from the real estate industry has been public safety: large stores and offices would be allowed to keep their interior and exterior lights on as long as employees are working in the buildings.

Just how many buildings fall under the rule is unclear, but it’s a lot. According to the Department of Buildings, there are approximately 21,000 so-called Class B and M buildings in the categories in question. (This does not include buildings built 40 years ago, for which there were no records given.)

That leaves the remainder of the City’s million-plus buildings. However, Dr. Partridge maintains that passing Int. 1039 will be a major step if buildings go dark, “especially since many of the buildings impacted are in lower and midtown Manhattan, which have recorded the most bird kills in the City.”

“The bill will benefit both birds and people,” stresses Jessica Wilson, NYC Audubon’s executive director. “Turning off lights at night doesn’t just help birds—it will make the City more sustainable and resilient for all New Yorkers.”

Even as NYC Audubon and its partners work to further this landmark legislation, the organization’s scientists continue to collect the data that fuels NYC Audubon’s advocacy efforts. On the night of September 11, as has been the case for over 20 years, NYC Audubon community scientists will be at the Tribute in Light memorial lighting site with binoculars trained on the towering twin beams of light, looking for birds trapped in them. When more than 1,000 birds are counted in the lights, NYC Audubon asks the memorial producers to turn the lights off for 20 minutes to allow the birds to disperse. As Dr. Partridge notes, “the Tribute in Light is a powerful memorial for New Yorkers, but it is also a powerful demonstration of light’s impact on birds, and how we can help.” ■

PROTECTING BIRDS AND HABITATS IN THE CITY'S FIVE BOROUGHES

By New York City Audubon Staff

ADVOCACY UPDATES



NYC Audubon speaks up for birds and their habitats with advocacy efforts across the city.



Bright lights fill the NYC skyline at night.

TAKE ACTION FOR LIGHTS OUT BILL INT. 1039

As spotlighted in our feature story this issue, Lights Out legislation Int. 1039 is a critical bill introduced by Councilmember Francisco Moya that would benefit New York's people and environment, with the potential to save thousands of birds' lives. You can help get this bill passed! Please contact your New York City Council Member and urge them to sign on to Int. 1039 as co-sponsor (or thank

them if they already have). Calling is more effective than emailing. Visit our Lights Out legislation page at nycaudubon.org/lights-out for helpful tools, including an interactive map to identify your council member, a script for talking with them, and more. We also ask that you sign and share this online petition to support local Lights Out legislation and urge the NYC Council to pass Int. 1039:

link.nycaudubon.org/light-petition. ■

ENGAGEMENT UPDATES



NYC Audubon works to create the next generation of conservationists by instilling a love of birds and nature through hundreds of bird outings and classes, public festivals, a lecture series, community science volunteer opportunities, and a seasonal nature center at Governors Island.

ENJOY FALL MIGRATION WITH A NYC AUDUBON BIRD OUTING

This fall, NYC Audubon will offer more than 100 bird outings and classes around the City, including many free programs and those that are great for beginners. Join us for planned photowalks in Staten Island, birding by boat in the Bronx, bilingual events, a series of outings tailored for those with physical disabilities, and lots more! Check out our listings at nycaudubon.org/outings.



A participant gets up close with "Auggie" the Eurasian-eagle Owl at the 2022 "Raptorama!" Festival.

GOVERNORS ISLAND, A BIRDING AND CONSERVATION HOTSPOT

Don't miss NYC Audubon's seasonal environmental center on Governors Island, open through October 29. You'll enjoy free weekly bird outings, conservation-themed art through our Artist in Residence program, and bird-friendly glass workshops. Make sure to visit us on October 21-22 and 28-29 for our special "H-OWL-oween" festivities. For more information, visit nycaudubon.org/gov-island.

OWLS & EAGLES & HAWKS: OH MY!

NYC Audubon engages thousands of New Yorkers annually at public wildlife and environmental festivals around the

City. Wrapping up our festival season, fan favorite "Raptorama!" returns to Jamaica Bay National Wildlife Refuge on October 15 and Floyd Bennett Field on October 21. Come see and learn about over a dozen live owls, eagles, and hawks who have become ambassadors for their species. More information on our festivals can be found at nycaudubon.org/festivals.

CELEBRATE MIGRATION ON OCTOBER 14

On October 14, NYC Audubon celebrates World Migratory Bird Day with many events taking place all over the five boroughs! Check nycaudubon.org/wmbd in October for more information on the day's celebrations. ■

STAY IN THE KNOW: More details about programs and registration are available on our website. Sign up for the eGret eNewsletter at nycaudubon.org/egret and follow us on Instagram, Facebook, Threads, and X (@nycaudubon) to ensure you know about events as they are announced. ■

CONSERVATION UPDATES



NYC Audubon's scientists work from the rooftops of Manhattan to the beaches of the Rockaways to collect data on wild bird populations and the habitats they need to thrive.

ALARMING TRENDS IN AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER POPULATIONS

NYC Audubon's 12 years of work monitoring American Oystercatchers has revealed population threats. In particular, productivity—the number of chicks fledging from each adult pair—is in steep decline, mostly due to egg losses. To understand the threats to nests, we deployed 20 cameras at nests in the Rockaways this summer. We're now using Artificial Intelligence to help sort through the tens of thousands of images collected. Preliminary analysis shows nest losses as a result of predation (by cats, raccoons, and opossums), and from people, through both theft and accidental destruction.

GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS FOR THE 38TH YEAR OF HARBOR HERONS SURVEYS

For almost four decades, NYC Audubon has conducted its annual Harbor Herons Survey of the nearly 20 islands in New York Harbor. This year's survey found some bright spots: the overall population of nesting long-



BP12A

103F 39C



BP07B

69F 20C

An American Oystercatcher and three chicks captured on one of our nest cameras at the Rockaways. It looks like a great nesting spot during the day, but at night our cameras revealed predators including raccoons, feral cats, and opossums (pictured here) roam the beach, often disturbing nests and stealing eggs.

legged wading birds and water birds was up, colonies identified last year remained, and a few islands in Jamaica Bay had surprisingly abundant and diverse numbers! However, some species, like the Black-crowned Night Heron, are in such a steep decline that state protections may be warranted.

Along with this 38th year of surveys, we are analyzing population trends to guide future management and conservation. Stay tuned for the new "State of the Harbor Herons" report, which will be released on our website this winter.

HABITAT RESTORATION HELPS BIRDS IN THE BRONX

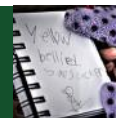
It takes 30 miles of biking each week for field biologist Emilio Tobón to monitor birds' use of restoration sites along the Bronx River, but the impacts of his work are felt across New York Harbor. Over the last 12 years, the Bronx River Alliance and partners have restored major stretches of the Bronx River. The river is now easier to bike along, with increased waterfront access and pathways. The restoration may benefit birds, too: the cleaner water and improved habitat are better for foraging waterbirds, which have been observed hunting along all stretches of the river this summer. While the wading bird population across other parts of the harbor has decreased significantly in the last 10 years, continued restoration of habitats along the Bronx River may be invaluable in reversing those trends.

BIRD-SAFE BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Our work with building partners makes the City safer for birds, including reducing the 230,000 bird deaths from building collisions that occur annually. We applaud property managers and building owners who have taken voluntary steps to adopt bird-safe glass, including 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge and the Port Authority of NY & NJ. Check out our list of bird-friendly buildings at nycaudubon.org/birdsafenyc, and let us know what additional buildings should be recognized for their efforts. ■



The Black-crowned Night Heron is one of nine long-legged wading bird species we survey each year as part of our Harbor Herons Surveys in New York Harbor.



HELP US SELECT A NEW NAME

As readers of *The Urban Audubon* know, in March, New York City Audubon's Board of Directors announced its decision to change the organization's name, dropping "Audubon" as many chapters around the country have done. We don't have a new name yet, but have begun a process to develop a name that is inclusive and welcoming to all New Yorkers, and better represents our work to protect wild birds and their habitats across the City. We'd love your suggestions! To learn more about the board's decision and propose ideas for a new name, visit nycaudubon.org/newname.

BOARD AND ADVISORY COUNCIL NEWS

NYC Audubon welcomes **MaryJane Boland**; **Simon Keyes**; **Georgia Silvera Seamans, PhD**; **Lili Taylor**; and **Sharon Weidberg**, who were elected to the Board of Directors at our June annual meeting of members. Learn more about all five new directors at nycaudubon.org/leadership.

Also at the meeting, **Mike Yuan** and **Dianne Benner** were re-elected as Executive Vice President and Treasurer, respectively, while **Elizabeth Norman** and **Steven Dean** were re-elected as Directors. **Richard Veit, PhD**, was elected as Vice President. **Seth Ausubel**, **Jennifer Maritz**, and **Alan Steel**'s terms on the board have ended; we thank

Seth, Jenny, and Alan for their service and are pleased to welcome them as members of the Advisory Council.

NYC AUDUBON STAFF NEWS

Two dynamic new staff members have just joined New York City Audubon:

Saman Mahmood, who has deep experience in working with elected officials and in constituency engagement, has joined us as director of advocacy and engagement. In this new role for NYC Audubon, Saman leads our government relations and advocacy efforts, supervises our public programs, and creates connections to engage the tens of thousands of New Yorkers in our community to become advocates and stewards for birds and sustainability.

Olivia Liang, a recent graduate of Columbia University with a MFA in creative nonfiction writing, will support our digital marketing and communications efforts as our new communications associate.

Welcome Saman and Olivia! Learn more about them at nycaudubon.org/staff.

We also thank our seasonal staff and interns for their conservation and engagement work on the City's streets, beaches, islands, and green roofs. See below for a selection of photos of these invaluable team members in the field for NYC Audubon! ■



Thank you to our seasonal staff! Top left: Seasonal Field Technicians Wesley Craig and Denis Ramos hold banded Herring Gull chicks on the Javits Center Green Roof. Bottom left: Engagement Intern Leila Winn and Programs Manager Roslyn Rivas pose at an Earth Day event at Carl Schurz Park, Manhattan. Right: Director of Conservation and Science Dustin Partridge, PhD, and Seasonal Field Technician Emilia Zhang Heaton hold banded American Oystercatchers at Jacob Riis Park, Queens.

SUPPORT NYC AUDUBON

GIVE NOW TO HELP BIRDS THRIVE IN NEW YORK CITY

Your contribution helps NYC Audubon protect the birds of New York City and their habitats by advancing more comprehensive bird-friendly legislation, expanding innovative conservation and green infrastructure projects, and introducing *all* New Yorkers to the wonder of birds.

MAKE A DONATION

Donate to support NYC Audubon's critical conservation, advocacy, and engagement efforts. Give at nycaudubon.org/donate.

BECOME A MEMBER

Join our flock by becoming a member of NYC Audubon! Check out our membership levels and perks at nycaudubon.org/membership.

GIVE MONTHLY

Provide ongoing monthly support to protect birds throughout the year. Make a huge difference for as little as \$15 per month. Set up recurring monthly donations at nycaudubon.org/donate.

GIVE A MATCHING GIFT

You can easily double or triple your donation through your company's matching gift program. Contact your employer's personnel office to learn how.

REMEMBER THE BIRDS

Including NYC Audubon in your estate plan is a generous way to ensure that New York City remains a haven for the birds you love. Discuss a bequest with your attorney or learn more at nycaudubon.org/leave-a-legacy.

Contact Director of Development Matthew Coody at 646.502.9611 or at mcoody@nycaudubon.org to discuss making a bequest to NYC Audubon. ■



The night-migrating Wood Thrush is a frequent victim of collisions with buildings. Read more on the back cover.

Tickets on sale now! Get yours at:
nycaudubon.org/roost2023

2023 FALL ROOST

Monday, October 23 at 6pm
1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge

Join us to toast two champions of sustainability and urban biodiversity. Proceeds support NYC Audubon's work in conservation, advocacy, and engagement.

honoring **JEFFREY KIMBALL**
and **1 HOTEL BROOKLYN BRIDGE**



NEW YORK CITY AUDUBON

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THE HAUNTING SONGS OF THE WOOD THRUSH

By Don Riepe

Thrushes are perhaps the most beautiful songsters of the northeast woods, and the song of the Wood Thrush is memorable and haunting for both birders and poets. I often hear Wood Thrushes singing at dusk in the forested areas of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, announcing that darkness is about to descend:

"The last of the light of the sun / That had died in the west / Still lived for one song more / In a thrush's breast." (Robert Frost)

The Wood Thrush also sings around daybreak, evoking a different, more optimistic emotion. The sweet sounds are produced by a double voice box, which gives the bird two pipes to blend sound harmoniously:

"I admire the moderation of this master. There is nothing tumultuous in his song. He launches forth one strain with all his heart and life and soul; a pure and unmatchable melody and then he pauses and gives the hearer and himself time to digest this. And then another and another at suitable intervals." (Henry David Thoreau)

Similar to the Hermit Thrush, the Wood Thrush can be identified by a reddish-brown head and back, with well-defined spots on its breast, while the Hermit Thrush has a reddish-brown tail and lighter breast spots.

A denizen of deciduous woodlands, especially those with tall trees near damp areas, the Wood Thrush can be seen in many wooded NYC parks. However, population declines threaten this gorgeous singer. Human actions such as forest fragmenta-



© Hal Moran

The Wood Thrush's double voice box is the secret behind its ethereal, flute-like song. The two halves of its syrinx can produce notes independently, allowing the bird to create a symphony of sounds that blend together perfectly.

tion (leading to increased parasitic predation by Brown-headed Cowbirds), light pollution, and collisions with glass windows put Wood Thrushes and other songbirds at risk in the Northeast, while continued habitat loss both here and in thrushes' tropical lowland wintering areas also take their toll. NYC Audubon's work to reduce bird collisions and restore habitat is critical so that the Wood Thrush will continue to delight present and future generations with its haunting and ethereal song. (See page 2 for more information on proposed Lights Out legislation.) ■

THERE'S MORE ONLINE! DIGITAL URBAN AUDUBON STORIES

Visit nycaudubon.org/digital-ua to find more bird-filled **Digital Urban Audubon Stories**. ■