

# THE URBAN BIRD CALL

NEW  
TITLE!



NEW INITIATIVE WELCOMES MORE  
NEW YORKERS TO ENJOY NATURE

YELLOW-CROWNED  
NIGHT HERON

CELEBRATING OUR  
FALL ROOST HONOREES



## MISSION & VISION

NYC Bird Alliance (formerly 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 Bird Alliance envisions a day when birds and people in the five boroughs enjoy a healthy, livable habitat.

## 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. 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 [go.nycbirdalliance.org/edia](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/edia).

## THE URBAN BIRD CALL (FORMERLY THE URBAN AUDUBON)

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## BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

By Jessica G. Wilson,  
Executive Director



As birders know, fall brings not just changing leaves but migratory songbirds. These lively and colorful visitors remind us of the City's unique position as a vital sanctuary along their migratory paths—and our role in providing them safe passage through the urban landscape. Fall is also a season of celebration for NYC Bird Alliance (formerly NYC Audubon) as we gather for our annual Fall Roost gala, a night to highlight and support our growing work.

This year's Roost on October 1 (see page 7) is particularly special as we commemorate 45 years of dedication to urban bird conservation. Our journey has been marked by countless milestones and birding experiences that have brought joy and knowledge to so many people. At this gala, we will be honoring two individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to our mission.

We are thrilled to honor Karen Benfield, immediate past president of our board of directors, whose vision and leadership guided the transformation of our organization's identity from NYC Audubon to NYC Bird Alliance. Karen's commitment to inclusivity and outreach has strengthened our community and broadened our impact, ensuring that our mission resonates with the diverse fabric of the City. Additionally, we will be proud to present Dr. Claude Bloch with an Impact in Birding award, celebrating his long-standing contributions to our organization's achievements and his commitment to birding—a dedication that continues to this day.

Looking toward the future, we're excited about our "NYCHA in Nature" program—a beacon of our vision for urban conservation. This initiative brings nature-based education and experiences to the residents of New York City Housing Authority, fostering a deeper connection between urban communities and the natural world for the next generation of conservationists. Read more about NYCHA in Nature on page 3.

As we celebrate our past, engage with the present, and look to the future, we thank you for your support and participation in making New York City a thriving habitat for birds and a model of urban conservation. ■



NYC Bird Alliance Immediate Past President Karen Benfield is photographed with longtime supporters Lucienne and Claude Bloch at the 2021 Fall Roost gala at the Central Park Zoo.



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# NEW INITIATIVE WELCOMES MORE NEW YORKERS TO ENJOY NATURE

By Carol Peace Robins, Publications Committee Volunteer

**A**s a small group gathers in an area of lush vegetation, shady trees, and inviting walking paths, a woman and her three grandchildren learn to use their borrowed binoculars. Before the outing even begins, a Common Grackle appears. But not only a grackle. This bird's eating something way bigger than a fly or mosquito.

When Ronnie Almonte, a NYC Bird Alliance (formerly NYC Audubon) bird guide and a high school biology teacher, explains that the snack is none other than a dragonfly, Ivan, the youngest grandchild, is enthralled.

This familiar scene, one of wonder and excitement inspired by an avian visitor, is part of NYC Bird Alliance's pilot program, NYCHA in Nature. Where are we? Wyckoff Gardens, a public housing development in Brooklyn, where we are about to start a stroll through its grounds and those of the neighboring Gowanus public housing development, to explore the fascinating world of birds.

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) provides affordable housing to nearly 600,000 New Yorkers—almost 12% of all City residents—many in park-like campuses containing a collective 1,000 acres of urban forest. NYC Bird Alliance, in partnership with the Public Housing Community Fund, an independent nonprofit that raises funds to support public housing residents, started this pilot program in 2023 to engage these residents living in NYCHA housing.

Research shows that being in nature improves mental and physical health, social cohesion, and children's ability to learn. Yet too many urban residents, especially in communities of color, lack that connection. The goal of the NYCHA in Nature program is to invite public housing residents outdoors to enjoy wildlife, with the long-term aim of engaging people in urban biodiversity, the beauties of nature, and the importance of sustainability.

Although the program is in its infancy, Alex Zablocki, executive director of the Public Housing Community Fund, has high hopes: "The NYCHA in Nature program gives some 525,000 public housing residents the unique opportunity to explore the urban oasis outside their front doors and learn from experts about the wonders they're seeing."

A prime example of the power of this invitation to explore nature is the partnership between NYC Bird Alliance and an established photography club engaging the senior citizens of New Lane, a Staten Island NYCHA campus. On a recent field trip to Brooklyn Botanic Garden, New Lane residents and bird guides alike were enthralled to see an Osprey dive for koi in the Japanese Garden before a Red-Tailed Hawk swooped in to fight the fellow raptor.



Public Housing Community Fund Executive Director Alex Zablocki (left) joins a NYCHA in Nature outing exploring Brooklyn's Canarsie Pier and Bay View Houses, led by NYC Bird Alliance guide Ronnie Almonte (right).

"We sat there watching and no one could take a photo," said Imani Heath, the photography club leader. "The guides were amazed, and we were amazed, and then we got to share in conversation afterward."

"It was natural and holistic and that's what I love about this partnership," she added.

Jessica Wilson, executive director of NYC Bird Alliance, is equally optimistic about the power of this new program: "It's important to engage all of the City's residents in the world of birds and nature. The threats facing birds are monumental, and more people who care about birds means more people who will take action to protect them."

Returning to that outing through the Gowanus NYCHA campus, the grandmother and children saw pigeons, of course, but also European Starlings, House Sparrows, Mourning Doves, Fish Crows, American Robins eating worms, and an elusive Cardinal. With every sighting, Ronnie has facts and stories to tell and the kids love it. At the end of the walk, Ivan, when asked his favorite part, immediately says, "the dragonfly!"

Who knows what else NYCHA in Nature can nurture? ■



Hammel housing campus residents in Queens helped NYC Bird Alliance scientists spot Yellow-crowned Night Herons nesting nearby as part of its 2024 Harbor Herons surveys. (See back cover for more information.)

# PROTECTING BIRDS AND HABITATS IN THE CITY'S FIVE BOROUGHS

## CONSERVATION UPDATES



*NYC Bird Alliance 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.*

### NEW STUDY: WINDOWS KILL OVER A BILLION BIRDS IN THE U.S. ANNUALLY

"A bird hit my window and was temporarily stunned, but it flew off, so it was fine." This is a common response when speaking about collisions. However, a new study by NYC Bird Alliance (formerly NYC Audubon) reveals that most stunned birds die. Collaborating with researchers from Fordham University, American Bird Conservancy, and Stony Brook University, NYC Bird Alliance Director of Conservation and Science Dr. Dustin Partridge tracked over 3,000 window collision victims in the Northeast brought to rehabilitation, finding that 60% die even under the best conditions.

While it's long been estimated that up to one billion birds die annually from collisions, we now know

the true number exceeds one billion in the U.S. This is a significant issue. Rehabilitators provide safe spaces for injured birds, but to reverse global declines driven in part by window collisions, glass needs to be made bird-safe. Easy and effective solutions are available. For more information, visit [go.nycbirdalliance.org/bird-safe](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/bird-safe).

### 2024 HARBOR HERONS RESEARCH

For 39 years, NYC Bird Alliance has surveyed the waterbirds of NY Harbor, documenting trends in this critical population of long-legged wading birds and the effects of climate change, predation, and habitat loss. While we continue to see troubling trends in key species like Black-crowned Night Heron and Glossy Ibis, this summer's survey also had hopeful findings: the

wading bird colony on South Brother Island is thriving, with the highest number of nesting pairs since 2007, and—an unexpected first: this year five pairs of Great Blue Herons nested on Hoffman Island near Staten Island. ■



© NYC Bird Alliance

NYC Bird Alliance partnered with Bronx-based youth development organization Rocking the Boat, whose high school students helped set camera traps on two islands in the East River. The data will inform our understanding of nest predation and guidance for the management of the East River islands, some of the most important for wading birds in New York Harbor.

## ADVOCACY UPDATES



*NYC Bird Alliance speaks up for birds and their habitats with advocacy efforts across the City.*

### HELP US PASS LIGHTS OUT NYC BILL

Each year, an estimated 250,000 birds die in New York City from collisions with glass, often exacerbated by nighttime artificial light that attracts and disorients them. Turning off lights not only saves birds, but also reduces energy costs and enhances human well-being.

A new bill by NYC Council Member Francisco Moya would require commercial and industrial buildings to turn off non-essential lights at night. Currently, 16 Council members support the bill, but we need 34 for it to pass. Has your Council member co-sponsored it yet? Urge them to support Int. 0896, the Lights Out Bill. Take action: [go.nycbirdalliance.org/int0896](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/int0896).

### MORE GREEN ROOFS FOR MORE NEW YORKERS

Green roofs in New York City provide critical habitat for birds, and help the City mitigate the effects of climate change. Thanks to the efforts of NYC Bird Alliance advocates, an improved version of the Green Roof Tax Abatement passed this summer. The updated program offers greater financial incentives for building owners to install green roofs, with increased abatements in areas of highest environmental need and simplified access for qualifying projects—promoting equity across all five boroughs. Learn more about green infrastructure: [go.nycbirdalliance.org/gr](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/gr).

### URGE GOVERNOR HOCHUL TO SIGN HORSESHOE CRAB BILL

Atlantic Horseshoe Crabs, a keystone species in decline, produce eggs that are a crucial food source for vulnerable shorebirds like the threatened Rufa Red Knot. Bill A.10140/S.3185-A, passed this spring by New York's Assembly and Senate, would ban horseshoe crab harvesting for commercial and biomedical use in the state, but as of this writing has not been signed into law. Urge Governor Hochul to sign this bill to protect New York's at-risk birds. Learn how you can help by visiting [go.nycbirdalliance.org/hscbill](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/hscbill). ■

## ENGAGEMENT UPDATES



*NYC Bird Alliance works to create the next generation of conservationists by instilling a love of birds and nature through hundreds of bird outings and events each year.*

### CLIMATE WEEK EVENTS (SEPT 22-29)

Two-thirds of U.S. bird species are at risk due to climate change. This September, join NYC Bird Alliance to mark Climate Week NYC with a host of bird outings, panel discussions, and special events focused on climate and birds. More information at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/cw](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/cw).

### HORSESHOE CRABS PROTECTED BY COMMUNITY SCIENTISTS

Horseshoe crabs are a critical food source for migratory shorebirds, but their populations are at risk. NYC Bird Alliance data helps protect them. For 11 nights in May and June, NYC Bird Alliance scientists were joined by nearly 300 volunteers to count and tag spawning horseshoe crabs in Jamaica Bay. We counted nearly 3,300 crabs—a 28% increase over last year—great news for both horseshoe crabs and the migratory shorebirds that rely on their eggs. We also tagged 610 horseshoe crabs, helping scientists track their journeys and advocate to protect the habitat on which they rely. See our Advocacy Updates section for how you can help protect Horseshoe Crabs spawning on our shores.



NYC Bird Alliance guide Annie Barry (right) leads a fall birding outing on Governors Island.

### WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY (OCT 12)

This October, NYC Bird Alliance is hosting several free programs across the City, including an Accessible Bird Tour at Fort Tryon Park, Spanish-English birding at Alley Pond Park, Intro to Birding at Marine Park, and more. Check out our full calendar of events at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/cal](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/cal) to find an outing near you on October 12 or one of hundreds of others throughout the fall.

### BIRDING ON GOVERNORS ISLAND

NYC Bird Alliance has a seasonal island home, just a few minutes from lower Manhattan, accessible by ferry. Our Governors Island nature center, open on weekends through October, now occupies a historic house at the Island's popular Colonels Row area. Talk birds with us on the porch, make birdy art, explore our exhibitions, and bird with us every Saturday at 2pm. Check our website at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/gi](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/gi) for details on Artist in Residence Susie Oh's upcoming exhibition, the Pumpkin Point festival in late October, and more fun on Governors Island with NYC Bird Alliance.

### FALL FESTIVALS

Fall means festival season, and we're back with your favorites:

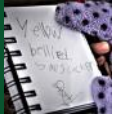
- October 12: Raptorama Part 1 at Jamaica Bay
- October 19: Raptorama Part 2 at Marine Park
- October 26-27: Pumpkin Point on Governors Island

For more information on these festivals, visit [go.nycbirdalliance.org/fest](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/fest). ■



Red Knots depend on the eggs of Horseshoe Crabs for food to fuel their long migratory journeys.

## NEWS & NOTES



### THANK YOU FOR HELPING US SELECT A NEW PUBLICATION TITLE

Following NYC Bird Alliance's June renaming, we invited readers to help us choose a new title for our beloved publication, formerly known as *The Urban Audubon*. Your creativity took flight, with nearly 100 suggestions received. After lively debate amongst our Publications Committee and a task force that included former publication editors and writers, it was clear *The Urban Bird Call* soared above the rest! This name reflects our unique status as an urban chapter, with a mission to give voice to the City's diverse birds in need of our protection. We're grateful for your input and excited for this new chapter in our publication's rich history.

### CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP ACROSS FIELDS

NYC Bird Alliance scientists demonstrate their expertise not just on our local projects, but across disciplines and across the country.



Director of Conservation and Science Dr. Dustin Partridge joined a discussion panel at NYCxDESIGN to demonstrate why bird-safe design needs to be a part of building sustainability efforts.

This spring and summer, our scientists gave over a dozen scientific talks at meetings and conferences, including presentations on banding for urban conservation at the Eastern Bird Banding Association, the impacts of climate change on the City's birds for the NYC Department of Health, careers in urban ecology for a Nation Science Foundation-funded research program, and running collision monitoring programs for a Chicago-based nonprofit coalition.

### THE PASSING OF LENORE SWENSON

The NYC Bird Alliance community is deeply saddened by the loss of longtime member, supporter, and friend Lenore Swenson, who passed away on June 18, 2024. A devoted birder and naturalist, Lenore was a co-leader of NYC Bird Alliance's field trip committee in the 1990s and 2000s, organizing bird outings or serving as a volunteer guide to popular local sites. Over the past few decades, Lenore was a frequent attendee of the Jamaica Bay Shorebird Festival, Sunset Eco Cruises, and Christmas Bird Count, but might be encountered birding anywhere in the New York City area.

NYC Bird Alliance remembers Lenore for her kindness, deep birding knowledge, and warm wit. She will be missed. Lenore's legacy is remembered by Alice Deutsch, past president of Linnaean Society of New York, in an article published at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/blog](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/blog). ■

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NYC Bird Alliance thanks its seasonal staff for their work monitoring birds and biodiversity on Google and Javits Center green roofs, studying American Oystercatchers in the Rockaways, and serving as environmental educators on Governors Island.

# SUPPORT NYC BIRD ALLIANCE

## GIVE NOW TO HELP BIRDS THRIVE IN NEW YORK CITY

**Y**our contribution helps NYC Bird Alliance (formerly NYC Audubon) protect the City's birds and their habitats by advancing 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 Bird Alliance's critical conservation, advocacy, and engagement efforts. Give at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/donate](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/donate).

### BECOME A MEMBER

Join our flock by becoming a member of NYC Bird Alliance! Check out our membership levels and perks at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/join](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/join).

### 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 Bird Alliance 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 [go.nycbirdalliance.org/legacy](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/legacy).

Contact Director of Development Matthew Coody at [mcoody@nycbirdalliance.org](mailto:mcoody@nycbirdalliance.org) or at 646.502.9611 to discuss making a bequest to NYC Bird Alliance. ■



© David Lei

NYC Bird Alliance's recently published study (see page 4) reveals more than a billion birds—many of them songbirds like the Cape May Warbler—die annually from window collisions.

Tickets on sale now! Get yours at:  
[nycbirdalliance.org/roost2024](https://nycbirdalliance.org/roost2024)

## 2024 FALL ROOST

Tuesday, October 1 at 6pm

Tavern on the Green

*honoring* **KAREN BENFIELD**  
*with special awardee* **DR. CLAUDE BLOCH**

**Join us** to toast two heroes for birds.  
Proceeds support NYC Bird Alliance's work  
in conservation, advocacy, and engagement.



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**NYC BIRD  
ALLIANCE**  
FORMERLY NYC AUDUBON

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# YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON

By Kellye Rosenheim, former NYC Bird Alliance Director of Development

One of the more striking wading birds in the New York City area is *Nyctanassa violacea*, the “violet night queen.” Indeed, one is struck by the regal bearing of this colorful shoreline hunter.

The Yellow-crowned Night Heron’s sexes look alike, and you can identify them by the black head, white cheek patch, white or yellow crown, and gray overall body plumage, sometimes appearing slightly bluish-violet. During the breeding season, both sexes grow long white head plumes and their yellowish-green legs turn from coral pink to red.

The YCNH, as NYC Bird Alliance (formerly NYC Audubon) conservationists call them, can be found in every borough, usually in coastal habitats near their favorite food: crustaceans. That’s no surprise when you look at the bird’s sturdy bill. You’ll see them slowly stalking their prey, and when a crab is caught, they eat it whole or, if larger, dismember it, eating first the body, then the legs.

These birds are migratory and only one of six subspecies to venture out of the Caribbean each year to breed. You can spot their often-communal nests in urban or suburban street trees. This year, a science research study in conjunction with NYC Bird Alliance’s community engagement program, NYCHA in Nature, to the Hammel and Redfern housing campuses in the Rockaways found more than 70 nests in the latter location. (Learn more about NYCHA in Nature on page 3.)

Dr. Dustin Partridge, director of conservation and science at NYC Bird Alliance, oversees the organization’s



© D. Bruce Valton

A Yellow-crowned Night Heron nesting on Governors Island keeps a watchful eye on its chicks.

long-term work to study the nesting populations of these birds in New York Harbor.

“Because their diet consists primarily of marine crustaceans, Yellow-crowned Night Herons are important indicators of the health of New York Harbor, and they can be an early bellwether of environmental threats to humans. Due to their ability to shift nesting locations, their populations can be notoriously difficult to track. However, we know that their close relative, the Black-crowned Night Heron, has experienced dramatic declines in New York Harbor in the last two decades, and Yellow-crowns may be following a similar trend.”

In fact, the Yellow-crown is so closely related to the Black-crown that their young look remarkably similar. Both youngsters sport mottled brown and white plumage and have a similar silhouette, but one can distinguish them by their bills: Yellow-crowns’ bills are black, Black-crowns’ bills are yellow. ■

**THERE’S MORE ONLINE! DIGITAL URBAN BIRD CALL STORIES**

Visit [go.nycbirdalliance.org/digital-ubc](http://go.nycbirdalliance.org/digital-ubc) to find more bird-filled stories. ■