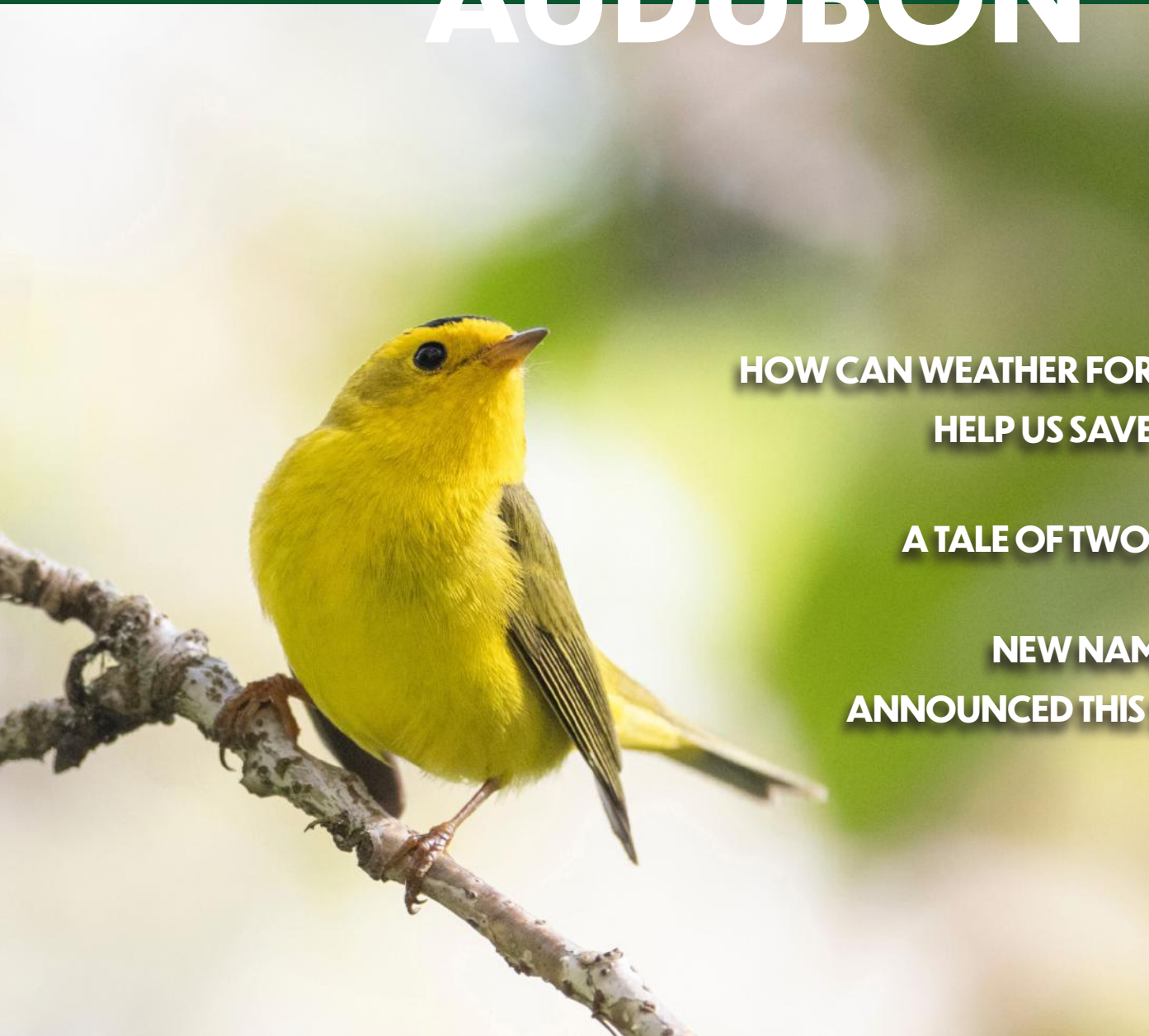


# THE URBAN AUDUBON



**HOW CAN WEATHER FORECASTS  
HELP US SAVE BIRDS?**

**A TALE OF TWO EGRETS**

**NEW NAME TO BE  
ANNOUNCED THIS SPRING**



## 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 [nycadubon.org/edia](https://nycadubon.org/edia).

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Supporting responsible use of forest resources

## PRESIDENT'S PERCH

By Karen Benfield,  
Board President



**W**ith spring comes growth and renewal in our City's green spaces. As I wind down my four-year term as president, I am awed by the growth and renewal inside our organization as well.

Since I began my role, we have welcomed new faces to all levels of our staff. These tireless and creative dynamos bring a diversity of experience to our work, commitment to conservation and birds, and endless energy and expertise. In the last four years I have been fortunate to work alongside two extraordinary executive directors; first Katherine Heintz, and since 2022, Jessica Wilson. They have paved the way for continued impact.

We have also grown our community outreach through new initiatives like our NYCHA in Nature partnership with public housing residents, multilingual bird outings, and the City's first Spanish-English bird guide. Our volunteer and advocate armies continue to expand.

And oh—the progress we have made for the birds: passing landmark bird-friendly design and artificial light laws, partnering with buildings to retrofit bird-killing glass, and leading the charge in the creation of a network of green roofs that have become a haven for wildlife and make our City more resilient.

Of course, our core mission remains unchanged. For more than four decades we have been guardians for birds in our urban spaces. We continue to protect waterbirds along our waterways and beaches. We know which birds are thriving and which are in trouble, and we have plans to help. Our Project Safe Flight program, launched in 1997, has become a nationwide model and remains a cornerstone of our bird collision efforts. Excitingly, we will continue this work under a new name this spring, welcoming all New Yorkers into our conservation community with a new calling card. I am proud to have led our dedicated board, committed to tackling important projects like the name change to serve the organization's future.

I step down fulfilled by the privilege of being part of such magnificent expansion of urban conservation. And what an honor it has been to have come to know our members. Your support of our mission is key to the continuing growth of our organization and the future for birds. ■



## BIRD NAMES FOR BIRDS

Names may be symbolic, but symbols matter. NYC Audubon applauds the American Ornithological Society's (AOS) decision to rename English bird names (like the striking Wilson's Warbler pictured on our cover) so that they no longer pay homage to people, but honor and represent the birds' unique characteristics and beauty.

As AOS President Colleen Handel, PhD, said when making the announcement in November: "Some English bird names have associations with the past that continue to be exclusionary and harmful today... Everyone who loves and cares about birds should be able to enjoy and study them freely—and birds need our help now more than ever."

This is an important move to make birding and conservation more welcoming for all. It's why NYC Audubon will be changing its own name, removing "Audubon" and choosing a name that is more inclusive and better represents what we do. Learn the latest updates about our name change process on page 6. ■

# HOW CAN WEATHER FORECASTS HELP US SAVE BIRDS?

By Sara Kross, PhD, Katherine Chen, and Benjamin Van Doren, PhD

**M**igration is a particularly dangerous journey, and it's estimated that collisions with windows kill up to one billion birds across North America annually. NYC Audubon scientists and partners have focused on this problem for decades. Now, new research on weather's impact can make solutions more effective.

Every year, billions of birds migrate from their breeding grounds to their overwintering sites and back again. During this journey, NYC Audubon estimates that nearly a quarter million birds die from injuries caused by window collisions in the City each year. The causes? Glass and light.

A key action to decrease bird collisions is turning off unnecessary night-time lighting and reducing New York City's light pollution, which draws migratory birds into the City, disorienting them and making them more susceptible to collisions with windows.

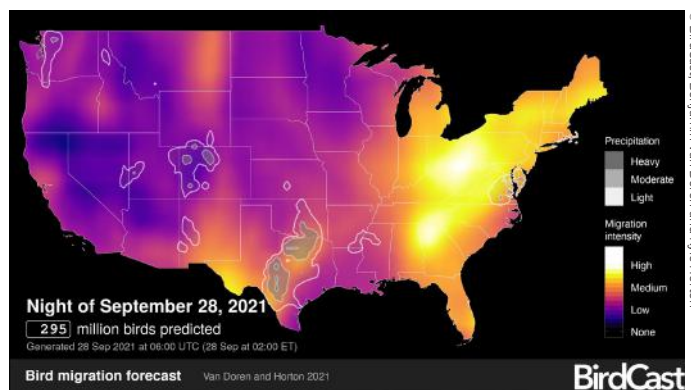
Across the continent, "Lights Out" programs encourage building owners and tenants to turn off unnecessary lights during migration. However, these programs are largely voluntary, and for many large buildings, a season-long Lights Out program (in New York City, April 1–May 31 in spring; August 15–November 15 in fall) has been a barrier to full participation.

In 2021, we—scientists from NYC Audubon, Columbia University, the University of Canterbury, American Bird Conservancy, Great Hollow Nature Preserve & Ecological Research Center, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign—set out to remove this barrier. Our goal was to better understand collision risk factors and hone in on the most dangerous nights for birds in order to facilitate more effective calls for Lights Out participation.

Radar technology, like the Cornell Lab of Ornithology BirdCast tool, allows us to better predict nights that are likely to be problematic for bird collisions based on the number of migrating birds. Sometimes, however, nights that were predicted to be especially risky for bird collisions were below average, and nights that supposedly didn't pose a threat turned into major mortality events. We thought weather might explain this variation.

Building on NYC Audubon's Project Safe Flight—where volunteers monitor buildings across the City for collision victims—we incorporated local weather data to avian migration data to see if weather could be an important predictor of collisions.

Our findings indicated that weather conditions combined with migration traffic patterns are important predictors of bird collision risk. Generally, bird collision rates were higher when there was more migration traffic, but they were also



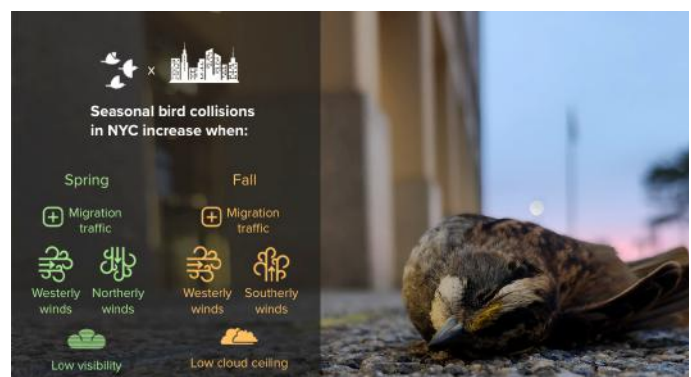
BirdCast uses radar technology to predict migration intensity on given nights, up to three days in advance. Combining this information with weather forecasts and historical collision data opens up new bird conservation opportunities.

affected by unfavorable wind and visibility.

In spring, birds migrate north; therefore, headwinds blowing from the north are unfavorable. In fall, when birds fly south, winds coming from the south are unfavorable. In both seasons, winds from the west push migrating birds toward New York City and its bright lights and then further past the coast towards open water. These wind conditions, along with poor visibility at higher altitudes, lead birds to fly at lower heights where they are more susceptible to collide.

These results will allow organizations and individuals to tailor their Lights Out initiatives. While Lights Out throughout entire migration seasons is the ultimate goal, it's not an easy ask of many buildings, especially large ones. If we can garner greater participation from buildings across the City (and country) on the nights that are likely to be most dangerous—when migration traffic is high and birds are likely to face headwinds or low clouds—we can begin reducing collisions immediately.

Visit [nycaudubon.org/artificial-light](https://nycaudubon.org/artificial-light) to learn more about the dangers of light pollution to birds and how you can help prevent collisions. ■



An infographic, with a dead White-throated Sparrow at the right, explains the weather conditions that increase collision risk in New York City during the fall and spring seasons.



# PROTECTING BIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS

By New York City Audubon Staff

## ENGAGEMENT UPDATES



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

### SPRING MIGRATION BIRD OUTINGS

This spring, we will host over 100 bird outings and classes to welcome birders and to celebrate the birds migrating through our City. We are offering outings across all five boroughs, including events in multiple languages and for all levels of physical accessibility. On Friday, March 8, you will be able to see our full calendar at [nycaudubon.org/outings](https://nycaudubon.org/outings); registration then opens for members on Monday, March 11, at 9am. Registration for non-members opens the following week on Monday, March 18, at 9am. Keep an eye out for special members-only outings and experiences as well.

### WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

Every May and October we celebrate World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD), appreciating our winged wonders that travel thousands of miles on their migrations. This spring, WMBD falls on Saturday, May 11, and we will have a day packed with events across the City, including at the Bronx Zoo, Snug Harbor, Marine Park, and more. See more at [nycaudubon.org/wmbd-2024](https://nycaudubon.org/wmbd-2024).

### BLACK BIRDERS WEEK

Black Birders Week—started by BlackAFInSTEM in 2020 to raise the visibility of and showcase Black birders, scientists, and nature enthusiasts—takes place this year May 26 to June 1. Be on the lookout for information on events hosted by NYC Audubon throughout the week on our Instagram, @nycaudubon.

### FESTIVALS

Join us at these engaging weekend festivals around the City this spring:

- April 20, Earth Day Festivals at Carl Schurz Park, Manhattan, and Red Hook, Brooklyn
- May 18, SUBMERGE Marine Science Festival at Hudson River Park

### VISIT US ON GOVERNORS ISLAND

For seven years, we have hosted a nature center on Governors Island from May–October. This year, we're excited to move to a new seasonal home at the Island's Colonels Row area. Visitors can talk birds with us out on the porch of the house, make bird art, check out our exhibitions including ones from our

Artists in Residence, and enjoy free bird tours of the Island.

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

This spring, NYC Audubon has conservation and engagement volunteer opportunities for everyone. Learn about leading after-school bird outings in the Bronx, monitoring building collisions, transporting injured birds to rehabbers, and engaging New Yorkers at festivals throughout the boroughs at [nycaudubon.org/volunteer](https://nycaudubon.org/volunteer). ■



© NYC Audubon

**Nearly 400 New Yorkers (a record number!) participated at dozens of NYC Audubon's Christmas Bird Count locations across Manhattan on Sunday, December 17, 2023. Here, dedicated volunteers tackle Central Park's Northwest Corner.**

## ADVOCACY UPDATES



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

### ARTIFICIAL LIGHT REDUCTION

We continue our work to reduce artificial light at night, which can confuse and disorient night-migrating birds. Our focus has been on proposed Lights Out legislation, and this winter we pushed to secure 20 co-sponsors for a new Lights Out bill. We'll need the support of all bird advocates to help this bill cross the finish line, so stay tuned for how to get involved.

Artificial light comes not just from

buildings, but also from new sources such as drones. Drone light shows featuring massive displays of artificial light have grown in occurrence and popularity in our City. NYC Audubon is currently working with NYC Parks to outline guidelines for bird-safe drone shows in New York City.

### BIRDS AND BEES PROTECTION ACT

For the past two years, Avian Advocates have raised their voices about toxic

neonicotinoid pesticides (neonics). We're thrilled to report that in late 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul signed the Birds and Bees Protection Act: Legislation S.1856-A/A.7640. This groundbreaking law bans the application of neonics on corn, soybean, or wheat seeds, as well as on outdoor ornamental plants and turfs. These measures aim to safeguard New York's pollinators, birds, and other wildlife from potential harm caused by these toxins.

# ACROSS THE CITY'S FIVE BOROUGHS

## GREEN ROOF TAX ABATEMENT

Birds need healthy habitats to thrive, and in our City of a million buildings, good habitat can increasingly be found on green roofs. NYC Audubon has been working to renew the state's Green Roof Tax Abatement, which is a critical piece of legislation to provide wildlife habitat and make our City more climate resilient. The renewal, which is essential to prevent the program from sunseting and introduces improvements that will increase incentives and access, has passed the

New York State Senate and has been introduced in the State Assembly, but it needs more support to pass.

## HABITAT PROTECTION

Additional habitat can be found on the City's beaches. This winter, we encouraged NYC Parks to continue to protect and manage a biodiversity hotspot in the Rockaways, on a one-mile stretch of beach which is the summer nesting ground of the endangered Piping Plover, American Oystercatcher, and two species of terns.

Our work on habitat extends offshore and to federal policies, as well. The potential development of six wind-lease areas off the shores of New York and New Jersey, in an area known as the New York Bight, is a boon for clean energy—but could be dangerous for birds if not sited correctly. NYC Audubon has submitted comments to the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management on the effects of offshore wind energy development on wild birds in New York City. ■

## 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.**

## PROTECTING WATERBIRDS

New York City, an archipelago, provides remarkable habitat for colonial and beach-nesting birds. However, citywide populations are in steep decline, and NYC Audubon is working to reverse those trends.

For nearly 40 years NYC Audubon has collected data on the City's waterbird populations. This winter we published our new *State of the Harbor Herons 2023* report. A visually stunning showcase of these wading birds, the report also reveals that some of NYC's waders—such as the Glossy Ibis and Black-crowned Night Heron—may sadly disappear unless we take action. (Learn more about the report on our back cover.)

To protect birds along the City's beaches, we've begun to uncover the cause of American Oystercatcher nest failure by using an important conservation tool, camera traps, which collect 250,000 photos of nests each year. We're using Artificial Intelligence to help us analyze these scores of images in a way that can allow us to identify the various threats facing these birds. A reminder that our work has impact far beyond the five boroughs: an American Oystercatcher,



**Our work consulting on the installation of bird-friendly window treatments with notorious bird-killing building "Circa Central Park" made the front page of *The New York Times* on October 17, 2023.**

banded by NYC Audubon in the Rockaways in spring 2023, was spotted months later in Honduras.

## MAKING THE CITY SAFER FOR BIRDS

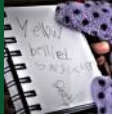
This spring, NYC Audubon's army of collision monitoring volunteers takes to the streets for Project Safe Flight's 27th year. Their work provides crucial data to help us advocate for bird-friendly building retrofits, such as our recent partnerships with the Circa Central Park building, the all-glass Brookfield Place Terminal, and the sustainable 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge.

Thanks to a recently published paper by staff scientist Katherine Chen (see page 3), our community scientists will be paying close attention to weather forecasts.

In addition to continuing our collision monitoring this spring, we're working to publish our methods as a framework for other organizations to use. Our decades of experience monitoring collisions, engaging volunteers, and building partnerships can be applied to any city hoping to reduce collisions; our aim is to help others learn from our mistakes and our wins, in order to improve collision monitoring across North America.

## PROVIDING HABITAT WITH GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

For over 10 years, we have conducted long-term studies of the Javits Center's biodiverse green roofs. That work continues to build, and last year we conducted biodiversity monitoring on over 30 green roofs and small parks across the City. This past fall, we recorded over a dozen new bird species—most of them migratory—using the City's green roofs, highlighting the importance of these small green spaces for helping birds navigate the built environment. ■



### NEW NAME COMING IN SPRING 2024

As reported in previous issues of *The Urban Audubon*, we will soon choose a new name that is both inclusive and welcoming and represents the organization's work to protect wild birds and habitat.

Throughout 2023, we collected hundreds of suggestions for new names. We've also considered the new names that other chapters in the Audubon network across the nation are choosing and learned from branding experts to guide our process. Our Name Change Task Force narrowed down the hundreds of choices to these top five names:

- Birds Connect NYC
- Birds for All NYC (or, NYC Birds for All)
- Birds NYC (or, NYC Birds)
- NYC Bird Alliance (or, Bird Alliance of NYC)
- NYC Bird Conservancy (or, Bird Conservancy of NYC)

This past winter, our Name Change Task Force collected input on those top five names from our organization's diverse array of stakeholders, including members and supporters, volunteers, educators and bird guides, and partner organizations. The Task Force also considered marketing, legal, and admin-

istrative concerns and will narrow to two choices in March. Our board of directors will then decide on a final name and we'll make it official later in the spring; please keep an eye on your email and mail for updates.

Though our name will change, our work will not. We remain a chapter of National Audubon Society and committed to our mission to protect wild birds and their habitat.

For more information on our process, visit [nycaudubon.org/newname](https://nycaudubon.org/newname).

### SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR ANNUAL MEETING AND ELECTIONS: JUNE 5

Join us on Wednesday, June 5 for our Annual Meeting of Members. At this meeting, NYC Audubon members will elect directors and officers to the board of directors and vote to amend the certificate of incorporation to effect our organization's name change. The organization's leaders will also share an update on our conservation, engagement, and advocacy efforts to protect wild birds and engage New Yorkers in enjoying and stewarding nature.

Information about the meeting location, as well as proxy ballots, will be sent by mail and email in May.

### SAYING GOODBYE TO A LEGEND

We are greatly saddened by the passing of longtime Advisory Council

member Albert Butzel. We share a remembrance from former executive director and board member (and current advisory council member), Marcia Fowle:

*Al was a persistent, witty, brilliant, unassuming man. When NYC Audubon president Peter Mott and I asked Al to join the newly forming Advisory Council in 1998 and he said yes, we were thrilled. Al's involvement was a natural fit since NYC Audubon had advocated against development of the Westway Highway project proposed along Manhattan's Hudson River waterfront and against plans for a hydroelectric plant at Storm King Mountain north of the City, both defeated by Al's strategic litigation. Al's focus on preserving green spaces in Governors Island and Hudson River Park, and his support of Brooklyn Bridge Park, connected him deeply to NYC Audubon's work to protect wild birds and habitat.*

Al passed away on January 26, 2024. NYC Audubon joins other environmental groups around the City in remembering this champion of vibrant urban environments. A full obituary can be read in *The New York Times* at [link.nycaudubon.org/butzel](https://link.nycaudubon.org/butzel). ■

## SUPPORT NYC AUDUBON: GIVE NOW TO HELP BIRDS THRIVE IN OUR 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](https://nycaudubon.org/donate).

### BECOME A MEMBER

Join our flock by becoming a member! Check out our membership levels and perks at [nycaudubon.org/membership](https://nycaudubon.org/membership).

### 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 to send a matching gift.

### 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](https://nycaudubon.org/leave-a-legacy).

Contact Director of Development Matthew Coody at 646.502.9611 or at [mcoody@nycaudubon.org](mailto:mcoody@nycaudubon.org) to discuss making a bequest to New York City Audubon. ■



# A TALE OF TWO EGRETS

By Don Riepe

For most of my life, I lived happily at Broad Channel, Queens, with the birds outside. Until 15 years ago, when the birds started coming inside.

As I sat on my dock in 2009 looking out at Jamaica Bay, a beautiful white Great Egret landed—and to my surprise—followed me into the house. I know we’re not supposed to feed wild animals but I couldn’t help myself and I offered the bird a fish. Soon, my new friend Egor the egret would stop by nearly every day for a snack. Egor was a gentle bird and would gingerly take the fish from my hand. She (I learned a few years later that Egor was female) quickly became a hit with my neighbors and the summer interns hired for the American Littoral Society. Every spring, she showed up in Jamaica Bay around April 1 and stayed until late October before she migrated south.

One spring morning in 2014, another egret visited my dock and chased Egor away. This individual was a little bigger with a deeper croak and more aggressive behavior—I knew this one was a male. I named him Edgar. It too started coming into my house, but now I had to figure out how to accommodate the two opposing genders, including on the occasions they came in at the same time and started flying through the house! One solution was to lure Edgar into a side room and lock him in until Egor was given some fish. Another was to train Egor to come to the upper deck out of Edgar’s sight and then feed her there.

Egor was a regular and reliable visitor for 10 years. Once she even showed up at my front door! But in 2020, Egor failed to return from her southern wintering area.



Large Photo: “Edgar” the Great Egret is photographed exploring the interior of Don Riepe’s house in Broad Channel, Queens. Inset Photo: Edgar outside Don’s house, showing off magnificent breeding plumage.

To this day, Edgar still visits me at my house on the water in Jamaica Bay. Like Egor once did, he usually arrives in early April and stays through October, though last spring (2023) he came back in late March and didn’t leave the Bay until mid-November. This isn’t unusual—some egrets stay in New York well into December and have been seen on the annual Christmas Bird Count.

Over the years I’ve learned a lot about egret behavior and food preferences. Edgar for example rarely eats killifish and prefers Atlantic Silversides, a small baitfish that I catch in a trap or buy at a local bait shop. Once I ran out of silversides and gave him a small slice of salmon—which I soon learned was an expensive mistake because he now only wants salmon and refuses any other type of fish I give him. Fortunately, after the breeding season, he becomes

somewhat shy and eats much less as he prepares to leave town.

Great Egrets nest at several of the NYC Audubon Harbor Heron monitoring sites within Jamaica Bay along with Glossy Ibis, Snowy Egrets, Black-crowned Night Herons, and several other species of waders. While Great Egret populations are stable, other birds—including Glossy Ibis and Black-crowned Night Herons—are showing alarming population declines. (Our back cover highlights NYC Audubon’s *State of the Harbor Herons 2023* report, which details these findings.) While you don’t need to go as far as hand-feeding birds to understand them, the protection of these birds depends on monitoring and analyzing their behavior.

\* Editor’s note: NYC Audubon does not condone or encourage the feeding—or anthropomorphizing—of wild birds. ■

**THERE’S MORE ONLINE! DIGITAL URBAN AUDUBON STORIES**

Visit [link.nycaudubon.org/digital-ua](https://link.nycaudubon.org/digital-ua) to find more bird-filled Digital Urban Audubon Stories. ■



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# STATE OF THE HARBOR HERONS

PROTECTING THE CITY'S WATERBIRDS



2023

## LEARN ABOUT OUR CITY'S SECRETIVE HARBOR HERONS

For over 40 years, NYC Audubon scientists have monitored and protected 10 species of herons, egrets, and ibis—collectively known as the Harbor Herons—that nest on wild islands throughout our City's waterways. These large, charismatic birds bring many New Yorkers into birding and conservation, but more importantly, are critical indicators of the health of our harbor.

Get a view into the world of the fascinating Harbor Herons with our annual *State of the Harbor Herons* report. Learn about their nesting habits, conservation issues facing the harbor and its wildlife, and the incredible work done by NYC Audubon to protect these magnificent birds.

These secretive Harbor Herons are an integral part of our ecosystem, but they face urgent critical conservation challenges in New York City. ■

View the Full Report at  
[link.nycaudubon.org/  
hh2023](http://link.nycaudubon.org/hh2023)

