

# THE URBAN AUDUBON

**WHAT'S IN A NAME?  
DROPPING "AUDUBON"**

**CÉSAR ANDRÉS CASTILLO, 1980-2023**

**THE CHRISTIAN COOPER CHRONICLES**

**BARN SWALLOW**



## 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.

## STATEMENT ON EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY

New York City 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, including our full statement, visit [nycaudubon.org/EDIA](https://nycaudubon.org/EDIA).

## THE URBAN AUDUBON

**Editor** Andrew Maas

**Advisory Editor and Publications**

**Committee Chair** Lauren Klingsberg

**Publications Committee** Ned Boyajian;

Suzanne Charlé; Diane Darrow; Ivy Jo Gilbert;

Mary Jane Kaplan; Hillarie O'Toole; Don Riepe;

Carol Peace Robins; Phil Roosevelt;

Kellye Rosenheim

**Copyediting** Diane Darrow

**Art Direction and Layout** Andrew Maas

**Design Concept** reitdesign

**Publisher** NYC Audubon

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**President** Karen Benfield

**Executive Vice President** Michael Yuan

**Vice Presidents** Christian Cooper; Alan Steel;

Michael Tannen

**Treasurer** Dianne Benner

**Secretary** Deborah Laurel

**Immediate Past President** Jeffrey Kimball

**Directors** Gina Argento; Seth Ausubel; Marsilia

A. Boyle; Shawn Cargil; César A. Castillo (*in*

*memoriam*); Angela Co; Steven A. Dean;

Alexander Ewing; Linda N. Freeman, MD;

Tatiana Kaletsch; Kyu Lee; Jenny Maritz;

Patrick Markee; Andre C. Meade; Elizabeth

Norman; Vivek Sriram; Richard Veit, PhD

## STAFF

**Executive Director:** Jessica G. Wilson

Katherine Chen; Matthew Coody; Aidan Donaghy; Monika Dorsey; Andrew Maas; Jesse McLaughlin; Dustin Partridge, PhD; Roslyn Rivas; Anne Schwartz; Soheli Shah; Emilio Tobón; Tod Winston

**Scientists Emeritae:** Susan Elbin, PhD; Kaitlyn Parkins

## PHOTO CREDITS

**Cover Photograph:** Nesting Green Heron

© 6381380 / Getty Images

**Small Banner Photographs:** Marc Goldberg Photography, Steve Nanz, Andrew Maas

## BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

By Jessica G. Wilson,  
Executive Director



Since I joined NYC Audubon last year, I've been inspired by the organization's legacy of conservation success, and by its forward-looking perspective on protecting the future's birds of tomorrow and engaging tomorrow's New Yorkers.

And so the decision of the NYC Audubon Board of Directors in March to change the organization's name, dropping "Audubon" and beginning a process to develop a new name to better represent our work and our values, was the logical next step in that effort. This challenging but important change will strengthen our work to protect wild birds and their habitat throughout the city. There's much more about the board's decision, as well as stories about the change from across the organization, on pages 2-5.

Changing the organization's name is a visible representation of our commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA)—but it is only one of many steps we are taking. For several years, the organization has centered EDIA in our conservation and science work, engagement and education programs, and advocacy efforts as we have worked to engage all New Yorkers in taking action to protect wild birds. This spring, we're leading multilingual bird outings, launching a program on public housing campuses, publishing the city's first Spanish-English field guide to birds, surveying wildlife along the Bronx River, and advocating for green roofs in environmentally-vulnerable communities. Read more about these programs on pages 7-9 and online at [nycaudubon.org/EDIA](https://nycaudubon.org/EDIA).

Our vision to create a more sustainable city for wildlife and people requires us to be a conservation organization for the future, one that relies on the voices of many to achieve powerful change for birds. We recognize there will be those who disagree with our decision to change the organization's name. But we hope that our unswerving commitment to this mission and our shared joy for birds will keep us moving forward together in this important work. ■



**Photo: NYCHA in Nature bird outing on the Lower East Side's Wald and Riis Houses on April 16, led by NYC Audubon bird guide Efu Peterson.** Our new "NYCHA in Nature" program, a partnership with the Public Housing Community Fund, brings birding to New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) campuses. This initiative aims to engage the hundreds of thousands of NYCHA residents with the green spaces and biodiversity right in their own backyards.



RECYCLED  
Supporting responsible use of forest resources



# WHAT'S IN A NAME? DROPPING "AUDUBON"

By Karen Benfield, President of the Board of Directors

**A**t a time when birds are threatened by climate change, habitat loss, and the risks of built infrastructure in urban environments, it is vital to enlist support from all the communities across New York City. The more people who hear our message and help us save bird populations, the better.

It is because of this mission that our Board of Directors decided to change the organization's name, dropping the "Audubon" that has been part of our identity for 44 years. By taking this difficult but crucial action, we will enhance our efforts to conserve the city's birds and their habitat.

Over eight months, our board and staff thoroughly examined how the "Audubon" name affects our mission, values, and work. We weighed the impact of the name on our conservation, engagement, and advocacy goals, and considered complex factors including brand recognition; alignment with our commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility; our partnerships and credibility; and the time and cost involved in a name change. We spoke with members, supporters, partners, volunteers, scientists, and historians who provided helpful feedback and insights. We are sharing a selection of them in this newsletter.

We value John James Audubon's contributions to art and ornithology. Our assessment also explored how his work helped spark the country's conservation movement. It is important to note, however, that he was not directly involved in bird protection efforts, nor did he found the many Audubon Societies which bear his name. Most important, the more we learned about John James Audubon's actions and views towards people of color and Indigenous people—including his ownership, purchase and sale of enslaved people and his writings defending slavery against the abolitionist movement—and the more that racist past became publicly known, the more we became convinced that the negative consequences of continuing to use his name outweighed the positive.

Our assessment ultimately concluded that continued association of our organization with the Audubon name not only raised deeply troubling ethical issues, but also would



© Rumen Raykov / Getty Images

We will continue to dedicate ourselves to making our city safer for birds like the Common Yellowthroat, a frequent collision victim in New York City.

increasingly harm our vital efforts to extend our work and support across all communities of the city. In short, we concluded that the negative connotations attached to the Audubon name now outweigh the positives. In order for us to promote our mission of bird conservation, advocacy, and engagement as widely as possible, we determined that the name must change.

We are not alone in making this change. Many other chapters, especially in large cities, have made the same decision, though the National Audubon Society intends to keep its name. Despite a different name, we will remain a chapter of the national organization and continue our partnerships to protect birds across the flyways.

We don't yet know what our new name will be. Time is needed to collect input and to identify a name that feels inclusive and welcoming to all New Yorkers. We invite your suggestions, and for you to learn more about our process here and on our website at [nycaudubon.org/audubon-name](https://nycaudubon.org/audubon-name).

I am proud to be part of an organization that is unafraid of reflection and evolution. Our name will change, but our mission won't. We will keep protecting wild birds and their habitat across the five boroughs, and engaging all New Yorkers in those efforts, to shape a healthier and more sustainable city for birds and people. This is an important time for bird conservation. We step forward with great excitement and purpose. ■

There's more online! Please scan the QR codes, or visit [nycaudubon.org/audubon-name](https://nycaudubon.org/audubon-name).



STATEMENT




AUDUBON NAME FAQs



SUBMIT NAME IDEAS

# WHAT'S IN A NAME? VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

Members from the community share their perspectives on our organization's decision to change its name.



As an African American and lifelong birder, I stand firmly in the camp that the Audubon name must go—because such a change will help save more birds. If we as advocates for the wild want to guarantee a future with a healthy diversity of birds, then we must foster a healthy diversity of people who value them. Instead of letting our name be a barrier to reaching more people, we're seizing this opportunity to tell ever-wider audiences who we are and what we do: protect birds and their habitats, to the benefit of all New Yorkers.

— *Christian Cooper, Vice President, Board of Directors*




Though we'll have a new name, our work with chapters along the Atlantic Flyway and across the country will continue, and we remain committed to our partnership with National Audubon. The critical issues facing birds require everyone to work together.

— *Mike Yuan, Executive Vice President, Board of Directors*



I support the change to ensure a warm welcome to the organization for bird-lovers of all races. That said, let's not forget the great contributions John James Audubon made to science and art. On appropriate occasions, those contributions should still be recognized in the organization's lectures and other programs.

— *Jai Chandrashekar, NYC Audubon member*




If you have ever looked at the John James Audubon watercolors at the New-York Historical Society, you are awe struck by the artist's clear and beautiful representation of birds and their habitat. What genius! However, his artistry cannot negate or erase his racist mindset. I am no longer comfortable wearing a t-shirt with his name nor referring to my chapter as New York City "Audubon." I support the board, staff, and community members' carefully considered decision to remove his name. Now there is an extraordinary opportunity to re-invent a name that celebrates the diversity of life in New York City.

— *Marcia Fowle, NYC Audubon Advisory Council; past Board Member and the organization's first Executive Director*



There has always been a level of prestige attributed to the Audubon brand. Nearly everyone has heard and knows of the Audubon Society; "Audubon" is synonymous with birding. For nearly thirty years I have facilitated an experience with birds in the natural world for thousands of Staten Islanders and not one of them ever shared disdain for the deplorable aspects of the life of John James Audubon. Changing the name of NYC Audubon is a performative stunt. The NYC Audubon organization remains a charter of the National Audubon Society and each member of the organization remains intrinsically tied to the name of John James Audubon. One can change the name, but one cannot change that relationship. So, let us be reminded of the powerful proverb, a bird does not change feathers because the weather is bad.

— *Cliff Hagen, bird guide and naturalist/educator*



Our work with NYC Audubon is focused not just on habitat restoration, but on shared goals of introducing and engaging communities with core concepts of urban ecology through place-based learning. For this education work to be successful it has to be inclusive. This means addressing what restoration looks like in hyper-developed areas like NYC, and how it relates to people's day-to-day lives, but it also means confronting the problematic legacies tied to most large-scale conservation movements. Social justice, environmental justice, and environmental protection are tied together, and we can not afford to ignore these connections. We commend NYC Audubon in taking steps to address these issues and work towards inclusivity that will ultimately benefit both the wildlife and human communities that call NYC home.

— *Willis Elkins, Executive Director, Newtown Creek Alliance*

Our founding members wanted to protect bird habitat and share birding with others, and equity and inclusion have long been central in our pursuit of those goals. But as we dug into the history of John James Audubon, we realized the negative impact that the Audubon name had on our ability to welcome everyone into that work. And once you know the history, you can't unknow it. The next inclusive step for our mission is changing our name.

— Angie Co, NYC Audubon Board of Directors and Co-Chair, EDIA Committee



I never associated NYC Audubon or its mission with Audubon himself, since my primary interest in joining (many years ago) was environmental conservation—not something I identified with John James and his delight in shooting birds. Only later did I become a birder. For me, the name represents a long, happy relationship with kindred spirits and a sense of community with fellow birders.

So I have a sentimental attachment to the name “NYC Audubon.”

However—if indeed “the use of ‘Audubon’ in the name affects our ability to retain and attract staff, board members, supporters, volunteers, and organization members,” as stated on the website—then the name must be changed, both for those who object to the bad vibes the name holds for them, and for those that have little idea of who Audubon was and for whom the name means nothing. We want everyone to share our goals and our enjoyment of birds and nature.

— Mary Jane Kaplan, NYC Audubon Advisory Council and past Board Member



I was very excited to hear about NYC Audubon's decision to change its name. This organization does impressive work towards bird conservation, but it does so within a diverse city and through the work of a diverse group of people, and it's important that its choices indicate awareness of that. As someone who reflects that diversity and works with the organization, it is very meaningful to me that they are willing to rethink the historical choice to celebrate an extremely racist man, and to adapt to changing landscapes. To me, that is reflective of an organization that will be able to endure and continue to do the important work of protecting birds and wildlife.

— Efu Peterson, bird guide and Young Conservationist Council member



I am someone whose family is negatively impacted by the aftermath of colonization. I've struggled to see myself as part of a conservation legacy when many of its great figures enacted harm that reaches across generations. While it's easy to be dismissive of something that doesn't impact you, it's also a reminder that empathy is a muscle we all could do better to exercise. There are so many people I've spoken to (well before 2020) that have a deep distrust for conservation organizations who haven't acknowledged the nuanced, and often painful, legacies of their forefathers—as a result, choosing not to join these efforts. Meanwhile, our planet is in crisis, and we need as many people working together as possible.

A new name won't absolve all ills, nor will it erase the positive contributions of any individual—but it will shift focus to the importance of the cause, which is most effectively addressed by collective action. As a volunteer, I witness the effectiveness of this daily. When we stop centering one person or the other, we can get things done!

— Divya Anantharaman, NYC Audubon volunteer

I think dropping the Audubon name is a faulty decision. The name, as it has been associated with the birding association over the last 100+ years, does not bring to mind John James Audubon, the man with opinions once common, but no longer respectable. Instead, it brings to mind the conservation organization that has done so much to save bird species in the past and is doing so in the present.

Changing the name does nothing except virtue signal. I can understand some reluctance to identify with the man and his opinions. However, censorship of the opinions of the dead is foolish. The time will likely come when our current opinions will be held to be scandalously offensive. Do we really want to begin a cycle of posthumous censorship?

It's particularly faulty if this is not the decision of the National Audubon Society. Those local groups that drop the name risk becoming second-tier organizations with considerably less clout than they had. At a minimum they risk losing the immediate name recognition that the general public has around the Audubon name. Moreover, the lack of name recognition may result in diminished funding.


— Margaret Duffy, NYC Audubon member



In my childhood home, Audubon's Pileated Woodpeckers greeted visitors inside the front door. I grew up attending meetings of our local Audubon Society with my birdwatcher father. And over the past 15 years, my work with NYC Audubon and National Audubon has reconnected me to the great gift of birds my father gave me. You'd think I might cling to the Audubon name. My father was also a Quaker, however. The Quakers urged us to “put ourselves in someone else's shoes.” That simple call for empathy has echoed in my mind, as a White man, as I've understood the feelings of Black birders who recoil from continuing to honor an unrepentant slaveholder and anti-abolitionist. Audubon's paintings are beautiful. They will not be forgotten. But our organization need not honor the man. We must not, if we truly wish to welcome all into the fight to protect the birds we love.

— Tod Winston, NYC Audubon Urban Biodiversity Specialist and bird guide





I feel strongly that the name change is really meaningless. When you study American history and see the milieu that John Audubon had around him, he surely was not a great exception. Many others had similar points of view. One cannot change history by simply changing names or removing statues! In my opinion, changing our name solves few if any problems related to inclusion; it may even create new ones. I am and have always been a very liberal-minded person in all phases of my life, and totally support our focus to a more inclusive organization (and society). However without the well-known NYC Audubon name, our organization will lose important recognition, and will therefore lose clout.

— *Claude Bloch, MD, NYC Audubon Advisory Council and past Board Member*




As an Afro-Latina birder, I'm proud to be part of an organization that values marginalized voices. Our bird outings, lectures, and festivals are intrinsically tied with inclusivity and belonging. Everyone, especially Black and Indigenous people of color who've been historically excluded from the conservation movement, should feel like our community is a place where they are welcome and valued.

— *Roslyn Rivas, NYC Audubon Public Programs Manager*



I'm deeply impressed by the courageousness of New York City Audubon's decision to rename the chapter based on recognition of John James Audubon's actions and values which were profoundly flawed and more than troubling. NYC Audubon's achievements on behalf of birds since its founding in 1979 are enormous. It would be deeply sad, and a profound disservice to birds and conservation, to hinder the organization's work due to a lack of interest in its ongoing and future stewardship because younger generations find the name anachronistic and a barrier to their involvement. Instead, a new name will be far more welcoming to, and therefore will allow the organization to enlist, a broader range of members, volunteers, program participants, staff and donors. New York City has one of the most diverse populations of any city in the world. A new more inclusive name is a thoughtful, brave, and necessary step to ensure the organization's future and effectiveness.


— *Jamie Johnson, NYC Audubon member and volunteer*



As NYC Audubon's Director of Development from 2015 to 2021, I have lived and breathed our reputation and our brand. My work included communications, and I talked with a lot of people at festivals and outreach events. I also continue to work as a bird walk leader for NYC Audubon, with a focus on welcoming new and young birders. In my experience, "Audubon" means very little to people younger than myself (a youngish baby boomer) and to people who are not yet birders. Far from being something like a household name, it's not readily recognized. I've had to explain so many times to people why we have this name, and, now that John James's history has been daylighted, apologize for that legacy. Believe it or not, "What does the Audubon society seek to protect?" was a question during a trivia game I played at a bar recently.

The name has always been hard to spell and there is no clear understanding—even among birders—that each Audubon Society has its own mission and board and priorities. A perfect case study in brand confusion. Dropping "Audubon" is not throwing away gold, and our embrace of change gives credibility to our leading-edge approach to conservation practices and to our equity, diversity, and inclusion values.

— *Kellye Rosenheim, staff alumna and bird guide*



I must register my dismay at your changing the name of the Audubon. George Washington had slaves. Are we to rename the GW Bridge? Should everything named after Thomas Jefferson be renamed? Yes, it's horrific that Audubon had slaves. And his brilliant contributions to ornithology don't excuse that. But dropping his name and the recognition it brings to the NYC Audubon will only hurt our fine feathered friends.

— *Patricia Volk, NYC Audubon member*



Names and language matter. I am proud to be a collaborator and member of the organization soon-to-be formerly known as NYC Audubon as they take this step to create a more welcoming and inclusive organization. When our very language perpetuates a history of racism and colonialism, it is hard to imagine that we can make meaningful progress toward repairing these broken legacies—and since the subjugation of nature and people are intimately linked, without such repair we cannot achieve our missions. A greener world is a more just world. In every facet of the conservation and environmental movement, we need to make sure our language, programs, advocacy, and organizations fully represent the incredible diversity of our world and communities—and I applaud steps to create this greener and more just future.

— *Emily Noble Maxwell, Director, Cities Program, The Nature Conservancy*

**For more considerations and voices of the community—both in favor of and against a name change—see the continuation of this article online at [nycaudubon.org/audubon-voices](https://nycaudubon.org/audubon-voices). ■**

# CÉSAR ANDRÉS CASTILLO, 1980-2023

By Donna L. Schulman, Queens County Bird Club member

*César A. Castillo, an adjunct professor of biology at Queens College and a beloved member of the City's birding community, passed away from an illness on March 1, 2023. César was a passionate naturalist and a valued member of NYC Audubon's board of directors who generously shared his love of nature with others. We are grateful to be able to share this tribute to César, penned by fellow Queens birder Donna L. Schulman. NYC Audubon extends its sympathies to César's wife, Wendy Castillo, and their three young children, Giselle, Elyse, and Santiago.*

César Andrés Castillo first came to the attention of the Queens birding community through his eBird checklists. Someone was birding Kissena Park—a park plop in the middle of busy Flushing—and finding good birds. And sometimes, great birds: Swallow-tailed Kite on May 10, 2013. Golden Eagle on September 30, 2013. The list went on: Red-headed Woodpecker, Lark Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, and more warblers than we ever knew stopped there. All had well-documented records that had all of us supposedly-more experienced birders standing with our mouths open, looking at the sky, trying to see what César was seeing.

A member of the Queens County Bird Club, César also became a sector leader on the Queens County Christmas Bird Count—a new sector pieced together from areas he himself proved were worth the work. He was always welcome at twitches for rare birds, because he would be able to spot the target bird, no matter how skulky. (My first memory of César is that of a tall, soft-spoken guy standing next to me in a long line of birders, searching for a Virginia's Warbler—a “mega” find—in Alley Pond Park. César patiently pointed out the tiny bird in dense shrubbery, over and over.)

But César was more than a finder of “good birds.” He was a kind, generous, smart soul, a caring participant in our birding community who happily shared his finds and always greeted you in the field with a smile and had a good bird, insect,

or blooming tree to point out. He was a member of the board of NYC Audubon, where he advocated for diversity and inclusion.

Occasionally, I would see César with his Queens College biology students. In fact, that's how I last saw him, at Meadow Lake in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, surrounded by young people. He was showing them something on the shore, probably not a bird because it was a not-very-birdy November afternoon, and then a bird nest in a small tree near the boathouse. The students were engaged and happy, and so was César. It was an all-too-brief glimpse into a side of his life most of his fellow birders didn't get to see: César in a more formal teaching role, which obviously fit him as well as birding did.

César was a scientist. His bird sightings were precisely recorded in eBird (with notes!) and in iNaturalist, where he documented at the research-grade level 3,693 species of birds, insects, herps, moss, and plants: 1,929 species in Queens County, 2,122 species in New York City, and 2,488 species in New York State. These are significant contributions to both community science databases, particularly to iNaturalist. There are many people out there observing birds, but how many have also identified 28 species of lichen in their home county?

César was an excellent photographer and a look at the albums on his Flickr site gives another glimpse into his broad nature interests: warblers (534 photos and 1 video); frogs;



César Andrés Castillo

mosses and liverworts; heaths; UBOs (Unidentified Botanical Objects); birds of Ethiopia—these are just a few. Many of his New York City bird photos illustrate NYC Audubon's soon-to-be-published bilingual Spanish-English field guide, *Las Aves de la Ciudad de Nueva York / The Birds of New York City*. His Yellow Warbler is featured on the cover (see page 9).

Ironically, perhaps, César did not identify himself as an expert. On his eBird personal page, he wrote, “I can't seem to focus on any one type of life form. Fish, plants (living and fossil, tropical or temperate), algae, Amphibians, Insects, Reptiles, Mammals, Birds, Protists. I guess I know a little about a lot of things.” On his iNaturalist page he wrote, “Trained in botany as a grad student, and consider myself a Naturalist in training for the rest of my life.”

The birding and nature communities lost a wealth of knowledge when César passed away, and a good person. It is our fortune that he leaves us with some of that knowledge, good memories, and an inspiring life. ■

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

By New York City Audubon Staff

## 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.*

### NEW PARTNERSHIPS SHOWCASE BIRD-SAFE GLASS INSTALLATIONS

New and renovated buildings in New York City are required by the recently passed Local Law 15 to use bird-safe materials, but many existing buildings still have dangerous glass, causing up to 250,000 bird deaths in our city annually. To minimize risks to birds, NYC Audubon works with partners citywide to promote the voluntary installation of bird-safe glass and film. Birdwatchers at Green-Wood Cemetery should visit the Hillside Mausoleum, where the installation of an externally applied film that enhances glass visibility to birds, was just completed. We're also working on film installations at the Brookfield Place ferry terminal, and the Circa building on the Upper West Side.



Green-Wood Cemetery's Hillside Mausoleum now has almost 20,000 sq. ft. of bird-safe glass.

To learn more about making your windows bird-friendly, head to our seasonal environmental center on Governors Island (see page 8) and see installations of different bird-safe films and other do-it-yourself options.

### MOTION-SENSING CAMERAS TO IMPROVE SHOREBIRD SURVIVAL IN THE ROCKAWAYS

Shorebirds, including American Oystercatchers and endangered Piping Plovers, are suffering population declines, with fewer chicks fledging on the city's beaches. New York City Audubon is using motion-sensor trail cameras to study why so few chicks fledge on Breezy Point, an important nesting site at the western end of the Rockaway peninsula in Queens. Using last year's smaller pilot study as a guide, we deployed 20 cameras near American Oystercatcher nests early this spring, before nesting began. The results of our analysis will be used to increase chick survival in coming years. ■

## ADVOCACY UPDATES



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

### "LIGHTS OUT" BILL RE-INTRODUCED IN NYC COUNCIL

Collisions with windows are estimated to kill nearly a billion birds annually across the country—with nearly a quarter million bird deaths in New York City alone. There are solutions, including reducing the artificial light at night that draws in birds and disorients them, making them more susceptible to collisions. NYC Audubon has been at the forefront of legislative change to make buildings and the city safer for birds, working with the Lights Out Coalition on a new bill this spring.

A Lights Out bill requiring privately-owned buildings in New York City to turn off non-essential lights during migration seasons was re-introduced in the New York City Council in May by City Councilmember Francisco Moya (Queens, District 21). The bill builds upon the Lights Out legislation passed unanimously by the City Council in 2021 requiring all city-owned buildings to turn off non-essential lights during spring and fall migration.

Over the next few months, the new bill will move to City Council committee hearings. We'll need the full weight of NYC Audubon members and bird lovers around the city to advocate for this important change and support Councilmember Moya's office in their work as champions for birds. Please subscribe to Avian Advocates action alerts at [nycaudubon.org/avian-advocates](https://nycaudubon.org/avian-advocates) to stay in the loop on how to help us pass this critical legislation.

### SUPPORT IMPROVED GREEN ROOF TAX ABATEMENT BILL

The Green Roof Tax Abatement, which offers a \$15 abatement for each square foot of green roof installed in environmentally vulnerable parts of the city, has been reintroduced for renewal in the New York State Legislature with significant improvements. These improvements remove barriers to use, increase accessibility, and raise the baseline abatement from \$5.23 to \$10 for non-priority community districts. Call your state legislators to vote in favor of the bill (AB6902/SB6409). ■



## 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.**

### SUMMER OUTINGS AND CLASSES

From weekly bird tours on Governors Island to botanical garden birding in the Bronx, we have a ton of fun bird outings throughout the city this summer. Listings for early summer outings and classes will be posted at [nycaudubon.org/outings](https://nycaudubon.org/outings) by June 2, 2023, with additional events posted throughout the season.

### SUMMER PROGRAMS REGISTRATION

**NYC Audubon Members:** Registration for summer outings and classes opens early for members on June 5, 9am. Members also receive a discount on fee-based programs! Email [membership@nycaudubon.org](mailto:membership@nycaudubon.org) to confirm your membership is active.

**Nonmembers:** Registration opens to the public on June 8, 9am. Visit [nycaudubon.org/membership](https://nycaudubon.org/membership) to become a member and get early access to registration.

### BLACK BIRDERS WEEK 2023

Taking place from May 28 to June 3, the fourth annual Black Birders Week, organized by the BlackAFinSTEM Collective, celebrates birding identities in and across Black diasporas in this theme, "Flying Full Circle." We will be hosting #BBW events each day of the week. Learn more at [nycaudubon.org/bbw-2023](https://nycaudubon.org/bbw-2023).

### LET'S GO BIRDING TOGETHER IN JUNE

Celebrate Pride Month with Let's Go Birding Together (LGBT) events! We're excited to partner this year with Alice Austen House for an LGBT outing on June 17, and to host our annual LGBT outing in Central Park on June 18. These free events are open to all queer folks and allies who love nature. Register at [nycaudubon.org/lgbt-2023](https://nycaudubon.org/lgbt-2023).

**STAY IN THE KNOW ABOUT PROGRAMS:** More details about programs and registration are available at the website above. Sign up for the eGreet Newsletter at [nycaudubon.org/egret](https://nycaudubon.org/egret) and follow us on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (@nycaudubon) to ensure you know about events as they are announced. ■

### JOIN US AT A SUMMER FESTIVAL

Get ready for a summer of fun and feathers with our free public festivals! Check [nycaudubon.org/festivals](https://nycaudubon.org/festivals) for details on these events:

**Jamaica Bay Festival:** June 15.

**Shorebird Festival at Jamaica Bay:** August 19.

**Kingsland Wildflowers Festival:** July 22.

### VISIT US ON GOVERNORS ISLAND

Explore our seasonal environmental center on Governors Island, open from May 5 to October 29 on Fridays-Sundays, 11am-5pm. You'll find fun and educational activities for all ages, inspiring art exhibitions by our talented Artist in Residence cohort, guided bird outings, and more. Visit [nycaudubon.org/gov-island](https://nycaudubon.org/gov-island) for more information.

### RECORD VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

An unprecedented number of volunteers participated in our community science programs this spring: over 350 volunteers signed up to count and tag spawning horseshoe crabs—whose eggs are a critical food source for migrating shorebirds—at three Jamaica Bay beach sites in May and June. Our Project Safe Flight program also saw all-time high participation, with 122 community scientists across the city monitoring 47 buildings for birds that have collided with windows. Stay tuned for highlights from these programs on our blog at [nycaudubon.org/blog](https://nycaudubon.org/blog).

Want to get in on the action? Sign up for Project Safe Flight fall monitoring by attending an information session in August. Check [nycaudubon.org/volunteer](https://nycaudubon.org/volunteer) in mid-July for details. ■



Governors Island visitors designed their own bird masks for our H-OWL-oween weekend festivities.

## ELECTIONS AND ANNUAL MEETING

### CAST YOUR BALLOT

Current, direct NYC Audubon members are invited to take part in this year's election of Board Members by voting at [nycaudubon.org/vote](https://nycaudubon.org/vote). You will need to enter the unique Election 2023 Identification Number sent to you via email or mail. Contact [membership@nycaudubon.org](mailto:membership@nycaudubon.org) for questions.

### ANNUAL MEETING (JUNE 7)

Join us for our Annual Meeting & Update to hear more about our efforts to engage all New Yorkers in enjoying and protecting birds. We'll also share an update on the planned NYC Audubon name change. Announcements of our board election results, and annual members meeting will precede the presentation. Register to attend at [nycaudubon.org/vote](https://nycaudubon.org/vote). ■

# THE CHRISTIAN COOPER CHRONICLES

By Carol Peace Robins

Longtime birder and NYC Audubon Board Member Christian Cooper became more widely known in 2020 as the target of the infamous “Central Park Birdwatching Incident” involving a white woman dialing 911 to report an African American man threatening her. That incident, coupled with George Floyd’s death in Minneapolis the same day, sparked conversations and protests across the country about racial justice and equity.

Now no stranger to the limelight, Chris will soon be more happily celebrated for his poignant memoir about the joys and healing powers of birding, as well as an illuminating National Geographic television series.

I recently spoke with Chris, who was in Palm Springs for the winter partly to be closer to his sister in L.A.—and partly because he hates the cold. He assured me he would be back to New York City and his Central Park birds this spring for prime-time migration.

We talked about his new book, *Better Living Through Birding: Notes from a Black Man in the Natural World*, arriving in June from Penguin Random House. It’s the story of how a nine-year-old boy’s birding passion was sparked by a Red-winged Blackbird, a passion that helped him make it through high school as a closeted gay and self-described “openly nerdy” Black boy. Readers see the Marvel Comics-reading kid blossom into Marvel’s first openly gay writer and



Christian Cooper bands a Herring Gull with NYC Audubon scientists atop the Javits Green Roof.

the creator of the first gay character in the Star Trek universe. Chris includes us in his travels around the world from Buenos Aires to Kathmandu, discovering new and exciting species. And flitting gracefully throughout the tale are Chris’s wise, been-there-done-that “Birding Tips” and his “Seven Pleasures of Birding.”

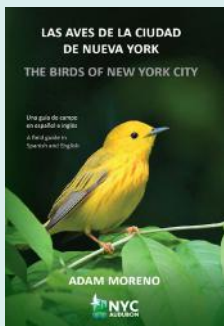
June also brings the first episode of *Extraordinary Birder*, National Geographic’s six-part documentary starring Chris as host and guide through some of his favorite birding haunts in New York (of course), as well as Palm Springs, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Alabama. As for the title, Chris is emphatic that it’s not all about him, explaining that “extraordinary birders are the ones who mentored me on Long Island when I was a kid, and the real experts in Central Park who

welcomed me.” Though episodes were not available at the time of writing for preview, Chris noted they’re not just about beautiful birds in scenic places, but also an exploration of the interactions between birds and “the farmers, biologists, and the truly extraordinary folks dedicated to birds’ conservation.”

Upon leaving Long Island after high school, Chris graduated from Harvard and went to work for Marvel Comics. Following his time at Marvel, Chris worked as a copy editor for a pharma-related medical education company for 20 years. He credits Jeff Kimball for his involvement with NYC Audubon and his eventual election to the board of directors in 2016. Kimball, a NYC Audubon Board Member and past president, is also the director of the 2012 film *Birders: The Central Park Effect* featuring Chris as one of the members of Central Park’s cozy group of “Regulars.” Kimball recognized a kindred spirit.

Chris’s home on Manhattan’s Lower East Side is not exactly convenient to Central Park, but it’s closer than Palm Springs. Every morning during spring migration, Chris heads for the park at daybreak. His excursions are usually without further “incidents”—unless you count getting to see a Kirtland’s Warbler a few years ago, a rare first-timer in the park. It was “a unicorn come alive before my own eyes.” An awe-inspiring incident indeed. ■

## THE FIRST SPANISH-ENGLISH FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF THE CITY



¡APRENDE SOBRE LAS AVES DE LA CIUDAD DE NUEVA YORK! NYC Audubon se alegra de anunciar la publicación de *Las Aves de la Ciudad de Nueva York / The Birds of New York City*, co-creado por NYC Audubon y Dr. Adam Moreno. Esta guía de campo bilingüe, escrita en español e inglés, es una fácil y divertida introducción a la increíble diversidad de aves de la Ciudad, e incluye fotografías de más de 100 especies comunes. Aprende más en [nycaudubon.org/las-aves-de-nyc](https://nycaudubon.org/las-aves-de-nyc).

LEARN ABOUT THE BIRDS OF NEW YORK CITY! NYC Audubon is thrilled to announce the publication of *Las Aves de la Ciudad de Nueva York / The Birds of New York City*, co-created by NYC Audubon and Dr. Adam Moreno. This bilingual field guide, written in Spanish and English, is an easy and fun introduction to the incredible diversity of birds in the City, and includes photographs of over 100 common species. Learn more at [nycaudubon.org/las-aves-de-nyc](https://nycaudubon.org/las-aves-de-nyc). ■



# SUPPORT NYC AUDUBON

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

**Y**our 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 of NYCAudubon! Check out our membership levels and perks at [nycaudubon.org/membership](https://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 donations at [nycaudubon.org/donate](https://nycaudubon.org/donate).

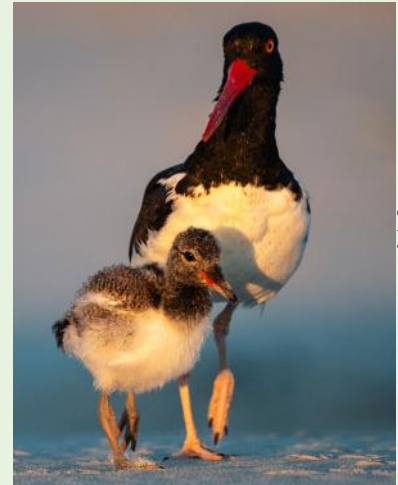
### GIVE A MATCHING GIFT

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

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



© Marian Bodart / Audubon Photography Awards

American Oystercatchers nest on New York City beaches during the summer. They need protected nesting areas on our shores to successfully raise their young.

## SAVE THE DATE

October 23, 2023

1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge  
60 Furman Street, Brooklyn

*Don't miss the party!*

**NYC AUDUBON  
FALL ROOST**

*Proceeds from the Fall Roost fundraiser  
provide critical operating funds to protect  
wild birds and their habitat in NYC*







## NEW YORK CITY AUDUBON

71 West 23rd Street  
Suite 1523  
New York, NY 10010  
[www.nycaudubon.org](http://www.nycaudubon.org)

DATED MATERIAL:  
Summer 2023 Issue

# BARN SWALLOW (*HIRUNDO RUSTICA*)

By Don Riepe

**B**arn Swallows are one of New York City's most ubiquitous summer birds and a frequent sight from my dock at Jamaica Bay. This small, beautiful bird is one of the world's most numerous and widespread. They have a large distribution across almost the entire North and South American continents, and also breed in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and northern Africa. Barn Swallows are often found in areas of human development; while old or open barns are a preferred nesting site, swallows also nest in boat sheds, under bridges, on building rafters, and other structures that provide a covered overhang.

While not a conservation concern, these birds are great fun to watch. They arrive in New York in late May or early April from their Mexican, Central and South American wintering grounds, and many stay through August. New Yorkers can help find good nesting spots for them, too. A few years ago I built a little L-shaped ledge under my neighbor's dock (with his permission) at a site high enough that it wouldn't be inundated by a spring tide. Within a few days, the swallows began constructing their little cup nest made of mud and lined with grass and feathers. They fledged four young the first year and have returned to the same site every year since. The young leave the nest about 14–23 days after hatching and sit on the dock railing or ropes while being fed by the parents. Both parents feed the young and are sometimes helped by older offspring.

These aerial acrobats are a joy to behold as they zoom around and catch insects, and occasionally mate and drink on the wing. Barn Swallows live about four years on average, although records of up to 11 years have been documented.

Other swallows nest on my dock: Tree Swallows have nested on a pole in a bluebird box, with Purple Martins in a large multiple-dwelling martin house above them. These species help the Barn Swallows in putting a dent in the number of mosquitoes and deer flies that occasionally plague us in summer. Barn Swallows are easily distinguishable from other swallows by their deeply forked tail, rust-colored throat, and pale orange breast. It's a delight to have them as neighbors. ■



© Don Riepe

Barn Swallows often nest in areas with human development.

## THERE'S MORE ONLINE! DIGITAL URBAN AUDUBON STORIES

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