

# THE URBAN ~~AUDUBON~~

**HATCHING A NEW NAME:  
NYC BIRD ALLIANCE**

**ISLANDS IN THE SKY**

**AMERICAN KESTREL  
(FALCO SPARVERIUS)**





## 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](http://go.nycbirdalliance.org/edia).

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## PHOTO CREDITS

**Cover Photograph:** Herring Gull eggs on the Javits Center network of green roofs © Javits Center

**Small Banner Photographs:** Molly Adams, NYC Bird Alliance, Steve Nanz, Camilla Cerea

## PRESIDENT'S PERCH

By Michael Yuan,  
Board President



**A**s I embark on my term as president of the board of directors, I think back on the organization's presence in my life for the past 15 years. It all began when I first looked through a pair of binoculars, discovering the magic of migration and connecting with the City's birding community through outings led by what was then called NYC Audubon. The spark that made me a passionate birder inspired me to lead birding outings for the Brooklyn Bird Club, coordinate and compile the Audubon Christmas Bird Count in Brooklyn, and since 2019, serve on the board of NYC Audubon (now NYC Bird Alliance). I'm proud to be a part of this organization's 45-year legacy of conservation efforts and initiatives that not only makes our city safer for birds but also invites people to enjoy them.

NYC Bird Alliance's expanded impact in recent years could not have been accomplished without the vision and guidance of Karen Benfield, our outgoing board president. Her encouragement and poise centered us all and never dwindled, even during the uncertain times of the pandemic. She sought innovative ways to improve how we work and better serve our supporters—and of course, the City's birds. Under her leadership, I'm pleased to have taken the lead in promoting World Migratory Bird Day in May and October, which we celebrate with free bird outings in every borough. We've also reached new audiences via bilingual events, such as our first-ever Mandarin-English event in Kissena Park that I had the honor to lead last month.

Looking ahead, I'm filled with excitement as the organization and its impact continue to grow. I'm energized by the board's partnership with Executive Director Jessica Wilson and the entire staff, whose dedication, passion, and commitment drive our mission forward every day.

Nothing pleases me more than opening someone's eyes to the world of birds, and to the warm community who loves and cares for them. With our new name, NYC Bird Alliance, we will continue to welcome new voices for urban conservation to make our city a safer and more vibrant habitat for birds and a better place for all New Yorkers. ■



NYC Bird Alliance Board President Michael Yuan (center, with green jacket and hat) leads a bird outing in Canarsie Park, Queens.



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Supporting responsible use of forest resources

# ISLANDS IN THE SKY

By Olivia Liang, Communications Associate

**B**efore European arrival, the Lenape people, Manhattan's original inhabitants, named this place "Manahatta," meaning "hilly island."

"It was a diversity of habitats, with upland forests and freshwater wetlands—there were even trout in what is now Central Park's Harlem Meer," says Dustin Partridge, PhD, director of conservation and science for NYC Bird Alliance (formerly NYC Audubon).

Green infrastructure, a central pillar of NYC Bird Alliance's conservation work, is an effort not to restore this former state, but to honor it. For millennia, birds incorporated this biodiverse region into their migratory pathways because it allowed them to refuel during their risky journeys. Green roofs can never replace ground-level habitats, but they can provide the critical resources that birds still need to survive.

"Green roofs provide little islands in the sky that give wildlife a fighting chance," says Dr. Partridge.

Green infrastructure can take many forms, but the ideal bird-safe combination is a green roof with insect-rich habitat, native plants, and surrounding bird-friendly glass, where people can engage with nature safely.

"A green roof is a space for the public, it's a space for wildlife, it's a space to reduce environmental impact," says Myles Davis, senior manager of green infrastructure.

Davis oversees the biodiversity monitoring—and risk assessment—of private buildings that contract with NYC Bird Alliance. These partnerships help us tell individual sustainability stories, but they also provide us with critical data to explain why green roofs are important and to encourage their installation.

With partnerships that span the City, our green infrastructure work has grown over the years. We've worked with FXCollaborative's Bruce Fowle, husband to NYC Bird Alliance Advisory Council Member and former Publications Chair Marcia Fowle, to reduce collisions at the Jacob K. Javits



© NYC Bird Alliance

Kingsland Wildflowers at Broadway Stages, a stunning wildflower meadow and green roof that NYC Bird Alliance (then NYC Audubon) helped build with partners in heavily polluted Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

Center. Thanks to the leadership of Javits Center CEO Alan Steel, we have continued to monitor its bird-friendly glass for collisions and its near eight-acre green roof network for biodiversity (65 bird species recorded by our scientists as of this writing). Years of collision data collection has heavily influenced bird-friendly legislation like Local Law 15, which was enacted in 2020 and requires bird-friendly glass in new and renovated buildings. We've raised public awareness of conservation issues at Kingsland Wildflowers at Broadway Stages, which includes 24,000 square feet of low-growing sedum and wildflower meadows in a largely polluted and industrial area. We have prioritized restoration projects at Sherman Creek. And most recently, we've helped guide sustainable development at Google.

Since 2023, NYC Bird Alliance has worked with Google to redefine the green spaces of their New York City office buildings. With a presence at their buildings in both Chelsea and Hudson Square campuses, including the recently reopened St. John's Terminal, our survey technicians have supported Google's sustainable development goals with biodiversity monitoring on their various green roofs, which hosts a surprising amount of avian diversity. Since last fall, at the St. John's Terminal building, our scientists observed over 40 bird species using the built habitat to forage.

With a global company like Google choosing to foster green space, we are hopeful that it will be a game-changing role model for other companies and office buildings across New York City and the world.

Imagine all the roofs of the City: apartment buildings, schools, hospitals, museums, and community centers. Now imagine green roofs on each one, from which New Yorkers can hear crickets and see Louisiana Waterthrushes. Green roofs can make our city healthier and more resilient, returning it to a rich and sustainable home for birds and people. ■



© Michelle Taich

A Palm Warbler photographed on the green roof atop Google's St. John's Terminal office building.



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

## ADVOCACY UPDATES



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

### IMPROVING AND EXPANDING GREEN ROOFS ACROSS THE CITY

Green roofs are a necessary resiliency and conservation tool for humans and birds at a time of global extreme weather crises and staggering declines in bird populations.

In 2019, data from NYC Bird Alliance (at the time, NYC Audubon) on the ecological benefits of green roofs was critical for passing a state Green Roof Tax Abatement (GRTA), which provides a financial incentive for private buildings to install green roofs. We're working now to renew that abatement with improvements; this past spring, NYC Bird Alliance helped the renewal of the GRTA pass the NY State Senate and Assembly, and—at the time of this writing—is focused on getting the Governor to sign the legislation. Read more about green roofs and how the GRTA will make the City more bird-friendly and climate-resilient at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/gradvocacy](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/gradvocacy).

### ENSURING SHOREBIRD SAFETY IN THE ROCKAWAYS

Rockaway Beach Endangered Species Nesting Area (RBESNA) is a one-mile stretch of beach in Edgemere, Queens that is a biodiversity hotspot with several types of nesting shorebirds, including the federally threatened Piping Plover. It has been closed to the public during nesting season for 20 years but this year following requests from a group of residents, NYC Department of Parks and Recreation started partial openings of the beach.

NYC Bird Alliance is working to ensure that NYC Parks effectively manages the beach to protect the shorebirds, while encouraging them to foster open communication



© Kathryn Perkins

Green roofs not only provide numerous sustainability benefits, but also critical habitat for wild birds. These three Herring Gull chicks were hatched from nests on the Javits Center network of green roofs.

regarding the challenges and threats faced by shorebirds. We are also nurturing enduring partnerships with organizations and local residents to involve the community in protecting this site.

### REDUCING COLLISIONS WITH BIRD-FRIENDLY BUILDINGS AND LIGHTS OUT

When Flaco, the Eurasian Eagle-Owl that escaped the Central Park Zoo, passed away in March 2024, the beloved raptor left New Yorkers with a growing love of birds and a new awareness of the dangers faced by urban wildlife. NYC Bird Alliance is at the forefront of proposed legislation to make our urban landscape safer for birds.

The NY State Bird Safe Buildings Act, renamed the FLACO Act, would require state-owned and leased buildings to incorporate bird-safe features to reduce collisions.

At the City-level, Lights Out bill Intro 896 (part of a package of bills called Flaco's Laws) was reintroduced in the New York City Council in May 2024 by Councilmember Francisco

Moya. This legislation would require privately owned commercial buildings to turn lights off at night.

Please contact your city and state elected officials and encourage them to support these bills. Read more on how you can help support these bills at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/lightsout](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/lightsout).

### PROTECTING BIRDS FROM HARMFUL DRONE LIGHT SHOWS

Drone Light Shows are a new public spectacle that can be disruptive and harmful to birds. Following our advocacy efforts last fall against a large drone light show in Central Park, we shared our recommendations with NYC Parks and the Mayor's Office for siting and timing of drone light shows to protect migratory and nesting birds. We hope to turn these recommendations into city-wide legislation to protect birds and people from the harmful effects of artificial light at night and guard nesting birds from disruption. Read more about drone light shows and our recommendations at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/drone](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/drone). ■

## 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.**

### IDENTIFYING THREATS TO BEACH-NESTING BIRDS

For the past 14 years, scientists from NYC Bird Alliance (formerly NYC Audubon) have studied the nesting success of breeding American Oystercatchers (AMOY) in the Rockaways. In 2022 our long-term monitoring data revealed that AMOY were failing to successfully raise young, mainly due to losses of eggs in the nest. To identify what was driving these losses and to guide management, we deployed motion-activated trail cameras on nests from Riis Beach through Breezy Point, starting the largest AMOY trail camera study to date. The hundreds of thousands of photos from last season reveal that direct losses of eggs are due to mammalian predators and flooding during storm surges, while disturbance by humans and off-leash dogs push adults off the nest, leaving eggs exposed.

This season, we deployed 22 cameras across nests and expect to collect another 200,000 photos, documenting a critical life stage of these beach-nesting birds and identifying the threats to their nests. The infor-



In March, Riverside Park Conservancy installed bird-friendly film to their Volunteer House windows after consulting with NYC Bird Alliance.

mation we collect in this final season of research will allow us to guide conservation actions to protect AMOY and other beach nesting birds in the Rockaways. Read more about our work to protect beach-nesting birds at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/bnbirds](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/bnbirds).

### GROWING OUR COLLISION MONITORING AND OUR IMPACT

Our Project Safe Flight has had tremendous impact recently in making the

City's buildings safer for birds. For 25 years, our community science volunteers have collected data on collisions that helps us identify the most deadly buildings for birds, enabling us to partner with individual buildings to retrofit their windows, and to advocate for effective legislation.

There's been tremendous growth in our monitoring program over the past two years; this spring we've been assisted by a record-breaking 162 volunteers monitoring 15 routes across all 5 boroughs, covering more than 80 buildings. Many of the buildings chosen for monitoring are known or suspected to be high-collision sites. However, little is known about collisions happening at buildings adjacent to high-collision sites or "lower risk" parts of the City, so we've also added suspected low-collision buildings to routes, to get a baseline for comparison. Data collected from the suspected low collision buildings and a new Chelsea (Manhattan) route will help us better understand the extent of collisions across the City. Read more about Project Safe Flight at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/psf](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/psf). ■

## 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.**

### BIRD FUN IN THE SUMMER SUN

Spring migration may be over, but there are still plenty of birds to find in New York City! Check out our full events calendar at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/cal](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/cal) for all the programs we have coming up, including birding tours focused on physical accessibility, Birding by Boat along the Bronx River, and Let's Go Birding Together outings in honor of Pride Month. New outings will be continuously added to the calendar as the summer progresses, so be sure to check back regularly.

### NEW NEST ON GOVERNORS ISLAND

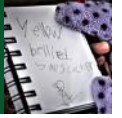
Since 2017, NYC Bird Alliance (formerly NYC Audubon) has operated a seasonal environmental center on Governors Island. This year, we're delighted to offer the same great programming at a new location. At our new house in the island's Colonels Row area, you can enjoy free weekly guided bird outings, conservation-themed art through our Artist in Residence program, bird-friendly glass workshops, and craft activities for kids. Visit us on weekends through

November 3. For more information about our house on Governors Island, visit [go.nycbirdalliance.org/gi](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/gi).

### MORE FESTIVALS INCOMING

Join NYC Bird Alliance and partners for the Shorebird Festival in Jamaica Bay on August 24. It's the perfect time to explore the diversity of New York City's shorebirds, especially in a place as biologically rich as Jamaica Bay. To see our full line-up of this year's festivals, visit [go.nycbirdalliance.org/fest](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/fest). ■

## NEWS & NOTES



### HATCHING A NEW NAME: WE'RE NOW NYC BIRD ALLIANCE

For nearly two years, our organization has discussed the “Audubon” name. We wrestled with our namesake’s legacy, and considered hundreds of possible new names, while continuing our important work of protecting wild birds and habitat across the five boroughs. After a robust and inclusive process involving thousands of stakeholders, our members voted at the Annual Meeting on June 5, 2024 to change the organization’s name to NYC Bird Alliance.

While the name we use to introduce ourselves is new, our work isn’t changing at all. We continue to collect data on bird populations and the habitats they need to thrive; we lead hundreds of public programs across the City annually, including a new initiative that welcomes public housing residents into birding; we fight to make New York City a bird-friendly urban environment with legislation that reduces light at night and makes windows safe for birds; and much more.

For 45 years, since our founding by a group of dedicated bird



The organization’s refreshed logo, which continues to feature our familiar mascot, the American Kestrel, as well as the buildings and habitat that are the focus of our work.

advocates, we’ve been a chapter of the National Audubon Society and we remain an affiliated chapter, even with the name change. We are excited to join the dozens of other formerly-named Audubon chapters in this alliance of conservationists to make birds’ lives better—and safer—in our city and beyond.

For more information on our new name, visit [go.nycbirdalliance.org/name](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/name).

### NYC BIRD ALLIANCE BOARD AND ADVISORY COUNCIL NEWS

NYC Bird Alliance welcomes **Pepper Evans** and **Judy Lipton**, who were elected to the board of directors at our June Annual Meeting of Members. Learn more about these dynamic new directors at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/board](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/board).

Also at the Annual Meeting, new officers were elected for the board of directors: congratulations to **Michael Yuan**, our organization’s new president, **Linda N. Freeman, MD**, our new executive vice president, and **Sharon Weidberg**, our new secretary. (Dianne Benner continues as treasurer, and Karen Benfield becomes the board’s immediate past president). **Christian Cooper** and **Michael Tannen** were re-elected as vice presidents, and **Angela Co**, **Jeffrey Kimball**, **Kyu Lee**, and **Patrick Markee** were re-elected as directors. **Sandy Ewing**’s and **Tatiana Kaletsch**’s terms on the board have ended; we thank them for their years of service. ■

## WE NEED YOUR SUGGESTIONS HELP US CHOOSE A NEW TITLE FOR OUR PRINT PUBLICATION

With the change of our organization’s name, we’re seeking a new title for this publication, known up to now as *The Urban Audubon*. Published three times a year and distributed to members via both print and online versions, this esteemed publication reports on our work and highlights trends in conservation and birding. Let us know your suggestions for a new title at [communications@nycbirdalliance.org](mailto:communications@nycbirdalliance.org). ■



A selection of various publication covers dating back to the organization’s founding in 1979. Your publication title suggestion could grace the cover of our Fall 2024 issue!

© NYC Bird Alliance



# SUPPORT NYC BIRD ALLIANCE

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

Your 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 646.502.9611 or at [mcoody@nycbirdalliance.org](mailto:mcoody@nycbirdalliance.org) to discuss making a bequest to NYC Bird Alliance. ■



© Gail Karlsson

Your support helps provide habitat for birds like this Northern Parula, one of 65 bird species found so far by NYC Bird Alliance scientists at the Javits Center network of green roofs. (See page 3 for more information about our green infrastructure monitoring.)

# NYC BIRD ALLIANCE

## SAVE THE DATE

# 2024 FALL ROOST

Tuesday, October 1 at 6pm

Tavern on the Green

Support the event at [go.nycbirdalliance.org/roost2024](https://go.nycbirdalliance.org/roost2024)

Proceeds provide critical operating funds to protect wild birds and their habitat in NYC



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**NYC BIRD  
ALLIANCE**  
FORMERLY NYC AUDUBON

DATED MATERIAL:  
Summer 2024 Issue

# AMERICAN KESTREL (*FALCO SPARVERIUS*)

By Andrew Maas, Director of Marketing and Communications

**A**s I sit at my desk during a work-from-home day in early May, my work inbox churns out messages with the persistence of a caffeinated woodpecker looking for a new home. As the emails mount, the distractions do too. My cats Conan and Zelda are the main culprits, popping into my room several times a day. The temptation to take a break and join them in their midday feline siesta is strong. But just as I'm about to surrender, it happens—the unmistakable call that jolts me back to purpose: “klee klee klee!”

It is the call of the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) during breeding season. The smallest and most colorful falcon in North America, this feisty bird has adapted well to our city and can be found throughout the five boroughs—high up on water towers (like the one calling outside my apartment), hovering over fields like Governors Island's Parade Ground, or atop trees in smaller, pocket parks like Greenpoint's McGolrick Park. And now, kestrels are often seen on green roofs by NYC Bird Alliance (formerly NYC Audubon) scientists as part of the organization's green infrastructure work. (Learn more on page 3.)

Despite its ubiquity in New York City, the kestrel needs new habitat like green roofs to survive long term: the North American Breeding Bird Survey estimates an over 50 percent drop in the American Kestrel population since 1966, with another 50 percent loss projected by 2075 if trends like loss of habitat continue.

The American Kestrel has served as our organization's “mascot” bird and adorned the organization's logo for over two decades. As NYC Bird Alliance underwent a robust process to change our organization name, there was little question the kestrel would remain perched on our refreshed logo (see page 6). In a bustling city where distractions abound, the call of the kestrel serves as a poignant reminder of why our organization's work to protect birds and their habitats in New York City is so needed, and as an inspiration for how our organization can successfully adapt and thrive in new environments. ■



American Kestrels use perches while hunting for prey, like grasshoppers and birds. This kestrel was photographed here by NYC Bird Alliance scientists using a bird-safe glass windbreak on Google's St. John's Terminal office building. Photo: Michelle Talich

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

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