



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
November—December 2019 • Vol. 23 No. 6



Helderberg Escarpment Hawk Watch at Thacher Park Overlook, Fall 2019

The annual fall diurnal raptor migration (hawks/ daytime birds of prey) through the capital region as

observed and documented by the Helderberg Escarpment Hawk Watch at the John Boyd Thacher State Park Overlook has historically been centered around the 15th of the each September. Statistics and personal accounts dating back to the early 1980's have tended to reinforce this date. Over the past five years our local peak days have varied from September 15th and 22nd in 2015, the 17th and 19th in 2016, the 12th in 2017, the 19th in 2018, and the 13th this year (683 raptors/587 Broad-wings). Conjecture at the site has been that despite the variation of the migration peak date warmer weather seems to be delaying the bulk of the migration by about a week in recent years. HMANA /NEHW (Hawk Migration Association of North America /NorthEast Hawk Watch - HEHW's national affiliates) proclaimed September 22, 2018 as the average peak date for all its 41 member sites in the Northeast/New England region in their published annual report on the 2018 raptor migration. This year our neighboring site to the east at Wachusett Mountain in Massachusetts peaked on the 16th, Franklin Mountain in Oneonta peaked on the 15th, and Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania peaked on 16th. So much for conjecture and consistent consensus where raptors and the weather are concerned.

For our concentrated 102 hour/16 day raptor count this year, over 3496 park visitors contributed to our observation effort. We observed 98 Black Vultures, 201 Turkey Vultures, 16 Osprey, 52 Bald Eagles, 3 Northern Harriers, 30 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 33 Coopers Hawks, 3 Red Shouldered, 1181 Broad-wings, 112 Red-tails, 1 tentative Golden Eagle, 16 American Kestrels, 9 Merlins, 23 Peregrines, and 137 unidentified raptors - for a total of 1915. We also

observed 1158 Monarch butterflies on their way to Mexico. It was an exciting, encouraging year for *Danaus plexippus*.

Some of these raptor numbers are skewed and inflated a bit by a recently introduced institutional bias. The original mission of the HEHW was to educate the public about the thrill and ecological significance of the annual fall raptor migration through the capital region and to document raptor migration numbers for scientific purposes. This goal has been accomplished and HEHW is in the process of transitioning into a more park visitor oriented, less statistically focused site. Over the past 18 years the statistical validity and reliability of this site relative to neighboring sites has been documented and verified. As members of the general birding community have grown in their contribution to this site in terms of time and energy the emphasis has moved from the strict migration protocol of noting only migrating raptors who cross a designated geographic line to observation and education of the public via noting every instance of a bird, even if it's multiple sightings of the same bird over the course of the day. And that is a fine thing especially for those park visitors interested in observing a larger number of birds than just migrants. Over the next two years, approaching our XXth anniversary, I, myself, will be looking forward to spending more time observing and enjoying the winged spectacle - and less time with my head down and logging data. In short, our emphasis will be shifting from data collection for HMANA/NEHW purposes to a more educational role supported by local chapters of the National Audubon Society and the Hudson Mohawk Bird Club with daily observations being made more readily available via Audubon and Cornell ['ebird.org'](http://ebird.org) websites. Yahoo! It's an exciting time.

Continued on the next page

Continued from the previous page

Thank you to Luciano Toffolo for his 102hr/16 day dedication to spotting, photographing, identifying, and logging migrating raptors. Truly amazing, much appreciated work. Also supporting the effort observing and educating were: Tom and Colleen Williams and friends from the Hudson Mohawk Bird Club, Marian Sole and her associates from the Alan DeVoe Bird Club of Columbia County, as well as photographer/spotter/identifier Curt Morgan and educator extraordinaire Sue Breslin. With the help of these members and others of the HEHW team the daily numbers for raptors observed can be seen on Cornell's ebird.org website. Information and pictures are also available on the Helderberg

Escarpment Hawk Watch Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/HelderbergEscapmentHawkWatch/>, thanks to John Loz.

Thanks to Richele Ford and her live raptor presentation at our September 7, 2019 migration event. Always enjoyable and educational. Thank you to Nancy Engel of the Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center for her support and contribution to the effort. Good to see you at the festival September 7, 2019.

Next year's festive event number XIX will be held on September 12, 2020 at the Thacher Park Overlook. Keep looking up.

-by Will Aubrey, HEHW

As one can see, the Pumpkin Painting event, organized by Park interns Amy Sparer and Jake Turner on October 20 was fun for young and old park visitors, despite the drizzle in the afternoon!



Photos by Hannah Young



Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

Officers of the Friends Board of Trustees

President:	John Kilroy	872-1501
Vice President:	Laure-Jeanne Davignon	578-4718
Treasurer:	Betsey Miller	869-0739
Secretary:	Christine Gervasi	872-1501
	Former President Barbara Flindt	

Other Trustees

Jim Schaller	861-7452	Ethan Willsie	588-4148
Chuck Ver Straeten	872-2223	Bert Schou	221-8693

As always, call 872-0800 or 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call any board member with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Will Aubrey, Hannah Young, Brian Horl, Sigrin Newell and Nancy Engel for their contributions to this newsletter.

Want to contribute? Please email me at cgervasi@albany.edu
Christine Gervasi—Editor

Samhain



Pronounced "Sow Win" or as most of us know it today "Halloween", Samhain is a pagan religious festival originating from ancient Celtic spiritual tradition. It is celebrated from Oct. 31st to Nov. 1st to welcome in the harvest and usher in the dark half of the year. The ancient Celts marked Samhain as the most important of the four quarterly fire rituals.

During this time the home hearth would be allowed to burn out while the harvest was gathered and brought in. After the harvest work was complete the people would gather with the Druid priests to light a community fire using a friction wheel that would emit sparks igniting the fire. The wheel was a representation of the Sun. Cattle were sacrificed and each family took a flame from the fire to relight their home hearth.

Because the Celts believed that the barrier between the world of the living and the dead was weakest at this time they would leave offerings outside the villages and fields for the Fairies and Sidhs. People would dress as animals and monsters so the Fairies would not be tempted to kidnap them (sound vaguely familiar?). In the middle ages bonfires known as Samghnagans (which were a more personal form of the Samhain fires) became a tradition to protect the families from Fairies. About this time carved turnips called Jack-O-Lanterns began to appear. They were attached by strings to sticks and filled with hot coals to illuminate them.

Because it was believed that ancestors could travel between the worlds the tradition of Dumb Supper began. The celebrants would eat their meal, but only after the ancestors were invited to join them. The children would play games to entertain the dead while the adults would update them on the past year's news. That night doors and windows would be left open so the dead could come in and eat cakes that had been left for them.

Samhain prayer to the Ancestors

This is the night when the gateway between
Our world and the spirit world is thinnest.
Tonight is a night to call out those who came before.

Tonight I honor my ancestors
Spirits of my fathers and mothers, I call to you
And welcome you to join me for this night

You watch over me always

Protecting and guiding me

And tonight I thank you

Your blood runs in my veins

Your spirit is in my heart

Your memories are in my soul

*(you are encouraged to recite your genealogy at this point,
both blood family and spiritual)*

With the gift of remembrance

I remember all of you

You are dead but never forgotten

And you live on within me

And within those yet to come

Wishing you all a Happy Samhain from the porch.

-Brian Horl

Holiday Bazaar!

Don't miss the annual Holiday Bazaar at the Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center! Browse among unique, handcrafted gifts created from wood, wool or clay and original artwork, photography and jewelry! Saturday, December 7, from 10am to 4pm and Sunday, December 8, from 11am to 4pm.



Holiday Open House

Join Friends' board members at the Holiday Open House, enjoy live music, sweet treats and hot drinks! We'd love to meet our members!

Saturday, December 14, 11am to 3pm, at Thacher Visitor Center.

Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2019

Annual meeting, November 13, at Thacher Visitor Center.

After a short business meeting at 6:30pm, Dr. George Robinson will talk about his new children's book at 7:00pm. Spoiler alert: it involves a Thacher Park Monster. Children welcome!

Friends of Thacher Park
c/o Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center
87 Nature Center Way
Voorheesville, New York 12186-2601



Wednesday, November 13, 2019

Next:

Annual Membership Meeting

6:30 pm at Thacher Visitor Center

Followed by a presentation at 7:00pm by Dr. George Robinson on his new children's book.

Endozoochory

Endozoochory may seem like a difficult word, but you have known its meaning ever since you first ate a blueberry. Try saying it: End-oh-zoe + (ochory rhymes with crockery). The word rolls off the tongue nicely. From the Greek, it means "transport of seeds in the guts of an animal." Thacher Park abounds with examples of this successful evolutionary strategy which dresses a seed in sweet flesh in order to entice an animal to carry the seed elsewhere.

When alive, the stuffed bear at the Nature Center might have been stuffed with blueberries. A patient scientist observed a brown bear in a blueberry patch and calculated that the bear ate 16,000 berries in a morning. Since each berry has an average of 33 seeds, a bear can disperse half a million seeds per day.



Many trees have developed brightly colored berries to attract birds who can loft their seeds far from the parent tree. The park has lots of Cedar Waxwings that can be seen stripping a tree of its berries. The Waxwings

digest berries so quickly that their droppings are still sweet. Surprisingly, their rectums absorb sugars just as well as their intestines do. This fact is the sort that ought to appeal to Middle School kids and get them interested in nature.

Passing through an animal's intestine could destroy a seed's ability to germinate – all that chemical and physical scouring. But seeds relying on endozoochory have evolved hard coats for protection. Traveling in an animals' gut enhances the germination of fruit seeds twice as often as it reduces it. Abrasion in the gut breaks the seeds' dormancy.

It's icky to imagine, but some animals gather seeds from animal poop and carry them farther. Deer Mice scatter chokecherry and dogwood seeds in this way.

As you hike through Thacher in the fall, look for berries. See if you can figure out which animals are likely to eat them. And although they don't live in Thacher Park, I can't resist ending with the word describing the eating habits of fruit bats. *Chiropterochory* means "going abroad with an animal whose hands resemble wings". Try wrapping your tongue around that one!

-by Sigrin Newell

From a book that I recommend highly: Thor Hanson (2015) *Seeds*. NY: Basic Books

Photo by Sindri Skulason, <https://ppliedplantecology.wordpress.com/2016/12/01/animal-seed-dispersal/>

As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at www.friendsofthacherpark.org