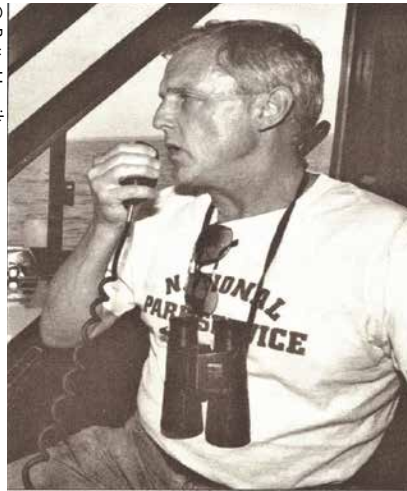


PRESERVING HABITAT FOR FOUR DECADES

Don Riepe is a past NYC Audubon vice president and secretary, a current member of the advisory council, and a longtime birding guide and research partner. Following a career in the National Park Service, Don became northeast chapter director and Jamaica Bay Guardian for the American Littoral Society.

Since its inception in 1979, NYC Audubon has been deeply involved in preserving habitat for birds throughout New York City. In the 1980s the society initiated the “Buffer the Bay” program, whereby vacant lands in Queens and Brooklyn surrounding Jamaica Bay were surveyed and prioritized according to ecological values. Most of these lands were being held by New York City agencies such as Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Economic Development Corporation (EDC). NYC Audubon worked with the Trust for Public Land and the American Littoral Society to have these lands transferred to NYC Parks. Fortunately, Henry Stern, then the NYC Parks Commissioner, was greatly in favor of accepting these lands as preserves. The first successful transfer was a 25-acre parcel in Far Rockaway named Dubos Point Wetlands Preserve. This site name was coined by a local activist named Bernie Blum in memory of Dr. René Dubos,

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“Captain” Don Riepe, Chief, Resource Management at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge and dedicated Auduboner, tours us through his back yard.

(Photo and caption, August-September 1995)

who wrote about people interacting with nature using Jamaica Bay as a prime example.

Following that success came Brant Point (named for the little Brant goose) and Four Sparrow Marsh (named by past Board President and Secretary Ron Bourque and his wife Jean). The latter site borders Flatbush Avenue and the Belt Parkway. My favorite site is Vernam-Barbadoes Terrapeninsula, a 20-acre Forever Wild* preserve bordered by Vernam and Barbadoes basins in Arverne, Queens. The local community board wanted to allow a developer to build a truck-body-customizing plant there. After a two-year letter writing campaign to have this lovely peninsula transferred from the EDC to NYC Parks, persistence prevailed. The site was given to the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) whose commissioner at the time was Al Appleton, a former NYC Audubon president. Appleton then turned it over to NYC Parks. On the day of dedication, Henry Stern arrived at the site in a small motor boat. He was dressed in battle fatigues (including helmet) and planted the NYC Parks’ green maple leaf flag on the shore, stating, “I claim this land as part of New York City’s Emerald Empire.” Additional Buffer the Bay site successes included a

NYCAS CONSERVATION SITES

The following are land areas protected through efforts of the New York City Audubon Society during the first ten years of existence.

HARBOR HERONS PROJECT

Island/wetland system to preserve nesting and feeding habitats of herons, egrets, cormorants, and other wildlife.

1. Pralls Island – NYC Dept. of Parks owned/NYCAS managed
2. Isle of Meadows – NYC owned/protected by Dept. of Sanitation
3. Shooters Island – multiple owners/working toward full protection
4. Goethals Bridge Pond – partially owned and protected by NYS DEC
5. South Brother Island – Bond Act purchase by NYS DEC

BUFFER THE BAY PROJECT

Campaign to protect all undeveloped, unprotected areas of Jamaica Bay

6. Bayswater Park – NYS owned/NYCAS managed
7. Dubos Point Park – NYC Dept. of Parks owned/NYCAS managed
8. Floyd Bennett Field Grasslands Restoration Project – joint effort of NYCAS & National Parks Service

(November 1989)

wooded shoreline at Fresh Creek, Brooklyn, also transferred to NYC Parks.

Another early habitat victory was persuading the National Park Service to set aside over 140 acres of open area next to runways at Floyd Bennett Field as grassland habitat for the Grasshopper Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Upland Sandpiper, American Kestrel, and other open-field-dependent species. Ron and Jean Bourque, along with NYC Audubon volunteers, cleared the site of woody vegetation so it could be mown yearly by the National Park Service. Along with the Bourques, past Board President, Vice President, and current Advisory Council Member David Burg, a longtime advocate for grassland birds and their habitat, was instrumental in this restoration effort.

Over the years NYC Audubon has been involved in many other projects and programs that protected and enhanced habitat

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NYC Parks Commissioner Henry Stern signing over management of Dubos Point Sanctuary to NYC Audubon. Also seated (left to right): past Board Member Drew Lehman and past Board President and Secretary Geoffrey Cobb Ryan. Standing (left to right): Bernard Blum of Friends of Rockaway, Marc Matsil of NYC Parks, past Board President and Vice President Albert F. Appleton, and NYC Parks Deputy Commissioner Diana Chapin.

(January-February 1989)

for birds. We advocated for and won protection for several of the Harbor Heron islands: the Isle of Meadows and Shooters and Prall's Islands, off Staten Island's western shore, and North and South Brother Islands, in the Bronx. We continue to monitor all 20 nesting islands as part of our 35-year-old Harbor Herons survey project. Other initiatives have included collaborative work to conserve Goethal's Bridge Pond on Staten Island, Bayswater State Park in Queens, Ridgewood Reservoir on the Brooklyn-Queens border, and Shirley Chisholm State Park in Brooklyn. Most recently, NYC Audubon has been in the forefront of creating bird habitat on some



Pictured (left to right): past Board Member Barbara Cohen; Mickey Cohen; Andy Stone of Trust for Public Land; David Burg; Elizabeth Goldstein of NYS Parks; Albert F. Appleton; Queens Borough President's Special Assistant for Parks Elaine Castas; NYC State Parks Commission Chair Cynthia Wainwright; John Graham; and two volunteers from the City Volunteer Corps.

(March 1992)

of the City's rooftops, in the form of green roofs, which we also monitor for wildlife including birds, bats, and insects. (See below to learn more about our green infrastructure work.) None of these projects could have been accomplished without NYC Audubon members, volunteers, and partners. NYC Audubon continues to provide the initiative and scientific basis for preserving open space and bird habitat in all five boroughs of New York City.

** The Forever Wild Program is a NYC Parks initiative to protect and preserve the most ecologically valuable lands within the five boroughs.*

BUILDING A GREENER FUTURE

Kaitlyn Parkins

Kaitlyn Parkins, NYC Audubon's conservation biologist, has a special research interest in animal migration and movement, as well as in innovative approaches to creating habitat in urban spaces.

Historically, NYC Audubon has advocated for the conservation of natural areas with two primary goals in mind: the preservation of habitat for birds, and the safeguarding of ecological services that protect our city. Projects such as *Buffer the Bay* (1987), *Buffer the Bay Revisited* (1992), and *Jamaica Bay Coastal Habitat Restoration Project* (1994-1996) aimed to protect land surrounding Jamaica Bay as bird habitat, and as a buffer from storms and flooding. In recent years, as the need to protect the City has become ever more imperative in the face of climate change, city planners have begun to design built infrastructure to mimic the ecosystem services provided by natural areas. Such projects include bioswales, permeable pavement, and green roofs.

These green infrastructure projects are usually designed with stormwater capture and management as a main priority, but they provide countless other benefits to our urban ecosystem, including lowered temperatures, improved air quality, reduced noise pollution, increased recreational space, and habitat for wildlife. Thus far NYC Audubon has been involved in the creation of three green infrastructure installations, at which we have also conducted biodiversity monitoring focused on birds, bats, and insects: the Libra Triangle bioswale in Queens, the Kingsland Wildflowers at Broadway Stages green roof in Brooklyn, and the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center green roof



The Jacob K. Javits Convention Center green roof. Inset photo: American Kestrel.

in Manhattan. The seven-acre green roof atop the Javits Center, designed by architects FXCollaborative, can absorb up to seven million gallons of stormwater runoff each year.

Most recently, NYC Audubon has facilitated creation of the Green Roof Researchers Alliance, a group of over 50 researchers in green roof science, policy, and education. Collaborative partnerships will be of critical importance as we continue to support green infrastructure in New York City. Such projects demonstrate how our urban environment can provide solutions to habitat loss, enabling birds to survive and even thrive here.