



Cayuga Bird Club

NEWSLETTER

ESTABLISHED 1914

SEPTEMBER 2006

Two Broods of Merlins Fledge in Ithaca

BY PAUL HURTADO

For graduate students like myself, the summer has come to a close. Classes have started, undergraduates are once again packing the streets and sidewalks on campus, and that massive movement of birds—fall migration—has begun. This year however, there is one more event to mark the end of summer: the dispersal of Ithaca's breeding Merlins.

During early to mid-July, a number of birders were able to see up to four chicks and both adults at the Merlin nest on East Seneca Street in Ithaca. Around July 10, the four young Merlins started to fledge and were out of the nest within a week or so. Whole and partially consumed prey (birds) still could be found below some of the adult Merlins' favorite perches, which suggests an abundance of prey items in the area. These Merlins were certainly well fed! After some very clumsy first attempts at flying, the

Paul Hurtado



This fledgling Merlin crash landed onto a tree trunk and then this window sill at 417 E. Seneca Street after taking one of its first flights on July 11, 2006.

adult Merlins managed to relocate the whole family uphill from the nest site about one block, between Schuyler Place and Stewart Avenue, where all six Merlins could be found until early August. Although their calls are no longer heard throughout

the day, as of August 22 the Merlins still were being seen in the area occasionally.

On July 10 Scott Haber discovered a *second* nesting pair of Merlins with at least two fledglings near his residence in Cayuga Heights, not far from last year's nesting site in that neighborhood. This nest was apparently a week or so ahead of the Seneca Street nest, as the young had already fledged and were flying well enough to harass crows while the Seneca Street Merlins were still in the nest and not yet capable of anything but very clumsy flight.

Although we only can guess what the winter months have in store for these small falcons, we can remember what we have learned from their presence as we anticipate their return. And to the Merlins, as they disperse for the winter: "*Bon voyage* neighbors; we'll be looking for you next spring!" 🐦

CAYUGA BIRD CLUB

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The Cayuga Bird Club meets on the second Monday of each month, September through June, at 7:30 P.M. in the Auditorium of the Johnson Center on Sapsucker Woods Road. All programs and field trips are free and open to the public. Membership costs \$10/year, payable in September. To join, send a check (made out to "Cayuga Bird Club") to Cayuga Bird Club Treasurer, c/o Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Bird club members receive the Cayuga Bird Club Newsletter monthly from September through June. Send newsletter submissions to Anne Marie Johnson, contact information above. Of particular interest are articles about local bird sightings, bird behavior, or birding hot spots, as well as original poetry, art, and photos.

Chickadee illustration in masthead by Karen Confer, waxwing illustration for native plants column and duck silhouette by Lena Samsonenko, archives illustration by Anne Marie Johnson.

Visit the Cayuga Bird Club website at:

WWW.BIRDS.CORNELL.EDU/CAYUGABIRDCLUB

From the President

Wow! In the blink of an eye, summer has come and gone. It seems like yesterday that we were enjoying our dish-to-pass dinner at Myers Point—and what a lovely evening that was, with a full shelter of attendees. I always enjoy our dish-to-pass meals because there is such an exciting assortment of yummy goodies to eat. We also lucked out with the weather that evening—neither too hot nor too cold, ending with a gorgeous sunset. As much as I do not want summer to be over, the crisp fall winds are starting to blow, which means migration is upon us. Already the level of exciting shorebird sightings from the surrounding areas, posted on the email list, have geared up as new birds are being spotted amongst us every day. I encourage everyone to get out there and join in the fun!

One exciting birding event that I hope many of you will be participating in is the Montezuma Muckrace. This annual event helps raise money to support the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge (MNWR). I know there are a lot of club members who visit MNWR regularly, so if you are not able to join a team, I hope you will consider sponsoring one of the many teams. Our club is planning to sponsor two teams: the Downy Chicks, a youth team and the Mudhens, composed of adult club members. Wish them luck, and support them with your donation!

Late this summer, the field trip committee met and planned some exciting field trips and lectures for this season. These events are listed on pages 5 and 6 and on our website; please take a look and see what we have in store for you this season. Also, a big thanks to the field trip committee for arranging these events and to Linda Clougherty for hosting the committee meeting.

In closing, I look forward to seeing everyone again, either out birding or at our monthly meetings held at 7:30 P.M. the second Monday of the month. Also, please remember to renew your club membership, and as always, we graciously accept any donations. See you soon!



Events Calendar

DATE	EVENT	DETAILS
SEPT. 8-9	Montezuma Muckrace Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge	The club is sponsoring two adult teams and one youth team. Reports to come in the next newsletter.
SEPT. 10 Sunday 7:30 A.M.– 12:00 P.M.	Field Trip: McIlroy Preserve Leader: Laura Stenzler Meet: Johnson Center*	Laura will lead a morning trip to the Finger Lakes Land Trust's McIlroy Preserve near Groton to look for migrants. Contact Laura at 539-6893 or at <lms9@cornell.edu> with questions.
SEPT. 11 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Cayuga Bird Club Meeting Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Mike Anderson and Gerrit Vyn	"Bird Songs of Alaska's North Slope." See the speaker profile on page 4 for more details.
SEPT. 17 Sunday 7:00 A.M.– 11:00 A.M.	Field Trip: Local birds Leader: Mark Chao Meet: Johnson Center*	Destinations will include Sapsucker Woods and other local hotspots for migrating songbirds. For information contact Mark at 257-3348 or at <markchao@imt.org>.
SEPT. 18 Monday	Newsletter deadline	Send newsletter submissions to Anne Marie Johnson, contact information on page 2.
SEPT. 18 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Rebecca Heiss	Historically a bird of the countryside, the American Crow has moved into cities only in the last 20 years, and for this they may be paying a price. Rebecca Heiss, Research Assistant for the New York State Health Department, will reveal the developmental repercussions for nestling crows raised on a city "junk food" diet in her presentation, "Why life is better in the country: how suburban crows are at a disadvantage."
SEPT. 22-24 Fri.–Sun.	Field Trip: Cape May Leader: Meena Haribal	Join this weekend trip to Cape May, New Jersey. Contact Meena at 277-3536 or at <mmh3@cornell.edu> by September 15 for details and to reserve a spot.
SEPT. 25 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Elliott Swarthout	Elliott Swarthout, Arkansas Ivory-billed Woodpecker Field Leader for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, will present "An Update on the 2005-2006 Ivory-billed Woodpecker Search," which will include a behind-the-scenes look at the technology and logistics involved. The search has yielded increased conservation for a unique ecosystem as well as tantalizing clues to the whereabouts of this majestic bird.
OCT. 2 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Janis Dickinson	In her presentation, "Environmental and social determinants of behavioral variability: examples from western bluebirds," Janis Dickinson, Director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, will present results from a 20+ year project to find the rules male western bluebirds use to make decisions regarding dispersal, helping at the nest, and parental care—decisions with important implications for individual survival and reproductive success.

*Meet for field trips in the front parking lot.

Events Calendar

DATE	EVENT	DETAILS
OCT. 7 Saturday	Field Trip: Hawk Mountain Leader: Linda Clougherty	Linda will lead an all-day trip to Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania, for hawk migration. Rain date will be Sunday, October 8. Contact Linda at 539-7546 or at <lindaclougherty@yahoo.com> for details and to reserve a spot.
OCT. 9 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Cayuga Bird Club Meeting Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Richard Marx	In his presentation, "Purple Martins: history, lives, housing, and more," Richard Marx will give an overview of the Purple Martin's long history of association with humans. Richard will also describe the life cycle and biology of Purple Martins and provide some hints on how to attract these incredible fliers to manufactured martin houses.
OCT. 16 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Catherine Graham	Catherine Graham, Assistant Professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolution at Stony Brook University, will present, "Toucans and Seed Dispersal in Mexico." See the next newsletter for details.
OCT. 23 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Kevin A. Parker	In his presentation, "New Zealand conservation and avian translocations: the intersection of management, science, and the wider human community," Kevin Parker, from the Institute of Natural Resources at Massey University in Auckland, New Zealand, will talk about the history of New Zealand conservation and translocations, with a focus on his own research examining the impacts of translocation on the cultural evolution of dialect in the New Zealand Saddleback.
OCT. 30 Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monday Night Seminar Johnson Center Auditorium Speaker: Jack Barclay	Burrowing Owls are a species of concern across California. Jack Barclay, of Albion Environmental, Inc., will describe the challenges involved in the ongoing management of a Burrowing Owl colony located at San Jose International Airport that seems to be beating the odds. His presentation, "Burrowing Owls in California—an abundant endangered species?" gives special emphasis to understanding the basic biology and natural history of this charismatic species, as well as the conflicts that arise when implementing conservation at a major airport.

September Speaker Profile: Mike Anderson and Gerrit Vyn

Every spring, millions of birds migrate to the boreal forests and arctic tundra to breed. For the short few months of the boreal summer, many typically silent species, such as shorebirds, jaegers, grebes, and loons, become exceptionally vocal with elaborate aural and visual courtship displays. In June 2006, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Macaulay Library sent Michael Andersen and Gerrit Vyn on a month-long recording expedition to the North Slope of Alaska to record the songs of these breeding birds for the library's collection of audio recordings.

Michael Andersen, Assistant Curator of Terrestrial Audio, and Gerrit Vyn, Production Engineer, have worked in the Macaulay Library for nearly two years. They each have extensive experience working with birds in a wide array of field settings and disciplines. In their presentation, "Bird Songs of Alaska's North Slope," Michael and Gerrit will share many of the recordings made on their trip as a means to discuss the breeding biology of these Alaskan birds. In this way they hope to diverge from the typical lecture format and let the birds do most of the talking. 🐦

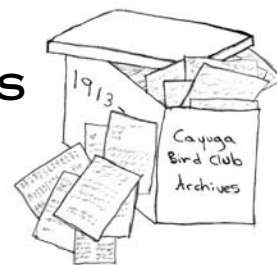
OFFICER ELECTIONS

BY DEIRDRE ANDERSON

It is time to start thinking about our club elections, which will be held at the November club meeting. If you know of someone you would like to nominate for President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, or Corresponding Secretary, please submit your nomination, with an agreement letter from the nominee stating that they would be interested in running, to either Laura Stenzler or me. If no nominations for President, Vice President, and Treasurer are received, Laura Stenzler, Vice President; Kim Kline, Treasurer; and I, President; would be happy to remain in our positions for another year. However, we need nominations for a Secretary and a Corresponding Secretary because these positions are currently vacant. 🐦

INSIDE THE ARCHIVES

COMPILED BY CINDY TWARDOKUS



Officers of the Cayuga Bird Club for the year 1913-1914

Honorary President... Dr. A. D. White
 President..... Mr. L. A. Fuertes
 Vice presidents..... Mrs. J. H. Comstock
 Mrs. A. W. Smith
 Mr. W. D. Funkhouser
 Treasurer..... Mrs. S. A. Munford
 Secretary..... Dr. A. G. Allen.



Paul Hurdado

Bobolink along Mount Pleasant Road in Ithaca, June 20, 2006.

ORNITHOLOGY MEETING DRAWS NEAR

BY ANDREW MASON

This year's New York State Ornithological Association meeting is scheduled for September 29–October 1, 2006, in Oneonta, New York, and will feature keynote speaker Don Kroodsma, author of the critically acclaimed *The Singing Life of Birds: The Art and Science of Listening to Birdsong* and recognized as the "reigning authority on the biology of avian vocal behavior" by the American Ornithologists' Union.

Also scheduled are workshops, including raptor identification, using Raven-Lite software to visualize bird sounds, a presentation on Adirondack birds, and photo tips by noted photographer Jeff Nadler. Field trips will include a visit to the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch. There also will be a research paper session and social gatherings.

The meeting, hosted by the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society, will be held in the Morris Conference Center at the State University of New York College at Oneonta. Further information and a registration form can be found at <www.nybirds.org> or by contacting Andy Mason at (607) 652-2162. 🐦

LILLIAN STONER AWARD NOMINEE

BY MATT PODOLSKY

I am a research assistant at Ithaca College and have recently been nominated by the Cayuga Bird Club for the Lillian Stoner Award. This New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA) award provides \$350 to fund attendance at the association's annual meeting. Attendance at this year's NYSOA meeting would not only be an invaluable educational opportunity for me but would also give me the chance to share some of my knowledge and experience with others. I plan to present a paper, co-authored by John Confer, Associate Professor of Biology at Ithaca College, and Juliana Quant, research assistant at Ithaca College, about the effects of shrubland restoration on shrubland birds and on the birds of the surrounding forest interiors.

The research for this paper began in 2004 when two sites were established within Sterling Forest State Park. During the summers of 2004 and 2005, surveys were completed at both sites. Before the spring of 2006, four areas at one of the sites were restored to shrubland habitat while the other site remained unaltered as a control. In the paper that I will present at the annual meeting, the results of the surveys from the summer of 2006, which Juli and I compiled, will be compared to those from 2004 and 2005. I also will explain how shrubland restoration can take place without having a detrimental impact on the bird species of the surrounding forest interior.

In addition to the shrubland restoration project, I worked for John Confer in the summer of 2006 studying Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers in Sterling Forest State Park. I banded, took blood samples, and spent many hours searching for nests and monitoring nesting success.

During the summer of 2005, I worked as an intern for the Student Conservation Association at Lassen Volcanic National Park in California, where I assisted in the operation of a banding station, coordinated a small group of volunteers surveying wetlands in the park for nesting Bufflehead, and occasionally assisted a Spotted Owl survey crew, once feeding mice to a Spotted Owl that landed a few feet from me, in an effort to determine the location of a nest. I am currently conducting bird surveys on a utility right-of-way to assess the effect of experimental manipulation of invasive shrub species on breeding bird density.

I am about to enter my final semester at Ithaca College, where I have a double major in Environmental Studies and Cinema/Photography. During

the Spring 2006 semester, I worked on a project that effectively merged these two interests. I completed a 20-minute documentary about a \$600,000 stream restoration project that took place in the town of Caroline, New York. I conducted dozens of interviews with people involved in the project and edited over 30 hours of footage. The documentary will serve as an educational tool for other communities and agencies hoping to implement similar restoration projects.

I appreciate the club's nomination of me for the Lillian Stoner Award, which would help further my career goals and provide me with a priceless educational experience. 🐦

Flying lesson

By Inta Ezergailis

Just when we start to miss
their counterpoint to the sweet
twitter of spring warblers
the ravens do appear:

five, all at once, parents with
three young. Much instruction
follows — two bravely fly
across the deep abyss, land,
a bit clumsily, on the other side.

The last sits on his limb, gets
yelled at, coaxed, spreads his wings
again and again, but cannot quite
push off the branch, clings again,
flaps a bit, black pile of indecision.

We wait, unable to let go, stuck
on our own path, loth to think him
stuck forever, sick with thought,
postlapsarian bird, fallen into
consciousness, until he pushes off,
flies clear across on slow elegant wings,
freeing himself and us.

*Reprinted with permission from Inta's Poems
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Ezergailis.*

In Memory of Caissa Willmer

BY MARK CHAO

Joan Caissa Willmer, a longtime Cayuga Bird Club member and former editor of this newsletter (1998-2002), passed away in Ithaca on June 3, 2006, at age 74. The piece below is drawn from remarks that Mark Chao delivered at her memorial service.

Caissa and I often talked at length about our local birding community, as revealed through the Cayugabirds-L email list. She, like me, felt a real personal connection with many on the list, even if she had never met them face to face. She frequently sent private notes to people, thanking them for some insight or moving description. She freely asked questions and often set off discussions of behavior or conservation that illuminated us all.

She also didn't hesitate to register her disagreement with people who she thought had used sexist language or had demeaned or excluded other participants on the list. Caissa readily acknowledged being a sometime thorn in peoples' sides. She didn't mind; she never had any qualms about taking a stand for what she believed was right.

Everyone who read Caissa's messages noticed her writing style, which was full of heady turns of phrase, perhaps a bit arcane to some people, but always apt. Here is a message from Caissa from October 9, 2002, about a vagrant Purple Gallinule at Montezuma. (Note her idiosyncratic use of invented gender-neutral pronouns.)

I have met the "purple" gallinule and s/he is . . . a most unprepossessing bird. No thoughts of beauty there, but then s/he's young and is destined to grow out of her adolescent homeliness.

S/he was gorging on a dead and noisome (could smell it in my car) carp, actually wrestling it over to reveal its white underbelly for a few pecks and then wrestling it back to the blackish scaly side. It should provide hrim with gustatory interest for several days. . . .

Other descriptions of hers were similarly vivid. Once we were watching Double-crested Cormorants roosting along the jetty leading to the white lighthouse across from East Shore Park. She said that they looked like a panel of "old judges." And on our very last outing, on May 16 of this year, Caissa, Erin Quinn, and I saw a Wood Thrush carrying an old cottonwood leaf, so beaten and worn that only a network of white veins remained. Caissa pondered for a few moments how best to describe the leaf and came up with "tattered lace"—a most fitting phrase, we all agreed.

Over these few years, we grew to know and love each other as much as we loved the birds. Of course, many other friends had the same kind of special connection with her—many without any link at all to birds. She had a weekly Spanish-language discussion group, a playwriting group, classes, and work for the Finger Lakes Land Trust, for Cornell, and for the city's advisory council on access for people with disabilities. Perhaps Caissa was best known for her theater reviews for the Ithaca Times.

I will always hold Caissa in my memory. I see her at the wheel of the car, as we roll past sweeping lake-shore vistas and fields of corn and hay, on our way north to Montezuma. Her voice is low and smooth and gentle in tone, even as it offers up zinging wit, clever wordplay, and fiery opinion. The gas-gauge needle goes practically left of the E, but still we go on mile after mile, driven, perhaps, by her optimism and abandon as much as by the fumes in the tank. And we arrive at our destination, Caissa and I, as the sun, still rising in the east, casts stunning oblique rays on the marsh and all its birds—cormorants, bitterns, ducks, moorhens, Osprey, and much more—from our vantage point all the way to the horizon. 🐦

A new kind of cemetery

BY MARK CHAO

Caissa was the first person to be buried at Greensprings Natural Cemetery in Newfield, at the northern edge of the Arnot Forest. Open as a cemetery since June 2006, Greensprings is the only natural cemetery in New York, and as of this summer, only one of three in the United States. Burial here involves much less environmental impact than in conventional cemeteries. Here bodies are laid to rest without embalming fluid, in simple biodegradable caskets or no caskets at all, at low densities, with natural stone markers flush with the surface of the ground.

Greensprings is the fruition of the vision, generosity, and hard work of Mary Woodsen, Susan Thomas, and several others, as well as Herb Engman, who used to own this 100-acre property. The cemetery comprises fields of hay and goldenrod, early succession forest, and mature hardwood forest. Many bird species, including Prairie Warblers, Bobolinks, thrashers, cuckoos, owls, and others breed here.

For more information about Greensprings Natural Cemetery, visit their web site at <www.naturalburial.org>. 🐦



Native Plants for Native Birds: *Prunus virginiana* (Choke Cherry)

BY JOEL BAINES, PHOTO BY DAVID RUPPERT

Choke cherry is a close relative of black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), with similar leaves and fruits. In our area, it is difficult to tell a choke cherry apart from a young black cherry. Both trees have oblong leaves that are slightly toothed and shiny above, less shiny below. Black cherry leaves are thicker and more oblong, whereas choke cherry has a broader (rounder) leaf. Black cherry fruit is a little more palatable to humans, hence *P. virginiana's* common name reflects the astringency of the berry that makes people choke when they try to eat it. The habits of the trees are the best way to distinguish them. In the Cayuga Lake basin, if the tree is over 20 feet high with a single trunk, it is black cherry. Choke cherry can be multi-stemmed or single-stemmed, but it is never more than 20 feet high.

Choke cherry is one of the most important native plants for birds in North America, mostly because of its propensity to produce abundant amounts of fruit year after year but also because of the remarkable adaptability of the plant: it has the widest range of any tree in North America (!) with varieties near the arctic circle and all the way down to Mexico. Its fruits reportedly are eaten by more than 80 species of birds, and the Eastern Bluebird is particularly fond of the berries, which change from red to black as they ripen in July and August. Coyotes, bears, deer, rabbits, and rodents also browse the twigs and eat the fruit.

Choke cherry accumulates in forest clearings, woodland edges, and power line cuts. It is also an early succession plant of disturbed habitats. In other words, it is found almost anywhere there is a supply of seed, a bit of sun, and some moisture. The habit

of the plant is definitely shrubby, and the leaves are dense enough to provide bird cover but only rarely dense enough to provide nesting sites. Rich soil and more moisture will favor denser foliage and resistance to black knot disease, an affliction that it shares with black cherry. The plant is otherwise disease resistant, although various insects can make the leaves look a bit spotty by fall. Virtually any pH will serve the plant well. More water will tend to make choke cherry more vigorous, although the site must be well drained and not swampy.



Deer and rabbits browse choke cherry, but with its rapid growth, multiple stems, and general vigor, it can withstand such abuse reasonably well once it is more than 2-3 years old and of reasonable size. If planted, some sort of deer protection would be warranted for younger plants.

Given its shrubby unkempt habit and tendency to make abundant fruit that can be messy on driveways or walkways, choke cherry is not a choice plant for the formal garden. It is used best as part of a wildlife hedge or as part of a border to define a woodland edge, where the numerous white plumes can be very attractive when it flowers and its lovely almond-like scent can be appreciated best. Choke cherries bloom just in time

for spring migration, and orioles and low feeding warblers such as Wilson's, Magnolia, and Yellow warblers, are attracted to insects buzzing around the blossoms. Many specimens (and especially some cultivars such as Canada Red) turn a bright crimson in fall, beautifully framing the black fruit. This is a wonderful three-season plant for the bird-friendly garden! 🐦

IT'S TIME TO RENEW

AUTUMN IS THE TIME TO REJOIN THE CAYUGA BIRD CLUB

Dues remain at \$10 per household and cover your subscription to this newsletter from September through June as well as other bird club activities. Keep informed about birding trips, meetings, and other bird-related happenings in and around the Cayuga Lake Basin.

PLEASE JOIN US!

If your label is on the reverse side of this page and the address is correct, check here _____, indicate below which type of newsletter you would like to receive, and mail this page along with a check made out to "Cayuga Bird Club."

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MAIL TO:


Cayuga Bird Club Treasurer
c/o Cornell Lab of Ornithology
159 Sapsucker Woods Road
Ithaca, NY 14850

Birding Opportunities in Costa Rica

BY SANDY PULLOCK

Journeyweavers of Ithaca and Aventuras Yemaya of Costa Rica are offering a winter birding trip for January 5–16, 2007. The trip will include high mountain habitat, Caribbean lowland rain forest, Caribbean foothills, tropical dry forest, transitional dry forest, Pacific coastal marsh, and southern rain forest. The 12-day trip costs \$1,995, which includes meals, double occupancy lodging, local transportation in a private van, an experienced Costa Rican bilingual guide, and group excursions. Trip Extensions to Toretuguero or Osa Peninsula are available. The trip is limited to 12 people.

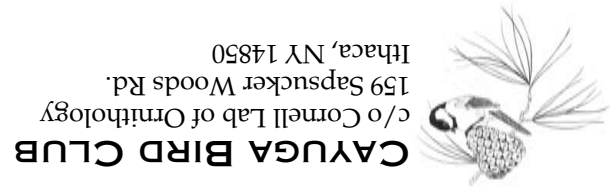
In addition to the winter trip, Journeyweavers and Aventuras Yemaya are planning a fall hawk migration trip for September 26–October 7, 2007. See complete trip itineraries and more on the Journeyweavers' web site at <www.journeyweavers.com>.

Cayuga Bird Club members and other local birders have participated in previous trips and are available to share their experiences. Contact Sandra Pollack at 277-1416 or at <journeyweavers@aol.com> with any questions or to reserve a spot. 

Adult and juvenile Caspian Terns at Myers Point on August 7, 2006.



Paul Hurtado



Mike Anderson recording a Long-tailed Tern, by Gerrit Vyn



NEXT MEETING SEPTEMBER 11

MIKE ANDERSON AND GERRIT VYN,
FEATURED SPEAKERS

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