



# Little Gull

Visit the RBA's website at [www.RochesterBirding.org](http://www.RochesterBirding.org)

Rochester Birding Association, P.O. Box 92055, 1335 Jefferson Road, Rochester, NY 14692-9998

## APRIL AND EARLY MAY 2021 EVENTS & BIRDING FIELD TRIPS

**Please Note:** Pre-registration is now required for all field trips (see the COVID-19 field trip guidelines in the revised field trip schedule or on the [RBA website](http://www.RochesterBirding.org)). Bring your own binoculars and scopes if you have them, as there will be no sharing of equipment. Social distancing will be practiced, and masks will be required.

**Apr 8**  
Thursday

**RBA Virtual Meeting, 7:00 p.m. Speaker: Alicia Rae Brunner. Title: Findings on Migratory Bird Behavior Under a Changing Climate.** See the article on p. 3 for more information.

**Apr 9**  
Friday

### **WOODCOCK COURTSHIP FLIGHT AT BRADDOCK BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY**

This will be an evening trip for woodcock courtship flight. If you've never seen this spectacle, prepare to be amazed. Birds call noisily from the ground in grassy fields before spiraling rapidly up high, descending back down in a zigzagging noisy frenzy, only to start the cycle anew. An amazing sight! Following the woodcock display, owl banding is a possibility at the banding station. Fields may be wet and muddy in spots. **Boots are STRONGLY recommended. Bring a flashlight or headlamp.** A port-a-john is available. We will meet at **7:00 p.m.** in the parking lot of Braddock Bay Bird Observatory, 10 Braddocks Avenue, Hilton, NY 14468. Take the Manitou Beach Road exit from Ontario State Parkway. Turn north and follow Manitou Beach Road until it forks. Take the left fork to the small dirt road (there is a sign for BBBO). The parking lot is at the end of the dirt road.

**Leader: Andrea Patterson 585-490-5361 co-leader Robert Buckert**

**Apr 17**  
Saturday

### **HIGH ACRES NATURE AREA**

Over 130 bird species have been observed at HANA including more than 70 that nest in the diverse habitats found there. During this field trip, we expect to see at least 40 species returning to nest or on their way to northern nesting grounds. Our approximately 2 mile walk over flat trails will explore about 250 acres at HANA and include some wet spots requiring ankle-high waterproof shoes or boots. No restrooms are available. We will meet at **8:00 a.m.** at the parking lot on Perinton Parkway approximately 1/4 mile east of the Waste Management offices.

**Leader: Rosemary Reilly 585-748-0802 and co-leaders Brian Rohrs and Gayle Lazoration 585-281-9534**

**Apr 21**  
Wednesday

### **HIGHLAND PARK**

We'll be looking for spring migrants while enjoying lovely flora. This walk would be gorgeous even without the birds, but it does have birds in abundance! Find out where people have spotted the rarities that pop up in this urban treasure. Dress for the weather. There are paved walkways with gentle hills. Walking in grass is a possibility, if you choose to. No restrooms are available. Meet at **8:00 a.m.** on Reservoir Avenue in front of the conservatory building.

**Leader: Jeanne Verhulst 585-473-9229, co-leader Amy Kahn 585-310-2330**

**Apr 25**  
Sunday

### **BRADDOCK BAY HAWK LOOKOUT**

This trip is for the spring hawk flight and migrating songbirds. This is a joint trip with the Buffalo Ornithological Society. We will be working to identify distant raptors and meet some great new people, too! This requires a short walk across grass to the viewing platform (wheelchair accessible). A port-a-john may be available. Meet at **9:30 a.m.** at the Braddock Bay Park main parking lot. Use the East Manitou Road exit from the Ontario State Parkway.

**Spotting scopes would be very useful.**

**Leader: Mike Tetlow 585-425-7849 and Members of the BOS**

**May 1**  
Saturday

**TAYLOR MARSH (Joint trip with the Bergen Swamp Preservation Society)**

Taylor Marsh is a preserve owned by the Bergen Swamp Preservation Society and located in Ontario County north of Honeoye Lake. It is best known for marsh birds, including both American and Least Bittern and Virginia Rail. However, the star attraction is the 2-3 Sandhill Cranes that have been present in this area all year around for many years. They are occasionally heard at Taylor, although seldom seen. Taylor also has brush-shrub and wooded upland habitat with a good variety of spring migrants and breeding birds. An adjacent hay field is home to Bobolinks and meadowlarks. It has a checklist of well over 100 species, and we usually rack up 40-50 in just a couple of hours. This is mostly flat trail walking, which can be muddy. No restrooms are available. Meet at **8:00 a.m.** at the Taylor Marsh parking area on the west side of Allen's Hill Road just south of Nighan Hill Road. From Rochester, take I-390 south to the Avon exit. Turn left onto Routes 5&20 and go east. In the town of Lima, turn right onto Route 15 A and follow it south. Turn left onto Richmond Mills Road (Livingston County Road 41). It becomes Ontario County Road 15. Follow County Road 15 past County Road 37 and turn right at the next stop sign onto Allen's Hill Road. (There is no road sign at the intersection.)

**Leaders:** Lynn Braband 585-436-9388 and Jay Greenberg 585-256-0485

**May 2**  
Sunday

**FOUR MILE CREEK PRESERVE, WEBSTER**

We will look for spring migrants along the approximately 2 to 3 miles of gently rolling hiking trails. The trails will most likely be muddy, so appropriate footwear is recommended. No restrooms are available. Meet at **8:00 a.m.** in the preserve parking lot at the southeast corner of Lake Road and Phillips Road in Webster. **Leaders:** Christina Hoh 973-224-7009 and co-leaders Sheryl Gracewski & Tom Nash 585-261-6975

**Welcome to the Flock**



**Join us in welcoming these 14 new members (7 memberships) who joined in the last month.**

Sally & Charlie Parmigiani  
Jackie Baldwin  
David Whitlock  
Diane Killigrew & Family (Dan, John, Kevin)  
Lee & Lucy Smassanow  
Jim Markson  
Stephanie Moretter & David & Madison

**Current RBA Membership as of March 15 is 403:**

387 household memberships  
2 young birders  
1 *Little Gull* membership  
13 complimentary

Jo Taylor  
Membership Data

Adrianna Anderson  
Membership Outreach

**President's Column**

Liz Magnanti



It's amazing how much can change in a month. Last month I was talking about the frigid temperatures and snow that had descended upon Rochester, and today

the feeling of spring is in the air. The sun is feeling stronger, the birds are beginning to sing, and early spring migrants are coming back into the area. Turkey Vultures, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Common Grackles are becoming daily sightings and are a sure sign of the migrants to come.

As the days get longer, birds begin to experience physiological changes that prepare them for the breeding season. They will also begin to stake out territories that provide food, shelter from predators and a suitable nesting habitat. Males will begin to attempt to attract mates by singing and showing off their feathers during courtship displays. Some males will provide females with food and bring them to a nest they have started to construct.

The Eastern Bluebird is one of the earlier nesting songbirds we have in the area. They prefer an open habitat of tall grasses, fields and

even golf courses, especially if there are nest boxes or large trees scattered throughout. The Eastern Bluebird is a cavity nester and can sometimes be enticed with a bluebird box that has an opening of 1.5" in diameter. Most birds like nesting boxes that are mounted securely to something unmoving: a pole, tree, or side of a building. Other birds, like wrens, aren't as picky. Wrens will nest in houses that hang and swing around in the wind. They are also known to nest in mailboxes, garages that left their doors open too long, or shoes that have been left outside! A wren house will have a small diameter opening, usually only 1" or 1 1/8" wide. This size is also small enough to keep out House Sparrows, which are known to take over nest boxes. Other cavity nesting species that will nest in cavities and nest boxes include nuthatches, woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice and screech owls!

Not all birds nest in cavities, however. Cardinals, goldfinches, Blue Jays, Mourning Doves, orioles and hummingbirds are just some examples of birds that will nest in trees or shrubs. Each has their own preferences for nesting habitat, materials, and height of nest. One of my favorites is the nest of the Baltimore Oriole, a woven sack

*(Continued on the next page)*

*(President's Column, continued)*

which hangs from a tree branch. Now is a good time to see some of these nests from last year before leaves begin sprouting on trees.

The RBA will be opening up field trips to more participants starting in April, and will hopefully continue to do so as the rate of COVID-19 infections continues to decline. Monthly meetings will continue via Zoom for the time being as well. The board has decided to cancel the annual picnic that usually occurs in June due to the inability to share food and possible large group size.

As far as local birding goes, now is a great time to observe the hawk flight around Braddock Bay! The hawk watch platform is the place to be this time of year to get outdoors and be around birders, but at a safe distance. As birds begin the nesting and breeding process this season, don't forget about the Breeding Bird Atlas! Breeding bird behavior can be reported via the eBird app and is important data for this study.

I hope you all get a chance to enjoy the early spring weather we are having, and get a chance to get out and enjoy the birds!

## April Talk and Speaker

### Findings on Migratory Bird Behavior Under a Changing Climate

Alicia Rae Brunner will first talk about her master's project, in which she studied Swainson's Warbler winter ecology in Jamaica and demonstrated how individuals modified their space use in response to rainfall change throughout the non-breeding season. She will then discuss her current Ph.D. work on the behaviors of Black-throated Blue Warblers in New Hampshire, where she intends to gain a better understanding of the impacts of observed climate change trends in northern forests on the timing of breeding and migration of migratory birds.

Alicia is a Ph.D. student at Cornell University and the Lab of Ornithology researching the effects of climate change on migratory bird behavior. She currently studies Black-throated Blue Warblers on the breeding grounds in New Hampshire to understand how individual birds may respond to changing environmental conditions. In 2012, she graduated with her B.Sc. from UW-Green Bay after completing an undergraduate project on Eastern Bluebird nest box usage. The beautiful bluebirds got her hooked and she has been chasing birds ever since! She travelled to places like the Big Island of Hawaii and the Gulf Coast of Alabama to work on an array of avian research projects before starting her master's at Ohio State in 2015. There, she studied various aspects of Swainson's Warbler winter ecology, specifically, how they respond to rainfall fluctuations throughout the winter. While in Jamaica, she also worked with American Redstarts on the long-term research project with the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, one of the studies that kick-started our understanding of the importance of studying non-breeding migratory birds. She enjoys birding (obviously!), hiking, traveling, and spending time in nature. Ultimately, she hopes her research will be valuable in our understanding and protection of migratory bird populations now and into the future.



## Editor's Corner

Jay Greenberg



### RBA Member Bird Photos

There are some amazingly good bird photos in the Last 30 Days Gallery, which is now hosted by Flickr at

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/130251828@N07/albums/72157684118670726>. There are a few examples on p. 7 of this issue. I'm sorry that I can't include more. Kudos to curator Dick Horsey and all the others who contributed.

### Local Bird Checklists

In my *in memoriam* article last month about the late Ann Watson, I mentioned that I had asked the powers that be at the RBA to put her Cobbs Hill Park bird checklist on the RBA website for download by interested birders. I never got a response to the request, so I assume that it will not be going on the RBA website. As an alternative, I am making it available for download from my personal Google Drive folder at <https://bit.ly/310YyDB>.

There are checklists available for a number of other local birding locations such as Taylor Marsh, Thousand Acre Swamp, Durand-Eastman Park, and Letchworth State Park.

The Taylor Marsh checklist is recent and can be downloaded from the website of the Bergen Swamp Preservation Society at [https://bergenswamp.org/TaylorMarshBirdList\\_19\\_03\\_03.pdf](https://bergenswamp.org/TaylorMarshBirdList_19_03_03.pdf). It consists mainly of the observations of RBA member Lynn Braband plus some eBird data. My role was limited to laying out the checklist and having copies printed.

I hope to make more local checklists available online when *Little Gull* space and time permit.

## RBA IN THE FIELD

### Lake Shore Marshes East Wildlife Management Area 3/13/2021

A hardy group of 9 joined us on a sunny, windy Saturday morning for a trip across coastal Wayne County. Our first stop was at Sodus Point Beach Park, where we picked out lots of Long-tailed Ducks bobbing in the channel, a handful of White-winged Scoters and mergansers farther out on the lake, a lone Double-crested Cormorant, and an American Kestrel cruising by on the wind. We continued down along the bay, finding a little more ice and a little less wind, and picked up Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Redhead, Mallard, swans, and scaup. At the Ridge Road bridge, we found Canada Geese, Mute and Trumpeter Swans, American Wigeon, a large raft of Ring-necked Ducks, and a couple of Killdeer busy in the barely-thawed mudflats.

Heading inland a bit, we found some early-arriving Great Blue Herons at their rookery, a singing Eastern Bluebird, and several active Red-tailed Hawks. A pair of adult Bald Eagles flew by in formation overhead, though we couldn't tell whether they were flirting or working out territory boundaries. At our last stop on Fields Hill Road, we were joined by a large, inquisitive flock of Black-capped Chickadees, numerous woodpeckers including a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and an unexpected Yellow-rumped Warbler. Our far-ranging trip tallied a total of 55 species, pretty respectable for such a blustery day!

While conditions for this trip are always a little unpredictable, it's a great way to view our winter waterfowl and catch some of the earliest, very welcome signs of the coming spring.

*Kinsley Whittum and Christina Hoh*



An adult male **White-winged Scoter**. Photo by Jay Greenberg.



An adult female **White-winged Scoter**. Photo by Jay Greenberg.

## Feather Atlas

by Norma Platt

Tell me if you haven't, while out in the field, come across a feather and marveled at its beauty. Feathers are beautiful and remarkable objects. If you find feathers in nature, please appreciate, study, photograph them, and leave them where you found them. Under federal law, it is illegal to take them home.

If you don't know about the Feather Atlas, it's a wonderful resource. Give it a try. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has provided 'an image database dedicated to the identification and study of the flight feathers of North American birds. The feathers illustrated are from the curated collection of the National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory.'

<https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/>.

Rosemary Reilly and I had recent cause to look at the images for an Eastern Screech Owl. She had found feathers in Owl Woods and the Atlas confirmed their origin. It was interesting to see the fine edge detail.... and to compare it with the other nocturnal owls.



The above image is from the Feather Atlas of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Feeling like you'd like to try out the Feather Atlas? Try identifying this set of tail feathers from the local species shown on the right.

Hint: you'll probably find them around your feeders.



**A Wild Turkey** tail feather. Photo by Jay Greenberg.

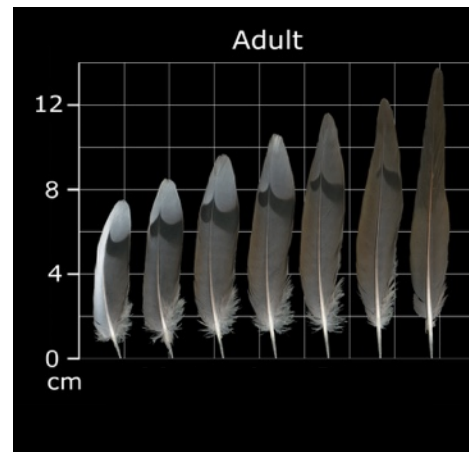
## February 2021 Sightings Report

February brought us the deepest cold of the winter in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> weeks, but still not extreme. Overall, it was a cold month, with some sunny breaks scattered throughout, precipitation only a bit above normal, and finally, snowfall above normal. Temperatures averaged 23.9 °F, 2.5° below normal. The period from the 5<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> remaining below freezing was the longest such stretch since 2015. But no records were set. Precipitation totaled 2.23", 0.28" above normal, with 0.71" of that on February 15. Snowfall totaled 29.9", 8.4" above normal. The heaviest events were on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, with lake effect bands leading to highly variable local totals. A warmup on the 24<sup>th</sup> and after ended with some rain at the end of the month.

Once again, all of the expected waterfowl were reported, with King Eider, Harlequin Duck, and Barrow's Goldeneye as bonuses. The persistent cold kept most of the lakes, bays, and ponds frozen through the period, so peak numbers were relatively low. There was no influx of Snow Geese into our region by month's end. With many species of waterfowl wintering in small numbers and no real break in this month, apparent spring arrivals were also few. Grebe numbers were also low, with only 2 reports for Horned Grebe and 2 individual Red-necked Grebes. American Coots also remained scarce. Virginia Rail was reported from the usual Mendon Ponds Park location. Only 2 Sandhill Cranes were reported from the Northern Montezuma Wildlife Management Area (NMWMA).

The warmth at month's end brought a couple of Killdeer reports from the west lakeshore, but no American Woodcock. The usual gulls were present in decent numbers all month. There were only 2 Bonaparte's Gull reports. Reports of the regular winter gulls (Iceland, Lesser Black-backed, and Glaucous) were down a bit, likely due to few of the usual ice edges with most water totally frozen. Loon reports were few, and Double-crested Cormorant was down to scattered reports of 1-2.

A brief period at the Braddock Bay Hawk Watch on the 26<sup>th</sup> by Dominic Sherony netted 10 raptors of 5 species.



David Brown is back again as this year's official counter, starting on March 1. Raptor reports generally remained low for the month, excepting a good number of Bald Eagle reports summarized as the number of lines in eBird. Again, similar eBird line counts for Cooper's:Sharp-shinned Hawks at 190:55 illustrate our typical experience for those 2 species locally. There were no Black Vulture or Northern Goshawk reports and only 3 Red-shouldered Hawks. Rough-legged Hawk reports and numbers were up a bit this month. About 5 Snowy Owls were reported from 4 locations. Short-eared Owl numbers on the DEC surveys were good, although the Tuesday dates for the Avon counts were again plagued by iffy weather. Jim Adams reported that the count in the Owl Woods area was off to a great start, with 10 Northern Saw-whet Owl reports, the second highest for February since he has been tracking numbers there, plus a Barred Owl and one Long-eared Owl. The saw-whet numbers are continuing the pace into March. The regular falcons were all well reported through the season, and a decent 8 Northern Shrikes were reported.

Among the other non-passerine land birds, woodpeckers are the major component. There were no reports of Red-headed Woodpecker for the month. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker provided one of the surprises, with approximately 42 reports of 28 individuals. Typically the number of reports for this month is less than 5 and sometimes zero. Some reports came from feeders in areas where the species would not really be expected.

Again, all of the really expected late-winter passerines were reported this month, but no early migrants were added. All of the winter finches were reported, several in good numbers. Many of the half-hardy species made it to this month, including, with approximate numbers in parentheses: Winter Wren (14), Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush (16), Gray Catbird (5), Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow (3), Vesper Sparrow, Fox Sparrow (max. 3), Savannah Sparrow (12), many White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, Pine Warbler, and Yellow-rumped Warbler (2). Additions this month were American Pipit, 2 very rare White-crowned "Gambel's" Sparrows photographed in the Gloria Drive area in Penfield on the 8<sup>th</sup>, and a very rare in winter male

Rose-breasted Grosbeak at a feeder in Pittsford on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Illustrations are provided in the Noteworthy Records table to be posted on the RBA website. Given all the interesting birds wintering, a surprise was a lack of numbers of blackbirds reported in the region.

The total number of records in the data download for the region was 35,616, up about 50% from last year. Causes probably include the surge in outdoor activity due to COVID-19, more birders energized by this year's breeding bird atlas work, and the Great Backyard Bird Count. The number of observers contributing to eBird records was 617 this month, nearly double that for last year. The number of species for the month and year to date are both nearly record highs for February since tracking that started in 1974.

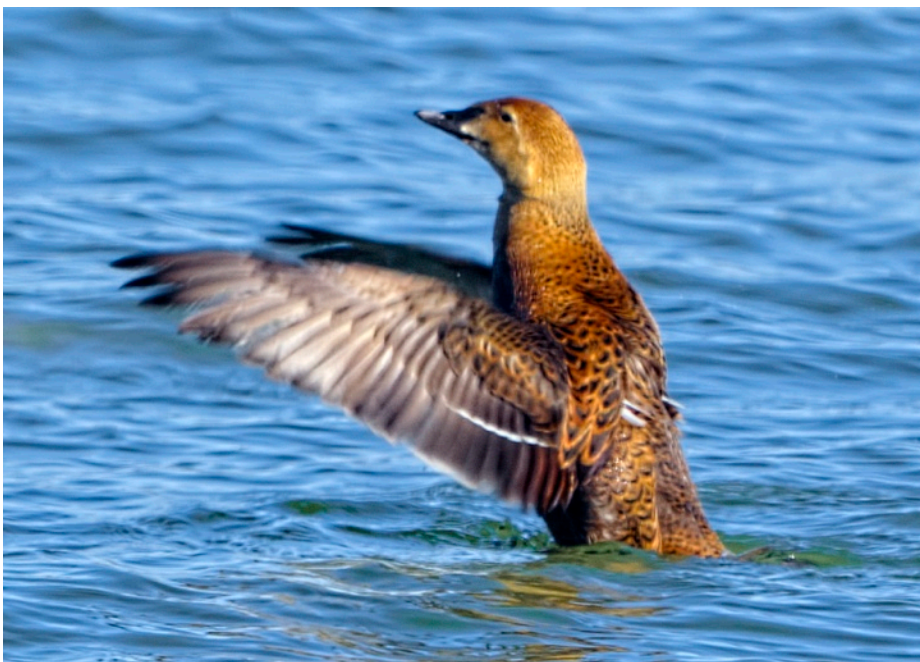
Please send your reports by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the to month to Andrea Patterson, 144 Greystone Lane, #24, Rochester, NY 14618.

	2021	2020	10-year Average (2011-2020)
Species for February	134	118	119.9
New for the year	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>7.2</u>
Total for the year to date	144	135	133.9

#### *Bob Spahn and the RBA Records Committee*

**Observers:** Kate Ackerman, Jim Adams, Carolyn & Jerry Barnhart, Mitchell Barry, Doug Beattie, Linda Clark Benedict, Steve Benedict, Lynn Bergmeyer, Barry Bermudez, Alan Bloom, John Boettcher, Terry Bohling, Lynn Braband, David Brown (BBRR hawk watcher), Mark Brown, Robert Buckert, Logan Brunner, Sara Burch, Brad Carlson, Donna Carter, Nancy Casper, Robert Cicotta, Kelly Close, Andrew Consler, Lydia Culbert, Kathleen Dalton, Doug Daniels, Gregg Dashnau, Gordon Dutter, Diane Egan, Debra Florio, George Ford, Jim Fry, Kyle

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A female **King Eider**. Photo by Jay Greenberg.

## Some Photos Taken by RBA Birders Recently

(from The Last 30 Days Gallery)



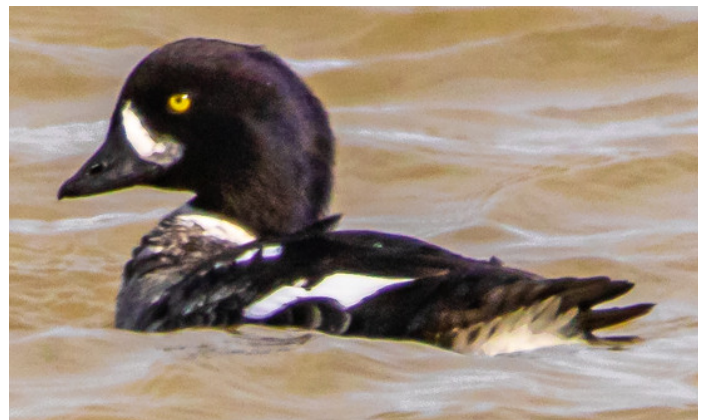
A **Bald Eagle** at Durand-Eastman Park.  
Photo by Alan Bloom on March 10, 2021.



A female Harlequin Duck at Charlotte. Photo  
by Barbara Smith on February 14, 2021.



A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** at Mendon  
Ponds Park. Photo by Dick Horsey on March 3,  
2021.



A **Barrow's Goldeneye** at Charlotte. Photo  
by David Lalacona on March 5, 2021.

### Birders Exchange

Birders' Exchange collects and redistributes new and used binoculars, spotting scopes, digital camera equipment, old and new field guides, and other relevant material. Sponsored by the American Birding Association, it supports critical research and conservation programs in the Caribbean, Central and South America. Won't you help? Please bring your donations to the RBA monthly meetings or contact Lucretia at 671-1310 or [lucretia@frontiernet.net](mailto:lucretia@frontiernet.net) for alternate arrangements. Remember to include a list of the items and your name and address with your donation.

Lucretia Grosshans



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The *Little Gull* is published monthly at the beginning of the month, except that the July and August issues are combined and published at the beginning of July. RBA members are encouraged to contribute. Please send contributions by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month to Jay Greenberg, Editor, [LittleGullEditor@gmail.com](mailto:LittleGullEditor@gmail.com). Contributions can consist of original birding-related nonfiction and fiction articles, poems, photos, and artwork. Humor is welcome. If you have any questions, please contact the editor.

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