

# STONY KILL ALMANAC

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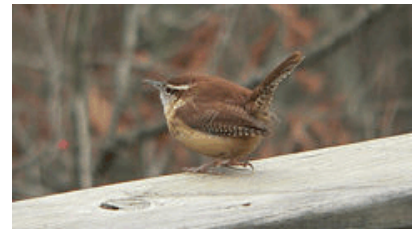
Stony Kill Farm Environmental Education Center

Calendar of Events Inside

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## Canaries in the Coal Mine: What a Little Bird Told Me

by Richard Parisio, Environmental Educator



"Tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle," rang from the edge of the woods, and fifteen pairs of binoculars lifted to find the source. No, it wasn't a tin peddler hawking his wares, but a diminutive bird, the Carolina wren, singing his spring song during a birdwalk I led in January. What surprised me was hearing this song on a *winter* birdwalk at Stony Kill.

Looking up the National Audubon Society's data for Christmas Bird Counts in Dutchess County, going back to 1901, I find that my own experience is confirmed by their records. Except for one odd sighting in 1961, the Carolina wren, originally a southern species (hence the name!), was not recorded at all in the county until 1975 when two birds were seen. In 1984, the year I came to work at Stony Kill, there were again just two Carolina wrens counted. Since then, with some fluctuation, the number of these birds recorded has risen dramatically. Last year, Waterman Bird Club members and other participating birders counted 62 Carolina wrens on their Christmas Bird count!

What is most troubling to me, beyond the mere presence of this species in such numbers locally, is hearing the Carolina wren's breeding song in the middle of January. To me, it is one of the clear signs, noticeable to anyone who spends time outdoors, that something is seriously out of balance in the environment. While the implications of shifts in the ranges, breeding and migration patterns of species like the Carolina wren are still being studied, it would seem prudent to heed the warning they may be giving us. In this way, birds and other wildlife are like the canaries once carried into coal mines to warn miners of poisonous gases before they themselves succumbed.

Such warnings will only help us, however, *if we are paying attention*. That is why I have a renewed sense of how important it is to bring people outdoors to enjoy, appreciate, and learn about the natural world. At Stony Kill we are continuing the work, begun here well over thirty years ago, of reconnecting people, especially children, to the outdoors. These days this mission seems more urgent than ever. Today's children, if taken outdoors to enjoy and explore nature right in their own backyards, or a nearby nature center, will be tomorrow's environmental stewards.

(Continued on page 3)

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## SLATE OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS

We welcome those who have any type of physical challenge to attend our programs. Call us ahead at **845-831-8780, ext 300** to let us know your needs. We will be happy to learn how we can best serve you. All programs are approximately one and one-half hour in length.

### MARCH

**Saturday, March 1 at 2:00 PM**

**Explore Nature on Snowshoes**

Snow conditions permitting, we'll strap on snowshoes as Native Americans have done for hundreds of years and enjoy a bracing winter excursion in search of wildlife tracks and traces. If there is not enough snow, we'll go for a winter walk instead.

**Saturday, March 8 at 2:00 PM**

**Know, Know, Know Your Oaks!**

Demystify winter tree identification by learning to use bark, buds, and twigs to tell trees apart without their leaves.

**Saturday, March 15 at 2:00 PM**

**End-Of-Winter Stories**

According to local Native American tradition, winter is the time for storytelling. Before the rush of spring begins, join us for a relaxing hour of cold weather stories from various cultures around the world.

**Saturday, March 22 at 2:00 PM**

**You Can Help Stop Climate Change**

Learn about the steps all of us can take to meet the challenge of climate change without sacrificing quality of life. Games, crafts, and even solar cooking!

**Saturday, March 29 at 2:00 PM**

**First Signs of Spring Walk**

Even before the trees leaf out, early flowering plants like skunk cabbage and the mating calls of wood frogs herald the arrival of spring. Join us for an easy walk on our wooded trails in search of these and other spring harbingers.

### APRIL

**Saturday, April 5 at 2:00 PM**

**Amphibian Amble**

Join a Stony Kill naturalist for a walk through our wetlands, turning rocks and logs, and peering into pools, for a look at emerging amphibians. Wear old clothes and rubber boots and come ready to get wet and muddy!

**Saturday, April 12 at 2:00 PM**

**Leave it to Beavers**

Get a close-up look at how these engineers of the wildlife world have transformed their environment. We'll see an active beaver lodge and dam, look for cuttings and other beaver signs, and maybe even get a glimpse of the beavers themselves.

**Saturday, April 19 at 2:00 PM**

**A "River of Words" Runs Through It**

Bring your favorite poem about the natural world to share. Hear nature poems by famous poets and by Hudson Valley children from the "River of Words" contest. Then we'll go out on the trail and try writing our own nature poems.

**Saturday, April 26 at 2:00 PM**

**Sierra Trail Walk**

A leisurely one-mile ramble through a variety of habitats including forests, meadows and wetlands. We'll stop along the way to admire spring wildflowers and watch for songbirds back from migration.

**Sunday, April 27, 11 AM - 4 PM**

**Earth Day at Stony Kill**

Celebrate and renew your commitment to taking care of the earth by joining us for a day of fun, outdoor activities for the whole family. Nature crafts, scavenger hunt, games, birdwatching activity, and more!

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(Canaries continued from page 1)

As Richard Louv puts it in his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, "Attachment to land is not only good for the child, but good for the land as well."

Only those who venture outdoors at all times of year will be able to detect a change in the finely-tuned balance of the natural world and will care enough to do something about it. Become a part of the Leave No Child Inside movement and bring your children to Stony Kill for a walk on our trails this spring, or just in your own backyard. It's never too soon, or too late, to renew our connection with nature.



Fifth graders enjoying a field ecology lesson at Stony Kill.

## MAY

**Saturday, May 3 at 9:00 AM**

**Birding with John Burroughs**

A leisurely bird walk at the height of spring migration, in search of scarlet tanagers, rose-breasted grosbeaks, and a variety of warblers. We'll read a few passages from "John O' Birds," the famous Hudson Valley naturalist, along the way.

**Saturday, May 10 at 2:00 PM**

**The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring, Tra La**

Painted and red trillium, trout lily, and Solomon's seal are just a few of the delicate spring wildflowers we expect to find in bloom on this easy woodland walk. Learn how to identify wildflowers, and some of their fascinating natural history and cultural lore as well.

**Saturday, May 17 at 2:00 PM**

**The Forest or the Trees?**

Now you don't have to choose! Gain a closer acquaintance with native trees along Stony Kill's forested trails, and learn each species' ecological role and importance to humans.

**Saturday, May 24 at 2:00 PM**

**Spring Farm Trail Walk**

Come for a leisurely walk around Stony Kill's farm trail, and learn about succession in old fields and the plant and animal life that inhabits them.

**Saturday, May 31 at 2:00 PM**

**Leaves of Grass**

On Walt Whitman's birthday, come to Stony Kill and learn more about these humble yet tremendously important plants that we tread underfoot and never look closely at: the grasses.

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**A Look Ahead to June:**

June 7: Bats!

June 14: Family Fishing Day at Stony Kill

June 21: Summer Solstice Walk

June 28: Muller Pond Ramble

# NEW YORK STATE CONSERVATIONIST

**Support Stony Kill Foundation by subscribing to *Conservationist***, New York’s premier outdoor and environmental magazine. Half of the subscription price goes directly to support programs at Stony Kill Farm EEC. This offer is also good for renewals, but you must include the word “Renewal” on your order, as well as your name as it appears on your *Conservationist* mailing label.

**YES, start a one-year subscription to *Conservationist* for just \$10.** I understand \$5 from each subscription goes directly to support educational programs at Stony Kill Farm EEC. **Make checks payable to: Stony Kill Foundation.** Mail to: Stony Kill Foundation, 79 Farmstead Lane, Wappingers Falls, NY 12590.

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